PICTURE THIS: PRACTITIONER RESEARCH WITH DIGITAL PHOTO STORIES AND

THE NOT-ICE TEACHER DISCUSSION PROTOCOL TO HELP TEACHERS CULTIVATE

GIFTS AND TALENTS IN EMERGENT BILINGUALS OF LATIN@ HERITAGE

by

JENNIFER K. ALLEN

(Under the Direction of Jennifer M. Graff)

ABSTRACT

Traditional school measures and norms often fail to validate giftedness in culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners, which causes them to have limited access to and remain underrepresented in gifted education programs. Building on critical theory and Latin@ critical theory (LatCrit), this practitioner research study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) engaged six elementary teachers in six small-group, collaborative discussion sessions. During these discussions, teachers acted as co-researchers and used photographs and digital photo stories, created by elementary-aged Latin@ children, along with the NOT-ICE protocol (Allen, 2016) to investigate how schooling labels carry potential biases that obscure emergent bilingual students' gifts and talents and cause teachers to overlook them for gifted referrals. The Listening Guide (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, 2003) facilitated the data analysis process.

The findings of this study are highlighted in three interrelated but stand-alone manuscripts. In the first manuscript, *"You Can't Know Until Someone Tells You or You Experience Something": Talking Back to Deficit Discourse with Digital Photo Stories and the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol*, the author argues that digital photo stories can act as

counter-stories because they can disrupt teachers' commonly held (mis)perceptions about emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage, emphasize their strengths and talent potential, and help teachers see how they might reach these students by providing them with challenging and engaging learning opportunities. Findings discussed in the second manuscript, *From Gatekeeper to Advocate: How Digital Photo Stories and the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol Sparked Conversations that Ignited Teacher Agency in Noticing and Cultivating Gifts and Talents in Emergent Bilinguals*, indicate that teacher agency is crucial in a teacher's ability to recognize untapped gifts and talents among diverse student populations, make sound pedagogical decisions to provide high-quality educational experiences for them, and act on the students' behalf to increase their opportunities to be referred for gifted evaluation. In the third manuscript, *Practitioner Research: A "Refreshing Change" for Professional Learning*, the author discusses the significance of using practitioner research involving visual media and collaborative discussions as an effective form of professional learning.

INDEX WORDS: Emergent bilinguals, English learners, Practitioner research, Gifted education, Underrepresentation

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The University of Georgia
August 2016

DEDICATION

To my co-researchers, who so graciously gave of their time to explore this relevant and

important issue with me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is cliché, but it really does "take a village." Though writing my dissertation often felt like a lonely endeavor, a close look in the rearview mirror reveals a journey that was anything but solitary. Yes, my name is printed in ink as the individual completing this dissertation and earning this degree; but if I had the ability to insert a page to this document, I would insert a dissertation Wall of Fame page where I would pen the names of all of those special people who have been my village while I worked on this study. The list of names would be endless and would still probably fail to accurately capture everyone who pitched in and helped me stay the course. I want to be certain that I in no way send the erroneous message that the completion of this dissertation was a solo endeavor. It was a community event. A community struggle. A community accomplishment.

I have always been taught to thank people when they contribute positively to my life. My mother made it especially clear growing up that a handwritten note was the only acceptable way to express your gratitude for a kind gesture. My grandmother had instilled that in her. Since I have kept my nose to the grind while writing this dissertation, I am positive that I have neglected to express my sincere gratitude to the people who have helped me along my journey. I know I haven't written many hand-written notes, and I have probably overlooked a verbal "thank you" or quickly-typed text message. I have undoubtedly fallen short of the thank-you note bar my mother and grandmother set for me all those years ago. So, while I know that saying thank you in the acknowledgements section of my dissertation is perhaps not the most ideal of places to

express my gratitude to those who have been a part of this adventure, at least it stamps their names in real ink and honors the ways they contributed to my journey.

Justin, you have been my biggest champion, never wavering in your support during this intense five-year journey. You accepted your role of "partner" in every true sense of the word. Of course, you partnered with me in caring for our children – as you always have – but you also accompanied me on this journey with equal – if not greater – persistence. You were the current that kept me moving forward. Even when I was a grump. Even when it meant that you had to work overtime as a dad. Even when I wanted to give up. I am eternally grateful for your steadfast support, your listening ear, and each and every spirited "NO you will NOT quit!" An educator yourself, your days at work were tiresome and grueling; yet you managed to stay armed and ready for whatever family success or emergency that came your way. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart for believing in me more than I ever believed in myself.

Carter and Julia, during this process, you have been the source of my highest highs and lowest lows. At times, you were my fierce motivators, giving me perhaps the best reason to stay the course. Yet at times, you were my most cumbersome sources of guilt. I questioned every minute I spent away from you to pursue my ambitions. I worried that you would resent me for always "working on the computer." Mommy guilt is a very real and tangible feeling, and there's no doubt that I felt my fair share of it along this journey. Carter, the loving iMessages you sent when I was in Athens always came at just the right times, and your hugs waiting for me when I got home at night reminded me that no amount of distance or work can come between our special mother-son bond. And Julia, your super, squeezie hugs and each and every bright and cheerful, "I love you, Mommy" helped remind me that our love for each other and our time spent together far outweighed my absence when I was away studying and working in "Afens." Today

I make an oath to both of you, promising that I will be physically and emotionally present in the remaining days and years of your lives. It's the only way I can repay you for your patience as I struggled to complete this chapter of my life. Thank you for giving me a sense of purpose and a reason to see this degree to the end.

Mom, I know you weren't thrilled about my decision to go back to school to pursue this PhD. Seven years ago, you retired from teaching to gain a little more of your own life back. Yet, you went from teaching other people's children to teaching mine – whether it was teaching them simple life lessons about how we can't eat ice cream *every single day* (but maybe three days a week is fine), or family lessons about our family tree and familial relationships, or true academic lessons about telling time, understanding history, or learning about letters and sounds. From taking charge on my days in Athens to giving me extra minutes of work time whenever you could, you selflessly gave more of yourself than you should have. If my kids couldn't be with Mommy or Daddy, I suppose I would say that a grandparent is the next best thing! I know that my children will always treasure the extra time they spent with CiCi.

Dad, in your quiet way, you cheered me on from the sidelines. When mom was filled with anxiety about my decision to go back to school, I know that you secretly advocated for me and reassured her that there was no need to worry. I'll never forget those rare times that you drove me to Athens for class (once when my vision was wonky from an optical migraine). I remember trying to explain to you about the theories I was studying, and you somehow likened me to a Marxist and told me I better keep that a secret or folks would start to be suspicious of me. You've always had a clever way of knowing just enough but not enough of what's going on. Your innocent ignorance has been calming for me because you're detached enough to help me see the value in not getting all worked up about things I can't control. Thanks also for all of the

time you've spent with the kids over the last five years, even when it meant leaving work early to rescue Jason from having to change a stinky diaper. Not to mention all of the IHOP and Waffle House dinners with the kids. Those were special times for the kids, and hopefully for you as well.

Judy and Lamar, you sacrificed countless weekends over the last five years to entertain Carter and Julia so that I could have extra work time one weekend a month. I calculated it and determined that the kids visited with you at least 60 weekends over the past five years. Thanks for planning extra special adventures for the Allen kids so that I could have an extra thousand hours to work on my school work. My hope is that the special bond and memories you've created with Carter and Julia over the years will make all of your lives richer.

Jason, thanks for pitching in with the kids when we needed you, even when it meant changing a diaper or two – wait, it just occurred to me that you somehow got out unscathed by the dirty diaper by calling Dad in for reinforcements. Jonathan and Amy, thanks for understanding when Mom wasn't able to come help you out with the girls because she was at our house watching Carter and Julia. Lauren, thanks for all of the laughs over the years, especially the ones over Christmas Vacation and Mary Jane jokes. Laughter has truly been the best medicine to help me survive this sometimes painstaking adventure.

Jenn, you stepped in and adopted me midway through my PhD journey. To be honest, I was petrified of making the shift to a new committee chair. I didn't go kicking and screaming, but I did go with sweaty palms and a knot in my stomach, filled with anxiety that I wouldn't be able to meet your seemingly unattainable high expectations. Over the years, I have learned to prepare myself before opening a document containing your feedback. *Take a deep breath, say a little prayer. Download. Take another deep breath and say another little prayer. Open. Scan*

document. Take several deep breaths, say several little prayers, try not to curse. Go back to the

beginning of the document and take it one comment at a time. I say this jokingly and with the

deepest amount of sincere gratitude, Jenn. You have believed in me from the beginning, and you

have required me to meet your rigorous expectations. Your guidance, support, availability,

questions, honesty, and advice have challenged me in productive and meaningful ways. I am

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that made you believe that you could get behind my research and mentor me. Your expert

knowledge about English learners was a perfect fit for my study.

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dealing with the recruitment and retention of ethnic minority populations in gifted education

perfectly balanced out my committee. I appreciate your guidance and the ways you challenged

me, both in my coursework and research.

JoBeth, I'm not sure I'd even be at this point if it weren't for you. After I interviewed for

the program, I hoped and prayed that if I got accepted I'd be paired with you. We were kindred

spirits. You were a mom who beautifully balanced your career and parenthood. You were an

advocate and a life-long learner. You were a teacher who held high expectations. You were a

writer. I wanted to be everything you were and still are. Thanks for challenging me, mentoring

me, listening to me, advising me, loving me. You were the perfect person to begin this journey

with. Thanks for believing in me and making doubly sure I was taken care of upon your retirement.

Mary, thank you for keeping me grounded in my work with pre-service teachers by always reminding me of the importance of maintaining a delicate balance of theory and practice in my literacy instruction. You and I clicked from the very beginning. Your down-to-earth, honest nature and your willingness to allow me to share my thoughts and suggestions made you the perfect mentor for me. Your ability to guide without stifling others' ideas is remarkable. I look forward to our continued advocacy work in the area of writing instruction.

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My co-researchers, thank you for honoring your commitment to study with me and engage in rich, productive conversations focusing on improving educational opportunities for underserved students. By listening to and critically discussing students' digital photo stories, we could hear loud and clear the ways in which schooling labels as well as our beliefs and perceptions sometimes work against children and disadvantage them.

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short of the mark, I could hear you telling me to stay the course because quality writing takes effort. Thanks for your editing work on my dissertation. I owe you.

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Marianne, I never imagined that sharing a minuscule, windowless office space next to a humming elevator shaft could be so much fun! To be perfectly honest, when I first saw that I had been paired with you, a "Presidential Scholar," I dreaded the office move-in day. I just knew you were going to be a stuffy, nerdy intellectual who would scoff at the thought of small talk…or watching YouTube™ music videos from the 80's…or listening to stories about my kids…or hanging up glittery year banners…or creating non-sense chalk drawings or phrases on the chalk board. But I soon realized just how shallow that was of me to make an assumption about you based on the institutional label of "Presidential Scholar" (amazing what we learn through writing a dissertation, huh?!). You were nothing like the "Presidential Scholar" I had imagined. Your sense of humor, genuine spirit, and down-to-earth personality made you the absolute BEST office mate around. You are the perfect balance of silly and serious. If I were going to share an office the size of a matchbox with someone again, I'd pick you a million times over! Thanks for always letting me bend your ear and for offering your words of wisdom. And of course, thanks for sharing so many laughs with me. I will miss you like crazy.

Heather and Crystal, remember that first class we took together where we created our special writing group, the Commuticators? I have grown so much as a writer these past few years because of the consistent, thorough, and valuable feedback the two of you have provided. Who would have ever thought that such great friendships could emerge from a writing group? Heather, you have propelled me forward throughout this entire PhD journey by keeping me on track and gently nudging me to take the next steps, even when they seemed daunting. I credit you for providing me with the courage and guidance to create my pilot study, which eventually helped to shape my dissertation study. I struggle with self-doubt, but you were my constant reminder that if I just believe in myself and take things one step at a time, I can accomplish my goals. Crystal, you taught me more about social media, hashtags, and acronyms than I ever wanted to know! You were one of my most enthusiastic cheerleaders and the person whose laugh could turn me from an absolute meltdown to a fit of laughter in an instant. You're a gem of a teacher, researcher, colleague, and friend. So incredibly glad our paths crossed.

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the best! I appreciate how you remembered to share ideas with me, yet you equally valued my ideas. Thanks also for your feedback on my work along the way.

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The fact that I just wrote a dissertation for the acknowledgements section of my dissertation is evidence of the many people who have celebrated with me, cried with me, motivated me, challenged me, distracted me, loved me. And this list doesn't even begin to thank all of those who have done their part in lifting me up along the way. The gratefulness I hold in my heart for all of the countless ways people have supported me along this journey is immeasurable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Although I didn't realize it at the time, my dissertation research dates back to the early

years of my elementary school teaching career when I pursued my gifted certification and began

serving small cluster groups of gifted learners in my general education classroom. Following

that, I gained additional experience with gifted learners when I worked as a gifted specialist,

serving only gifted learners in the resource setting and evaluating students for gifted education

programs. However, it wasn't until I enrolled in the ESOL (English to Speakers of Other

Languages) endorsement courses as part of my PhD program when my research interests really

began to develop. The ESOL courses stimulated me to think about what had been missing from

my gifted classes all those years. I reflected on the many faces of color that were absent not only

in my gifted classes and cluster groups but in the gifted referrals as well. In particular, I realized

that students who were English learners were predominantly forgotten when it came to gifted

education programming. I am ashamed to admit that I never noticed or questioned this trend. It

wasn't even on my radar. I was humbled by this realization. It was the reality check I needed.

The respectable teacher I thought I was allowed students to be overlooked and slip through the

cracks. And while I knew that I couldn't undo what had happened in the past, I determined that I

could move forward in a way that honored my new understandings. From that moment, it

became clear that I wanted to be an advocate for English learners and concentrate my work in a

way that would increase their opportunities to access gifted education programs.

I spent a lot of time reading, studying, and reflecting and decided that working alongside elementary teachers would be a perfect starting point for my advocacy work. Because of the significant role teachers play in the gifted referral and identification processes, I believed that concentrating my efforts on working with teachers would ultimately positively impact students. So, I launched into interviewing teachers to first learn about how their beliefs and perceptions of English learners and gifted learners impacted the gifted referral process. From there, I began thinking about designing a practitioner research study with teachers who wanted to delve deeper with me into the topic. Over the past few years, I have learned so much about the challenges that plague classroom teachers and English learners and influence their underrepresentation in gifted education programs. I now feel that I am armed with research-based understandings that will allow me to continue to move forward in my work with educators to open doors for CLD learners.

Although giftedness exists in every level of society and in every cultural and ethnic group, traditional school measures and social norms often fail to validate it in culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Castellano & Diaz, 2002; Frasier, Garcia, & Passow, 1995; Grantham, 2014; Shaklee & Hamilton, 2003). Almost thirty years ago, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988 deemed potentially gifted students from CLD backgrounds, including those who are economically disadvantaged, to be a targeted population of highest priority, considered at-risk due to a lack of sufficient and appropriate educational services (Frasier, et al., 1995). This act represents the only federal program committed specifically to gifted and talented students, and it focuses resources on identifying and serving students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs to

encourage equitable educational opportunities for all students. (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.a).

In the nearly thirty years that have passed since the Jacob Javits Act recognized the need for supporting underserved student populations, little improvement has been made in the area of access to gifted programming for CLD students as these students remain underrepresented in gifted education programs nationwide (Ford, 2012; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). For instance, Ford (2014) cited that according to the Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection Agency, Black and Hispanic students were underrepresented in gifted education programs across the nation by 50% and 36% respectively. Numerically, these percentages translate into at least one half million underserved students (Ford, 2010). In the state of Georgia specifically, White students have 3.8 times the opportunity of Black and Hispanic students to be identified for and served in gifted and talented programs (Realize the Dream, 2015). This is evidence that CLD learners who are Black and Hispanic are disadvantaged in the state of Georgia and across the United States because they lack access to gifted programming and its teaching methods, which are generally challenging, engaging, and rigorous (Ford, 2013). Such inequitable representation calls for continuing empirical research to raise awareness about the issue of underrepresentation so that educators can work toward providing more equitable procedures, outcomes, and possibilities for underserved student populations.

In the sections that follow, I will elaborate on the purpose of my dissertation study, define related key terms, and support the necessity of this study with connections to relevant literature. I will also share details regarding the manuscript format of my dissertation.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

There are a plethora of reasons that lead to the underrepresentation of CLD learners in gifted education programs, but many researchers feel that a deficit view of diverse students contributes most heavily to it (Baldwin, 2003; Cahnmann, 2006; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier, et al., 1995). Deficit thinking involves negative and counterproductive labeling of students that views difference as a disadvantage and sees diverse students as being deprived, low-achieving, or at risk, resulting in lower expectations for these students (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Lee & Anderson, 2009; Nieto, 2002; Shaklee & Hamilton, 2003; Williams & Newcombe, 1994). For instance, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 refers to linguistically diverse learners as "Limited English Proficient," and the Georgia Department of Education, along with the United States Department of Education, labels these students as "English Learners" (ELs) (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a). These labels can bring about associations of deficiency as they highlight students' abilities in relation to speaking or not speaking English (Lee & Anderson, 2009). Overlooking the varied strengths, interests, talents, and capabilities these students bring to the classroom often causes schools to become sites of struggle for these learners instead of sites of boundless opportunities (Lee & Anderson, 2009). This explains why scholars like García (2009) argue for the use of a more positive label, such as "emergent bilingual," which is more promising as it suggests a child's bilingual development potential.

Labels, which often carry assumptions with them, are tightly intertwined with how educators teach. Oftentimes mainstream educators categorize linguistically diverse learners as different or "other," resulting in connotations of linguistic deficiencies instead of capabilities and academic restrictions rather than opportunities (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p. 182). For instance, because of the EL label often used in schools, teachers may focus more intently on these

students' competencies with the English language instead of perceiving their home language and bilingual abilities as a strength. Teachers may refer to this as "the language barrier," which figuratively represents the "wall" that prevents teachers from seeing students' academic abilities that lie beyond their English language proficiencies (Allen, in press). The high stakes accountability climate present in today's schools compounds this issue as teachers find themselves focusing on remediating perceived weaknesses rather than exploring and cultivating strengths (Baldwin, 2003; Ford & Grantham, 2003).   When teachers hone in on perceived weaknesses, they often overlook gifts and talents and subsequently overlook English Learners when making gifted referrals. This creates a significant barrier for these students who desperately need access to gifted programming and more challenging curricula.

Cognizant of the disproportionate representation of English learners in gifted programming, as well as their inequitable access to challenging educational opportunities, I designed this study to work alongside elementary educators so that we could reflect on our attitudes toward and assumptions about emergent bilinguals, specifically those of Latin@ heritage whose native language is Spanish. I wanted to encourage and help educators to see past the language barrier and look for potential and untapped strengths, interests, gifts, and talents in these learners. To do this, I crafted a practitioner research study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) using photographs and digital photo stories from Latin@ students' outside-of-school lives in combination with focused critical dialogue with teachers. I hoped that the stories the students told through their visual images and narratives might yield productive conversations to help educators shift from any negative labeling they may be doing to truly honing in on the gifts and talents of emergent bilinguals that often lie hidden behind the labels and language competencies.

I wanted to involve teachers in the process because I believe that teachers can learn ways to transform most any aspect of the human condition as long as the condition is accessible and they have an open awareness of it (Heron & Reason, 2001). I used photographs because they can be useful tools for promoting acceptance of diversity by prompting educators to view situations from different vantage points, bridging connections and developing understanding of differences (Cook & Quigley, 2013; Lintner, 2005; Lykes, 2011; Serriere, 2010). Additionally, since stories are a primary means for understanding ourselves and others, the use of storytelling can interrupt complacency by helping both the listener and the speaker construct new understandings and sort through false and constraining perceptions of individuals and cultures (Delgado, 1989/2011; Espinoza & Harris, 1997/1998). Add in meaningful community dialogue, and the result is an experience that can engage and inspire educators in a powerful way (Cook & Quigley, 2013).

While the issue of underrepresentation of diverse student populations in gifted programming has been explored more extensively in recent years due to increasingly diverse school populations, the topic does not seem to have been examined to see what shifts occur in teachers' deficit thinking using photography, digital storytelling, and critical dialogue. I believe that an ounce of awareness is worth a pound of cure and that "the courage to act often springs from awareness" (Hansen, 2012, p. 19). My hope was that teachers' increased awareness about the underrepresentation of CLD learners in gifted education programs would result in an increased desire to act in order to create more equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds.

Despite the challenges that labels can present, I included a section elaborating on the key terms I will use in this dissertation in order to enable a shared understanding of terminology.

The following section provides guiding definitions as well as insight into my understanding of the terms and how they will be used throughout the study.

Definitions of Key Terms

Meaning of language is not fixed and static but rather is negotiated and constructed socially (Gee, 2015). Therefore, labeling or defining people, actions, and things is often challenging because of the ever-changing connotations, varying degrees of acceptance, complex interconnectedness among labels, and the fact that certain labels carry assumptions and beliefs – both positive and negative – with them (Castellano & Diaz, 2002). Furthermore, labels become problematic when they are used habitually and haphazardly, resulting in false assumptions of neutrality and suggesting absolute truths about people that impose limitations on them (Lee & Anderson, 2009). Despite these challenges, however, choices in terminology must be made in order to enable collective understanding. I have chosen the following guiding definitions of key terms for this study:

In my research, I use the specific term *emergent bilinguals* to represent those culturally and linguistically diverse students who are commonly referred to in schools as *English Language Learners* or *English Learners* (*ELLs or ELs;* García, 2009). *Culturally and linguistically diverse* (*CLD*) students (or learners) refers to a wide spectrum of students representative of diverse cultural and ethnic groups and includes those students with native language backgrounds other than English (of whom the majority learn English as a second language; Castellano & Diaz, 2002). I prefer the term *emergent bilingual* because it illuminates the students' bilingualism as a positive characteristic and potential resource, resulting in higher expectations for these learners; furthermore, it places these learners on a sliding bilingual continuum that emphasizes potential instead of the limitations possibly associated with their English learning status (García, 2009).

While I advocate for the *emergent bilingual* label, I also realize that the *English Language Learner* and *English Learner* labels are a reality in schools as they are often tied to ESOL services (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a). While I recognize that these labels are problematic (as noted previously), and I do not support the deficit thinking that is often associated with the *ELL* and *EL* labels, I use these labels when I cite scholars who use them in their work and when I reference discussions among the teachers in my study in order to honor the language or school discourse that has become deeply entrenched into their daily professional lives.

     Latin@s are the specific population of emergent bilinguals I will focus on in this study. *Latin@s* are people who trace their origins to Latin America and sometimes the Caribbean or Spain (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). Constituting approximately 16 percent of the total population in the United States and 24.7 percent of the nation's public elementary school children, *Latin@s* are the largest and youngest ethnic minority group in America and one of its fastest growing minority groups (Darder & Torres, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2011, 2012). I use *Latin@* because of its gender inclusiveness in representing both Latino and Latina.

     For the purposes of this study, I will use the federal definition of a *gifted education student* because of its emphasis on talent potential (and development) and its inclusiveness of students from diverse backgrounds. According to the federal definition, g*ifted education students* are those students with outstanding talent who, according to the federal definition

> "perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of
> accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or
> environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in
> intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity,

or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not

ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and

youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of

human endeavor" (Ross, 1993, p. 26)

Gifted referrals are usually the first step in the gifted identification process. They include

nominations often based on test results and/or screening activities designed to illuminate which

students should be formally evaluated to determine gifted eligibility (Frasier, et al., 1995). While

gifted referrals can be made by parents or students themselves, most referrals are made by

teachers (Bianco, Harris, Garrison-Wade, & Leech, 2011; Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Elhoweris,

2008). Teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels can refer students for gifted

evaluation, but the majority of referrals occur at the elementary level. Therefore, teacher

referrals for gifted education at the elementary level are the focal point for this particular study.

"The language barrier" is a term used frequently by educators to describe the often

perceived troublesome obstacle emergent bilinguals face due to the linguistic mismatch between

their native language and American schools (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Valdés, 1996). In the

classroom setting*, the language barrier* figuratively represents the "wall" that prevents teachers

from seeing students' academic abilities that lie beyond their language proficiencies because it

lends prominence to their learning practices and abilities in relation to speaking or not speaking

English (Allen, in press; Lee & Anderson, 2009).

Deficit thinking involves negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive labeling of students

that views difference as a disadvantage and sees diverse students as being deprived, low-

achieving, or at risk, and results in lower expectations for these students (Ford & Grantham,

2003; Lee & Anderson, 2009; Nieto, 2002; Shaklee & Hamilton, 2003; Williams & Newcombe, 1994);

Attribute or *dynamic thinking* involves positive and productive labeling that diversity as a resource and sees students as self-motivated, effortful, resilient, and at promise, resulting in higher expectations for these students (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Lee & Anderson, 2009; Nieto, 2002; Ruiz, 1984; Shaklee & Hamilton, 2003; Williams & Newcombe, 1994).

Review of the Literature

Research on the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted programming has become more prevalent as the landscape of schools in the United States continues to change rapidly with more diverse students attending today's schools. Between 1980 and 2009, the number of students (ages 5-17) speaking a language other than English at home more than doubled, rising from 4.7 million to 11.2 million, which is 21% of the school-age population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). As of 2009, nearly half of the public school students in the United States come from racially, ethnically, or linguistically diverse backgrounds (Ford, Coleman, & Davis, 2014). Latin@ students specifically have reached a new milestone representing a record 23.9 percent of the total pre-K through 12th grade student population across the nation (Darder & Torres, 2014), and comprising 13 percent of Georgia's public school students (Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2014). Even more remarkable, from 1997-2008, Georgia's population of ESOL students increased over 400 percent (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2010), with 79 percent of those students speaking Spanish as their primary language as of 2014 (GPEE, 2014). Despite the fact that the number of diverse learners continues to skyrocket, the representation of these learners in gifted and advanced programming remains disproportionate (Ford, et al., 2014).

Schools have understandably struggled to respond to this sharp increase of emergent bilinguals that took place quite suddenly and in a relatively short amount of time. Yet, as the number of emergent bilinguals continues to rise dramatically and schools work to ensure quality instruction for all students, schools must also strive to create equal opportunities for these students to gain access to programs designed for gifted learners. While it is generally agreed upon that gifted children exist among culturally and linguistically diverse groups from every level of society, students from diverse backgrounds are not identified for gifted education programs in numbers reflective of the school age population (Ford, et al., 2008; Frasier, et al., 1995). Thus, these students lack equal access to and continue to be overlooked for gifted education programs. Therefore, in order to meet the needs of emergent bilinguals, a shift in how educators view these learners – from a deficit to a strength perspective – is necessary to ensure that the distinctive abilities of diverse learners are recognized and cultivated (National Association for Gifted Children, 2011).

Research provides insight into the sources driving the differential representation of CLD learners in gifted education with some scholars citing the inconsistent definitions of giftedness as a primary factor (Maker, 2005; Pierce, et al., 2006). Others blame the over-emphasis on standardized testing as the cause of underrepresentation because of the biases inherently found in standardized testing measures (Allen, in press; Ford, et al., 2008; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Gonzàlez, 2002; Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007; Pierce, et al., 2006). Much of the research, however, attributes the underrepresentation of CLD learners in gifted programming to deficit mindsets that ultimately impact referrals (Baldwin, 2003; Cahnmann, 2006; Ford, 2013; Ford, et al., 2008; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier, et al., 1995; Harris, Plucker, Rapp, & Martinez; 2009; Milner & Ford, 2007; Olthouse, 2013). Because my research study centers on

further awakening educators' minds to their potentially deficit ways of thinking as well as encouraging them to reflect on their role in the gifted referral process, the following sections highlight what the research says regarding deficit thinking and its impact on gifted referrals and discusses suggested solutions.

Deficit Thinking Impacts Gifted Referrals

Some researchers feel that a deficit view of diverse students contributes most heavily to the underrepresentation of CLD learners in gifted programming because many of today's educators are ill-equipped for handling the changing demography of today's schools and operate from a deficit perspective that obscures the varied capabilities of these diverse learners (Baldwin, 2003; Ford & Grantham, 2003). The sections that follow describe the gifted referral process, discuss how terms and labels as well as the home-school mismatch promote deficit thinking, and elaborate on how professional learning can be effective in promoting awareness and change.

The referral process. A lack of teacher referrals significantly contributes to the underrepresentation of CLD learners in gifted and advanced programs (Ford, et al., 2008). Referrals, which include nominations or screening activities designed to determine which students should be formally evaluated to determine gifted eligibility, are usually the first step in the gifted identification process (Frasier, et al., 1995). While parents and students can refer students for further gifted evaluation, teachers are the primary initiators of gifted referrals (Bianco, Harris, Garrison-Wade, & Leech, 2011; Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Elhoweris, 2008). Relying heavily on teachers to initiate the referral process gives them substantial influence and power over the gifted identification of ELLs since students who are not referred will never have the chance to be selected for gifted programs (Bernal, 2009; Milner & Ford, 2007; Reyes, 2004).

One of the main reasons these students are significantly underrepresented is because teachers and other school personnel – due to their assumptions and low expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse students – sometimes overlook minority populations for referrals (Frasier, et al., 1995). When teachers aren't able to notice gifts and talents among culturally and linguistically diverse students, they often do not refer them for gifted evaluation, thus creating a significant barrier for these students who desperately need access to gifted and advanced programs, which involve teaching methods that strive to be challenging, engaging, and rigorous (Ford, 2013).

Terms and labels. While terms and labels afford educators with shared understandings, they also have the potential to create spaces of deficit discourse. The beliefs and claims we espouse as a result of these labels, such as the the ELL or EL label often being associated with assumptions of struggle and deficiency, can have harmful and lasting effects on students (Gee, 2015), as our perceptions of students result in certain expectations we have of students and play out in the ways we interact with and teach those students. This may very well explain why the academic achievement of CLD learners continues to be disproportionately low at all educational levels (Gay, 2010).

As mentioned previously, schools categorize students and give them labels, such as "ELL" or "EL," which can suggest associations of deficiency that result in decisions, policies, and services that can be limiting for these learners (Lee & Anderson, 2009). For instance, some teachers believe that ELLs should not be placed in gifted education programs until after they gain mastery of the English language (Harris, et al., 2009). This deficit thinking philosophy caused one school district in Illinois to be tried in court and found guilty of intentional discrimination because they not only used discriminatory assessment instruments and policies,

but they offered two physically segregated gifted programs for White and Hispanic students under the belief that the Hispanic students were not proficient enough in English to participate in the English-only advanced classrooms (Ford, 2014; *McFadden v. Bd. of Ed. for Ill. Sch. Dist. U-46*, 2013).

Practices and policies in educational settings are often grounded in labels that ascribe who learners are or should be based on socially constructed assumptions (Lee & Anderson, 2009). For instance, in the state of Georgia, students who are labeled as "ELLs" or "ELs" are eligible for ESOL services because their home language is not English and they are perceived to struggle academically because of their lack of proficiency in English. Therefore, instead of being considered for gifted referrals, these students are often placed in low tracks because of the perception that they are less able or less intelligent than their peers (Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), 1998). The misperceptions based on these commonly accepted labels result in disproportionate numbers of diverse students being identified for gifted education because they are often not ever referred for gifted evaluation (Milner & Ford, 2007).

Home-school mismatch. There is often a mismatch between home and school Discourses (Gee, 2015). While emergent bilingual populations are on the rise, the teaching force remains predominantly White and monolingual (Calderón, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2006; Howard, 2006; Peercy, Martin-Beltrán, Silvermann, & Nunn, 2015). For an emergent bilingual, this means that the first, Primary Discourse that child acquires from his or her home and family will likely not match the mainstream Secondary Discourse(s) he or she must learn when he or she enters the social institution of school (Gee 2015). And, since teachers' perceptions of children are often based on how closely children's appearance and behavior match with their own cultural background (Peterson, 2009), well-intentioned, mainstream teachers may unintentionally

respond more favorably to students who are similar to themselves, giving unequal attention to emergent bilinguals when nominating students for gifted programs.

Some scholars believe that many ELLs may not be referred for gifted programs because mainstream U.S. educators have difficulty recognizing the ways they communicate their learning (Harris, Plucker, Rapp, & Martinez, 2009; Olthouse, 2013). For instance, code switching, which involves using more than one language or dialect in conversation, or interpreting or translating from one language to another, both requiring profound cognitive ability, may be indicators of giftedness (Abellan-Pagnani & Hébert, 2013; Valdés, 2003). Yet, because these abilities are not included in traditional gifted assessments or checklists, mainstream educators may not appreciate them or be aware that these abilities can signify potential giftedness.

Professional learning. Because gifted and talented students, whether identified or not, generally spend the majority of their school days in the regular classroom, all teachers should understand how to recognize and meet the needs of advanced students and make referrals for further evaluation when appropriate (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.b). Unfortunately, professional learning related specifically to identifying and nurturing talents in CLD learners is lacking (Allen, in press; Davis & Rimm, 2004; Samson & Collins, 2012). In fact, in some school districts, professional learning endeavors related to gifted and talented education programs were reported to be as low as 15 minutes per academic school year (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2013), which obviously barely scratches the surface when it comes to identifying and serving students with gifts and talents. This lack of regular professional learning could be a result of the fact that very few school districts are guided by a full-time administrator for elementary gifted and talented programs (Callahan, et al., 2013).

Deficit thinking leads to discriminatory referral and identification practices and procedures for gifted education, whether intentional or not. More work must be done to help eradicate barriers that cause students from diverse backgrounds to be severely underrepresented in gifted education programs. The following sections summarize possible solutions for helping educators chisel away at deficit mentalities and create more equitable opportunities and outcomes for these diverse learners.

Suggested Solutions

In order to resolve the underrepresentation of CLD learners in gifted education, appropriate and applicable strategies that address its root causes must be shared, examined, and implemented. While scholars offer a range of possibilities, the following sections discuss those options that align most closely with this specific study.

Re-examining the definition of giftedness. Defining giftedness is often a complex and highly debatable task because there is no one established and universally accepted definition of giftedness (Davis & Rimm, 2004). While the federal definition of a gifted education student is inclusive of CLD learners and emphasizes talent potential (and therefore development), as described earlier, state departments of education often form their own policies for gifted education based on their own interpretation of the federal definition of a gifted and talented learner (Bianco, 2005). The state of Georgia's definition, for example, emphasizes *current performance* only (overlooking potential) and does not emphasize the need for seeking out students from diverse backgrounds (Georgia Department of Education, 2015b). This means that teachers in Georgia, as well as those in other states whose definition of a gifted learner deviates from the federal definition, may overlook talent potential in emergent bilinguals because the definition used in the state doesn't explicitly remind them to be mindful of these notions of

16

potential and diversity when thinking about gifted referrals. While it would seem that the federal

definition of a gifted learner would filter down to the school level, this often doesn't occur

because gifted education provisions are generally left to state and local boards of education.

When these entities do not stress the importance of talent potential or including students from

diverse backgrounds, many emergent bilingual students remain overlooked for gifted education

programs.

Similarly, school policies, practices, and funding often dictate the ways in which teachers

define CLD learners, particularly emergent bilinguals. As mentioned previously, schools often

identify "ELLs" or "ELs" so that they can serve them in ESOL programs designed to improve

their competencies in English (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a). The pitfall of labeling

and serving students based on their level of English language proficiency is that their bilingual

abilities can be overshadowed and seen as barriers to academic learning rather than strengths

(García, 2009). Rethinking these labels and using terms that highlight student strengths, such as

"emergent bilinguals," might reveal linguistic potential in a way that allows educators to see

these students in a more positive light (García, 2009).

A multicultural review of the definition of giftedness – as well as a review of how

schools define learners – is necessary in order to promote diversity in gifted programs (Bernal,

2009). Educators must adopt culturally responsive definitions of giftedness that openly

recognize that giftedness exists within and across culturally and linguistically diverse groups of

students (King, Kozleski, & Lansdowne, 2009). Nudging teachers to re-examine their definition

of giftedness as well as how they define emergent bilinguals may be a good first step in opening

doors for CLD learners as the definitions teachers internalize serve to shape the way they

perceive gifts and talents in students and influence judgments and decisions they make about

those students (Milner & Ford, 2007; Lee & Anderson, 2009). When schools emphasize a broader definition of giftedness – one that specifically accounts for the diversity of learners as well as talent potential – they are able to qualify ten to fifteen percent more of their student population for gifted and talented services (Nguyen, 2012).

The following assumptions about giftedness, endorsed by Baldwin (2003) are helpful for thinking more broadly about giftedness:

- "Giftedness can be expressed through a variety of behaviors."

- "Giftedness expressed in one area is just as important as giftedness expressed in another area."

- "Giftedness in any area can be a clue to the presence of potential giftedness in another area, or a catalyst for the development of giftedness in another area."

- "A total ability profile is crucial in planning an educational program for gifted children."

- "All populations have gifted children who exhibit behaviors that are indicative of giftedness" (p. 85-86).

These assumptions about giftedness allow educators to cast a wider net when contemplating students for gifted referrals. For instance, an elementary school in the southeastern United States serving predominantly Latin@ students implemented the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) and Enrichment Clusters (Renzulli & Reis, n.d.) in order to increase students' access to enriched curricula. The SEM, based on a broadened conception of giftedness, recognizes many types of intelligence and promotes talent development through systematic enrichment opportunities offered via enrichment clusters, which are designed to expose students to a wide variety of topics that would not ordinarily be covered in the regular curriculum (Renzulli & Reis, n.d.).

Enrichment clusters are comprised of students sharing common interests who meet weekly to work with an adult who shares their interests and who has some degree of expertise in the area, or is willing to develop expertise in the area.

Within five years of the school's implementation of the SEM and enrichment clusters, the population of gifted identified students more than doubled, rising from 3% to 7% of the school's total population (Allen, Robbins, Payne, & Brown, 2016). Additionally, the representation of CLD learners in gifted programming at this school became more closely aligned to the total student body population than in many schools with diverse learners (Allen, et al., 2016). This increase in equity was a result of the fact that the SEM, an alternative approach to gifted education that shows sensitivity to cultural and linguistic differences (Ford, et al., 2008), provided all students with enriched learning experiences and gave teachers authentic opportunities to more easily notice the manifestation of gifted behaviors in all students (Allen, et al., 2016). As teachers worked with students in areas of interest and strength in enrichment clusters, they more easily noticed their gifted behaviors (Renzulli, Gentry, & Reis, 2014), thus increasing referrals of students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted programs.

Improving the referral process. Elementary school teachers play an important role in the gifted referral process, and they must ensure that emergent bilinguals with gifts and talents receive the gifted education services they deserve. Teachers are important "gatekeepers" for programs when they are asked to refer students who have not surfaced through standardized testing screeners (Peterson, 2003, p. 314). If teachers do not fully understand their role in the gifted referral process, their students may miss out on opportunities for gifted programs and advanced courses in middle and high school, which may ultimately fail to prepare them for admission into the best institutions of higher education (Milner & Ford, 2007). Raising

awareness about the phenomenon of underrepresentation is the first step toward helping educators recognize gifted and talented potential among emergent bilinguals. Along with that, improving the referral process is crucial and includes three primary actions, which are all addressed in my study: 1) raising teacher awareness, 2) developing teachers' cultural competencies, and 3) collaboration among school personnel.

First and foremost, teachers must become aware that an issue or concern exists before they are able to jump into action and develop possible solutions for improvement. In my previous interview study with elementary teachers (Allen, in press), teachers reported that they often receive training on how to not over-identify ELLs for special education services, but they never receive professional learning opportunities that explore ways to identify gifts and talents in these learners. Bringing the issue of underserved and potentially gifted emergent bilinguals to the forefront of teachers' consciousness is a first step toward allowing teachers to examine and explore potential solutions.

Ford (2012) suggested that teachers improve their cultural competence in order to help them learn to notice, nurture, and develop gifts and talents among diverse student populations. This would translate into culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2010) in which teachers minimize the clash between school culture and home/community cultures by drawing on students' cultural and language strengths, honoring the funds of knowledge they bring to the classroom, and connecting learning to students' lives (Gonzáles, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). When teachers learn how to recognize, validate, and incorporate students' personal abilities into their teaching (Gay, 2010), they can take a more proactive role in the gifted referral and identification processes and be advocates for gifted students from diverse backgrounds (Miler & Ford, 2007).

Harris, et al. (2009) asserted that collaborative efforts on the part of educators can serve to bring together information about a child from multiple sources and multiple environmental influences. This would allow teachers to truly know students as whole learners and be better equipped to recognize their gifts and talents. For instance, Bianco and Harris (2014) proposed a culturally responsive, strength-based Response to Intervention (RTI) model that asks teachers and other education professionals to trade in their deficit-based RTI model for one that consists of flexible tiered supports to help ELLs build on their gifted potential while simultaneously developing their English language skills. Using this model, educators intentionally and explicitly focus on higher level thinking skills as well as students' culture, linguistic abilities, interests, needs, and strengths (Bianco & Harris, 2014). This model also asks teachers to self-monitor and regularly reflect on their own biases and assumptions that may affect their classroom instruction as well as their thinking about the gifted referral process.

Collaborative efforts among school professionals, such as general education teachers, gifted specialists, ESOL teachers, school psychologists, as well as families and communities, are necessary to consider the full range of students' abilities and plan appropriate interventions that focus on students' strengths, interests, culture, native language, and English language development (Bianco & Harris, 2014; OERI, 1998). My study capitalized on intentional and focused collaboration among educators and encouraged them to interrogate the biases and assumptions they possess that might hinder equitable educational opportunities for emergent bilinguals.

Professional learning will lead to improving the referral process. Some of the literature related to the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted programming discusses the need for shifting deficit mindsets and suggests that professional learning can serve as a promising catalyst

for transforming teachers' negative beliefs, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors toward students from diverse backgrounds and encourage them to look twice at these students to make doubly sure that they are not overlooked in the referral and identification process (Peterson, 2003; Williams & Newcombe, 1994). Even as far back as 1995, Frasier argued that future research on the topic of underrepresentation of diverse learners in gifted and advanced programs should revolve around the following primary goals:

- "changing teacher attitudes, skills, and understandings so that they comprehend the nature of talent potential and its diverse manifestations"

- "helping teachers understand the different ways such talent potential may be exhibited by students from different cultural, economic, and language groups

- and "sharpening teachers' referral skills" (Frasier, et al., 1995, p. 12).

Nearly twenty years have passed since Frasier offered this sage advice, yet the underrepresentation of CLD learners remains a central issue in gifted education. This is perhaps due, in part, to the fact that high-quality professional learning is limited, especially on the topic of underrepresentation or referring emergent bilinguals for gifted evaluation as teachers in my interview study consistently pointed out (Allen, in press). While professional learning is the most effective avenue for improving classroom instruction, it is often a missing or misguided component in the effort to enhance teaching and learning (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2015). The most common type of PL, traditionally referred to as professional development, has been criticized for being disconnected and ineffective in increasing knowledge and encouraging meaningful change (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; New York City Department of Education, 2014). Furthermore, in most cases, professional learning follows a very traditional format, assumes all learners have the same needs, comes in isolated

sessions, and is controlled by outsiders – the state, district, administration, or other "experts" – holding educators "captive to another's priority" (Sagor, 2000, p. 8), and leaving them little to feel empowered about (Rogers, et al., 2005).

I wanted to approach professional learning differently. Therefore, I designed a practitioner research study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), combining student photography and digital storytelling with educators' critical dialogue and reflection as a means for promoting awareness about the differential representation of CLD learners in gifted education, stimulating change in deficit thinking, and examining teachers' roles as gatekeepers in the gifted referral process. I wanted to help transform teachers in powerful and sustainable ways by allowing them to investigate an issue that mattered to them so that the knowledge gained would be more pertinent (Allen, in press; Hendricks, 2006; Schaenen, I., Kohnen, A., Flinn, P., Saul, W., & Zeni, J., 2012), and the necessity for change would be more persuasive with the investigation coming from within (Borgia & Schuler, 1996).

I believed teachers would be invested in this study because prior to facilitating this study, I conducted a pilot study using semi-structured interviews with teachers at the same school site to better understand how teachers make decisions about students they refer for gifted and talented evaluation and how their perceptions of English Learners influence their decision to refer or not refer them for this evaluation (Allen, in press). During those interviews, the teachers collectively identified that "the language barrier" is a very real phenomenon that often negatively impacts teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward English Learners, making it difficult for teachers to recognize gifted characteristics among these students. Additionally, teachers reported that they saw a definite need in raising awareness about the issue of underrepresentation through future study.

Structure of this Dissertation

This dissertation is manuscript style with three of its six chapters being journal articles that will be submitted to peer-reviewed academic journals. Although each manuscript provides an overview of the methodology I used in this study, I included a methodology chapter (Chapter 2) to provide greater detail about my research design. The three manuscripts included in this dissertation center on various salient findings from the study.

In Chapter 3, entitled "*You Can't Know Until Someone Tells You or You Experience Something": Talking Back to Deficit Discourse with Digital Photo Stories and the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol*, I examine the use of student-created digital photo stories combined with focused teacher conversations guided by the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol (Allen, 2016) to provide insight into why Latin@ students' gifts and talents may or may not be recognized by classroom teachers. Findings indicate that digital photo stories can act as counter-stories because they can serve to make teachers more aware of and disrupt their commonly held assumptions of learners because of how these students are labeled. This interrogation of labels and assumptions helps teachers see students' strengths and talent potential and therefore determine how they might reach these students differently by providing them with challenging and engaging learning opportunities.

Chapter 4, *From Gatekeeper to Advocate: How Digital Photo Stories and the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol Sparked Conversations that Ignited Teacher Agency in Noticing Gifts and Talents in Emergent Bilinguals,* examines the idea of teacher agency in the gifted referral process and discusses how the teachers in my study shifted from seeing themselves as gatekeepers in the gifted referral process to seeing themselves as advocates for their students. Findings indicate that mindful and intentional advocacy on the part of teachers is key in being

able to recognize untapped gifts and talents among emergent bilinguals, make sound pedagogical decisions to provide high-quality educational experiences for them, and act on their behalf to increase their opportunities to be referred for gifted evaluation.

In Chapter 5, *Practitioner Research: A "Refreshing Change" for Engaging in Collaborative Inquiry,* I illuminate my experience engaging with teachers in a practitioner research study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) where our shared interest in a common educational issue led us to investigate ways we may be contributing to the problem of underrepresentation as well as ways we might collaboratively work toward promising solutions. In this article, I focus my findings on the affordances of practitioner research, discussing the specific research design that proved to create an effective professional learning setting. Highlighted design elements include the importance of visual media as a springboard for intentional, productive discussions as well as the significance of a precise small grouping arrangement that allowed for cross-grade-level collaboration. An alternate look at how schools might define data is also offered.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I look across all three manuscripts to summarize significant findings and share implications for research and classroom learning. I also share two "I Poems" that represent our work together and reflect our individual and collective growth from harboring assumptions to gaining awareness to discovering our sense of agency and being more confident in our roles as advocates for emergent bilinguals.

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CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The underrepresentation of emergent bilinguals in gifted programming as well as their

inequitable opportunities for access to gifted education programs is troubling. Equally

distressing is the research-demonstrated lack of awareness among teachers about the issue of

underrepresentation of English Learners in gifted programming (Allen, in press). Teachers often

do not question the seemingly innocuous policies set in place when they appear to work soundly

for most (Nieto, 2014). However, it is important to realize that seemingly equal policies, such as

those purported to set an equal playing field for gifted referrals and identification, do not always

result in equal outcomes for students. Nieto (2014) explained it perfectly stating, "we don't

always question that which is familiar to us, even when it's negative or detrimental" (p. 31).

I take my role as an advocate for emergent bilinguals very seriously as I believe in the

importance of raising awareness about the issue of underrepresentation and searching for ways to

improve their access to gifted programming. I understand the need to help teachers re-examine

their views of giftedness as well as their beliefs about English Learners, so they might have new

lenses to better see their students' gifts and talents (Milner & Ford, 2007). To my knowledge,

none of the research on this topic suggests a practitioner research approach that combines

photography, digital stories, and critical discussion.

If negative descriptions and values associated with labels, such as "English Learner (EL)"

or "Latin@," are not truths about individuals but are socially constructed assumptions or beliefs

(Lee & Anderson, 2009), my hope was that the stories students shared through their photographs

and digital narratives in combination with our in-depth, small group discussions would bring to light how educators' perspectives and potential biases may work against certain student populations to unintentionally marginalize them. Furthermore, I hoped that our discussions would illuminate the positives associated with labels as well as the idea that no label can sufficiently encapsulate the individuality that exists among groups of learners. Essentially, I wanted to help educators see how their assumptions and biases may work for or against certain student populations to unintentionally advantage or marginalize them. The following sections provide an overview of my research design, which is also shared in the manuscripts that follow.

Research Design

I utilized practitioner research for this study to involve educators as co-researchers, stimulate them to think about the inequities in schools, and nudge them to interrupt the status quo, challenge dominant viewpoints, and strive to make educational resources and outcomes more just and equitable (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Practitioner research provides "a way of knowing, an attempt to peel back layers of knowledge and understandings in order to stimulate growth and generate new knowledge for use" (Dinkins, 2009, p. 271). Practitioner research includes various types and forms of educational research that "emphasize local contexts, local knowledge, and the role of teachers as decision makers and change agents" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 6). Teachers play a crucial role in improving education as they have intimate relationships with students as well as with the daily work of teaching and learning; therefore, the practitioner is simultaneously an educator and researcher engaged in inquiry with the ultimate purpose of enriching students' educational experiences and life chances (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). And since the teachers are invested in their own learning, their new understandings are

more convincing and more readily applied to enhance instructional practices and learning opportunities and outcomes for students.

The immediate goals for this study consisted of working with teachers using photographs, digital storytelling, and critical dialogue to 1) raise elementary teachers' awareness about the issue of underrepresentation of CLD students, specifically emergent bilinguals, in gifted education programming, 2) to help teachers understand how labels and their social constructions of gifted and English Language Learners influence their potential biases about students, thus impacting the gifted referral process for these learners (emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage, specifically), and 3) to help elementary teachers understand their roles as gatekeepers in the gifted identification process. This study relied on the data created from a previous study I conducted with emergent bilingual Latin@ children from my local community.

Previous Study: A Precursor to the Dissertation

This dissertation study was designed to include data collected from a previous study I conducted with elementary-aged emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage who created photographs and digital photo stories about their out-of-school lives. These photos and digital photo stories were later viewed by educators in this dissertation study who acted as co-researchers to investigate and understand how schooling labels carry potential biases that obscure students' gifts and talents. I recruited six elementary-aged emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage from my community. Participants did not attend the school site where I facilitated my dissertation study because I did not want my teacher co-researchers to have prior background knowledge that might impact their viewing of the students' photos and digital photo stories. While all of the children I worked with were born in the United States, four trace their heritage to Mexico, and the other two students to Honduras and Nicaragua.

I began the previous study by engaging the participating children and their parents in a seminar where I got to know them better and shared the details of the project. To help the parents and students feel comfortable with me, I began the seminar by inviting the parents to help their child(ren) create an "About Me" collage. This process illuminated students' hobbies, interests, strengths, and the like and helped to build trust. A translator was present to facilitate understanding, when needed.

After the children shared their collages, I described the photography and digital photo story aspects of the project. I asked parents to take photos of their children that revealed information about their out-of-school lives, including their interests, hobbies, strengths, and the like. We discussed ideas for the kinds of photos that families might take, and I informed the children and parents that the photos would be shared with elementary school teachers to help them learn more about the child. Families had approximately two weeks to take 3-5 photos of their child(ren) engaged in an activity of high interest or one that requires great skill or commitment. I offered to provide families with cameras if needed, but all of them chose to use smart phones or other devices to take pictures.

I also invited parents to initiate discussions with their children about the photographs taken so that the students would have ideas for what to write about for their photo story when we met for our two subsequent writing sessions. Optional discussion questions were provided in English and Spanish. Possible questions to discuss were why certain pictures were important, what places/objects/actions/people in the picture they wanted to share with the viewer, how the pictures helped others know more about them, what objects or people might be missing from the photo, and the like. Families submitted their photographs to me in digital form via email, and I

saved the photos as PowerPoint slides for later viewing and uploaded them to my private

VoiceThread® account for the creation of the digital photo stories.

The next step of this study involved working with each child during a one-on-one session

to help him or her create a photo story. A photo story uses photographs, often accompanied by

words, to tell a story or share personal information. Before actually writing their photo story,

each child first described each picture through an oral conversation with me. Then, each child

used a drafting storyboard template to write and capture the story he or she wanted to tell about

each photo. I helped the children revise and edit their texts so that they could rehearse their

writing before our next session. Children had the option to create bilingual photo stories if they

wished, and three of the six children opted to do so. A Spanish-speaking translator was available

on a case-by-case basis in case students needed assistance creating bilingual texts using a fusion

of both languages.

In order to transform children's photo stories into a digital format, I met one final time

with the children to record their digital photo story using VoiceThread®. I used one of the

children's photo story from that study as a sample in my introductory workshop with my teacher

co-researchers and chose three additional photo stories to use during future critical discussion

sessions with teachers that represented a range of individual voices and experiences, yet

illuminated a collective voice through commonalities as well. The following sections describe

my dissertation study, which began approximately one month after this previous study

concluded.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are invaluable guides for helping researchers better understand their problem,

frame their research questions, design their study, and interpret their findings. In general, I

operate from a critical theory worldview because it aligns with the way I perceive the world –

that it doesn't have to be accepted *as is*, but it should be seen for how it *might or should be*

(Bronner, 2011) or for how it can be "disassembled and improved considerably" (Poster, 1989, p.

3). Generally, critical theorists desire to understand society's unjust actions in order to stimulate

collective and individual transformation (Tierney, 1993). Thus, critical theory broadly informs

this research study, from the research questions through the analysis and discussion of data

collected.

Critical theory highlights the idea that dominating structures, created by human choice

and practice, can be undone – though not easily – through human agency (Hanks, 2011).

Moreover, education is viewed as a primary means for the eradication of structural domination

and the realization of freedom because it is generally reflective of society and helps shape our

knowledge, identity, and power (Bronner, 2011; Freire, 1970/2012; Levinson, 2011). Therefore,

critical educational scholars aim to address social injustices in the field of education, particularly

how the marginalization of people is constructed through schooling, in order to promote positive

social and educational change (Popkewitz, 1999).

Working within the critical theory tradition involves exploring subjective lifeworlds and

therefore stresses the importance of dialogue between researchers and participants (Bronner,

2011; Habermas, 1981/1984, 1981/1987). By increasing the awareness of the sources of

domination and confronting social injustices, critical researchers help people realize their status

as active and empowered agents in the construction of their social and personal worlds

(Comstock, 1982; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Prasad, 2005).

Specifically for this study, I used Latin@ critical theory (LatCrit) to promote

understanding of why Latin@ students' gifts and talents may not be recognized by their teachers.

LatCrit illuminates the idea that while schools have the potential to free and empower individuals, certain populations of students are often marginalized due to the often unquestioned structures, procedures, and discourses schools have in place as well as the deficit notions that continue to plague the classroom experiences of Latin@ students (Darder & Torres, 2014; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Lee & Anderson, 2009). Like critical theory and critical race theory, LatCrit theory challenges perspectives that view CLD students as deficient and variance from the mainstream as problematic for teaching and learning (Nieto, 2002).

Because of its pledge to validate diverse ways of knowing and its unique way of highlighting the lived experiences of students of color through storytelling (or counter-storytelling) LatCrit speaks directly to this research study (Delgado, 1989/2011; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). A long, rich history of storytelling infuses Latin@ culture (Stefancic, 1997/1998), and many of the stories marginalized populations share attempt to shift or disrupt the dominant reality (Delgado, 1989/2011). Counter-stories highlight the stories of those whose experiences often remain silent and can discredit the prevailing story, thus opening up doors to new possibilities for reality (Delgado, 1989/2011; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Research Questions

The overarching question driving my research – *How can educators help improve access to gifted education, advanced programs, and/or more challenging curricula for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students?* – has been addressed by other scholars in the field (Castellano & Diaz, 2002; Ford, 2013; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Frasier, et al., 1995; Gonzales, 2002; Harris, Rapp, Martinez, and Plucker, 2007; Milner & Ford, 2007; Sisk, 2003); however, because these students continue to be underrepresented in

gifted education programs, further research was necessary. Thus, the specific research questions guiding this study included the following:

1. How do focused, critical conversations cued by Latin@ students' individual and collective photographs and digital stories help teachers become more aware of their social constructions of labels such as "gifted" and "English Language Learner" and their potential biases associated with them?

2. Subsequently, how do teachers understand the ways in which these labels encourage and/or hinder an equitable gifted referral process for English Language Learners?

3. Furthermore, how do these critical conversations contribute to teachers' awareness of their role as gatekeepers in the gifted referral process?

Site and Participants

The site of this study was a Title I elementary school located in a southeastern state in a county experiencing steady growth in its Latin@ population, rising from 2.6% in 2000 to 6.5% in 2013 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2015). The school uses a pull-out ESOL model to serve its 50 English Learners who qualify for services based on their performance on an English language proficiency test. An issue of access to gifted education permeates this school as CLD learners are noticeably underrepresented in gifted programming at this school site. For instance, White students represent 69% of the student body but comprise 89.5% of the students served in the gifted and talented program. Conversely, Latin@s make up 11.2% of the total student body but only 2.6% of gifted identified students. While the underrepresentation of all ethnic minority groups is concerning, the scope of my study honed in on emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage.

For this study, I worked with six elementary school teachers from the school site described above. These teachers each had at least five years of teaching experience as well as

experience working with gifted and/or English Learners. All teachers identified as White, monolingual, native speakers of English. I considered the teachers to be co-researchers because they collaboratively contributed to the gathering and clarification of data. Table 2.1 provides additional information about each of the teachers who participated in the study.

I, also a White, monolingual, native English speaker, was a participant in the study as well. While I planned parts of the study based on the study's purpose and goals prior to meeting with my co-researchers, our processes and procedures were flexible and adapted to the group's collective needs as the study progressed. For instance, I accommodated for the teachers' busy schedules and allowed them to suggest the days and times that were most conducive to their schedules. Additionally, while I developed the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol utilized to guide our discussions (Allen, 2016), we collectively discussed possible options for refining it prior to experiencing students' photo stories.

Table 2.1
Study Participants

Participant (All Pseudonyms)	Years of Experience	Current Position	Reason for Participating
Brooke Hutcheson	8 years	Gifted facilitator	She wanted to make a more concerted effort to work with other teachers in the school to help them notice potential talent in English Language Learners.
Hannah James	10 years	ESOL specialist	She wanted to learn more about the gifted referral process so that she would be better able to notice gifts and talents among her students and better equipped to make gifted referrals.
Mary Byers	8 years	Second grade teacher	She has experienced the frustration of referring English Language Learners she "just knows" are gifted but don't qualify for services because of the standardized tests. She joined the study to learn more about how she can better support those

			learners in the regular classroom and in what ways she might advocate for changes in the gifted evaluation process.
Virginia Turner	8 years	Second grade teacher	She wanted to learn more about the most effective ways to cultivate the strengths and talents of her English Language Learners in the classroom. Also, along with the small group of English Language Learners she typically serves each year, she had recently welcomed an emergent bilingual student into her classroom whose language of preference was Spanish, and she saw this study as a good opportunity to learn more about how to best meet his needs.
Lura Hanson	5 years	Third grade teacher	She was frustrated with the number of advanced English Language Learners who had reached her third grade class having never been referred for gifted evaluation. She, therefore, saw herself in a pivotal role and wanted to learn more about the gifted referral and testing processes.
Louise Jones	16 years	Fifth grade ELA teacher	She wanted to improve her practice with English Language Learners. She joined the study to learn new ideas for connecting with students and providing them with challenging and enriching learning experiences.

Data Collection

For this study, my co-researchers and I used data I collected from the previous study described in detail above as a springboard to elicit data for this study. The previous study involved six CLD elementary-aged learners of Latin@ heritage from the local community who used their own photographs to create digital photo stories about their outside-of-school lives. The photographs and photo stories provided insight into the children's strengths and interests. While all of the children I worked with were born in the United States, four traced their heritage

45

to Mexico, one to Honduras, and one to Nicaragua. These children did not attend the school where my co-researchers work, so they were all unfamiliar to the teachers.

Individual interviews. The study began with individual teacher interviews to gain insight into their experiences working with gifted and/or CLD learners and making gifted referrals. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes.

Introductory teacher workshop. Next, the co-researchers and I participated in a workshop together to discuss and refine the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol I created. We implemented it using a sample of photographs as well as a sample digital photo story from one of the children described above. NOT-ICE is intentionally divided to represent the idea that our (mis)perceptions do not have to remain frozen and static, but instead should be fluid and dynamic. NOT-ICE suggests a melting away or thawing of our current (mis)perceptions about emergent bilinguals in exchange for more holistic, dynamic perceptions that capture students as whole learners and not simply language learners

During the initial workshop, we used the mnemonic NOT-ICE as a means for facilitating critical dialogue and reflection around the photographs and digital stories. The NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol guided us in answering the following questions:

- N - What Noticings can you make about the photos? (Still photographs only)
- O - What did you Overlook in the photos? (Digital photo story from this point forward)
- T - How does this discovery relate to your Teaching?
- I - What Impact might it have on students?
- C - How have your initial perceptions Changed?
- E - In what ways can we use what we have learned through this process to ensure

Equitable referral opportunities and outcomes for students from CLD

backgrounds?

The workshop lasted about an hour and a half and gave all participants an opportunity to practice

the protocol before launching it during a live critical discussion session. The teachers found that

the protocol facilitated rich and productive discussions because each question built on the one

before in a logical, sequential format. Initially, a couple of teachers found the opening question

about noticings to be somewhat ambiguous, but then all teachers later agreed that the openness

was what allowed them to approach the question from their own vantage point and develop their

own interpretation, not feeling constrained by a specific expectation.

Critical discussions. Over a period of approximately two months, my co-researchers

and I engaged in three critical discussion sessions using the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion

Protocol to discuss students' photographs and digital photo stories. We met after school in the

gifted facilitator's classroom approximately once every three weeks, and each session lasted for

about an hour to an hour and a half. Each session focused on one child's photographs and digital

photo story, and these images and stories, along with the prompts from the NOT-ICE protocol,

served as springboards for the discussion. It is important to note that I shared pertinent

information that had I learned about each child (during the previous study) after we viewed his or

her photographs but prior to experiencing his or her photo story. For instance, one child, Bennie

(all names are pseudonyms), lost his mother to a car accident when he was three years old and is

being raised by his grandparents. I shared this information with the teachers because I thought it

was an important part of Bennie's life story.

Focus group interview. I facilitated one follow-up focus group interview session with

the teachers using a general interview guide approach to debrief and discuss topics that needed

further exploration. This focus group interview lasted approximately an hour and a half. During this time, we also created individual "What I Learned" poems (Hansen, 2012) to artistically express our thoughts on the insight we gained from the study.

Future actions meeting. Approximately two weeks after debriefing, our group reconvened to discuss future actions we might take to raise awareness among teachers in the school about the issue of underserved English Language Learners and plan strategies for helping to shift teachers' deficit thinking to more productive thinking. The group discussed how we might act as advocates for ELLs at the school and district level. Ideas that were generated included hosting seminars with the faculty facilitated jointly by the gifted facilitator and the ESOL specialist revolving around the issue of underrepresentation; leading faculty members in a critical discussion session using the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol; presenting about the study at a state-wide gifted education conference; inviting colleagues to participate in a book study focused on culturally responsive pedagogy; deliberating ideas for how we might widen the school district's scope for what counts as data for gifted referrals to broaden what might be included in students' gifted referral portfolios. Table 2.2 provides a general overview of the data sources and methods of collection used in this study.

Table 2.2
Data Sources and Methods of Collection

Research Questions:
Overarching question: *How can educators help improve access to gifted education, advanced programs, and/or more challenging curricula for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students?*
Specific Question: *1. How do focused, critical conversations cued by Latin@ students' collective photographs and digital stories help teachers become more aware of their social constructions of labels such as "gifted" and "English Language Learner" (ELL) and their potential biases associated with them? 2. Subsequently, how do teachers understand the ways in which these labels encourage and/or hinder an equitable gifted referral process for*

Participants	Data Source	Collection Methods	Artifacts	Time Frame
		English Language Learners? 3. Furthermore, how do these critical conversations contribute to teachers' awareness of their role as gatekeepers in the gifted referral process?		
Six elementary teachers	Individual Interviews	1 per teacher	Audio recordings; interview protocol with written notes	Thirty minutes/ interview; end of August, 2015
	Introductory Teacher Workshop	Six teachers; one session to familiarize teachers with the NOT-ICE protocol and modify it if needed	video recordings; teachers' comments and notes discussing the NOT-ICE protocol	1 - 1 ½ hours Sept. 2015
	Critical Discussions	Six teachers; three sessions; NOT-ICE protocol	NOT-ICE protocol notes; video recordings; transcriptions; reflective memos	1-1 ½ hours/session; Sept.-Nov. 2015
	Focus Group Interview	Six teachers; one session	video recordings; transcriptions; "What I Learned" poems; emailed notes; reflective memos	1-1 ½ hours; Nov. 2015
	Meeting to Discuss Future Actions	Six teachers; one session	video recordings; transcriptions; reflective memos	1 hour; Dec. 2015

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a complex process that began at the outset of the research study, based on what the researcher and co-researchers brought to the study, what we paid attention to and responded to during discussions, as well as how we constructed field notes and transcriptions along the way (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Charmaz, 2005). Analyzing field texts, including written

notes on the NOT-ICE protocol and transcriptions, was one crucial phase of data analysis. I invited my co-researchers to be involved in the data analysis process to the degree they wished to be included. Because they are school teachers, they had very limited amounts of time to contribute to data analysis. In fact, only one teacher, the gifted facilitator, was able to take the time to read through a couple of transcripts and offer her insights. Thus, while all co-researchers were involved in member checking to validate analytic interpretations and conclusions, I took the lead on most aspects of the data analysis process.

To formally analyze the data from my study, I used the *Listening Guide* method – one that draws on voice, resonance, and relationship – to guide the analysis process (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, 2003). Universal in application and enhanced by work within collaborative communities, the Listening Guide is designed to open pathways to discover the inner world and thought of another by paying close attention to his or her multiple voices through a close analysis of verbalizations. Just as LatCrit recognizes marginalized perspectives of reality through stories that represent diverse ways of knowing (Delgado, 1989/2011; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), this data analysis approach involves multiple readings of interview transcripts due to the assumption that simultaneous voices may co-occur, and these voices may be in tension with one another, with oneself, with the voices of others, and/or with the culture or context (Gilligan, et al., 2003). Each listening amplifies an aspect of a voice like listening to a piece of music and following the clarinet through and then listening again for the flute (Gilligan, Brown, & Rogers, 1990). I used this approach as a mentor for my data analysis method, but my process took on a "voice" of its own.

During the first step of my analysis process, I read through the transcripts to identify participants' initial assumptions and ultimate realizations. Additionally, since I was curious to

know more about labels, I highlighted mentions of characteristics of learners, both gifted learners as well as ELLs. I noted discussions of personal and professional relationships and whether or not they revealed evidence of connections or disconnections (between teacher-student, teacher-teacher, student-student, parent-teacher, and the like). I created three separate tables that included conversational exchanges relating to each focus area: assumptions/corresponding realizations, labels/characteristics of learners, and personal/professional relationships. See Table 2.3 below for an excerpt from the assumptions/realizations table.

During the second step, I focused in on the voice of "I" by following the use of this first-person pronoun and creating "I poems" for each transcript (Debold, 1990 as cited in Gilligan, et al., 2003). To do this, I underlined every first-person "I" within the passage along with the verb and other significant accompanying words and created a poem writing each "I" phrase on its own line, maintaining the sequence in which the phrases appear in the text. These "I poems" helped me hear "a variety of themes, harmonies, dissonances, and shifts" among the first-person voices (Gilligan, et al., 2003, p. 164). The poem that follows is an excerpt of an "I poem" that emerged from the data. Each stanza in the poem reveals our shift from harboring assumptions to gaining awareness to discovering our sense of agency.

I Poem: From Bias, to Awareness, to Agency

I would say she is very well behaved in class.
I was surprised by her level of vocabulary.
I initially noticed that the book was a lower level so I figured she struggled.
I would imagine they wouldn't let a lot of that show in a regular classroom.
I'm guilty of it (harboring misconceptions).
I had several assumptions.
I hate to use that word but a "typical" ELL.
I just didn't expect so much confidence.
I wouldn't have expected an eleven-year-old to even think about that.
I was not expecting that to be in Puerto Rico.
I had wondered about assumptions that we typically carry with us that we don't ever speak or verbalize.

I think in a group, in a safe space, we feel like somebody might be willing to chime in and say something that might alter that just a little bit.

I mean, ESOL means a million different things; giftedness means a million different things.
I feel like sometimes that (translating) is a skill we often overlook.
I feel there is value in allowing a child to narrate and tell the story.
I noticed her expanded vocabulary.
I could tell that her Spanish is lagging behind her English.
I put that she didn't seem as comfortable reading the Spanish.
I think we just need to be better about encouraging who they are as a person.
I don't think we ever purposefully discount it, but we never talk about it.
I had said that she obviously enjoys being challenged.
I wrote that she would do well on projects at home.
I said that she does have the family support.
I said that she was definitely a leader.

I am so upset with myself.
I feel like as a teacher sometimes we don't reflect enough.
I've learned to open my eyes a little bit more to a different group of people… students that may have traits of giftedness.
I'm embracing whoever they are, wherever they come from.
I wish we were collectively more sensitive.
I am going back into my classroom and seeking out the strengths that my ELL students do have, which we should do anyway, but it's helped me realize that maybe I'm not giving certain students a chance to show they are, or possibly could be gifted.
I can have them share their experience through their native language in the writing or their speaking.
I have more confidence now.
I was going to say, too, advocacy; that's a large role of mine always, but I think I haven't always thought of it in the area of giftedness so much.
I think part of it is that teachers don't always realize their role in being the advocate.
I think realizing that we are those gatekeepers, in a sense, because if you don't advocate, a lot of times no one else will.
I have been more educated here.

During step three, I brought my analysis back into a direct relationship with the research questions and purpose of the study, listening for the multiple facets of experience being expressed (Gilligan, et al., 2003). Here, I read through the tables I created in step one and the "I poems" to tune in to a different voice, or layer of the story. These voices were not specified in advance but were determined through multiple listenings of transcripts and "I Poems" (Gilligan,

et al., 2003). Table 2.3 provides an excerpt from the assumptions/realizations table and illustrates how each voice was coded.

Table 2.3
Excerpt from Assumptions Table with Voices Coded
Voice of Bias (labels, assumptions)   Voice of Awareness (Aha! Moments, realizations)   Voice of Agency (gatekeeping, advocacy)

Transcript Info	**Line Info**	**Assumptions/Realizations**
Introductory Workshop 9.14.15	177-179	LJ: It's kind of like with the Hispanic population, they respect us as teachers and we are going to take care of their kids and they're just kind of, unfortunately a little bit quieter than some of the other…
	388	WRITTEN PROTOCOL: MB wrote "You learn more about someone the more you do with them." And "You learn more in different elements or atmospheres." (meaning different contexts)
	435-436	LH: . . . I would say she is very well behaved in class, she looks like she would be, just based on making an assumption
	472-480	LH: I was surprised by her level of vocabulary she used like the cul de sac BH: And I initially noticed that the book was a lower level so I figured she struggled…
	856-857	LH: . . . their writing is probably always going to be a struggle.
Critical Discussion Session #1 9.28.15	42-45	MB: That first picture, I thought, oh, she's probably just helping her mom cook but then after listening, I realized she's either doing it by herself or helping her older sister and that she likes to cook you know, for her family to try. I guess I just assumed she was probably helping out her mom to cook that, you know.
	88-93	LH: . . . they're very well-traveled. I was not expecting that to be in Puerto Rico. MB also noted "very well-traveled" LJ wrote: "assumed fair but she actually travels"
	405	WRITTEN PROTOCOL: HJ wrote: She has many more experiences than I would have guessed.
Critical Discussion Session #2 10.21.15	46	VT: He is a normal boy, likes to play ball, likes to draw WRITTEN PROTOCOL: VT wrote: seems like a normal child, taking part in many experiences other kids his age do MY COMMENT: What is "normal"?

	142-157	LJ: This goes, this is it, this is the WOW moment that we overlook because of the way he speaks, like his verbs, like the "ed" like I look-ed, like just by listening to him, you just can't go by the conventions and grammar, I mean because he's got style, connections, enhanced vocabulary, expressive BH: He used a simile LJ: Figurative Language… BH: He's confident… talking about himself being a sweaty kid and the underwear LH: He had great expression too with the Yee Haw R: yeah, expressive VT: And he's very smart, he sequenced the jelly fish. First we did this and then we did this
	430-439	HJ: I also said confident. I just didn't expect so much confidence and I think sometimes we can get a picture in our head of what a new student to us or a new kindergartener or a new pre-Ker might be like and I think we need to get away from that because I mean, if this translates into him being at school I would guess that he is not what I would have expected the first day of school to a new place. WRITTEN PROTOCOL: LH wrote: Bennie was more verbal and outgoing than I thought after looking at the pictures
	543-547	LJ: Right, maybe I've always just felt like I wasn't supposed to try to find kinds who are gifted. No one ever told me that, it's just like it wasn't our job to but it *has* to be the teacher's job.
Critical Discussion Session #3 11.4.15	47-54	R: The bike thing, I wondered that, too. She never did talk about why it was inside. When she describes riding the bike, it's an outdoor description… LJ: I wonder – her neighborhood – if they have to keep it inside because people might steal her bike. MY COMMENT: Assumption about living in a "bad" area
	345-358	LH: I wrote that she would do well on projects at home. If it's a school project she had to do at home, she has the family's support to help her. She put a lot of detail in her writing that she would probably put into the project as well. R: What I guess you're going on is that there is often that assumption that the family isn't involved or she's not getting help, but based on what she's told us through this, that is definitely… LJ: To piggy back off of that, I said that she does have the family support, and a lot of times, we just assume that she would not be able to participate in extra-curricular

		activities, like Junior Beta. We know that her parents would provide transportation. Some of the kids that are selected to participate in activities, sometimes we overlook the kids that we think, "Oh, they couldn't stay after school." In actuality, she has good family support.
	413-443	BH: That's when we have to be the advocates. If their Star scores don't show it, and there is no data to back it up. MB: Sometimes, those kids…you know they got it, but everything doesn't point to it… You're looking and saying, "This kid's Star scores really aren't that good; words per minute aren't that great." But in class you see how they are a leader. Not maybe a bold leader, but when it's with a partner…you know, like, and they are a leader in small groups. Who's to say that…then I just feel like it's your word… **LJ: But your word is important. Your voice is important.** R: I think part of it is that teachers don't always realize their role in being the advocate, because if you see something like this, this would definitely be a student that I would go, "Okay, I definitely need to look twice at this, take a double-take at this student, but had I not done this, I might not have." …I think realizing that we are those gatekeepers, in a sense, because if you don't advocate, a lot of times no one else is.

Anticipated Contributions

The landscape of American schools is changing dramatically, and educators must be equipped to respond to this change with "culturally sustaining pedagogy" that values our "multiethnic and multilingual present and future" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). If the current trend continues, emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage will continue to enter American classrooms at unprecedented rates. Instead of turning a blind eye to linguistic and cultural deficit discourse, allowing it to remain an invisible and oppressive reality (Espinoza & Harris, 1997/1998), we must do everything we can to help emergent bilinguals feel validated, accepted, and challenged. Instead of holding on to mainstream ways of thinking about gifted learners and English Learners,

educators can create new and more inclusive concepts of giftedness that positively impact students from diverse backgrounds.

Teachers can accomplish this by inviting their students to share photographs and digital stories about their outside of school lives that highlight their gifts, talents, and interests. This will help teachers expand on their understandings of students by learning more about their personal strengths and talents. Then, teachers can collaborate with others and use the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol to more deeply examine these images and photo stories and discuss ways to notice and cultivate students' gifts and interests in the classroom. In turn, emergent bilinguals – in fact *all* students – will benefit from teachers' increased mindfulness of the potential gifts and talents that lie within students from diverse backgrounds. Helping teachers move from primarily Eurocentric measures of knowledge towards ones that value and nurture other forms of knowledge will not only impact the referral process, but it will also impact the way teachers teach (Delgado Bernal, 2002). When teachers are able to see the promise and potential in *all* students, including those from diverse backgrounds, their instruction will become more rigorous and they will differentiate their instruction in ways that validate and cultivate a diverse array of gifts and talents.

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CHAPTER 3

"YOU CAN'T KNOW UNTIL SOMEONE TELLS YOU OR YOU EXPERIENCE

SOMETHING": TALKING BACK TO DEFICIT DISCOURSE WITH DIGITAL PHOTO

STORIES AND THE NOT-ICE TEACHER DISCUSSION PROTOCOL[1]

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[1] Allen, J. K. To be submitted to *Literacy Research and Instruction*.

Abstract

This practitioner research study explored the use of student-created digital photo stories combined with focused teacher conversations guided by the NOT-ICE protocol (Allen, 2016) to provide insight into why Latin@ students' gifts and talents may be overlooked by classroom teachers. Digital photo stories, created by emergent bilingual elementary Latin@ learners, were used to elicit the primary data from the study. Teachers acted as co-researchers, participating in six small-group, collaborative discussion sessions to investigate and understand how schooling labels carry potential biases that obscure students' gifts and talents. The Listening Guide (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, 2003) was used to facilitate the data analysis process. Findings indicate that digital photo stories can act as counter-stories because they can disrupt teachers' commonly held (mis)perceptions about emergent bilinguals, emphasize students' strengths and talent potential, and help teachers see how they might reach these students differently by providing them with challenging and engaging learning opportunities.

Keywords: emergent bilinguals, deficit discourse, digital photo stories, counter-stories

"You Can't Know Until Someone Tells You or You Experience Something":
Talking back to Deficit Discourse with Digital Photo Stories and the NOT-ICE Teacher
Discussion Protocol

"Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset. . .

stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo. . . they enrich imagination and

teach that by combining elements from the story and current reality, we may construct a new

world richer than either alone."

~Richard Delgado (1989/2011, p. 2413-2415)

It was a Monday afternoon in late November and Brooke, the gifted specialist, welcomed me into her classroom, which had become our meeting space over the last several months. Soon after, Hannah, the ESOL teacher, ambled in with Mary and Virginia, the second grade teachers, following close behind. Lura, the third grade teacher, rushed in with Louise, the fifth grade ELA teacher. Their warm smiles were no match for their yawns, evidence that they were weary after a long day's work. The time between Thanksgiving and winter break is always brutal for elementary school teachers. Yet, these dedicated teachers, tired as they were, honored their commitment to continue our work and engage in rich, productive conversations focusing on improving educational opportunities for underserved students.

Through our work together, critically discussing emergent bilingual students' digital photo stories, we could hear loud and clear the ways in which our beliefs and perceptions due to common school labels, such as English Language Learner, and their resulting policies often produce deficit discourses that work against these children as well as those they individually and collectively represent . Through narrating their personal photo stories, children ignited conversations that allowed themselves as well as educators to talk back to and interrogate the

dominant deficit discourses that are unfortunately alive, well, and thriving in their communities, schools, and classrooms, much like the discourses that are flourishing in schools and communities across the nation.

"You can't know until someone tells you or you experience something," Hannah, the ESOL teacher casually stated during this meeting. This seemingly off-the-cuff remark came as the elementary teachers and I talked about the need for culturally responsive pedagogy, truly listening to our students, and making meaningful attempts to validate and honor the experiences and linguistic competencies *all* students bring into the classroom. *You can't know until someone tells you or you experience something.*

It was a modest statement with a bold impact. In all of its simplicity, this statement encapsulated the reason behind our work together. We needed to hear the stories of emergent bilinguals in order to know them more fully – to truly hear their individual and collective stories – so that we could teach, or better yet, *reach* them differently.

In this article, I will discuss a practitioner research study guided by Latin@ critical theory (LatCrit) that explored the use of student-created digital photo stories combined with focused teacher conversations guided by the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol to provide insight into why the gifts and talents of emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage may be overlooked by classroom teachers (Allen, 2016). I will highlight how Latin@ critical theory frames a common educational issue and how students' digital photo stories can help teachers disrupt their commonly held (mis)perceptions about emergent bilinguals and talk back to deficit discourses that abound in classrooms, schools, and communities across the United States.

Using LatCrit to Question Educational Realities

Latin@ critical theory (LatCrit), developed from critical theory and a relative of critical race theory (CRT), addresses the intersection of race, class, gender, language, and immigration status to account for oppression (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Valdes, 1996). LatCrit illuminates the idea that while schools have the potential to free and empower individuals, certain populations of students are often marginalized due to the unquestioned structures, procedures, and discourses schools have in place as well as the deficit notions that continue to plague the classroom experiences of Latin@ students (Darder & Torres, 2014; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Lee & Anderson, 2009).

Like critical theory and CRT, LatCrit challenges perspectives that view students of color as deficient and variance from the mainstream as problematic for teaching and learning; furthermore, it enables teachers and teacher educators to question their everyday roles and practices in order to uncover ways they may potentially marginalize their students (Nieto, 2002). When teachers become more cognizant of their unwitting participation in policies and procedures that may be harmful to their students, they can interrogate the structures that impede students' access to high-quality education (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

A long, rich tradition of storytelling infuses Latin@ culture (Stefancic, 1997/1998). Storytelling is often used as a tool to either inculcate or challenge dominant mindsets and realities, as stories remind us of how reality is socially constructed (Delgado, 1989/2011). As listeners and tellers of stories, we continuously shape our realities when we view the world from another's perspective or cause others to do the same. Counter-stories highlight the stories of those whose experiences often remain silent (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). They are stories that challenge dominant understanding, can extinguish complacency, help us overcome difference,

and discredit the prevailing story, thus paving the way for new stories with new possibilities for reality (Delgado, 1989/2011).

   To illustrate, the education realm sometimes perpetuates the commonly accepted narrative that parents of Latin@ children are indifferent about their children's academic performance at school because they aren't involved in ways that are recognized or valued by mainstream society (Valdés, 1996). A counter-story to help discredit this narrative would involve Latin@ parents who are intensely concerned and committed to their children's schooling and want them to be successful; who believe their role in helping their children succeed in school means fulfilling their own obligations to ensure their family's survival and teaching respect and obedience at home (Valdés, 1996). Another example of a counter-story might involve a Latin@ mother who regularly accompanies her children when they take part in a literacy study over the summer, even when it presents a hardship for her (Allen, 2016). These examples are obviously not representative of all Latin@s, but the individual stories help illustrate the flawed assumptions present in the commonly accepted narrative.

   When using LatCrit, researchers must ensure they are accurately representing Latin@s as the diverse group of people that they are who have become part of American society in different but overlapping ways (Delgado, 2002; Espinoza, 2011; Valdes, 1996; Wildman, 1997). While Latin@s may have many commonalities and share some similar collective stories, there is significant value in hearing and honoring the variety of experiences expressed in their individual stories as well (Gallo & Wortham, 2012).

   I used LatCrit for this study to provide insight into why the gifts and talents of emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage may not be recognized by their teachers and to investigate why mainstream educators often categorize emergent bilinguals in ways that yield connotations of

cultural and linguistic deficiencies and academic restrictions (Lee & Anderson, 2009). Some

elements of LatCrit that speak directly to this study include its commitment to a social justice

research agenda, its pledge to validate diverse ways of knowing, and its unique way of

highlighting the lived experiences of students of color through storytelling (or counter-

storytelling), narratives, oral histories, and the like (Delgado, 1989/2011; Solórzano & Delgado

Bernal, 2001). As a White female researcher, I am reminded that I cannot speak as a Latina or

for Latin@s (Espinoza & Harris, 1997/1998). However, while remaining cognizant of my own

White privilege, I, along with my fellow researchers, can call on LatCrit ideals to help us listen

to and value the stories of Latin@ students, learn from their collective and individual

experiences, and hopefully help other educators do the same.

Battling Deficit Discourse

For this study, I focused on emergent bilinguals of Latin@s heritage. *Latin@s*[2] trace

their origins to Latin America and sometimes the Caribbean or Spain (Delgado & Stefancic,

2011). Constituting approximately 16 percent of the nation's total population and 24.7 percent of

the nation's public elementary school children, *Latin@s* are the largest and youngest ethnic

minority group in America and one of its fastest growing minority groups (Darder & Torres,

2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Specifically, Latin@ students

have reached a new milestone representing a record 23.9 percent of the total pre-K through 12th

grade student population across the nation (Darder & Torres, 2014), and comprising 13 percent

of Georgia's public school students (Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2014).

For the purposes of this article, I use the specific term *emergent bilinguals* to represent

those students commonly referred to in schools as *English Language Learners* or *English*

Learners (*ELLs or ELs;* García, 2009). I prefer the term *emergent bilingual* because it

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[2] I use Latin@ because of its gender inclusiveness in representing both Latino and Latina.

69

illuminates students' bilingualism as a positive characteristic and potential resource to be developed, resulting in higher expectations for these learners; furthermore, it emphasizes potential instead of limitations (García, 2009). While I advocate for the *emergent bilingual* term, I also realize that the *English Language Learner* and *English Learner* labels are widely used in schools as they are often tied to ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) services (Georgia Department of Education, 2015). While I recognize that these labels are problematic, and I do not support the deficit thinking that is often associated with them, I use these labels when I cite scholars who use them in their work and when I reference teacher conversations in my study in order to honor their language and school discourse, which has become interwoven into their daily professional lives.

Labeling or defining people, actions, and things is often challenging because of the ever-changing connotations, varying degrees of acceptance, complex interconnectedness among labels, and the fact that certain labels carry assumptions and beliefs with them that often impose limitations on them (Castellano & Diaz, 2002; Lee & Anderson, 2009). Despite these challenges, however, choices in terminology must be made in order to enable collective understanding.

While terms and labels afford readers with common understandings, they also have the potential to reinforce spaces of deficit discourse, or negative dialogue. Deficit thinking involves negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive labeling of students that views difference as a disadvantage and sees diverse students as being deprived, low-achieving, or at risk, and results in lower expectations for these students (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Lee & Anderson, 2009; Nieto, 2002; Shaklee & Hamilton, 2003; Williams & Newcombe, 1994). In addition to the "Limited English Proficient" label officially used in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, oftentimes,

schools categorize students and give them labels, such as "ELL" or "EL" and these labels highlight only students' abilities in relation to speaking or not speaking English, overlooking the varied strengths, interests, talents, and capabilities these students bring to the classroom (Georgia Department of Education, 2015; Lee & Anderson, 2009).

The beliefs and claims we espouse as a result of these categories can have harmful and lasting effects on students (Gee, 2015), which may very well explain why the academic achievement of emergent bilinguals continues to be disproportionately low at all educational levels (Gay, 2010). For instance, the misperceptions based on commonly accepted schooling labels often result in disproportionate numbers of diverse students, especially Latin@s and African Americans, being identified for gifted education because they are often not referred by their teachers for gifted evaluation (Baldwin, 2003; Cahnmann, 2006; Ford, 2013; Ford, et al., 2008; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier, Garcia, & Passow, 1995; Harris, Plucker, Rapp, & Martinez; 2009; Milner & Ford, 2007; Olthouse, 2013). Thus, a deficit view of diverse students contributes heavily to the fact that CLD learners are grossly underrepresented in gifted and talented programs as educators often operate from a deficit model that focuses on remediation rather than exploring and enhancing the positives (Baldwin, 2003; Ford & Grantham, 2003).

Ford (2014) cited that in 2012, according to the Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection Agency, Black and Hispanic[3] students were underrepresented in gifted education programs across the nation by 50% and 36% respectively. Numerically, these percentages translate into at least half a million underserved students (Ford, 2010). In the state where this study took place, White students have nearly 4 times the opportunity of Black and Hispanic students to be identified for and served in gifted and talented programs (Realize the Dream, 2015). Thus, CLD learners in the state of Georgia and across the nation are disadvantaged

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[3] Hispanic is the term used by government agencies.

because they lack access to gifted programming and its teaching methods, which are generally challenging, engaging, and rigorous (Ford, 2013).

This inequitable representation calls for empirical research to raise awareness about the issue so that educators can talk back to deficit discourse and work toward providing more equitable procedures, outcomes, and possibilities for underserved student populations. My study utilized participatory research methods that capitalized on the use of visual media – photographs and digital photo stories – to facilitate discussion and provide participants with opportunities to view situations from various perspectives (Allen, 2016; Cook & Quigley, 2013; Lykes, 2011; Serriere, 2010). Additionally, since stories are a primary means for understanding ourselves and others, we used digital photo stories, told through the eyes of local Latin@ children, to help us sort through false and constraining perceptions of individuals and cultures (Delgado, 1989/2011; Espinoza & Harris, 1997/1998). The reflective community dialogue that resulted awakened our minds to the biases and assumptions we often harbor due to labeling and deficit thinking (Cook & Quigley, 2013). In the sections that follow, I will elaborate on the details and findings of my study.

Research Context, Methods, and Analysis

In light of the significant barriers emergent bilinguals face in accessing challenging and engaging educational opportunities in schools, I developed a practitioner research study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) that involved teachers as co-researchers who engaged in professional collaboration to raise awareness about the issue of underserved learners, to better understand how schooling labels carry potential biases that obscure students' gifts and talents and impact gifted referrals, and to help them discover how they might enact change to create improved realities for their students. I support the proposition widely recognized by gifted

scholars that giftedness exists in every level of society and in every cultural and ethnic group, even though traditional school measures and social/cultural norms may fail to validate it (Castellano & Diaz, 2002; Frasier, et al., 1995; Grantham, 2014). I hoped that our work together, viewing, experience, and critically discussing Latin@ children's photos and photo stories, would illuminate how educators' perspectives and potential biases may work against certain student populations to unintentionally disadvantage them. Furthermore, I hoped that we could all learn to recognize, honor, and cultivate the strengths, interests, and talents students bring into the classroom and translate those capabilities into challenging and engaging educational experiences (Gay, 2010).

Specifically for this study, I investigated the following research question: *How do focused, critical conversations cued by Latin@ students' individual and collective photographs and digital stories help teachers become more aware of their social constructions of labels such as "gifted" and "English Language Learner" and their potential biases associated with them?*

Research Design

This study evolved from a previous interview study I conducted with teachers, which illuminated the teachers' desire to raise awareness about the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted programming, specifically for emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage, as well as a need for shifting teachers' unknowing immersion in deficit thinking and helping them to see past "the language barrier" (Allen, in press). This study involved working with elementary teachers to engage in focused, critical conversations inspired by photographs, digital photo stories, and the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol (Allen, 2016).

The photographs and digital photo stories used in this study were created during a previous study where I recruited six elementary-aged emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage

73

from my community to create student projects that would later be used as springboards for eliciting additional data. During this previous related study, I asked parents to take photos of their children that revealed information about their outside-of-school lives, including their interests, hobbies, strengths, and the like. I also invited parents to initiate discussions with their children about the photographs taken so that the students would have ideas for what to write about during our one-on-one photo story writing sessions. I helped the children create, revise, and edit their photo story texts, and we transformed them into a digital format using VoiceThread®. I gave children the option to create bilingual photo stories if they wished, and three of the six children opted to do so.

My hope was that the stories students created, in combination with our in-depth, small group discussions, would stimulate us to think about the inequities in schools and help teachers trade in their deficit thinking for attribute or dynamic thinking, which involves positive and productive labeling, seeing diversity as a resource and students as self-motivated, effortful, resilient, and at promise, resulting in higher expectations for these students (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Lee & Anderson, 2009; Nieto, 2002; Ruiz, 1984; Shaklee & Hamilton, 2003; Williams & Newcombe, 1994). Participatory research methods that utilize visual media are effective for professional learning because they offer participants new and reflective ways to perceive their world. Images and photographs act as a springboard for discussion (Serriere, 2010), adding a unique visual layer to research and prompting participants to pause, view a situation from a different vantage point, and begin to question and think critically about the situation (Cook & Quigley, 2013).

The following sections provide the details of my study and highlight findings that illuminate how digital photo stories acted as counter-stories when combined with critical

discussions in that they disrupted teachers' commonly held (mis)perceptions about students, emphasizing their talent potential and placing them at promise instead of at risk (Boykin, 2002).

Site and Participants

The site of this study was a Title I elementary school located in a southeastern state with 9% of its inhabitants identifying as Latin@ (Pew Research Center, 2011) and a county where the Latin@ population more than doubled in just over a decade (U. S. Census Bureau, 2015). The demographic breakdown of the total student body by ethnicity as well as those served in the school's gifted and talented program reveals that underrepresentation exists at this school. White students represent just under three-fourths of the student body but comprise almost 90% of the students served in the gifted and talented program. Conversely, Latin@ students make up just over 10% of the total student body but only roughly 2.5% of gifted identified students. This local data mirrors the nationwide data regarding the underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted programming, where the nationwide underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education programs has reached 50% and 36% respectively (Ford, et al., 2008; Ford, 2012; Ford, 2014). While the underrepresentation of all ethnic minority groups is troubling, the scope of my study honed in on emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage who are learning English as a second or additional language (although they may not receive formal ESOL services).

Six elementary school teachers with at least five years of teaching experience agreed to be co-researchers for this study. These teachers had experience working with gifted learners and/or English Language Learners. My co-researchers consisted of the gifted facilitator, ESOL specialist, two second grade teachers, one third grade teacher, and one fifth grade teacher, and all identified as White, monolingual, English-language native speakers. Table 3.1 provides additional details about each co-researcher.

I, also a White, monolingual, English-language native speaker, was also a participant in the study. While I planned parts of the study based on the study's purpose and goals prior to meeting with my co-researchers, our processes and procedures were flexible and adapted to the collective needs as the study progressed. Additionally, while I developed the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion protocol utilized to guide our discussions, we collectively practiced it and discussed potential revisions prior to experiencing students' stories.

Table 3.1
Study Participants

Participant (All Pseudonyms)	Years of Experience	Current Position	Reason for Participating
Brooke Hutcheson	8 years	Gifted facilitator	She wanted to make a more concerted effort to work with other teachers in the school to help them notice potential talent in ELLs.
Hannah James	10 years	ESOL specialist	She wanted to learn more about the gifted referral process so that she would be better able to notice gifts and talents among her students and better equipped to make gifted referrals.
Mary Byers	8 years	Second grade teacher	She has experienced the frustration of referring ELLs she "just knows" are gifted but don't qualify for services because of the standardized tests. She joined the study to learn more about how she can better support those learners in the regular classroom and in what ways she might advocate for changes in the gifted evaluation process.
Virginia Turner	8 years	Second grade teacher	She wanted to learn more about the most effective ways to cultivate the strengths and talents of her ELLs in the classroom. Also, along with the small group of ELLs she typically serves each year, she had recently welcomed an emergent bilingual student into her classroom whose language of preference was Spanish, and she saw this study as an opportunity to learn more about how to meet his needs.

Lura Hanson	5 years	Third grade teacher	She was frustrated with the number of advanced ELLs who had reached her third grade class having never been referred for gifted evaluation. She, therefore, saw herself in a pivotal role and wanted to learn more about the gifted referral and testing processes.
Louise Jones	16 years	Fifth grade ELA teacher	She wanted to improve her practice with ELLs. She joined the study to learn new ideas for connecting with students and providing them with challenging and enriching learning experiences.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data from this study was elicited by photographs and digital photo stories created during a previous study by elementary-aged emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage from my community. The photos and photo stories shared information about the children's outside-of-school lives. The photographs acted as springboards for discussion (Serriere, 2010), and the photo stories were a primary means for understanding ourselves and others (Delgado, 1989/2011). When Latin@ students told their stories through photography and from their own perspectives, mainstream educators were offered multiple opportunities to "better understand and appreciate the unique experiences and responses of students of color through a deliberate, conscious, and open type of listening" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 116). Furthermore, their stories interrupted complacency by helping us, the listeners, construct our own meanings and sort through false and constraining perceptions of individuals and cultures (Delgado, 1989/2011; Espinoza & Harris, 1997/1998). The additional meaningful community dialogue, resulted in an experience that engaged and inspired us in powerful ways (Cook & Quigley, 2013).

Table 3.2 provides an overview of the data sources and how they were collected. Following the table, I offer a more detailed description of each aspect of this study.

Table 3.2
Data Sources and Methods of Collection

Research Questions:

Overarching question: *How can educators help improve access to gifted education, advanced programs, and/or more challenging curricula for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students?*

Specific Question: *How do focused, critical conversations cued by Latin@ students' collective photographs and digital stories help teachers become more aware of their social constructions of labels such as "gifted" and "English Language Learner" and their potential biases associated with them?*

Participants	Data Source	Collection Methods	Artifacts	Time Frame
Six elementary teachers	Individual Interviews	1 per teacher	Audio recordings; interview protocol with written notes	Thirty minutes/ interview; end of August, 2015
	Introductory Teacher Workshop	Six teachers; one session to familiarize teachers with the NOT-ICE protocol and modify it if needed;	video recordings; teachers' comments and notes discussing the NOT-ICE protocol	1 - 1 ½ hours Sept. 2015
	Critical Discussions	Six teachers; three sessions; NOT-ICE protocol;	NOT-ICE protocol notes; video recordings; transcriptions; reflective memos	1-1 ½ hours/session; Sept.-Nov. 2015
	Focus Group Interview	Six teachers; one session;	video recordings; transcriptions; "What I Learned" poems; emailed notes; reflective memos	1-1 ½ hours; Nov. 2015
	Meeting to Discuss Future Actions	Six teachers; one session;	video recordings; transcriptions; reflective memos	1 hour; Dec. 2015

The study began with individual teacher interviews to gain insight into their experiences working with gifted learners and/or ELLs and making gifted referrals. Then, the co-researchers and I participated in a workshop together to discuss and refine the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol I created and implemented it using a sample of photographs as well as a sample digital photo story from one of the participating children from the previous study. NOT-ICE is intentionally divided to represent the idea that our (mis)perceptions do not have to remain frozen and static, but instead should be fluid and dynamic. NOT-ICE suggests a melting away or thawing of our current (mis)perceptions about emergent bilinguals in exchange for more holistic, dynamic perceptions that capture students as whole learners and not simply language learners.

This workshop gave all participants an opportunity to practice the discussion protocol before launching it during a live critical discussion session. The NOT-ICE protocol guided us in answering the following questions:

- **N** - What **N**oticings can you make about the photos? (Still photographs only)

- **O** - What did you **O**verlook in the photos? (Digital photo story from this point forward)

- **T** - How does this discovery relate to your **T**eaching?

- **I** - What **I**mpact might it have on students?

- **C** - How have your initial perceptions **C**hanged?

- **E** - In what ways can we use what we have learned through this process to ensure **E**quitable referral opportunities and outcomes for students from CLD backgrounds?

Over a period of approximately two months, my co-researchers and I engaged in three critical discussion sessions using the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol. Each session focused on one child's photographs and digital photo story, and these images and stories served as springboards for the discussion. For each session, we viewed students' photographs and

commented on the significant things we noticed. After listening to the digital photo stories, we used the mnemonic NOT-ICE as a means for facilitating critical dialogue and reflection around the photographs and digital stories.

Following those discussion sessions, I facilitated one follow-up focus group interview session with the teachers using a general interview guide approach to discuss topics that needed further exploration. We also created individual "What I Learned" poems (Hansen, 2012) to express our thoughts on the insight we gained from the study. Approximately two weeks after debriefing, our group reconvened to discuss future actions we might take to raise awareness among teachers in the school about the issue of underserved CLD students and plan strategies for helping to shift teachers' deficit thinking to more productive thinking. The group discussed how we might act as advocates for ELLs at the school and district level.

I invited my co-researchers to participate in the data analysis process to the degree they wished to be included. Because they are elementary school teachers, they have very limited amounts of time to contribute to data analysis. Therefore, I generally took the lead on most aspects of the data analysis process. All co-researchers were involved in member checking to validate the honesty of analytic categories, interpretations, and findings.

I drew on the *Listening Guide* method to guide my analysis process (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, 2003). This approach involves multiple readings of interview transcripts due to the assumption that simultaneous voices may co-occur, and these voices may be in tension with one another, with oneself, with the voices of others, and/or with the culture or context (Gilligan, et al., 2003). Each listening amplifies an aspect of a voice like listening to a piece of music and following a different instrument each time (Gilligan, Brown, & Rogers, 1990). I used

this approach as a mentor for my data analysis method, but my process took on a "voice" of its own.

I read through the transcripts to identify participants' initial assumptions and ultimate realizations. Additionally, I highlighted mentions of characteristics of learners, both gifted learners as well as English Learners, and I noted discussions of personal and professional relationships and whether or not they revealed evidence of connections or disconnections (between teacher-student, teacher-teacher, student-student, parent-teacher, and the like).

I brought my analysis back into a direct relationship with the research questions and purpose of the study by listening for the multiple facets of experience being told (Gilligan, et al., 2003). Here, I read through the tables I created in step one to tune in to a different voice, or layer of the story. I determined, through multiple listenings and readings, that the emerging voices were the voice of bias (labels, student characteristic), the voice of awareness (Aha moments, realizations), and the voice of agency (gatekeeper, advocate).

Talking Back to Deficit Discourse

In this study, Latin@ children initially told stories through photographs. We responded with stories – stories laden with prevailing themes and assumptions reflective of established belief systems (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). A true dialogue began when the children shared their photo stories in their own voices – stories that countered the dominant narratives being told about them – and we *listened* and dialogued with one another, with the stories, within ourselves. While the voice of bias was alive and well in this study, as evidenced in the teachers' initial noticings and comments about the children's photographs, the voices of awareness and agency ultimately triumphed as we questioned our beliefs and came to new realizations about emergent bilinguals. Furthermore, we deconstructed the untruths we harbored about these learners and

81

discussed sound pedagogical decisions and changes we must make in order to provide these students with high-quality educational opportunities.

The children's counter-stories caused us to recognize and appreciate things we had overlooked all along (Delgado, 1989/2011). For the purposes of this article, I will highlight how the student-created photo stories acted as counter-stories when combined with our focused, critical discussions. I will focus on the voice of awareness – the Aha! Moments – our group experienced when engaging with the students' photo (counter)stories and subsequent critical conversations. These Aha! Moments illuminate how we talked back to deficit discourse and altered our interactions with students. These breakthrough moments of new understandings caused us to see students in a new light and think about how we might teach them differently – in a way that engages them and capitalizes on their strengths and interests – and think differently about making gifted referrals.

Voice of Awareness: Aha! moments

My co-researchers and I experienced Aha! moments because of the children's powerful stories combined with the safe discussion spaces we collaboratively created. We discovered that often times, the untruths we carry about people are not verbalized so no one ever has an opportunity to challenge our assumptions, and we therefore continue to harbor them. Thus, it is important for us to have safe spaces to share our thoughts with others so that our assumptions may shift. Our breakthrough moments served to help us realize the untruths we had been harboring all along regarding the communicative competence and family involvement of Latin@s.

The following exchange from our group's second critical discussion session highlights an Aha! Moment that resulted from one of the photo stories told in English by a six-year-old boy

from Nicaragua named Bennie.[4] Though Bennie's photo story revealed hesitations and

grammatical mistakes, it illuminated his expert communication skills in other ways.

> *Louise*: This is it! This is the WOW moment that we overlook because of the way
>
> he speaks, like his verbs, like the "ed" like "I look-ed"…just by listening to him,
>
> like you just can't go by the conventions and grammar, I mean because he's got
>
> style, connections, enhanced vocabulary, expressive…
>
> *Brooke*: He used a simile
>
> *Louise*: Figurative Language…
>
> *Brooke*: He's confident… talking about himself being a sweaty kid and the
>
> underwear
>
> *Lura*: He had great expression too with the "Yee Haw!"
>
> *Researcher*: yeah, expressive
>
> *Virginia*: And he's very smart, he like sequenced the jelly fish. First we did this
>
> and then we did this…

As Bennie narrated his photo story, he required some prompting, stumbled over his words at

times, and had difficulty at times with verb tenses and pronouncing words correctly. For

instance, when talking about the jellyfish he caught at the beach, he said that he and his uncle put

water in the bucket "so it won't die" (instead of "wouldn't").   Later, when describing a past day

at an arcade, he said, "I shoot so many baskets…" (instead of "shot").   While sharing about his

baseball team, he recalled, "One time, some kid threw the ball right on my leg, and it hurted like

a jellyfish" (instead of "hurt"). However, in this example, Bennie talks back to the common

narrative that Standard English must be used to communicate effectively with others. In this

way, he ignited rich discussion that helped us shift our thinking to realize that expressiveness,

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[4] All names are pseudonyms.

style, vocabulary choice, figurative language, sequencing, a sense of humor, and confidence play a significant role in meaningful communication with others.

Another Aha! Moment came when we listened to Yuri's story. Yuri is a nine-year-old girl of Mexican heritage whose bilingual photo story radiated themes of family support and involvement as she shared about her wide variety of interests in cooking, sports, exercise, swimming, and church activities.

> *Louise*: {In response to the protocol question, How does this discovery
>
> relate to your **T**eaching?] I said that she does have the family support, and a lot of
>
> times, we just assume that she would not be able to participate in extra-curricular
>
> activities, like Junior Beta. We know [from the photo story] that her parents
>
> would provide transportation…sometimes we overlook the kids that we think,
>
> "Oh, they couldn't stay after school." In actuality, she has good family support.

After hearing Yuri's photo story, the teachers consistently wrote in their notes that Yuri's family was extremely involved in supporting her interests. Yuri's story and our conversations troubled the myth that Latin@ parents are not actively involved in their children's lives and that they often do not take advantage of after-school academic opportunities for their children. From Yuri's story, the teachers realized that they may have been discounting certain children to participate in positive after-school educational experiences, such as Junior Beta Club, because of assumptions they harbored about familial support. While this instance may not represent a pure and true example of a counter story since the teachers still harbor a traditional mainstream view of what family involvement looks like, it certainly provided a lesson in not making assumptions about students and triggered a first step in teachers changing their thinking about the students they teach.

During our focus group meeting that followed the critical discussion sessions, we discussed our Aha! moments from the process of listening to students' stories and reflecting on them in a collaborative way. The following exchange illustrates the idea that when we truly listen to and observe students, we are able to more easily see the strengths they bring into the classroom.

> *Mary*: I think by seeing the videos [photo stories] you saw so much of them and what they *can* do [teacher emphasis], and how they verbalize things that you may not necessarily see in the everyday classroom. You saw a whole different –
>
> *Louise*: And the first time when we could only see the pictures, it's what we see in the classroom. And then when they were able to verbalize, that was a reminder to us to communicate with these students. Do what it takes to bring out the talents they *do* have [teacher emphasis].

In this exchange, Mary and Louise highlight the importance of creating spaces where students are able to share about their strengths and abilities so that they can be cultivated in the classroom. The key is *inviting* students to tell stories about themselves that reveal their interests and talents – and truly *listening* to them – so that we can design learning opportunities around students' capabilities and interests.

The focus group ended when we shared our take-away learnings from the critical discussion sessions. Brooke shared that she learned to address her own flaws, presumptions, and perspectives because they "clashed with the truths that were revealed by the students." When she shared this, all heads nodded in agreement. It's interesting what we can learn about students through a simple digital photo story; yet, these comments demonstrate our new-found awareness that when we listen to and thoughtfully reflect on children's stories, no matter what form they

present themselves, we are able to intentionally confront the false assumptions we hold about students and recognize their potential by seeing the things they *can* do. Then, we are better able to teach into students' strengths in a way that maximizes student engagement and learning.

Altering teacher and student interactions. Through our work together, we also discovered that our perceptions of students result in certain expectations we have of students and play out in the ways we interact with and teach those students. In addition to breaking down untruths we carried about the students, the digital stories and Aha! moments nudged us to think about ways we might alter our instructional approaches to reach these students differently and more effectively in our classrooms. These adjustments in teaching approaches resulted in changed realities for teachers as well as students. For instance, during our first critical discussion session, Ms. Turner, a second grade teacher shared how our initial workshop had nudged her to think differently about writing activities for her new Spanish-speaking student.

> *Virginia*: And for learners, like the little guy I have whose broken English is about the same as my broken Spanish. . . maybe having him write his story in Spanish first and then English, even if it takes more time, it would probably be a better quality.

Ms. Turner put her thinking into action and invited her student to write bilingual texts, beginning in Spanish, and later, with her help, translating his writing into English. Realizing that his – and her own – knowledge of both Spanish and English could grow through appropriate language scaffolding activities, such as hooking his English learning onto his current Spanish literacies, Virginia validated and nurtured the student's native language and second language abilities as well as his translation skills, thus cultivating his ability to be bilingual. In an era of teaching when teachers feel pressed for time, Virginia realized that her investment in this student's

86

developing literacy skills provided him a better quality learning process and resulted in a better quality product in the end that showcased the student's ability to function between both languages.

During our second critical discussion session, we discussed motivation and engagement and the payoff that results for students when teachers build off of students' strengths in the classroom.

> *Hannah*: That's what I said [in agreement to another's response about motivation to the question, What Impact might it have on students?] …motivation and engagement because you can easily lose a student like that [whose creativities and strengths are not capitalized on], and then they're gone, but if you keep them engaged in doing things that they like and that they're good at, then they can pick up those language skills as they go along.
>
> *Louise*: And I took it a step farther and said that it would help, of course we're talking about the things like in school, but like in other public places, he (Bennie) will learn when he gains that self-confidence that he can be that way [humorous, creative, expressive] at story hour at the library, if he's not already, or at the park…or he might go and take the art camps or get into little theater camps in the summer because that has been brought to his attention, you know?

This exchange highlights the idea that when teachers invite students to share about their lives through photographs and storytelling, they are better able to look beyond labels and perceived weaknesses and acknowledge gifts and talents among students. Subsequently, students can learn, with the help of a teacher, to seek outside-of-school outlets and extracurricular activities that will allow them to further develop their talents. In a world of standardized assessments and

an over-abundance of quantitative data about students, qualifying them and nurturing their

personal interests, strengths, and talents is key to helping students feel valued and successful.

Other examples of instructional shifts include converting to an inclusion model to serve fifth

grade ESOL (as well as other variously labeled) students for writing instruction, translating

assignments into Spanish as needed, and inviting students to speak, read, and write (when

appropriate) in their native language.

Tensions

While this study was transformative and brought about a number of positive changes, it

was not without tensions. Some teachers had difficulty reconciling their newfound

understandings within the standardized testing era in which our students and teachers currently

live. Many of them struggled to recognize the value of qualitative data about students and felt

that their voice was significantly overpowered by scores and numbers. The teachers discussed

the idea of using photo stories and the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol as part of the

gifted referral and identification processes, but they were unsure of how much value it would

realistically carry in the eyes of local policymakers.

However, the gifted facilitator reminded us that the gifted eligibility team, which is made

up of gifted facilitators from across the county and led by an Instructional Specialist from the

county office, seems to be open to using a variety of forms of data, as long as the data is

substantiated, so perhaps that might be a reasonable place to start in advocating for a shift in the

collection of gifted referral data. After all, the goal of these meetings should *not* be to allow test

scores or numbers to cause teachers to attend more to student weaknesses than strengths or make

standardized decisions about their educational opportunities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Perhaps teachers can begin telling their own stories of how qualitative data helped them sort

through constraining perceptions of students which might change the narrative of what's accepted as data at gifted referral meetings (Delgado, 1989/2011; Espinoza & Harris, 1997/1998).

Teachers also discussed the need for professional learning in the area of culturally responsive pedagogy, but they were somewhat disillusioned about how they might actually bring that professional learning to their school with so many other mandated initiatives. In fact, teachers even discussed the idea having to use test score data about subgroups to get buy-in from the school district's leadership so that they would see a need for that kind of professional learning and authorize it. This speaks to the current culture of professional learning, in which professional learning is mandated from the top down as opposed to being initiated from within by the teachers and grounded in their daily classroom realities (Sagor, 2000; Stephens, et al., 2000; Rogers, et al., 2005). Despite the current culture, I am hopeful that we can use our newfound awareness of our roles as advocates to be agents of change and bring more culturally sensitive instructional practices to our classrooms.

Finally, teachers were unable to devote as much time to data analysis as I had hoped. I had envisioned data analysis to be a collaborative process, but the teachers' understandable time constraints prevented that partnership.

Implications

Using digital photo stories in the classroom introduces teachers and students to an alternate storytelling approach and provides students with a means for sharing their (counter)stories (Delgado, 1989/2011; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Using these stories along with the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol to cue reflective, collaborative conversation is useful in helping teachers expand their views of students in order to see that students' home

languages, cultures, and interests are strengths and assets that promote learning as opposed to obstacles that impede it (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Nieto, 2002). Moreover, these photo stories help teachers see that while Latin@s may share similarities in their collective stories, the variety of unique experiences expressed in their individual stories can help counter common stereotypes teachers may harbor about them (Gallo & Wortham, 2012). Since teachers appear to be more likely to make cognitive and behavioral shifts when they witness colleagues they admire modifying their thoughts and behaviors (NCEE, 2015), collaborative endeavors that bring teachers together to focus on student work in authentic ways, such as through critically reflecting on and discussion students' digital photo stories, is helpful in illuminating students' individual and unique capabilities.

Finally, since the practice of measuring students by test scores and numbers pervades nearly all educational settings, and the voices of scores and numbers are often privileged in telling stories about children, digital photo stories provide students with a genuine opportunity to contest those stories by qualifying students in a way that highlights and privileges their true lived experiences (Delgado, 2011; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Examining various and multiple sources and types of data about students will prevent us from allowing quantitative data to color our views of students.

While this study focused specifically on emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage, the approach of using photography, digital photo stories, and collaborative discussions guided by the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol could be used to help teachers trouble the stereotypes they harbor about *all* students, including those from other ethnic minority populations, students of low socio-economic status, students with disabilities, as well as students of all sexual orientations and gender identities. When teachers shift their thinking about students from deficit

thinking to promising thinking, they change their expectations of students and thus engage with students differently, in a way that capitalizes on students' strengths and interests. This, in turn, results in improved educational opportunities for students.

As a former elementary school teacher, critical researcher, and teacher educator, I am deeply concerned with the unequal opportunities that exist in schools for emergent bilinguals. Equally distressing is the lack of awareness among teachers about the issue of underserved CLD learners. Challenges with the English language should not be synonymous with limitations in the classroom. Students from diverse backgrounds have much more to offer than their language challenges may reveal. But we have to be willing to observe, listen, converse, and experience so that we can begin to see those hidden treasures. I can only hope that the story of our work together, cued by the students' stories, will be told and re-told so that we can shape what others hear, perceive, and eventually come to know about emergent bilinguals. *You can't know until someone tells you or you experience something.* Now that you've heard and perhaps experienced, how might you go forth and retell the story so that you can positively impact another's reality?

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CHAPTER 4

FROM GATEKEEPER TO ADVOCATE: HOW DIGITAL PHOTO STORIES AND THE

NOT-ICE TEACHER DISCUSSION PROTOCOL SPARKED CONVERSATIONS THAT

IGNITED TEACHER AGENCY IN NOTICING GIFTS AND TALENTS IN EMERGENT

BILINGUALS[5]

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Abstract

This practitioner research study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) explored the use of student-created digital photo stories combined with focused teacher conversations guided by the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol (Allen, 2015) to provide insight into why classroom teachers sometimes fail to notice Latin@ students' gifts and talents. The primary data from the study comes from six small group, collaborative discussion sessions in which teachers acted as co-researchers to investigate how schooling labels carry potential biases that obscure culturally and linguistically diverse students' gifts and talents and cause teachers to overlook these students for gifted referrals. The Listening Guide (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, 2003) facilitated the data analysis process. Findings indicate that teacher agency is key in recognizing untapped gifts and talents among diverse student populations, making sound pedagogical decisions to provide high-quality educational experiences for them, and acting on their behalf to increase their opportunities to be referred for gifted evaluation.

Keywords: gifted referrals, labels, culturally and linguistically diverse learners, Latin@s, underrepresentation

From Gatekeeper to Advocate: How Digital Photo Stories and the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol Sparked Conversations that Ignited Teacher Agency in Noticing and Cultivating Gifts and Talents in Emergent Bilinguals

Giftedness exists in every level of society and in every cultural and ethnic group even though standardized assessments and school policies are often not successful in validating it in culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners[6] (Castellano & Diaz, 2002; Frasier, Garcia, & Passow, 1995; Grantham, 2014; Shaklee & Hamilton, 2003). Considered to be most at-risk due to a lack of sufficient and appropriate educational services available to them, potentially gifted students from CLD backgrounds, as well as those who are economically disadvantaged, have been targeted populations of highest priority under the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1998 (Frasier, et al., 1995). This act represents the only federal program committed specifically to gifted and talented students, and it focuses resources on identifying and serving students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs to encourage equitable educational opportunities for all students (National Association of Gifted Children, n.d.).

In the twenty-five years that have passed since the Jacob Javits Act recognized the need for supporting underserved student populations, little improvement has been made in the area of access to gifted programming for CLD students as these students remain underrepresented in gifted education programs nationwide (Ford, 2012; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). In fact,

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[6] Although labels carry potential biases with them, they are sometimes necessary to promote collective understanding. In my research, I use the term *culturally and linguistically diverse learners* to represent students commonly referred to as *English language learners* (Lee & Anderson, 2009). I use *culturally and linguistically diverse* because of its inclusion of both the culture and language dimensions, which are interrelated (Castellano & Diaz, 2002).

Ford (2014) cited that in 2012, Black and Hispanic[7] students were underrepresented in gifted education programs across the nation by 50% and 36% respectively, according to the Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection Agency. That means that at least half a million students across America are underserved in schools (Ford, 2010). Similarly, in Georgia, White students have 3.8 times the opportunity of Black and Hispanic students to be identified for gifted and talented programs (Realize the Dream, 2015), putting CLD students in Georgia and across the nation at a disadvantage because they lack access to gifted programming and its generally challenging and engaging teaching methods (Ford, 2013). Therefore, empirical research is needed to raise awareness about the issue of underrepresentation so that educators can improve their abilities to notice and cultivate gifts and talents in CLD learners and work toward providing them with more equitable procedures, outcomes, and possibilities.

Research on the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted programming has become more prevalent as the landscape of American schools has continued to change rapidly with more diverse students attending today's schools. Between 1980 and 2009, the number of students (ages 5-17) speaking a language other than English at home more than doubled, rising from 4.7 million to 11.2 million, which is 21% of the school-age population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). As of 2009, nearly half of the public school students in America come from racially, ethnically, or linguistically diverse backgrounds (Ford, Coleman, & Davis, 2014). Latin@ students specifically have reached a new milestone representing a record 23.9 percent of the total pre-K through 12th grade student population across the nation (Darder & Torres, 2014), and comprising 13 percent of Georgia's public school students (Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2014). Even more remarkable, from 1997-2008,

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[7] Government agencies report these students as Hispanic, but I use the term Latin@ to represent both Latino and Latina, since that is how the majority of the families at my research site self-identify.

Georgia's population of ESOL students increased over 400 percent (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2010), with 79 percent of those students speaking Spanish as their primary language as of 2014 (Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2014). Despite the fact that the number of diverse learners continues to skyrocket, the representation of these learners in gifted and advanced programming remains disproportionate (Ford, et al., 2014).

While culturally and linguistically diverse (*CLD*) students (or learners) refers to a wide spectrum of students representative of diverse cultural and ethnic groups and includes those students with native language backgrounds other than English (of whom the majority learn English as a second language; Castellano & Diaz, 2002), my research focuses specifically on *emergent bilinguals* who are commonly referred to in schools as *English Language Learners* or *English Learners* (*ELLs or ELs;* García, 2009). I prefer the term *emergent bilingual* because it illuminates the students' bilingualism as a positive characteristic and emphasizes potential instead of the limitations possibly associated with their English learning status (García, 2009). However, I realize that the *English Language Learner* and *English Learner* labels are a reality in schools as they are often tied to ESOL services, and I honor those labels as they are part of teacher and school discourses (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

In this article I will discuss what the literature says about deficit thinking and the role it plays in the gifted referral process as background for the purpose of my study. I will also elaborate on my theoretical framework and research design. Additionally, I will explain my findings, discussing the voices of Bias and Awareness and specifically illuminating the voice of Agency. I will conclude with a discussion of the study's limitations and implications.

Deficit Thinking and Teacher Referrals for Gifted Evaluation

Many researchers believe that deficit thinking is one of the primary causes for the underrepresentation of CLD learners in gifted education programs (Baldwin, 2003; Cahnmann, 2006; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier, et al., 1995). Deficit thinking involves negative and counterproductive labeling of students and views diverse students as being disadvantaged, deprived, low-achieving, or at risk, resulting in lower expectations for these students (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Lee & Anderson, 2009; Nieto, 2002; Shaklee & Hamilton, 2003; Williams & Newcombe, 1994). The deficit thinking model, which seems to be deeply embedded within the beliefs and practices in the field of education, suggests that deficits reside within the individual (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998). Instead of examining shortcomings that might reside within the institution, causing it to fail the students, students are often unconsciously viewed through a deficit lens, which causes them to be relegated to lower expectations and outcomes in the classroom (Licona, 2013). Therefore, rather than identifying and enhancing the positives of children, many of today's educators and administrators operate from a deficit model that focuses on remediation (Baldwin, 2003; Ford & Grantham, 2003). This results in limited opportunities for some CLD students in schools when they must deal with educators' unconscious negative attitudes toward their ways of communicating and deficit perceptions of their intellectual abilities and academic capabilities (Cahnmann, 2006; Darder & Torres, 2014).

Deficit thinking is often a result of labels, which categorize people and tell incomplete stories about them. Labeling or defining people, actions, and things is often challenging because of evolving connotations and the fact that certain labels carry assumptions and beliefs with them (Castellano & Diaz, 2002). When categories are used habitually and haphazardly, they often result in false assumptions and suggest absolute truths about people that impose limitations on

them (Lee & Anderson, 2009). For instance, if a student is given the label of "immigrant,"

teachers might assume that student will be under-skilled, less intelligent, and poor, resulting in

lower expectations for that student.   Well-intentioned mainstream teachers often unconsciously

fall into this trap of assumptions about CLD learners, especially when they have difficulty

identifying with these learners (Katsarou, Picower, & Stovall, 2010; Sharma & Portelli, 2014).

When learners are labeled in ways that overshadow their abilities and result in connotations of

cultural and linguistic deficiencies instead of capabilities, they face academic restrictions rather

than opportunities (Lee & Anderson, 2009).

Labels and identity are tightly intertwined with how educators teach and how students

learn. Since practices and policies in educational settings are often grounded in labels that

ascribe who learners are or should be based on socially constructed assumptions, schools become

sites of struggle for students from diverse backgrounds rather than sites of boundless

opportunities (Lee & Anderson, 2009). For instance, the *English Language Learner* (*ELL*) and

English Learner (*EL*) labels are a reality in schools as they are often tied to ESOL services

(Georgia Department of Education, 2015). These labels can be problematic because they carry

deficit notions that highlight only students' English language competencies and ignore other

strengths they possess. The misperceptions based on commonly accepted labels such as these

result in disproportionately lower numbers of diverse students being identified for gifted

education because they are often not referred for gifted evaluation (Milner & Ford, 2007).

Gifted referrals are the first step in the gifted evaluation process. In most cases,

classroom teachers take the lead role in referring students for gifted evaluation (Bianco, Harris,

Garrison-Wade, & Leech, 2011; Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Elhoweris, 2008). Relying heavily on

teachers to initiate the referral process gives teachers substantial influence and power over the

104

gifted identification of emergent bilinguals since students who are not referred will never have the chance to be selected for gifted programs (Bernal, 2009; Milner & Ford, 2007; Reyes, 2004). When teachers aren't able to notice gifts and talents among these diverse learners, they often do not refer them for gifted evaluation, thus creating a significant barrier for these students who desperately need access to more challenging curricula (Ford, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

As a critical researcher, I am deeply concerned with the unequal opportunities that continue to exist in schools for emergent bilinguals. A previous interview study I conducted with teachers inspired this study because the interviews indicated a need for raising awareness about the issue of underrepresentation of emergent bilinguals in gifted programming as well as a need for shifting deficit thinking and helping teachers to see past "the language barrier" (Allen, in press). Additionally, teachers often do not question the familiar and seemingly innocuous policies set in place when they appear to work soundly for most (Nieto, 2014). However, seemingly equal policies, such as those purported to set an equal playing field for gifted referrals and identification, do not always result in equal outcomes for students.

Teachers play an important role in initiating the gifted referral process, and they are often considered to be important "gatekeepers" for gifted education programs (Peterson, 2003, p. 314); therefore, they must fully understand their role in the gifted referral process in order to ensure that diverse students with gifts and talents receive the challenging educational opportunities they deserve (Milner & Ford, 2007). Since awareness is generally a precursor to action (Hansen, 2012), raising awareness about the phenomenon of underrepresentation is the first step toward helping educators recognize gifted and talented potential among emergent bilinguals.

I believe in the importance of raising awareness about the issue of underrepresentation and searching for ways to improve emergent bilingual students' access to gifted programming. I understand the need to help teachers re-examine their views of giftedness as well as their beliefs about students from diverse backgrounds, so they might have new lenses to better see their students' gifts and talents (Milner & Ford, 2007). I, therefore, designed a study to illuminate how educators' perspectives and potential biases may marginalize their students. Through this research, I hoped to stimulate change in deficit thinking and have teachers examine their roles as gatekeepers in the gifted referral process. To my knowledge, none of the research on the underrepresentation of emergent bilinguals in gifted programming involves a Practitioner Research approach (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) combining student photography and digital storytelling with educators' critical and reflective dialogue as a means for promoting awareness about the differential representation of emergent bilinguals in gifted education.

Theoretical Framework

Critical theory broadly informs this study as critical theory highlights the idea that dominating structures, created by human choice and practice, can be undone – though not easily – through human agency (Hanks, 2011). Moreover, education is viewed as a primary means for the eradication of structural domination and the realization of freedom because it is generally reflective of society and helps shape our knowledge, identity, and power (Bronner, 2011; Freire, 1970/2012; Levinson, 2011). Therefore, critical educational scholars aim to address social injustices in the field of education, particularly how the marginalization of people is constructed through schooling, in order to promote positive social and educational change (Popkewitz, 1999).

Specifically for this study, I used Latin@ critical theory (LatCrit) to promote understanding of why the gifts and talents of emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage may not be recognized by their teachers. LatCrit illuminates the idea that while schools have the potential to free and empower individuals, certain populations of students are often marginalized due to the often unquestioned structures, procedures, and discourses schools have in place as well as the deficit notions that continue to plague the classroom experiences of Latin@ students (Darder & Torres, 2014; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Lee & Anderson, 2009). Similar to critical theory and critical race theory, LatCrit theory interrogates deficit perspectives of CLD learners along with the idea that deviations from the mainstream hinder teaching and learning (Nieto, 2002).

LatCrit speaks directly to this study because of its pledge to validate diverse ways of knowing and its unique way of highlighting the lived experiences of CLD learners through storytelling (or counter-storytelling) (Delgado, 1989/2011; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). A long, rich tradition of storytelling infuses Latin@ culture (Stefancic, 1997/1998), and many of the stories marginalized populations share attempt to shift or disrupt the dominant reality (Delgado, 1989/2011). Counter-stories highlight the stories of those whose experiences often remain silent, challenge dominant understanding, can extinguish complacency, help us overcome difference, and discredit the prevailing story, thus opening up doors to new possibilities for reality (Delgado, 1989/2011; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In my study, digital photo stories, when combined with the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol and critical discussion sessions (Allen, 2016), acted as genuine counter-stories and effectively challenged our assumptions about CLD learners and opened doors of opportunity for them.

Research Design

In light of the significant barriers emergent bilinguals face in accessing challenging and engaging educational opportunities in schools, I designed a practitioner research study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) that involved collaboration among teachers to better understand how schooling labels carry potential biases that obscure students' gifts and talents and impact gifted referrals, and to help them discover their roles as gatekeepers in the gifted identification process. I utilized practitioner research for this study because this approach involves educators as co-researchers and stimulates them to think about the inequities in schools, challenge dominant viewpoints, and strive to make educational resources, opportunities, and outcomes more just and equitable (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

I wanted to focus on teachers because of the significant role they play in initiating the gifted referral process. I hoped that our work together would illuminate how educators' perspectives and potential biases may work against certain student populations to unintentionally disadvantage them. Furthermore, I hoped that we could all learn to recognize, honor, and cultivate the strengths, interests, and talents students bring into the classroom and translate those capabilities into challenging and engaging educational experiences (Gay, 2010).

The overarching question driving my research – *How can educators help improve access to gifted education, advanced programs, and/or more challenging curricula for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students?* – has been addressed by other scholars in the field (Castellano & Diaz, 2002; Ford, 2013; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Frasier, et al., 1995; Gonzales, 2002; Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007; Milner & Ford, 2007; Sisk, 2003). This article focuses on two of the specific research questions that were part of a larger study: *1. How do teachers understand the ways in which labels encourage*

108

and/or hinder an equitable gifted referral process for English Language Learners? 2.

Furthermore, how do critical conversations contribute to teachers' awareness of their role as

gatekeepers in the gifted referral process?

For this study, I worked alongside six elementary teachers to engage in focused, critical conversations inspired by photographs and digital photo stories, which were created during a previous study by local Latin@ children to showcase their outside-of-school lives, including their strengths, interests, and talents. These photos and photo stories stimulated us to think about schooling labels and their resulting educational inequities. If descriptions and values associated with labels, such as "ELL" or "Latin@" are not truths about individuals but are socially constructed assumptions or beliefs (Lee & Anderson, 2009), my hope was that the photo stories students shared in combination with our in-depth, small-group discussions guided by the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol would help us trade in any deficit thinking we might have for attribute or dynamic thinking, which involves positive and productive labeling, seeing diversity as a resource and students as self-motivated, effortful, resilient, and at promise, resulting in higher expectations for these students (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, et al., 2008; Lee & Anderson, 2009; Nieto, 2002; Ruiz, 1984; Shaklee & Hamilton, 2003; Williams & Newcombe, 1994).

The following sections elaborate on the details of my study, including the site, participants, and methods used for data collection and analysis.

Site

The site of this study was a Title I elementary school situated in a southeastern state in a county experiencing steady growth in its Latin@ population, more than doubling in a span of thirteen years (U. S. Census Bureau, 2015). While it may unintentionally go unnoticed, clearly,

an issue of access permeates this school as CLD students are severely underrepresented in gifted programming. For instance, White students represent just under three-fourths of the total student body but comprise ninety percent of the students served in the gifted and talented program. Conversely, Latin@ students make up just over a tenth of the total student body but only approximately 2.5% of gifted identified students.

This local data mirrors the nationwide data regarding the underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted programming, which says that Black and Hispanic students are underrepresented in gifted education programs across the nation by 50% and 36% respectively (Ford, 2014). While the underrepresentation of all ethnic minority groups is concerning, the scope of my study honed in on emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage, learning English as a second or additional language who may or may not receive formal ESOL services.

Participants

For this study, I worked with six elementary school teachers as co-researchers. All teachers had at least five years of teaching experience as well as experience working with gifted learners and/or ELLs. My co-researchers consisted of a gifted facilitator, ESOL specialist, two second grade teachers, one third grade teacher, and one fifth grade teacher, and all identified as White, monolingual, native speakers of English. See Table 4.1 for additional information about each teacher who participated in the study.

I, also a White, monolingual, native English speaker, was also a participant in the study. While I planned parts of the study based on the study's purpose and goals prior to meeting with my co-researchers, our processes and procedures were flexible and adapted to the collective needs as the study progressed. Additionally, while I developed the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion

Protocol utilized to guide our discussions, I provided my co-researchers with an opportunity to

practice using it and suggest revisions prior to experiencing students' stories.

Table 4.1
Study Participants

Participant (All Pseudonyms)	Years of Experience	Current Position	Reason for Participating
Brooke Hutcheson	8 years	Gifted facilitator	She wanted to make a more concerted effort to work with other teachers in the school to help them notice potential talent in ELLs.
Hannah James	10 years	ESOL specialist	She wanted to learn more about the gifted referral process so that she would be better able to notice gifts and talents among her students and better equipped to make gifted referrals.
Mary Byers	8 years	Second grade teacher	She has experienced the frustration of referring ELLs she "just knows" are gifted but don't qualify for services because of the standardized tests. She joined the study to learn more about how she can better support those learners in the regular classroom and in what ways she might advocate for changes in the gifted evaluation process.
Virginia Turner	8 years	Second grade teacher	She wanted to learn more about the most effective ways to cultivate the strengths and talents of her ELLs in the classroom. Also, along with the small group of ELLs she typically serves each year, she had recently welcomed an emergent bilingual student into her classroom whose language of preference was Spanish, and she saw this study as a good opportunity to learn more about how to best meet his needs.
Lura Hanson	5 years	Third grade teacher	She was frustrated with the number of advanced ELLs who had reached her third grade class having never been referred for gifted evaluation. She, therefore, saw herself in a pivotal role and wanted to learn more about the gifted referral and testing processes.

| Louise Jones | 16 years | Fifth grade ELA teacher | She wanted to improve her practice with ELLs. She joined the study to learn new ideas for connecting with students and providing them with challenging and enriching learning experiences. |

Data Sources and Collection

Participatory research methods that utilize visual media are effective because they offer participants new and reflective ways to perceive their world. Images and photographs act as a springboard for discussion and prompt participants to view situations from different vantage points (Cook & Quigley, 2013; Serriere, 2010). Additionally, since stories are a primary means for understanding ourselves and others, the use of storytelling can interrupt complacency by helping both the listener and the speaker construct their own individual meanings and sort through false and constraining perceptions of individuals and cultures (Delgado, 1989/2011; Espinoza & Harris, 1997/1998). Add in meaningful community dialogue, and the result is an experience that can engage and inspire educators in a powerful way (Cook & Quigley, 2013). When students told their stories through photography and from their own perspectives, mainstream educators were able to hear directly from Latin@ students who challenged them to better understand and appreciate their experiences.

Table 4.2 provides an overview of the data sources and how they were collected. Following the table, I describe the specific methods involved in executing the study.

Table 4.2
Data Sources and Methods of Collection

Participants	Data Source	Collection Methods	Artifacts	Time Frame

Six Elementary School Teachers	Individual Interviews	1 per teacher	Audio recordings; interview protocol with written notes	Thirty minutes/ interview; end of August, 2015
	Introductory Teacher Workshop	Six teachers; one session to familiarize teachers with the NOT-ICE protocol and modify it if needed;	video recordings; teachers' comments and notes discussing the NOT-ICE protocol	1 - 1 ½ hours Sept. 2015
	Critical Discussions	Six teachers; three sessions; NOT-ICE protocol;	NOT-ICE protocol notes; video recordings; transcriptions; reflective memos	1-1 ½ hours/session; Sept.-Nov. 2015
	Focus Group Interview	Six teachers; one session;	video recordings; transcriptions; "What I Learned" poems; emailed notes; reflective memos	1-1 ½ hours; Nov. 2015
	Meeting to Discuss Future Actions	Six teachers; one session;	video recordings; transcriptions; reflective memos	1 hour; Dec. 2015

Step 1: Individual Interviews – Prior to meeting with the teachers as a group, I facilitated individual interviews with each teacher, each lasting roughly thirty minutes, to gain insight into her experiences working with gifted learners and/or ELLs as well as making gifted referrals.

Step 2: Teacher Workshop – The co-researchers and I participated in a workshop together to discuss and refine the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol I created and implemented it using a sample of photographs as well as a sample digital photo story from one of the participating children. This workshop lasted approximately an hour and a half and gave us an opportunity to

refine the NOT-ICE protocol as needed and a chance to practice the protocol before actually

launching it during a live critical discussion session.

The intentional division in the word NOT-ICE represents the idea that our

(mis)perceptions do not have to remain frozen and static, but instead should be fluid and

dynamic. NOT-ICE suggests a melting away or thawing of our current (mis)perceptions about

CLD learners in exchange for more holistic, dynamic perceptions that capture students as whole

learners and not simply language learners. The NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol guided

us in answering the following questions:

- **N** - What **N**oticings can you make about the photos? (Still photographs only)

- **O** - What did you **O**verlook in the photos? (Digital photo story from this point forward)

- **T** - How does this discovery relate to your **T**eaching?

- **I** - What **I**mpact might it have on students?

- **C** - How have your initial perceptions **C**hanged?

- **E** - In what ways can we use what we have learned through this process to ensure **E**quitable referral opportunities and outcomes for students from CLD backgrounds?

Step 3: Critical discussions – Over a period of approximately two months, we engaged in three

critical discussion sessions. Each session lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half and

focused on one child's photographs and digital photo story, and these images and stories served

as springboards for the discussion. For each session, we viewed students' photographs and

commented on the significant things we **N**oticed in writing and then shared these noticings out

loud. Next, we viewed the digital photo story and used the remaining letters of the original and

self-created NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol as a means for facilitating critical dialogue

and reflection around the digital stories. For each letter/guiding question, we wrote down our

thoughts and then shared them aloud. At the end of each session, teachers were asked to comment in writing on strengths and struggles of the session, if they wished.

Step 4: Follow-up debriefing session – I facilitated one follow-up focus group interview session with the teachers using a general interview guide approach to discuss topics that needed further exploration. Prior to the group interview, I invited the teachers to suggest topics and questions they felt were essential to address during the interview, and at the conclusion of the session, we created individual "What I Learned" poems (Hansen, 2012) to express our thoughts on the insight we gained from the study.

Step 5: Whole Group Discussion of Possible Future Actions – Following the debriefing session, our group reconvened to discuss future actions we might take to raise awareness among teachers in the school about the issue of underserved CLD students and plan strategies for helping to shift teachers' deficit thinking to more productive thinking. The group discussed how we might act as advocates for ELLs at the school and district levels. I followed up with teachers via email over the next few months to offer presentation opportunities as well as book study suggestions.

Data Analysis

I invited my co-researchers to participate in the data analysis process to the degree they wished to be included. Because they are elementary school teachers who have very limited amounts of time to contribute to data analysis, I generally took the lead on most aspects of the data analysis process. All co-researchers were involved in member checking to validate the honesty of analytic categories, interpretations, and findings.

I drew on the *Listening Guide* method to guide my analysis process (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, 2003). Just as LatCrit values stories that represent diverse ways of knowing and honors marginalized perspectives of reality (Delgado, 1989/2011; Solorzano &

Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), the *Listening Guide* values the existence of simultaneous voices, which present varied expressed lived experiences. This approach to data analysis involved multiple readings of interview transcripts due to the assumption that multiple voices may co-occur, and these voices may be in tension with one another, with oneself, with the voices of others, and/or with the culture or context (Gilligan, et al., 2003). Each listening amplified an aspect of a voice like listening to a piece of music and following a different instrument each time (Gilligan, Brown, & Rogers, 1990). I used this approach as a mentor for my data analysis method, but my process took on a "voice" of its own.

Initially, I listened to and read through transcripts to identify participants' initial assumptions and ultimate realizations. Additionally, I highlighted mentions of characteristics of learners, both gifted learners as well as ELLs, and I noted discussions of personal and professional relationships. I created three separate tables, an Assumptions Table, a Student Characteristics Table, and a Relationships Table. Each table included conversational exchanges relating to that particular focus area.

During the second step, I focused in on the voice of "I" by following the use of this first-person pronoun and creating "I poems" (Debold, 1990 as cited in Gilligan, et al., 2003). To do this, I underlined every first-person "I" within the passage along with the verb and other significant accompanying words and created a poem, maintaining the sequence in which the phrases appear in the text. These "I poems" helped me hear "a variety of themes, harmonies, dissonances, and shifts" among the first-person voices (Gilligan, et al., 2003, p. 164).

During step three, I brought my analysis back into a direct relationship with the research questions and purpose of the study, listening for the multiple facets of experience being told (Gilligan, et al., 2003). Here, I read through the tables I created in step one to tune in to a

different voice, or layer of the story. I determined, through multiple readings and listenings that the emerging voices were the voice of Bias (labels, student characteristics), the voice of Awareness (Aha moments, realizations), and the voice of Agency (gatekeepers, advocates), and I color-coded the conversational exchanges based on their voice. (See Appendix A for an excerpt of from the Assumptions Table). The sections that follow reveal my findings, which illuminate how digital photo stories and critical conversations disrupted teachers' commonly held assumptions about students, helped them see their talent potential, and encouraged them to think about ways they might advocate for better educational opportunities for ELLs.

Findings

In this study, emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage told stories that challenged teachers' beliefs and perceptions about CLD students as well as their interactions with and expectations of them. While the voice of Bias and the voice of Awareness were evident in this study, the voice of Agency prevailed in the ways that we questioned our beliefs and came to new realizations about how we might advocate for emergent bilinguals. By making sound pedagogical decisions in the classroom and better-informed judgments about students we refer for gifted evaluation, we can play a prominent role in improving the lives of emergent bilinguals by increasing their access to high-quality educational opportunities.

For the purposes of this article, I will summarize the voice of Bias and the voice of Awareness, as they were foundational in our shift from seeing ourselves as actors who hinder opportunities for students to agents who open doors for them. Following that discussion, I will focus more specifically on how our conversations ignited our sense of agency. Therefore, I will illuminate the voice of Agency to draw attention to the ways in which teachers became more confident in their roles as advocates for ELLs.

Voice of Bias

The voice of Bias represents the verbalized or written assumptions that were made because of the labels we assign to learners in schools, such as "English Language Learner" or "gifted learner." These assumptions were expressed during initial individual interviews and were verbally expressed and/or written on the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol handout during our critical discussion sessions. The ELL label was often associated with assumptions of struggle and deficiency, while the gifted learner label often connoted assumptions of success and achievement. For instance, teachers presumed that ELLs would struggle academically, especially with activities that are language-related, and they often verbalized their surprise when they learned of children's expressiveness and enhanced vocabularies through listening to their photo stories. Additionally, they seemed surprised by their ability to navigate fluidly between their first and second languages. ELLs were often characterized as lacking confidence and being quieter in class, and they were assumed to have less parental support. These unfavorable biases shifted the more we heard from students through their digital photo stories and discussed our noticings and realization (as you will see in the following Voice of Awareness section).

Gifted learners, on the other hand, were perceived in a more positive light. For instance, gifted learners were presumed to have expanded vocabularies, a wide range of interests, increased task commitment, greater confidence, as well as leadership skills. While "negative" traits were occasionally mentioned, such as obsessive and an unwillingness to conform, the positive attributes and the belief that gifted learners experience greater success overshadowed the potentially negative perceptions of these students. While we indisputably agreed that categories of students include a range of learners who often vary significantly in their learning styles and

abilities, our discussions proved that labels carry generalizations that often falsely represent individual students and create racial and ethnic binaries of those who can and those who struggle.

It is important to note that this study did not eliminate our biases as that would be impossible within the historically and current label-ridden context of education that continues to perpetuate these labels and corresponding assumptions. However, our biases did shift when we intentionally questioned these labels and the resulting structures, procedures, and discourses that continue to limit the classroom learning experiences of emergent bilinguals (Darder & Torres, 2014; Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Voice of Awareness

The voice of awareness represents the Aha! Moments and the new realizations that occurred as a result of the combination of the photo stories, NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol, and group discussions. These breakthrough moments of new understandings caused teachers to see students in a new light and think about how they might teach them differently, in a way that speaks to their strengths and interests and engages them in meaningful learning.

My co-researchers and I experienced lightbulb moments during our time together because of the children's powerful stories combined with the safe discussion spaces we collaboratively created. We discovered that often times, the assumptions we carry are not verbalized or openly challenged, so we therefore continue to harbor those assumptions. Thus, safe spaces for sharing our thoughts are key in allowing us to recognize our assumptions, encouraging us to be open and willing to question and explore these assumptions, and then nudging us to interrogate and possibly shift our assumptions to more accurate "truths."

The students helped us realize that we sometimes privilege the use of Standard English over expressiveness, style, word choice, figurative language, and confidence in presentation

when we think about meaningful communication with others. This preference for conventional English often marginalizes emergent bilinguals by failing to honor and cultivate the unique literacies these learners use to share about their diverse life experiences (Delgado, 1989/2011). We also realized that we falsely generalize the idea that Latin@ parents are not actively involved in their children's academic and extracurricular lives, and we determined that it is unacceptable to assume that these students will be unsuccessful completing take-home projects or that their parents will not be willing to pick them up from after-school activities. In general, we gained a new-found awareness that when we listen to and thoughtfully reflect on children's stories, we are able to intentionally confront the false deficit perceptions we hold about students and instead recognize their potential by truly seeing the things they *can* do.

Voice of Agency

The children's stories stirred fruitful discussions that ultimately shifted our perspectives and gave us the courage to act. Not only did we become more cognizant about how labels impact our beliefs about, expectations of, and interactions with students, but we also felt an increased confidence in our ability to act as agents on students' behalf in order to disassemble and improve flawed school practices to create more equitable procedures and outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds (Hanks, 2011; Popkewitz, 1999; Poster, 1989). We shifted gradually from being somewhat uneducated and indifferent about our roles in the gifted referral process to seeing ourselves as essential advocates for diverse students with potentially untapped gifts and talents. When teachers have a more highly developed sense of agency, we can offer high-quality educational experiences for our students and increase their gifted referral opportunities.

Improving educational experiences. Through our work together, we discovered that our perceptions of students result in certain expectations that affect the ways in which we interact with and teach those students. In addition to breaking down the aforementioned assumptions we carried about ELLs, we also thought about ways we might modify our instructional approaches to reach these students differently and more effectively in our schools and classrooms. These adjustments in classroom interactions resulted in improved educational experiences for students.

For instance, during our future actions discussion meeting, Hannah, the ESOL teacher, alluded to the benefits of allowing students to see cross-specialty teacher collaboration on behalf of students, and she also shared about her efforts to encourage her students to advocate for themselves and inform their other teachers about their successes.

Hannah: Well, I find myself encouraging the kids to advocate for themselves. Louise brought two students to me after one of our meetings, a month ago, and I think that's important. She was bringing them to me so that they would see our collaboration and see that she was showing me what they could do. Just today, I told a third grader, "You really need to show this to Ms. Hansen and show her…have you told her that you know how to do this?" He said, "Well, no." I said, "You need to go show her that you know how to do this."

Researcher: But if you continue to –

Hannah: Yes, if they know that we're all proud of them and we all want to know things that are happening in other spaces, I have found myself doing that more.

(Future Actions Meeting, 12.14.15)

This excerpt reveals not only the importance of teacher collaboration but it also highlights the potential benefits of students witnessing teachers' collective commitment to their

success. Hannah refers to an incident where Louise escorted her students to her classroom to show Hannah how proud she was of their accomplishments. This occurrence helped the students see the team of teachers who are all invested in their learning and find joy in their accomplishments, no matter where these successes take place. Hannah also shares about the attempts she has made to encourage her students to advocate for themselves in the classroom. By having conversations with students encouraging them to share their improvements with their teachers, she is helping students find the courage to tell their own success (counter)stories that might diminish undesirable biases teachers hold about them (Delgado, 1989/2011).

Additionally, we discussed motivation and engagement and the payoff that results for students when teachers build off of students' strengths and interests in the classroom.

Hannah: That is what I said, motivation and engagement because you can easily lose a student like that, you know and then they're gone, but if you keep them engaged in doing things that they like and that they're good at, then they can pick up those language skills as they go along.

Louise: And I took it a step farther and said that it would help, of course we're talking about the things like in school, but like in other public places you know, he will learn when he gains that self-confidence that he can be that way at story hour at the library, if he's not already, or at the park or he might go and take the art camps or get into little theater camps in the summer because that has been brought to his attention, you know?

Researcher: Yeah, because the teachers maybe recognized that in that student. That's a good point. (Critical Discussion Session #2, 10.21.15)

Louise had shared during our previous meeting that she was being more intentional about "seeking out the strengths that my ELL students *do* have." When teachers make conscious efforts to recognize students' gifts and talents and teach into these gifts and talents, they help foster students' confidence in their abilities and can also guide students to see how their gifts and talents might apply outside the classroom setting. Not only does acknowledging gifts and talents among students help improve learning experiences in the classroom, but it also improves upon their extra-curricular learning experiences by heling them learn, through the suggestion of a teacher, that they can seek outside-of-school outlets and extracurricular activities that will allow them to further develop their talents as well. For additional exchanges relating to improved learning opportunities for students, see Table 4.3.

Increasing Gifted Referral Opportunities. As teachers heard from several students through their photo stories and we discussed more and more their role in the gifted referral process, teachers began to gain more confidence in their ability to be advocates for ELLs during the gifted referral process. Teachers became empowered to use their voice to act on behalf of their students to increase students' opportunities to be referred for gifted and talented evaluation.

Brooke: That's when we have to be the advocates. If their scores don't show it, and there is no data to back it up.

Mary: Sometimes, those kids…you know they got it, but everything doesn't point to it… You're looking and saying, "This kid's Star scores really aren't that good; words per minute aren't that great." But in class you see how they are a leader. Not maybe a bold leader, but when it's with a partner…and they are a leader in small groups. Who's to say that…then I just feel like it's your word…

Louise: *But your word is important. Your voice is important* [teacher emphasis]….Like

this student's poster last week, for Red Ribbon week…the speech bubbles…some are green, some are red, and some are half red and half green. It was really neat and thought out. He said, "Well, I shaded in the speech bubbles bright red that was like things they shouldn't have been doing, and then they are kind of changing their mind, but they're still wanting to do it, it's red and green. Then, the green is a good advice." I submitted that poster and just wrote (a descriptive narrative describing the students' thinking)…

Brooke: Thank goodness you do that…

Louise: Right, just don't hold back, because this student's scores are low.

(Critical Discussion Session #3, 11.4.15).

It is obvious from the comments made during this conversation that quantitative data, primarily test scores, reign supreme when it comes to referring students for gifted evaluation. However, teachers can counter-balance the over-emphasis on test scores in the gifted referral process by writing narratives that showcase students' observed gifted characteristics (such as leadership traits observed in certain contexts as mentioned above). A teacher's word based on her classroom expertise and observations can serve as valuable evidence that a student should be referred for further gifted evaluation. Instead of allowing test scores to tell incomplete stories about students, teachers can write their own narratives about students to qualify them and paint a more detailed, holistic, and often more accurate picture of students' talent potential.

Furthermore, teachers can write explanations to provide insight into students' thinking process behind their work (as in the poster Louise referred to during the conversation). Often times the end product is less valuable than the thinking process a student engaged in to complete it; however, if teachers talk to students to gain insight into the decisions they made while

creating their product, they can enlighten members of the gifted eligibility team about a student's process, which gives greater insight into students' reasoning and creative thinking skills.

The following exchange shows how teachers ultimately became more confident and comfortable in their role as advocates for ELLs during the gifted referral process.

> *Louise*: I think, too, I have more confidence now. If I think that a child is gifted, in my mind maybe I think, "Oh, they won't be given a chance," that it is okay to go through with it and do other…if writing is the weakness or language, then go ahead and do all the other things you can. That's not going to keep them back necessarily.

> *Researcher*: So maybe being a little bit more of an advocate, or feeling more comfortable…

> *Hannah*: That's what I was going to say, too, advocacy. I mean that's a large role of mine always, but I think I haven't always thought of it in the area of giftedness so much, but in other areas so I think this maybe opened our eyes to advocacy for these kids in the area of giftedness. (Focus Group Interview, 11.30.15).

Louise alludes to the fact that she feels more able to build a stronger case for a student's gifted referral by presenting evidence that works in favor of the student and emphasizes his or her strengths. Instead of allowing a student's weaknesses to override his or her strengths, Louise feels armed and able to capitalize on that student's strengths and expose potential talent.

This dialogue also reveals a shift that occurred in Hannah's mind as well regarding advocacy. Whereas she always saw herself as an advocate for her students, she had not previously thought about how she might intentionally seek out her students' gifts and talents and advocate for her students by initiating referrals or collaborating on referrals involving her

students. During our initial interview, Hannah shared that she wanted to learn more about the gifted referral process. Because of the unquestioned services and deficit discourses in place regarding CLD students (Darder & Torres, 2014; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Lee & Anderson, 2009), such as the ESOL students Hannah serves, she had not ever been invited to be a part of the gifted referral process, so she therefore viewed it as a process that was initiated and carried out solely by classroom teachers. In other words, she felt that in her current position, her advocacy role was fulfilled by supporting her students' language learning needs. However, because of our work together, Hannah now views her advocacy role in a new light as she is aware that she has a voice in the gifted referral process and should therefore observe her students in a way that attends to gifts and talents.

The teachers also realized the power of collaboration and communication in improving the gifted referral process. For instance, the gifted facilitator recognized how she could provide better support for her colleagues when making gifted referrals and she also noted that her collaborative efforts with Hannah in sharing about underrepresentation with the faculty had paid off in the form of increased referrals of ESOL students. This data, along with additional discussions related to increasing gifted referral opportunities for students, can be found in Table 4.4.

Gatekeepers or advocates? Gatekeepers control access to something. In the case of gaining access to gifted education, teachers are recognized gatekeepers because, in most cases, they initiate the gifted referral process (Bianco, Harris, Garrison-Wade, & Leech, 2011; Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Elhoweris, 2008). During our third critical discussion session, I made the following statement regarding the teacher's role in the gifted referral process.

Researcher: I think part of it is that teachers don't always realize their role in being the

126

advocate…so, I think realizing that we are those gatekeepers, in a sense, because

if you don't advocate, a lot of times no one else is…

(Critical Discussion Session #3, 11.4.15)

This comment complicates the ideas of gatekeepers and advocates. In the gifted referral process, teachers are gatekeepers who exercise power over students, whether they realize it or not. Teachers can be gatekeepers who control students' access to gifted education by standing in the way and blocking the door, or they can be advocates and support students by helping them walk *through* the door. Understanding the ways in which we can advocate for emergent bilinguals by seeking out and cultivating their potential gifted traits as well as being a voice for them during the gifted referral process allows us to fulfill our important role in the gifted referral process in a productive and positive way.

Discussion

Teachers can be their students' strongest enemies or greatest allies. They can build barriers for their students or they can minimize obstacles. I believe that the difference between building barriers and minimizing obstacles comes from a willingness to truly get to know your students. As Virginia eloquently stated during one of our sessions, "It's about how we can better serve them (our students) because we *understand* them better." This understanding of emergent bilinguals learners can come in part from inviting students to share their counter-stories (Delgado 1989/2011) and listening to them in a way that counters deficit assumptions and maximizes student potential. Variance from the mainstream should not be seen as an obstacle for teaching and learning but as a unique perspective to be cultivated and celebrated (Nieto, 2002). Once we understand these learners more accurately, we can then work toward advocating on their behalf.

Being an advocate for CLD students in order to improve educational procedures and outcomes for them can reveal itself in a variety of ways (Hanks, 2011; Popkewitz, 1999; Poster, 1989). Modifying interactions in the classroom to learn more about student interests is advocacy. Altering instructional approaches that teach into student strengths is advocacy. Collaborating and communicating with other teachers who serve these students is advocacy. Encouraging these students to be their own advocate is advocacy. Being a strong voice during the gifted referral process in order to illuminate student talent is advocacy. Teachers are gatekeepers who control access to gifted and talented programs. This is a position of power that can be used positively if teachers channel this control into a position of mindful and purposeful advocacy.

Limitations and Implications

When gauging the findings of this study, there are limitations that must be taken into account. First and foremost, because of the small sample size and the use of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), the findings cannot be generalized beyond the participants and contexts in the study; however, the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol could be applied with similar participants in comparable contexts to investigate similar challenges. While the co-researchers and I unanimously agreed that the small group setting was an advantage for this study, and teachers appeared to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts among their colleagues, it is always possible that the more reserved teachers of the group may have been overshadowed or more hesitant to offer their perspectives than their more outspoken colleagues. I attempted to account for this by having teachers write notes down in addition to their spoken comments, but it is still conceivable that some teachers may have felt constrained due to the group setting. Additionally,

since all of the educators were white, middle-class, monolingual females, they may have been limited in approaching the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol process as cultural outsiders.

Moreover, I invited teachers to review and provide feedback on the NOT-ICE protocol, discussion session transcripts, and findings to the degree they wished to participate, but their roles were limited in these processes. Having recently left classroom teaching myself and being fully aware of the demands classroom teachers face, I respect their decision to be more involved with data collection than data analysis and am beyond grateful for their dedication to being fully present during our meeting sessions.

Using digital photo stories along with the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol to cue reflective conversation is useful in helping teachers expand their views of students and countering common stereotypes they may hold about students as well. Since today's students are often over-quantified in educational settings, where the voices of scores and numbers are often privileged, digital photo stories provide an authentic means to contest those numbers by qualifying students ways that privilege their strengths and interests.

While this study focused specifically on emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage, it could be used to help teachers trouble the stereotypes they harbor about all students, including those from other ethnic minority populations, students of low socio-economic status, students with disabilities, as well as students of all sexual orientations and gender identities. When teachers shift their thinking about students from deficit thinking to promising thinking, they change their expectations of students and thus engage with students differently, in a way that capitalizes on students' strengths and interests. This, in turn, can result in improved educational experiences for students.

Challenges with the English language should not result in imposed academic limitations. Students from diverse backgrounds have much more to offer than their language challenges may reveal. But we have to be willing to observe students, listen to their stories, and discuss them so that we can begin to see those hidden treasures and open doors of opportunity for all students. Schools must fight against deficit discourses that marginalize students so that they can become places of boundless opportunity where all students have access to learning experiences that are challenging and engaging (Darder & Torres, 2014; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Lee & Anderson, 2009). When teachers fully realize their sense of agency, they can take steps to make this seemingly ideal schooling experience become reality and help CLD students realize their full potential.

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Table 4.3
Improved Learning Experiences (Voice of Agency)

Transcript Info	Line Info	Improved Learning Experiences
Introductory Workshop 9.14.15	664-680	HJ: And they go to work with their parents, like, they *do* have experiences, they're just different from what we would expect their experiences to be. I have a couple, quite a few students that go to work with their mom or dad at, wherever, the Mexican restaurant or they clean buildings or…and that's their experience; so they haven't been to the fair maybe but they've been to this big building, so it's just how you're going to figure out what their experiences are. R: Uh huh and just honoring that and acknowledging that cultural capital that they bring into the classroom and inviting them to share about it and maybe it's in this kind of way (photo stories), maybe it's through pictures, maybe it's them narrating it or whatever it might be but getting that out of them…but first I think the initial thing is we have to ask, you know, be aware that because they're not coming to us and saying, "Can you come to my baseball game, or my cheerleading?" or whatever that doesn't mean they're not doing things that we can find value in or we might see potential qualities in or talents in and that kind of thing.
Critical Discussion Session #1 9.28.15	161-167	HJ: I said along the same lines of bilingualism, just encourage bilingualism because so many of our parents think that they should squelch that and say, "speak English"; and I could tell that her Spanish was lagging behind her English and so you can tell that she has had more English exposure than Spanish exposure so just encouraging it in the classroom and making sure you're letting parents know, you know we *want* her to be speaking in Spanish, and if she can write, which it was obvious to me she had written that down and was reading it, I mean that is incredible so just encourage her to keep doing that.
	392-405	LJ: We might just need to dig a little deeper. We come in on Mondays and talk about who won the football games and that's our conversation piece with the kids or look at this cheer I learned… and we need to branch out and have these conversations (that focus on students' outside-of-school experiences)… like one of my students goes to a um, Pick a Part, it's this car place and every weekend he and his dad go and pick up parts for cars and he and his dad work on cars. Well that's the coolest thing to me. He can tell me which car and how his dad puts cars together for other people and I would never know that if he didn't come in early and I asked him what he did over the weekend, you know he's not going to the Central Football game, he's going to Pick a Part. It's just really

		neat, the knowledge he has with probably watching his dad put together the motor or something in the car.
Focus Group Interview 11.30.15	306-311	LJ: I have asked…I have fifth grade. Some of my Hispanic students that go to the early intervention program just started staying with me for writing. That's been a very good thing. R: I was going to say, have you noticed any changes? HJ: She brought me two of their pieces of writing, and … LJ: It made me cry…they feel they are being given a chance.
	387-389	VT:…just making sure we take the time to qualify them when they can't see it themselves. R: You know, you used that word qualify, and I think we quantify them so much in today's classroom, you know, with numbers and scores.
Future Actions Meeting 12.14.15	179-195	HJ: Well, I find myself encouraging the kids to advocate for themselves. Ms. Jones brought two students to me after one of our meetings, a month ago, and I think that's important. She was bringing them to me so that they would see our collaboration and see that she was showing me what they could do. Just today, I told a third grader, "You really need to show this to Ms. Hansen and show her…have you told her that you know how to do this?" He said, "Well, no." I said, "You need to go show her that you know how to do this." R: But if you continue to… HJ: Yes, if they know that we're all proud of them and we all want to know things that are happening in other spaces, I have found myself doing that more.
	275	VT: It's about how we can better serve them because we understand them better.

Table 4.4
Increasing Gifted Referral Opportunities (Voice of Agency)

Transcript Info	Line Info	Increasing Gifted Referral Opportunities
Focus Group Interview 11.30.15	27-35	LH: I've learned to open my eyes a little bit more to a different group of people… students that may have traits of giftedness. LJ: Even though our focus was on Hispanic kids, I think that it was an eye-opener for other kids as well. R: So, when you say other kids, do you mean students that might be different or diverse? LJ: Yes, students who might have an IEP that could be twice gifted, perhaps.
	188-205	LJ: The small group discussion has been an awareness for me, and it's made me motivated. I know, me personally, I am going back into my classroom and seeking out the strengths that my ELL students do have, which we should do anyway, but it's helped me realize that maybe I'm not giving certain students a chance to show they are, or possibly could be gifted. R: And I know someone mentioned in the individual interview before we started that the culture, in general, of teaching now is on finding student's weaknesses and bringing those up. I think a couple of people mentioned that. It's almost like now we've been conditioned to look for weaknesses and figure out how we can improve those, as opposed to trying to cultivate strengths and nurture those in the classroom, we sort of maybe tend to get a little hung up on the deficiencies students have. HJ: That's especially true for students who are in the ESOL program, because Hispanic students who have exited the program, of course, are doing well academically, so they may be easier to spot. Students who are still in my program are struggling academically, or they wouldn't be in my program, so it is difficult to separate those two things, especially for me in my little part of the world, because that's exactly what I do is find weaknesses in language and try to bring them up…to be aware that they probably have strengths as well.
	559-570	BH: Maybe I can do a better job of giving you guys ideas on what to… I can say creative writing samples, no worksheets, but maybe giving you some samples, because we have some teachers who will create a portfolio. This past time, all the ones, no matter if their CogAT scores were not super high, I made notes that said, "This student is an ESOL student; we don't feel his CogAT scores truly represent his true ability." That, coupled with writing samples that the teacher had taken off the wall, you know, and it was a portfolio, and they got referred, so maybe I could do a better job of giving you guys examples. You know, sometimes you don't know what we see when we go to the

		meetings and what we're looking for.
	689-690	LJ: From the NOT_ICE protocol, I learned that collaborating with other professionals is essential in order to advocate for potential gifted students.
Future Actions Session 12.14.16	160-169	BH: Since that (referrals) kind of goes through what I do. Kind of better supporting the teachers. Recently, since we did have that conversation in the faculty meeting, I have had two third grade students who are ESOL students referred, and really sitting down with those teachers and making sure I make notes in there. I think I mentioned it last time about the score not truly reflecting the student's ability, ESOL learner, very bright. Just kind of being intentional to make sure I prove and show the person who is going to review that folder what they need to know about the student besides the data, if that makes sense.

CHAPTER 5

PRACTITIONER RESEARCH: A "REFRESHING CHANGE" FOR PROFESSIONAL

LEARNING[8]

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[8] Allen, J. K. To be submitted to *i.e.: inquiry in education*.

Abstract

This article discusses a study that utilized a practitioner research approach to professional learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) that used student-created digital photo stories combined with focused teacher conversations guided by the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol (Allen, 2016) to explore why classroom teachers sometimes fail to notice the gifts and talents of emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage. Six elementary teachers participated in six small-group, collaborative discussion sessions in which they acted as co-researchers. Findings illuminate the significance of the research design in providing an effective professional learning experience. Highlighted design elements include the importance of using visual media as a springboard for intentional, productive discussions as well as the significance of a purposeful, small-group arrangement that allowed for cross-grade-level collaboration focused on a relevant issue of shared concern. An alternate look at how schools might define data is also offered.

Keywords: practitioner research, professional learning, visual media, collaboration, culturally and linguistically diverse learners

Practitioner Research: A "Refreshing Change" for Professional Learning

Introduction

In the decade I spent as a classroom teacher, I participated in countless hours of professional learning. I took part in these formal seminars and informal meetings with other educators, often feeling as though I was being "held captive to another's priority" (Sagor, 2000, p. 8). Since these sessions were generally mandated from the top down, I had little to no ownership over what we studied. I imagine my experiences were much like many other educators since professional learning often follows a very traditional format, with disconnected and ineffective workshops that assume all learners have the same needs, come in isolated sessions, are controlled by outsiders, leaving educators with little to feel empowered about (Rogers, et al., 2005).

There is a definite need for shifting the format of professional learning so that teachers can become more invested in their learning and feel more committed to making adjustments to their teaching practices. Taking a participatory action research approach to professional learning can transform teachers in powerful ways because it allows teachers to investigate issues that matter to them, resulting in more meaningful and persuasive knowledge, and thus change (Hendricks, 2006; Borgia & Schuler, 1996).

This article illuminates my experience engaging with teachers in a practitioner research study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) where our shared interest in a common educational issue – the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD)[9] learners in gifted education programming – led us to collaboratively investigate ways we may unintentionally contribute to the problem as well as seek promising solutions for reversing the trend and

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[9] Although labels carry potential biases with them, they are sometimes necessary to promote collective understanding. In my research, I use the term *culturally and linguistically diverse learners* to represent students commonly referred to as *English language learners* (Lee & Anderson, 2009).

improving the educational experiences of ELLs. Despite efforts to address the recognized need

for supporting underserved diverse student populations in American schools, little improvement

has been made in the area of access to gifted programming for CLD students as these students

remain underrepresented in gifted education programs by greater than 40% nationwide (Ford,

2012; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). The goal for this study was to use practitioner research

involving student-created digital stories combined with an original protocol to facilitate

discussions to help teachers recognize and reflect on deficit thinking, shift their thought

processes from deficit thinking to attribute or dynamic thinking (Lee & Anderson, 2009; Shaklee

& Hamilton, 2003), and recognize their own sense of agency.

I will begin this article by sharing about the relevant literature related to the study, which

centers on the underrepresentation of CLD learners in gifted programming and the role

professional learning plays in improving this issue. The literature discussion will illuminate the

current state of professional learning and elaborate on the need for shifting into a more holistic,

participatory, and collaborative approach to make professional learning more effective. Next I

will move into a discussion of the study and how the use of visual media to drive small-group,

cross-specialty, collective practitioner research resulted in an effective form of professional

learning that promoted new understandings and shifted teaching practices among those involved

in the study. Finally, I will share recommendations for facilitating this type of work in schools.

Connections to the Literature

At least one half million CLD students are attending schools across America where their

potential gifts and talents are being neglected (Ford, 2010), putting them at a disadvantage

because they lack access to gifted programming and its generally challenging and engaging

teaching methods (Ford, 2013). Research provides insight into the sources driving the differential

representation of CLD learners in gifted education with scholars citing the inconsistent

definitions of giftedness (Maker, 2005; Pierce, et al., 2006) and the over-emphasis on biased

standardized testing as plausible causes (Ford, et al., 2008; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Gonzàlez,

2002; Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007; Pierce, et al., 2006).

Much of the research, however, attributes the underrepresentation of CLD learners in

gifted programming to deficit mindsets that ultimately impact gifted referrals (Baldwin, 2003;

Cahnmann, 2006; Ford, 2013; Ford, et al., 2008; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier, Garcia, &

Passow, 1995; Harris, Plucker, Rapp, & Martinez; 2009; Milner & Ford, 2007; Olthouse, 2013).

This is largely due to the fact that practices and policies in educational settings are often

grounded in labels that ascribe who learners are or should be based on socially constructed

assumptions (Lee & Anderson, 2009). Therefore, instead of being considered for gifted referrals,

teachers often place CLD students in low tracks because of the perception that they are less able

or less intelligent than their peers (Office of Educational Research and Improvement [OERI],

1998). This deficit thinking leads to discriminatory referral and identification practices and

procedures for gifted education, whether intentional or not, and makes teachers significant

"gatekeepers" for programs when they are asked to refer students who have not surfaced through

standardized testing screeners (Peterson, 2003, p. 314).

Professional Learning is Key

Some of the literature related to the underrepresentation of CLD students in gifted

programming suggests that professional learning can serve as a promising catalyst for

transforming teachers' negative beliefs, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors toward CLD learners

and encourage them to look twice at these students to make doubly sure that they are not

overlooking them during the gifted referral and identification process (Peterson, 2003; Williams

& Newcombe, 1994). Even as far back as 1995, Frasier argued that future research on the topic

of underrepresentation of diverse learners in gifted and advanced programs should revolve

around changing teacher attitudes and understandings about talent potential and its diverse

manifestations (Frasier, et al., 1995). Defined as the "routine work of a highly engaged group of

educators who come together to better their practice and in the process, improve outcomes for

students," high-quality, effective professional learning can engage educators in such a way that

they become committed to continuous improvement of teaching practices and student outcomes

(New York City Department of Education [NYCDOE], 2014, p. 3).

      The current culture of professional learning. While professional learning is the most

effective avenue for improving student learning, it is often a missing or misguided component in

the effort to enhance teaching and learning (National Center on Education and the Economy

[NCEE], 2015). The most common type of professional learning, traditionally referred to as

professional development, has been criticized for being disconnected and ineffective in

increasing knowledge and encouraging meaningful change (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, &

Yoon, 2001; NYCDOE, 2014). Traditional professional development usually comes in the form

of a structured workshop, which occurs outside the classroom and involves an "expert" leader

who talks at teachers to impart "knowledge" focused on a district or state initiative (Garet, et al.,

2001; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998; NYDOE, 2014). Moreover, many

professional learning endeavors, operating within the prevailing accountability agenda,

emphasize test scores and function under flawed assumptions about the nature of teaching and

learning – namely, that training, transmission of knowledge, and testing, as opposed to the

dynamic and social processes of teaching and learning, are the driving forces behind the

educational process (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This approach to professional learning may

result in disengaged educators who feel disempowered because they lack a sense of ownership over their work.

However, a growing interest in "reform" types of professional learning, which are often more responsive to teachers needs and goals, has led to a subtle shift in the nature of professional learning (Garet, et al., 2001, p. 920), and schools and districts are claiming to move toward more "holistic" and "participatory" approaches to professional learning (NYCDOE, 2014, p. 3). Yet, although a shift in professional learning is occurring, few of today's school reform efforts emphasize a practitioner research approach to professional learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Dinkins, 2009). This absence of a practitioner research approach is puzzling as features often found to be characteristic of practitioner research have also been found to be key components of effective professional learning.

Making professional learning effective. High-quality, effective professional learning is a complex, dynamic process that should be sustained over time, consistent, coherent, focused on student outcomes, and embedded into the daily practice of teaching (Forte & Flores, 2014; Garet, et al., 2001; NCEE, 2015; NYCDOE, 2014; Stewart, 2014; Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). Professional learning has also been found to be more impactful when teachers and school teachers and leaders take charge of their professional learning and determine what they and/or their students most need, allowing them to feel a sense of ownership over their learning (NCEE, 2015). Furthermore, individual teachers appear to be more likely to make cognitive and behavioral shifts when they see colleagues they admire modifying their approach. This "ripple effect" is more likely to occur when PL comes from within than when initiatives are mandated from the top-down (NCEE, 2015, p. 5).

Successful professional learning should be highly collaborative in order to result in teachers' collective sense of responsibility (NYCDOE, 2014). Professional learning that promotes collaboration from teachers at the same school may sustain changes in practice over time because teachers in the same setting often share common challenges as well as students and can discuss promising solutions as well as student needs across grade levels and contexts (Garet, et al., 2001). Practitioner research, a form of professional learning, engages teachers, or practitioners, in collaborative efforts in the quest to improve education because it encourages them to collectively reflect on and analyze their own teaching practices, successes, and challenges (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Practitioner research provides "a way of knowing, an attempt to peel back layers of knowledge and understandings in order to stimulate growth and generate new knowledge for use" (Dinkins, 2009, p. 271). And because the teachers are invested in their own learning, their new understandings are more convincing and more readily applied to enhance instructional practices and learning opportunities and outcomes for students. My study capitalized on practitioner research as a form of professional learning that engaged teachers to collaboratively learn more about the reasons teachers overlook CLD learners, emergent bilinguals (commonly referred to in schools as English Language Learners or English Learners) of Latin@ heritage specifically, for gifted programming and examine their own roles in improving the issue of underrepresentation.

Contexts of Research

I utilized practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) for this study to involve educators as co-researchers, stimulate them to think about the inequities in schools, and nudge them to interrupt the status quo, challenge dominant viewpoints, and strive to make educational resources and outcomes more just and equitable (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). I chose to

focus on teachers for several reasons. I initially became interested in the issue of the underrepresentation of CLD learners in gifted programming because of my previous experience as an elementary teacher during which I regretfully and unintentionally remained blind to the absence of English Language Learners (ELLs) in my own gifted education classrooms. Additionally, I was inspired by a previous qualitative interview study I facilitated with teachers, during which teachers indicated a need for raising awareness about the issue of underrepresentation of ELLs in gifted programming as well as a need for shifting deficit thinking and helping teachers to see past "the language barrier" (Allen, in press). Furthermore, I understand that teachers have the closest proximity to students and also have the ability to influence educational practices, especially at the classroom and school levels (Dinkins, 2009).

I agree with the idea that teachers can learn ways to transform most any aspect of the human condition as long as the condition is accessible and they have an open awareness of it (Heron & Reason, 2001). In essence, I hoped that my work with teachers would help us all learn to recognize, honor, and cultivate the strengths, interests, and talents students bring into the classroom and translate those capabilities into challenging and engaging educational experiences (Gay, 2010).

Guided broadly by critical theory and more specifically by Latin@ critical theory (LatCrit), I approached this study believing that dominating structures, created by human choice and practice, can be undone through human agency and that I was an active and empowered agent of change (Bronner, 2011; Comstock, 1982; Hanks, 2011; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Prasad, 2005). Particularly, I wanted to work with teachers to address social injustices in the field of education, specifically how the marginalization of people is constructed through schooling (Popkewitz, 1999), due to the often unquestioned structures, procedures, and

discourses schools have in place as well as the deficit notions that continue to affect the classroom experiences of emergent bilinguals (Darder & Torres, 2014; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Lee & Anderson, 2009). I hoped that we could challenge perspectives that view emergent bilinguals as deficient and variance from the mainstream as problematic for teaching and learning (Nieto, 2002).

This study took place in a southeastern state at a Title I elementary school experiencing noticeable underrepresentation of CLD learners in its gifted education program where Latin@ students make up 11.2% of the total student body but only 2.6% of gifted identified students. Six elementary school teachers from the school participated as co-researchers in the study. These teachers had at least five years of teaching experience as well as experience working with gifted learners and/or ELLs of Latin@ heritage. My co-researchers consisted of one gifted facilitator, an ESOL specialist, two second grade teachers, one third grade teacher, and one fifth grade teacher, and all identified as White, monolingual, native speakers of English. While all the teachers had various reasons for participating in the study, all of them had a vested interest in the study, ultimately wanting to improve the educational experiences of ELLs.

Brooke (all pseudonyms) is the gifted facilitator who serves students in first through third grades. She joined the study primarily because she wanted to make a more concerted effort to work with other teachers in the school to help them notice potential talent in the ELLs they serve. Hannah is the ESOL specialist who serves all students in the school who qualify for ESOL services. She wanted to participate in the study so that she could learn more about the gifted referral process and would feel better able to notice gifts and talents among her students and better equipped to make gifted referrals.

Mary is a second grade teacher who has experienced the frustration of referring ELLs she "just knows" are gifted but don't qualify for services because of the standardized tests. She joined the study to learn more about how she can better support those learners in the regular classroom and in what ways she might advocate for changes in the gifted evaluation process. Virginia is also a second grade teacher who participated in the study to learn more about the most effective ways to cultivate the strengths and talents of the ELLs she teaches. Along with the small group of ELLs she typically served each year, she had recently welcomed an emergent bilingual student into her classroom whose language of preference was Spanish, so the study was timely and relevant for her. Lura is a third grade teacher who was frustrated with the number of advanced ELLs who had reached her third grade class having never been referred for gifted evaluation. She, therefore, saw herself in a pivotal role and wanted to learn more about the gifted referral and testing processes. Louise is a fifth grade ELA teacher who wanted to improve her practice with ELLs. She joined the study to learn new ideas for connecting with students and providing them with challenging and enriching learning experiences.

I, a former elementary school teacher and PhD student, also identify as a White, monolingual, native English speaker. While I planned parts of the study based on the study's purpose and goals prior to meeting with my co-researchers, our processes and procedures were flexible and adapted to the group's collective needs as the study progressed. Additionally, while I developed the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol (described below) utilized to guide our discussions (Allen, 2016), we collectively refined it prior to experiencing students' stories. While the driving forces behind our individual participation in the study were somewhat varied as described above, we all shared a common desire to provide equitable, challenging, and engaging educational opportunities for our students.

Table 5.1 provides an overview of the data sources and how they were collected.

Following the table, I briefly describe the critical discussion sessions and the use of the NOT-

ICE protocol.

Table 5.1
Data Sources and Methods of Collection

Research Questions:
Overarching question: *How can educators help improve access to gifted education, advanced programs, and/or more challenging curricula for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students?*
Specific Question: *1. How do focused, critical conversations cued by Latin@ students' collective photographs and digital stories help teachers become more aware of their social constructions of labels such as "gifted" and "English Language Learner" and their potential biases associated with them? 2. Subsequently, how do teachers understand the ways in which these labels encourage and/or hinder an equitable gifted referral process for ELLs? 3. Furthermore, how do these critical conversations contribute to teachers' awareness of their role as gatekeepers in the gifted referral process?*

Participants	Data Source	Collection Methods	Artifacts	Time Frame
Six elementary school teachers	Individual Interviews	1 per teacher	Audio recordings; interview protocol with written notes	Thirty minutes/ interview; end of August, 2015
	Introductory Teacher Workshop	Six teachers; one session to familiarize teachers with the NOT-ICE protocol and modify it if needed;	video recordings; teachers' comments and notes discussing the NOT-ICE protocol	1 - 1 ½ hours Sept. 2015
	Critical Discussions	Six teachers; three sessions; NOT-ICE protocol;	NOT-ICE protocol notes; video recordings; transcriptions; reflective memos	1-1 ½ hours/session; Sept.-Nov. 2015

	Focus Group Interview	Six teachers; one session;	video recordings; transcriptions; "What I Learned" poems; emailed notes; reflective memos	1-1 ½ hours; Nov. 2015
	Meeting to Discuss Future Actions	Six teachers; one session;	video recordings; transcriptions; reflective memos	1 hour; Dec. 2015

During the study, my co-researchers and I engaged in one introductory seminar followed by three critical discussion sessions focused on photographs and digital photo stories that were created during a previous study by emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage from my local community. These photos and photo stories the students created focused on their strengths, interests, and hobbies and acted as springboards for eliciting additional data for this study. Our discussion sessions revolved around the children's photographs and digital photo stories, and the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol guided us in critically reflecting on our learning through the following questions:

- **N** - What **N**oticings can you make about the photos? (Still photographs only)

- **O** - What did you **O**verlook in the photos? (Digital photo story from this point forward)

- **T** - How does this discovery relate to your **T**eaching?

- **I** - What **I**mpact might it have on students?

- **C** - How have your initial perceptions **C**hanged?

- **E** - In what ways can we use what we have learned through this process to ensure
  Equitable referral opportunities and outcomes for students from CLD backgrounds?

NOT-ICE is intentionally divided to represent the idea that our (mis)perceptions do not have to remain frozen and static, but instead should be fluid and dynamic. NOT-ICE suggests a melting away or thawing of our current (mis)perceptions in exchange for more holistic, dynamic perceptions that capture students as whole learners and not simply language learners. Figure 5.1 captures a still shot of the teachers during our first critical discussion session where we are using the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol to document our thinking after viewing a student's photos and digital photo story. Although you are not able to actually see all teachers in this photo, all seven of us are present.

Figure 5.1: Co-researchers

The study concluded with a follow-up focus group interview to discuss topics needing further exploration followed by a whole group discussion meeting, where our group reconvened

to discuss how we might move forward and act as advocates for ELLs at the classroom, school, and district levels.

The *Listening Guide* method was used to guide the data analysis process (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, 2003). This process involved multiple listenings/readings of interview transcripts, each amplifying an aspect of a voice, like listening to a piece of music and following a different instrument each time (Gilligan, et al., 2003). I used this approach as a mentor for my data analysis method, but my process took on a "voice" of its own. I will summarize the distinct voices that emerged from the data because they provide a foundation for the discussion on the affordances of a practitioner research approach to professional learning that follows.

Audible Voices

The voice of Bias represents the assumptions that teachers made because of the labels we assign to learners in schools, such as "English Language Learner" or "gifted learner." Teachers frequently associated the ELL label with assumptions of struggle and deficiency. For instance, teachers presumed that ELLs would struggle academically, lack confidence, and be quieter in class. They also presumed that students with this label would have less parental support. On the other hand, teachers perceived gifted learners in a more positive light as they were presumed to have expanded vocabularies, a wide range of interests, increased task commitment, greater confidence, and leadership skills. Even though our group acknowledged that categories of students include a continuum of learners who vary in learning styles, abilities, and preferences, our discussions about student characteristics proved that labels often suggest generalizations that often misrepresent individual students.

The voice of Awareness represents the Aha! Moments and the new realizations that occurred during our conversations. These breakthrough moments of new understandings generated by our critical discussions of students' photos and photo stories caused teachers to see students in a new light and think about how they might teach them differently, in ways that speak to their strengths and interests and engage them in meaningful learning. For instance, the students helped us realize that we often privilege the use of Standard English over expressiveness, style, word choice, figurative language, and confidence. We also realized that we falsely generalize the idea that Latin@ parents are not actively involved in their children's academic and extracurricular lives, and we therefore determined that it is unacceptable to discount these students from after-school educational opportunities.

The voice of Agency represents the idea that the children's stories stirred fruitful discussions that ultimately shifted our perspectives and gave us increased confidence in our ability to act as agents on students' behalf in order to create more equitable instructional procedures and outcomes for emergent bilinguals. We shifted from seeing ourselves as gatekeepers in the gifted referral process to seeing ourselves as advocates for ELLs with potentially untapped gifts and talents. In addition to breaking down assumptions we carried about ELLs, we also thought about ways we could modify our instruction to reach these students more effectively in the classroom.

Effective Design Elements for Professional Learning

This study capitalized on the use of visual media to drive small-group, cross-specialty, collective practitioner research. Although I did not originally design the study with the intent to investigate the research design's impact on professional learning, I suspected that drawing a small group of thoughtful teachers together after school for roughly one hour per session to study

157

a common issue of interest using photographs, digital photo stories, and the participatory NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol would promote the creation of safe, collaborative learning spaces. Those features turned out to be critical design elements that aided our ability to come to new realizations about our perceptions of and practices involving CLD learners.

The Influence of Visual Media and Storytelling

The arts, photography, and other digital media can serve as effective complements to participatory research and professional learning because they allow for participation of all members and stimulate conversation within and beyond the group (Lykes, 2001). Participatory research methodologies that utilize visual media offer participants new and reflective ways to perceive their world because images act as a springboard for discussion and prompt participants to view situations from different vantage points (Cook & Quigley, 2013; Lykes, 2011; Serriere, 2010). Moreover, photographs can be useful tools for promoting acceptance of diversity because they help bridge connections and develop understanding, encouraging the viewer to accept and respect differences (Lintner, 2005).

Additionally, since stories are a primary means for understanding ourselves and others, the use of storytelling can interrupt complacency by helping both the listener and the speaker construct their own individual meanings and sort through false and constraining perceptions of individuals and cultures (Delgado, 1989/2011; Espinoza & Harris, 1997/1998). Supplement these images and stories with meaningful community dialogue, and the result is an experience that can promote dynamic and fruitful participation (Cook & Quigley, 2013). In the following exchange, Virginia, Mary, and Louise reflected on how viewing students' photos and listening to their digital photo stories encouraged them to focus more on students' strengths.

Virginia: For me, it's seeing the students that wouldn't necessarily shine

immediately as gifted…It's helped me to think about the student more as a

collective portfolio rather than just test scores. I think maybe that would be a

better approach in some ways.

Mary: I think by seeing the videos you saw so much of them and what they *can*

do, and how they verbalize things that you may not necessarily see in the

everyday classroom…You saw a whole different –

Louise: And the first time when we could only see the pictures, it's what we see

in the classroom. And then when they were able to verbalize, that was a reminder

to us to communicate with these students. Do what it takes to bring out the talents

they *do* have [teacher emphasis]…

Virginia: It forced us to see inside, it forced us to see deeper into these students

who are not so obvious…

Mary: Even just by seeing that (the photos and photo story), I felt like I knew

more about the kid than what I would know just in the classroom…by them

telling what they do, why they like to do it, explaining it in the video, seemed to

give you more insight.

This exchange points to some important insights about professional learning that leads to

new understandings. For instance, the visual (photos) and verbal (storytelling) aspects of the

discussion sessions stimulated the teachers to see and hear more deeply into the children's lives

and reminded them to translate that understanding into the classroom by communicating

intentionally with their students to discover their strengths, interests, and hobbies. In another

related exchange, Louise, Brooke, and Hannah reflected on their rediscovery of the importance

of being intentional in their conversations with students, even amid the hectic pace of the school day.

> *Louise*: Just talking more, too, instead of the basic, "How was your football game?" "Did you cheer this weekend?" Figure out what each kid does on the weekends and talk to them about that. Like, I had mentioned one of my students goes to a car part place, and that's neat. He is helping his dad put together cars that don't work. Just having that type of discussion with my students, instead of thinking, "Oh I bet he didn't do much this weekend." I don't mean me personally, but in general, we do that…

> *Brooke*: Being intentional to create that kind of environment. That's a big deal.

> *Hannah*: It's so hard in this day and age, I can only imagine. It's hard on my end, and I know it's harder on the classroom end…so many things, and having that time to create those conversations and to *listen* [teacher emphasis]. It's just so important.

The photographs and digital photo stories successfully prompted rich and productive discussions among the teachers, serving as reminders for them to seek out student strengths and interests and capitalize on them in the classroom. In order to "bring out the talents they *do* have," students must be offered spaces to learn that provide opportunities for their gifts and talents to manifest themselves so that teachers can more easily notice strengths, especially in CLD students whose gifts and talents are more easily overlooked. Furthermore because student engagement plays a key role in student achievement (McLester, 2012), learning tied to students' strengths and interests will be more meaningful and engaging for students and should lead to increased levels of success.

However, teachers cannot plan lessons that teach into students' strengths and interests if they don't know what those strengths and interests are. The photo stories were also a reminder of the importance of the role of the student as well. While teachers can successfully create classroom spaces that invite students to engage with them, it is also important for students to use their voice to communicate their interests and talents. While these data segments reveal the importance of visual and verbal communication, other modes of communication might be just as successful in communicating strengths and interests to teachers.

Collectively Wise

Professional learning opportunities that bring educators together allow for the collective creation of valuable knowledge (Forte & Flores, 2014). Harris, et al. (2009) asserted that collaborative efforts on the part of educators can serve to bring together information about a child from multiple sources, which allows teachers to truly know students as whole learners, making them better equipped to recognize their gifts and talents. Collaborative efforts among school professionals, such as general education teachers, gifted specialists, ESOL teachers, school psychologists, and other support specialists are necessary to consider the full range of students' abilities and plan appropriate interventions that focus on students' strengths, interests, culture, native language, and English language development (Bianco & Harris, 2014; OERI, 1993). These collaborative efforts, often referred to as professional learning communities, thrive when they consist of teachers from the same school who are invested in the work they are doing (Stewart, 2014). Additionally, professional learning that crosses grade levels and disciplines connects resources across the school and allows learning to transcend boundaries, thus impacting a wider range of teachers and students (Johnson, 2013).

A shared challenge brings us together. A collective commitment to investigate an issue and a desire to engage in self- and collective reflection are hallmarks of participatory research as well as professional learning (Forte & Flores, 2014; McIntyre, 2008). Moreover, effective professional learning must be relevant to participants and their educational context (NYCDOE, 2014). These tenets propelled this study as my co-researchers and I joined together to establish a collaborative community of teachers from the same school but various grade levels and specialty areas united by a central issue that impacts teachers and students on a daily basis.

Throughout the study, we discussed the benefits of working in a small group as well as working across grade levels and specialty areas. Teachers found that the small group allowed them to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions freely, and they felt that they learned more by working with teachers from other grade levels and specialty areas. The following exchange indicates these discoveries and preferences:

Louise: I think the way this was broken into little segments, it kind of just built. You know, you could take it one step. And also having a small group discussion, too…

Researcher: …And, then, I guess the group discussion part took your "ah-ha" further by allowing you to discuss…because I know, at one time, somebody mentioned that if you did this by yourself, it wouldn't be as powerful as it is since you can bounce ideas off of others.

(Group agreement)

Researcher: What would you say would be a group that's too large for something like this?

162

Lura: More than ten. Because you have too many opinions…too many people trying to share their thoughts.

(Group agreement)

Brooke: And also like a balance of what we specialize in. Hannah (the ESOL specialist) has input so much about the populations she works with, and you guys with the younger and older (grades)…

Mary: I think you shouldn't just do second grade. Her experience (referring to the fifth grade teacher, Louise) is so much different than our experience in the younger grades. What she sees, you know…

As one of my co-researchers so eloquently put it when she wrote down her take-away ideas from our sessions, the teachers ultimately realized that "collaborating with other professionals is essential in order to advocate for potential gifted students." Having the opportunity to bounce ideas off of one another deepened our understandings and allowed for greater learning than any one of us could have accomplished individually. The teachers also recognized the benefits of working with teachers across grade levels and specialty areas as they gained valuable insight and knowledge from venturing outside of their usual confined learning spaces (i.e. grade levels). For instance, the fifth grade teacher provided the lower grades teachers with a different classroom teacher perspective, and the gifted facilitator and ESOL specialist shared specific knowledge from their respective specialty areas. Moreover a preference for group size was established with no more than ten teachers being most ideal for encouraging open and honest discussions.

Building a community of trust. As illustrated above, effective and high-quality professional learning is grounded in a safe environment that allows for risk-taking on the part of

the teachers (NYCDOE, 2014). Through our shared commitment to learn and our willingness to be transparent, we established a community of trust by honoring and validating one another's comments; yet, we also felt comfortable interrogating one another's assumptions as well. The children's powerful counter-stories (Delgado 1989/2011) combined with the safe discussion spaces we created allowed us to discover that our assumptions were more likely to shift when we verbalized them so that they could be openly challenged. Thus, safe spaces for sharing our thoughts were essential in shifting our mindsets and creating change. For instance, during one of our critical discussion sessions, a teacher questioned another co-researcher's innocent assumption as noted in the following exchange:

Lura: Well, she's Catholic. I can tell you that because the priest was in the background.

Mary: So, the people *married* were Catholic. *She* might not be. [teacher emphasis]

Lura: That's true. It's a Catholic church. That's what I mean. He had the priest outfit on.

Researcher: But, just in that assumption…for her (Mary) to say, "Well, hold on a minute…." (interpretation of Mary's previous statement); most of the time – our assumptions – we never verbalize them. They remain silent, and we think them. So, no one ever has the opportunity to say, "Well, now actually maybe …"

Lura: That's good. Good point.

Later, during our focus group meeting, another exchange occurred that highlighted the need for honest conversations where assumptions can be verbalized and questioned.

Brooke: Also, for me, I think being able to identify that I do have some assumptions that I carry with me, even though I don't feel like it's a negative

164

way. . . but I guess they are still there, and being able to know more about these

students kind of broke some of that down.

Researcher: Yeah, along those lines, I had wondered about assumptions that we

typically carry with us that we don't ever speak or verbalize. They are in there,

and we're thinking them, but we are not saying them. And so…by saying them, I

think in a group, in a safe space, we feel like somebody might be willing to chime

in and say something that might alter that just a little bit.

We clearly made assumptions as we discussed student's photographs and photo stories.

Bringing those assumptions to the forefront and making ourselves aware of these assumptions

was a crucial step in our learning process because we were able to use the students' stories to

question those assumptions. In a recent blog post, Donna Ford wrote, "The less we know about

others, the more we make up…the more we know about others, the less we make up" (Leavy &

Ford, 2013, par. 14). The students' stories combined with our willingness to verbalize and

discuss those assumptions with others allowed us to break down some of those assumptions in

exchange for more truthful perceptions about students. Instead of making assumptions about

students, we can learn and in turn know more about them. Being able to share and learn new

ideas freely while also feeling safe to respectfully interrogate one another's (mis)perceptions

means trusting your group members fully; this is integral to creating professional learning

communities where teachers learn from one another and shift their thinking.

Empowered Agents of Change

A key feature of practitioner research is its concept of seeing the practitioner as an agent

for educational change (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), one who makes a decision to engage in

individual and/or collective action in hopes of reaching a productive solution (McIntyre, 2008).

For professional learning to "stick," it must allow for ongoing collaboration and promote a cyclical nature of improving instructional practices (NYCDOE, 2014). Seeing ourselves as active and empowered change agents has allowed us to take small steps in altering school structures and practices that marginalize certain students (Bronner, 2011; Comstock, 1982; Hanks, 2011; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Popkewitz, 1999).

Our group has begun taking action to mend the broken practices that have been holding some students back for years. For instance, the gifted specialist and ESOL teachers have already begun collaborating on seminars they facilitate with their faculty to share about the issue of underrepresentation of ELLs in gifted programming and provide tips for teachers to make doubly sure that they aren't overlooking these students for gifted referrals. Notable as well is the fact that one teacher from the group co presented about using the digital photo stories and the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol to notice and cultivate gifts and talents in emergent bilinguals at our state's practitioner-based gifted conference. This was the first time she had presented professionally, and she found the experience to be a valuable opportunity for both personal and professional growth. Our research group also discussed plans to facilitate a participatory critical discussion session using the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol with the faculty at their school, and we have also deliberated facilitating a volunteer-based, small-group book study about culturally responsive pedagogy. Furthermore, we have begun considering how we might widen the school district's scope for what counts as data for gifted referrals to broaden what might be included in students' gifted referral portfolios.

Teachers have individually shifted their thinking and integrated their new understandings seamlessly into their instructional practices and interactions with colleagues and students as well. For instance, Brooke, the gifted facilitator, has shared the gifted referral checklist with Hannah,

the ESOL teacher who had never been informed about the gifted referral process or what qualities often signify potential gifts and talents. Brooke also plans to be more intentional about providing teachers with ideas for outside-the-box work samples they can include as gifted referral data.

After our first critical discussion session, Louise went to her administration and requested to keep her ESOL students during the writing block. They had previously been pulled out for writing, and she felt that this made them feel disconnected from her learning community. The administration agreed, and she reported that those students "feel like they've been given a chance." Louise also said that our discussion sessions had encouraged her to begin "seeking out the strengths that my ELL students do have, which we should do anyway; but it's helped me realize that maybe I'm not giving certain students a chance to show they are, or possibly could be gifted." Hannah, the ESOL specialist, has also been encouraging her students to be stronger advocates for themselves. In our final meeting, she shared how she is nudging her students to speak up for themselves and share their successes with all of their teachers, even if the triumph doesn't happen in that teacher's particular classroom. It is my sincere hope that these small steps will ultimately impact teachers and students on a larger scale so that they might be more in tune with the strengths and capabilities their ELLs possess.

A "Refreshing Change" for Professional Learning: Recommendations

At the close of our introductory workshop, Louise stated, "This is a lot more enjoyable…I had no idea what I was going to be doing." At the end of a later session, Brooke commented, "I enjoy these…I never get to talk with people about this stuff." Similarly, during our first critical discussion session, a classroom teacher commented in writing that these conversations were a "refreshing change from data-driven meetings." These statements stirred

me to begin pondering the overall culture of professional learning in schools. Why did these teachers find *this* experience so enjoyably different?

Research has shown that when teachers have opportunities to collaborate and learn from one another, their job satisfaction increases (Louis, Marks, and Kruse, 1994). I believe that teachers feel a greater sense of self-efficacy, and thus higher levels of comfort and contentment in the classroom, when they feel that they know how to best meet their students' needs and they know they can work cooperatively to improve their practice. Providing teachers with opportunities to participate in on-going, relevant, and collaborative professional learning is critical to ensuring teacher and student success. But there's more to it than simply that.

High-quality professional learning must be "data-driven" (NYCDOE, 2014). That does not mean, however, that we should allow quantitative data to drive and completely monopolize PL sessions. Instead, we must provide teachers with various and multiple sources of data about students so that they come to truer pictures of students as whole learners through the blending of quantitative and qualitative data. Our meetings were collaborative, and the teachers evidently enjoyed discussing new understandings with colleagues. But our meetings were "data-driven" as well; yet, interestingly, it took some time for the teachers to come around to perceiving the students' qualitative photo stories as "data." I think they have been so indoctrinated into the accountability culture of schooling that it took some time for them to see data as anything other than test scores and numbers.

I've thought quite a bit about how schools and educators define data, allowing numbers and quantitative measures to speak loudly and boldly for students. Those thoughts led to subsequent group discussions about data and what counts – or what *should* count – as data about

students. One teacher said it best when she said that we need to be sure that we "qualify them (students) when they can't see it themselves."

Today's students are often over-quantified in educational settings. Therefore, allowing students to create digital photo stories about their outside-of-school lives provides students with an authentic means to contest the scores and numbers that often (mis)represent them; instead, these stories, qualify them in a way that privileges their strengths and interests. Thus, allowing teachers to use photo stories as qualitative data about students would offer a "refreshing change" from the data that is currently in power, illuminating students' strengths and interests. Personal narrative writing is generally included among the writing standards at the elementary level, so teachers can invite students to create photo stories about their outside-of-school lives as part of their Language Arts curriculum. Then, teachers can use the NOT-ICE protocol in conjunction with students' photo stories to reflect on what they learned about the students and share that information in a gifted referral and translate that learning into their teaching. Of course I advocate for using the protocol collaboratively in a small group setting, but if time or logistics prevent that from being an option, independent study of students' photo stories with the NOT-ICE protocol would be a practical starting point.

PL should also be grounded in what teachers and students are experiencing on a daily basis in their own classrooms (Stephens, et al., 2000). Furthermore, encouraging professional communication through collective participation appears to positively impact changes in teaching practices (Garet, et al., 2001). Therefore, to offer the most effective PL, educators should promote collaboration that allows teachers to juxtapose their ideas with the ideas of their colleagues. Facilitators should also pay careful attention to group size and teacher expertise as

my study demonstrated the value of small groups with roughly six to ten participants as well the affordances of including teachers from across grade levels and specialty areas.

The goal of practitioner research is *not* to turn schools into communities where test scores or "data" drive classroom practices to be more standardized, causing teachers to attend more to student deficits than their strengths (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Rather the ultimate goal of PL is to generate deeper understandings of how students learn, from the perspective of insiders – the teachers who actually work with the students as well as the students themselves. This study design brought together the voices of both teachers and students so that together, we could learn how to expand our views of students and better build on the cultural and linguistic resources they bring to school in order to create more challenging and enriching educational opportunities for them (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Nieto, 1999).

While this study focused specifically on emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage, the design could be used to help teachers interrogate the assumptions they harbor about *all* students, including those from other ethnic minority populations, students of low socio-economic status, students with disabilities, as well as students of all sexual orientations and gender identities. When teachers shift their thinking about students from deficit thinking to promising thinking and capitalize on students' strengths and interests, the result is improved educational experiences for all students. My sincere hope is that our work together can continue to provide that "refreshing change" that is so desperately needed, both for teachers and for students, so that schools can offer boundless and enriching academic opportunities that challenge and engage all students.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Reflections on My Personal Growth

When I enrolled in the ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) endorsement

courses as part of my PhD studies, I had no idea how those courses, combined with my passion

for and experience working with gifted and talented students, would open the door to the niche in

which I would find myself thriving for the remainder of my doctoral studies. My transformation

from an indifferent teacher and PhD student to a critical educator and researcher deeply

concerned about the issue of underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD)

learners in gifted programming has been striking. I am ashamed to admit that during my ten

years as an elementary teacher, I never thought much about the absent faces of color in my gifted

cluster groups or resource classrooms. It did not occur to me that emergent bilinguals in my

school with untapped gifts and talents were being overlooked. No one questioned their absence,

so neither did I. Instead, I put my faith in what I now know to be a broken, antiquated, and

biased gifted referral and identification process. After years of reading, studying, and exploring

this issue, I have discovered my sense of agency and realize that I can work with teachers to raise

awareness on the topic of underrepresentation and help teachers think about alternative

approaches to gifted referrals and identification that show sensitivity to cultural and linguistic

differences (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). The following sections reveal my most salient

findings and insights in relation to the research questions I set out to explore for my dissertation

study. Also included are the new understandings I gained about practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), which I did not originally intend to investigate.

Revisiting the Research Questions and Findings

For this study, my co-researchers examined how focused, critical conversations guided by the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol (Allen, 2016) and cued by Latin@ students' individual and collective photographs and digital stories helped teachers become more aware of how they socially construct labels such as "gifted" and "English Language Learner" and the potential biases associated with them. Furthermore, we also investigated ways in which the participatory NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol heightened teachers' awareness of their role as gatekeepers in the gifted referral process. Our group participated in six small-group, collaborative discussion sessions in which teachers acted as co-researchers to investigate and understand how schooling labels carry potential biases that often obscure students' gifts and talents.

Thus, the following research questions guided this study: *1. How do focused, critical conversations cued by Latin@ students' collective photographs and digital stories help teachers become more aware of their social constructions of labels such as "gifted" and "English Language Learner" and their potential biases associated with them? 2. Subsequently, how do teachers understand the ways in which these labels encourage and/or hinder an equitable gifted referral process for ELLs? 3. Furthermore, how do these critical conversations contribute to teachers' awareness of their role as gatekeepers in the gifted referral process?* In the sections that follow, I will synthesize the findings that help to answer each research question. Additionally, I will share unanticipated results of the study and discuss how the art of poetry led to new insights as well.

Schooling Labels Inform our Beliefs

In my first article, I focused on the ways in which the stories Latin@ children told countered the dominant assumptions teachers held about them. This article discussed the voice of Bias and how it represents the verbalized or written assumptions that were made because of the labels we assign to learners in schools, such as "English Language Learner" or "gifted learner" (Castellano & Diaz, 2002; Lee & Anderson, 2009). Teachers often associated the "English Language Learner" label with assumptions of struggle and deficiency, while the "gifted learner" label often connoted assumptions of success and achievement. For instance, teachers presumed that ELLs would struggle academically, especially with activities that are language-related, and they often verbalized their surprise when they learned of children's expressiveness and enhanced vocabularies through listening to their photo stories. Additionally, teachers were consistently amazed by the English learners' abilities to navigate fluidly between their first and second languages. English learners were often characterized as lacking confidence and being quieter in class, and they were assumed to have less parental support. These unfavorable biases shifted the more we conversed and reflected.

Gifted identified learners, on the other hand, were perceived in a more positive light. For instance, teachers presumed that gifted learners would have expanded vocabularies, a wide range of interests, increased task commitment, greater confidence, as well as leadership skills. While "negative" traits were occasionally mentioned, such as obsessiveness and an unwillingness to conform, the positive attributes and the belief that gifted learners experience greater academic success overshadowed the potentially negative perceptions of these students. While our group indisputably agreed that categories of students include a range of learners who often vary significantly in their learning styles and abilities, our discussions proved that labels carry

180

generalizations that often (mis)represent groups of students as well as individual students and can have limiting and negative lingering effects on students (Gee, 2015).

While the voice of Bias was alive and well in this study, it became less prominent as the study progressed, giving way to the voice of Awareness, which ultimately triumphed over the voice of Bias as we questioned our belief systems and came to new understandings about emergent bilinguals. For instance, one young emergent bilingual taught us that we should trade in our emphasis on and preference for the use of conventional English in exchange for noticing and appreciating expressiveness, style, vocabulary choice, figurative language, sequencing, a sense of humor, and confidence and the significant role they play in meaningful communication with others. From another student's story, we realized that we held false assumptions about familial academic support and that we should not discount ELLs to participate in after-school educational opportunities.

This article also discussed the Aha! moments my co-researchers and I experienced because of the children's powerful stories combined with our collaborative and open discussions. We realized that when we listened to and thoughtfully reflected on children's stories, we were able to intentionally confront and dispel the false assumptions we held about students, such as inadequate verbal competencies, limited life experiences, and a lack of family support, and we recognized their potential by seeing the strengths they could bring into the classroom, such as remarkable verbal communication skills, rich life experiences, and a high level of parental involvement.

Moreover, we discussed the idea that today's teachers have often been conditioned to focus on student gaps and weaknesses because of today's standardized assessment and accountability movement where teachers must account for an over-abundance of quantitative

data about students. However, this study helped us resist our impulse to fall into the quantitative

data trap, and we (re)discovered that qualifying students and nurturing their personal interests,

strengths, and talents is key to helping students feel valued, engaged, motivated, and successful

in the classroom. These breakthrough moments of new understandings caused teachers to see

emergent bilinguals in a new light and think about how they might teach them differently, in

ways that speak to their strengths and interests and engage them in meaningful and challenging

learning opportunities.

New Understandings about the Gifted Referral Process

This study was also designed to explore the ways in which labels – and in turn our biases

associated with them – impact the gifted referral process. As discussed above, the label of

"English Language Learner" may hinder an equitable gifted referral process for emergent

bilinguals because of the negative connotations associated with the ELL label. If teachers

negatively perceive these learners, they are significantly less likely to refer them for gifted

evaluation. Furthermore, since standardized tests, which are proven to be culturally and

linguistically biased (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Gonzàlez,

2002; Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007; Pierce, et al., 2006), are often used as screeners

for gifted referrals, emergent bilinguals face an additional barrier obstructing their access to

gifted education opportunities.

Article two discussed the realizations teachers made about the flaws in the gifted referral

process. Instead of allowing test scores to tell incomplete stories about students, the teachers

discussed the importance of writing their own narratives about students to qualify them and paint

a more detailed, holistic, and often more accurate picture of students' abilities and talent

potential. The teachers also realized the power of collaboration and communication across grade

levels and specialty areas in improving the gifted referral process (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Instead of working in isolation, the teachers realized the benefits of working across grade levels and specialty areas. For instance, the gifted facilitator recognized how she could provide better support for her colleagues during the gifted referral process, and the classroom teachers realized the significance of consulting other special area teachers as well when making a gifted referral. Furthermore, the ESOL teacher realized the need for intentionally seeking out her students' gifts and talents and advocating for them by initiating referrals or collaborating on referrals involving her students with other classroom teachers. Thus, the teachers understood that while they can individually advocate on behalf of ELLs by noticing and cultivating their strengths and providing evidence that they deserve to be referred for gifted evaluation, they discovered that the strongest advocacy is a united and collaborative advocacy, where they work in partnership with one another and subsequently influence one another's interactions with these learners.

Critical Advocates

As discussed in article two, our critical discussions increased teachers' awareness of their role in the gifted referral process. Whereas teachers initially saw themselves as gatekeepers, potentially closing doors of opportunity to ELLs, as the study progressed, the teachers began to see themselves as key advocates for these students in the gifted referral process (McIntyre, 2008; NYCDOE, 2014).

Teachers envisioned this newfound advocacy role as taking on a variety of forms. Most significantly, the teachers recognized their notable role in the gifted referral process and felt empowered to be a prominent voice for their ELLs. This was evident in the way the teachers regularly reminded one another of the importance of their voice in the gifted referral process.

Instead of relying solely on traditional test scores or performance measures during the referral process, the teachers discussed the need for being more open to innovative ways of highlighting students' strengths and talents. For instance, teachers discovered that they could advocate for ELLs by including original products that showcase their gifted potential, such as digital photo stories. They also discussed writing narratives about students that highlight their strengths in an attempt to offset the numbers and test scores that typically speak loudly for students.

Furthermore, teachers discussed the need for teaching into the strengths and talents students bring into the classroom as they connected the idea that when teachers nurture students' gifts and interests, students are more motivated in the classroom. When students are more engaged in their learning, their interests and abilities are more likely to present themselves, making teachers more likely to notice them when making gifted referrals (Allen, et al., 2016). Teachers also discussed the need for coaching students to advocate for themselves by conversing with their teachers and sharing their successful learning experiences with them. These acts of advocacy could ultimately allow teachers to open doors of opportunity for emergent bilinguals.

Unexpected Discoveries about Teachers as Co-Researchers

As article three discussed, this study was not originally designed to investigate the benefits of small-group, cross-specialty, collaborative practitioner research; however, the use of visual and digital media combined with the small group and safe, collaborative spaces we created turned out to be critical design elements that aided in our ability to come to new realizations about our perceptions of and practices involving ELLs. For instance, we realized that using visual media to stimulate discussion and reflection allowed us to view situations from different vantage points and more easily form connections and embrace and respect differences (Cook & Quigley, 2013; Lintner, 2005; Lykes, 2011; Serriere, 2010).

Moreover, we discovered the importance of collaborative efforts among school professionals, such as general education teachers, gifted specialists, and ESOL teachers in considering the full range of students' abilities and planning enriching learning opportunities that focus on students' strengths and interests (Bianco & Harris, 2014; OEIR, 1998). Furthermore, we realized the importance of the safe, collaborative spaces we created so that we could feel free to express our thoughts and learn from one another, making mindset shifts leading to change more likely (Garet, et al., 2014; NYCDOE, 2014). Essentially, we discovered that our assumptions were more likely to shift when we verbalized them so that they could be openly challenged. We also discussed the benefits of working in a *small* group as well as collaborating across grade levels and specialty areas. Teachers found that the intimate feel of the small group allowed them to freely and openly express their thoughts and opinions, and they felt that they learned more by working with teachers from other grade levels and specialty areas.

As I explained in article three, the teachers found our discussion sessions to be refreshingly different from their typical professional learning meetings. Their voluntary participation, combined with their collective commitment and desire to engage in self- and collective reflection, propelled our sessions as the teachers and I openly investigated an issue that mattered to them and impacted their students on a daily basis. Thus, they saw our sessions as a "refreshing change" from typical professional development sessions, which are generally driven by "data" that yields more standardized teaching practices geared toward addressing student deficits as opposed to strengths (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). During our sessions, teachers had a personal and vested interest in studying ways to qualitatively expand our views of students and better build on the cultural and linguistic resources they bring to school.

The following section shares "I Poems" I created from I statement excerpts from the data that reveal the individual and collective learning and mindset shifts that took place on our journey to self- and group-discovery regarding our own sense of agency in improving educational opportunities for emergent bilinguals.

Poetic Awareness

As part of my data analysis process, I created "I Poems" for each discussion session (Debold, 1990 as cited in Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003). To do this, I underlined every first-person "I" within each transcript along with the verb and other significant accompanying words and created a poem by writing each "I" phrase on its own line, maintaining the sequence in which the phrases appeared in the original transcripts. These "I Poems" helped me hear "a variety of themes, harmonies, dissonances, and shifts" among the first-person voices (Gilligan, et al., 2003, p. 164), and they allowed me to poetically weave each personal "story" as teachers became aware of their biases, questioned their assumptions as well as their teaching practices, and discovered their own sense of agency in enacting change (Comstock, 1982; Hanks, 2011; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Tierney, 1993).

I was not able to include these "I Poems" in my manuscripts, but I wanted to honor my co-researchers' "I voices" in this dissertation since I believe that the voice of I signifies a strong declaration of a stance, belief, opinion, or intention that needs to be heard. The "I Poems" from each transcript are lengthy, so in order to share parts of them, I combed through each "I Poem" and extracted the most significant lines from each one to create two "I Poems" that capture the essence of our work together over the last year. The first "I Poem" is a poem for three voices that reveals our shift from harboring assumptions to gaining awareness to discovering our sense of agency and being more confident in our roles as advocates. The second "I Poem" illuminates

our reflections on our learning process. Many of the insights and findings discussed previously

are evident in the "I Poems" that follow.

The following poem for three voices can be read column by column to focus on the one

voice at a time to gain a sense of the role each voice independently played in our discussion as

well as how each voice developed over the course of our work together. Or, the poem can be

read in three voices to get a big picture sense of the evolution of our conversations and how the

critical discussions led us to verbalize our assumptions, interrogate our assumptions as our

awareness was heightened, and ultimately realize our own sense of agency in enacting change.

An I Poem for Three Voices: Assumptions →Awareness →Agency

Assumption	Awareness	Agency
I had several assumptions.		
	I am so upset with myself.	
		I feel like as a teacher sometimes we don't reflect enough.
I hate to use that word but a "typical" ELL.		
	I mean, ESOL means a million different things; giftedness means a million different things.	
		I wish we were collectively more sensitive.
I would imagine they wouldn't let a lot of that show in a regular classroom.		
	I think we just need to be better about encouraging who they are as a person. I don't think we ever purposefully discount it, but we never talk about it.	
		I'm embracing whoever they

are, wherever they come from.

I am going back into my classroom and seeking out the strengths that my ELL students do have, which we should do anyway.

It's helped me realize that maybe I'm not giving certain students a chance to show they are, or possibly could be gifted.

I would say she is very well behaved in class.
I was surprised by her level of vocabulary.
I initially noticed that the book was a lower level so I figured she struggled.
I just didn't expect so much confidence.
I wouldn't have expected an eleven-year-old to even think about that.
I was not expecting that to be in Puerto Rico.

I said that she obviously enjoys being challenged.

A lot of times, we just assume that she would not be able to participate in extra-curricular activities, like Junior Beta.

But, she does have the family support.
She would do well on projects at home.
She was definitely a leader.

I've learned to open my eyes a little bit more to a different group of people… students

that may have traits of
                                                                      giftedness.

I'm guilty of it (harboring
assumptions).
I had wondered about
assumptions that we typically
carry with us that we don't
ever speak or verbalize.
I think in a group, in a safe
space, we feel like somebody
might be willing to chime in
and say something that might
alter that just a little bit.

                                    I feel there is value in
                                    allowing a child to narrate and
                                    tell the story.

                                                                      I just wrote "encouraging
                                                                      bilingualism."
                                                                      I can have them share their
                                                                      experience through their
                                                                      native language in the writing
                                                                      or their speaking.
                                                                      I think realizing that we are
                                                                      those gatekeepers, in a sense,
                                                                      because if you don't advocate,
                                                                      a lot of times no one else will.

I have been more educated   I have been more educated   I have been more educated
here.   here.   here.

                                                                      I have more confidence now.

       While this poem illustrates that each voice individually evolved, it also shows the

interconnectedness of the voices and how the voices influenced one another. The last line, which

is repeated across all three voices, "I have been more educated here," speaks *back* to assumptions

and reveals that the voice of assumption must concede to learning. This line speaks *up* for

awareness and acknowledges that new realizations and awareness came from being more

educated. This line speaks *out* on behalf of agency and illuminates the key role teachers have in

being agents of change. In other words, once these teachers realized that a system was broken, they knew that they must act to repair it. The final line of the poem reveals that ultimately agency prevails and is reflective of the teachers' newfound confidence in themselves as advocates for their ELLs.

The next "I Poem" provides insight into teachers' reflections on the process we engaged in throughout our time together. This poem is essentially a commentary on the method we used as we learned more about labels and how they impact ELLs and the gifted referral process.

I Poem: A Reflection on Our Process

I like the collaboration.
I like that it's a small group.
I just think this method is so powerful because it's starting with oral language and pictures and going to writing.
I enjoy these.
I never get to talk with people about this stuff.
I think that it was an eye-opener for other kids as well.
I know, at one time, somebody mentioned that if you did this by yourself, it wouldn't be as powerful as it is since you can bounce ideas off of others.
I think that collaboration piece is something that we, a lot of times, just don't have time for, as classroom teachers especially

The line that references the power behind the method is a good reminder to use students' strengths (i.e. oral language) as entry points into more difficult learning processes (writing). Additionally, that same line reminds teachers to use images as catalysts for writing (Ewald, 2012). The poem begins and ends with I statements about collaboration, which is a reminder that because teachers benefit from and enjoy collective participation when learning about a shared, relevant issue (Garet, et al., 2001; Stephens, et al., 2000), professional learning should allow for ongoing collaborative participation to improve instructional practices. As mentioned in the last line of the poem, teachers often don't have enough time in their over-scheduled days to participate in collective learning sessions; therefore, school systems need to build in time for this

collaboration to occur so that teachers can participate in meaningful and sustained professional learning.

Implications for Research and Practice

Using digital photo stories in the classroom introduces teachers and students to an alternate storytelling approach and provides students with a means for sharing their (counter)stories about their rich and varied outside of school lives. Using digital photo stories along with the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol to cue reflective conversation is useful in helping teachers expand their views of students and countering common stereotypes they may hold about students as well. Since students' strengths and talents are often overshadowed by test scores and numeric data, digital photo stories provide an authentic means to contest those numbers by qualifying students in ways that privilege their gifts and interests. For instance, teachers can invite students to create digital photo stories about their outside-of-school lives to gain insight into their hobbies, talents, and interests; teachers can then teach into those strengths so that students feel more engaged and successful in school because their areas of expertise are being nurtured. Additionally, students can share these photo stories with one another to learn about their peers and form greater networks and connections with students united by similar interests.

While this study focused specifically on emergent bilinguals of Latin@ heritage, it could be used to help teachers trouble the assumptions they harbor about *all* students, including those from other ethnic minority populations, students of low socio-economic status, students with disabilities, as well as students of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Visual media allow people to view situations from different vantage points (Cook & Quigley, 2013). Photographs help bridge connections as well as acceptance of diversity (Lintner, 2005), and

stories challenge dominant understanding and help us overcome difference (Delgado, 1989/2011), digital photo stories can provide teachers with a better understanding of students who seem atypical because they don't share their same background. When teachers shift their thinking about students from deficit thinking to promising thinking, they change their expectations of students and thus engage with students differently, in a way that capitalizes on students' strengths and interests. This, in turn, can result in improved educational experiences for all students.

My study capitalized on practitioner research as a form of professional learning that engaged teachers to collaboratively learn more about the reasons teachers overlook emergent bilinguals for gifted programming and examine their own roles in improving the issue of underrepresentation. The teachers were interested in this shared and relevant issue as it affects them and their students on a daily basis. Therefore, they felt a genuine sense of ownership over their learning and used their new understandings about labels, assumptions, instructional practices, and their role in the gifted referral process to make necessary and effective changes to their actions both in the classroom and during the gifted referral process.

I believe that high-quality, effective professional learning must replace traditional professional development in schools. In order to provide this type of collaborative professional learning, schools must prioritize the learning of their educators and intentionally invest adequate amounts of time in creating a dynamic professional learning environment centered on practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) – where teachers consistently spend a sustained length of time collectively studying an issue that permeates their school and classroom (Forte & Flores, 2014; Garet, et al., 2001; NCEE, 2015; NYCDOE, 2014; Stewart, 2014; Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). This might mean protecting teachers' planning periods

and/or setting aside one afternoon each week for teachers to engage in inquiry. Or, perhaps schools could schedule full or half-day professional learning sessions for collaborative study once a month.

Also, since multiple perspectives on teaching and learning from outside one's immediate circle can provide valuable insight for educators, I advocate for grouping arrangements that cross grade levels and disciplines (Harris, Plucker, Rapp, & Martinez, 2009; Bianco & Harris, 2014; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993). Moreover, I promote small-group collaboration, with group sizes no larger than ten, to ensure open and honest discussions that encourage mindset shifts and resulting change. Finally, I believe that for professional learning to "stick," it must promote a cyclical nature of improving instructional practices (NYCDOE, 2014). Therefore, educators must see themselves as active agents for educational change who can engage in collective action and take steps toward reaching reasonable and productive solutions that benefit students (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; McIntyre, 2008).

Next Steps

Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas (Lorenz, 1972)? Some scientists have argued that the butterfly effect is a real phenomenon and that a small change in one area can result in large differences in another. I like to think of my advocacy work with teachers as being much like the flapping of a butterfly's wings. My alliance with teachers is one promising way that I can advocate for emergent bilinguals, and my small role in helping teachers look twice at ELLs when making gifted referrals might ultimately have a large impact on their schooling experiences. I believe that teaching practices evolve over time in baby steps that eventually create a larger transformation. One small ripple can create dynamic change.

Our group has already begun taking action to enact change and mend the broken practices that have been holding some students back for years. For instance, the gifted specialist and ESOL teachers have already begun collaborating to provide seminars for their faculty to raise their awareness about the issue of the underrepresentation of CLD learners in gifted programming. These teachers are also providing their colleagues with ways to make doubly sure that they aren't overlooking these students for gifted referrals. Our research group also discussed plans to facilitate a critical discussion session using the NOT-ICE Teacher Discussion Protocol with the entire school faculty, in the form of breakout sessions, and we have deliberated facilitating a volunteer-based, small-group book study focused on culturally responsive pedagogy. Furthermore, we have begun considering how we might widen the school district's scope of what counts as data for gifted referrals to broaden what might be included in students' gifted referral portfolios. Our sincere hope is that our work together can continue to provide that "refreshing change" that is so desperately needed in order for the school and district to offer boundless and enriching academic opportunities for all students.

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Appendix A: Excerpts from Assumptions Table with Voices Coded

Voice of Bias (labels, assumptions) Voice of Awareness (Aha! Moments, realizations) Voice of Agency (gatekeeping, advocacy)

Transcript Info	Line Info	Assumptions/Realizations
Introductory Workshop 9.14.15	177-179	LJ: It's kind of like with the Hispanic population, they respect us as teachers and we are going to take care of their kids and they're just kind of, unfortunately a little bit quieter than some of the other…
	291-306	LJ: See I assumed that maybe she had help editing like her final narrative before she, you know, like maybe she struggles a little bit with, if she struggled with writing then whoever, like, conferenced with her, whatever, got her ready to read this aloud, helped her with a few words
	388	WRITTEN PROTOCOL: MB wrote "You learn more about someone the more you do with them." And "You learn more in different elements or atmospheres." (meaning different contexts)
	422-423	VT: And our assumptions can cause us to underestimate…Or overestimate certain kids or certain groups of kids WRITTEN PROTOCOL: LH wrote that our assumptions cause us to underestimate/overestimate student ability; BH also noted that "our assumptions could cause us to under/overestimate students or groups of students (GROUPS is key here); LJ wrote "students are often misjudged" and "come to school with a label on them that often has a negative impact on them"; HJ wrote "When we don't take time to know 'their side of the story,' we overlook strengths and weaknesses"
	435-436	LH: . . . I would say she is very well behaved in class, she looks like she would be, just based on making an assumption
	472-480	LH: I was surprised by her level of vocabulary she used like the cul de sac BH: And I initially noticed that the book was a lower level so I figured she struggled…
	856-857	LH: . . . their writing is probably always going to be a struggle.
	949	LJ: This is a lot more enjoyable… I had no idea what I was going to be doing… MY COMMENT: Does this speak to the culture of professional learning?
Critical Discussion	42-45	MB: That first picture, I thought, oh, she's probably just helping her mom cook but then after listening, I realized

Session #1 9.28.15		she's either doing it by herself or helping her older sister and that she likes to cook you know, for her family to try, I guess I just assumed she was probably helping out her mom to cook that, you know.
	88-93	LH: . . . they're very well-traveled. I was not expecting that to be in Puerto Rico. MB also noted "very well-traveled" LJ wrote: "assumed fair but she actually travels"
	405	WRITTEN PROTOCOL: HJ wrote: She has many more experiences than I would have guessed.
	432-443	LJ: One big thing that just hit me too is um, the teacher section that we fill out is it motivation? BH: uh-huh LJ: you know what look at these worldly, one of the things is the child participates in a lot of these extracurricular activities and has an interest in a variety of you know, things outside of the classroom. Look at these things we may not know about R: And you might put No because she doesn't talk about her cheerleading or her basketball team or her whatever but yeah LJ: Or just…Yes but…it just goes back to knowing each child
Critical Discussion Session #2 10.21.15	46	VT: He is a normal boy, likes to play ball, likes to draw WRITTEN PROTOCOL: VT wrote: seems like a normal child, taking part in many experiences other kids his age do MY COMMENT: What is "normal"?
	142-157	LJ: This is the WOW moment that we overlook because of the way he speaks, like his verbs, like the "ed" like I look-ed, like just by listening to him, you just can't go by the conventions and grammar, I mean because he's got style, connections, enhanced vocabulary, expressive BH: He used a simile LJ: Figurative Language… BH: He's confident… talking about himself being a sweaty kid and the underwear LH: He had great expression too with the Yee Haw R: yeah, expressive VT: And he's very smart, he sequenced the jellyfish. First we did this and then we did this
	430-439	LH: While looking at the pictures you know, you don't notice how outgoing or detailed he is but, you know after listening to it, even though he had to be prompted while he was reading he was still a confident reader and he didn't express any anger or frustration while reading. He was still happy

		HJ: I also said confident. I just didn't expect so much confidence and I think sometimes we can get a picture in our head of what a new student to us or a new kindergartener or a new pre-Ker might be like and I think we need to get away from that because I mean, if this translates into him being at school I would guess that he is not what I would have expected the first day of school to a new place. WRITTEN PROTOCOL: LH wrote: Bennie was more verbal and outgoing than I thought after looking at the pictures
	448-460	R: Yeah and I had thought the same, you know, when I worked with him initially I was like he is 6, you know, how is this going to go? What am I going to be able to get out of him you know, and then even when this was created, I was like how is this going to go? How are teachers going to perceive that I had to prompt him? LJ: He's the most gifted one of all! R: It is interesting to see how, you know, your take on it because knowing him and then working with him, I was like he's definitely-- LJ: And the neat thing is we're comparing him to our experiences, with our kids in our classroom and we're all WOW!
	543-547	LJ: Right, maybe I've always just felt like I wasn't supposed to try to find kinds who are gifted. No one ever told me that, it's just like it wasn't our job to but it *has* to be the teacher's job.
Critical Discussion Session #3 11.4.15	47-54	R: The bike thing, I wondered that, too. She never did talk about why it was inside. When she describes riding the bike, it's an outdoor description… LJ: I wonder – her neighborhood – if they have to keep it inside because people might steal her bike. MY COMMENT: Assumption about living in a "bad" area
	66-78	LH: Well, she's Catholic. I can tell you that because the priest was in the background. MB: So, the people married were Catholic. She might not be. LH: That's true. It's a Catholic church. That's what I mean right now. He had the priest outfit on. R: But, just in that assumption that…for her to go, "Well, hold on a minute…." I'm just saying, that's how, most of the time, our assumptions, we never like verbalize them, they may remain silent, and we think them. So, no one ever has the opportunity to go, "Well, now actually maybe …" LH: That's good. Good job.

		COMMENT: Usually our assumptions are silent and not verbalized so no one ever has an opportunity to challenge/trouble our assumptions; it's important for us to have safe spaces to share our thoughts with others so that our assumptions may shift.
	109-115	BH: She definitely has opportunities to be athletic and do extra-curricular or out-of-school experiences. LJ: And her family cares enough to encourage her to do these things and try to keep her as active as possible BH: buying shoes and cleats and all that.
	345-358	LH: I wrote that she would do well on projects at home. If it's a school project she had to do at home, she has the family's support to help her. She put a lot of detail in her writing that she would probably put into the project as well. R: What I guess you're going on is that there is often that assumption that the family isn't involved or she's not getting help, but based on what she's told us through this, that is definitely… LJ: To piggy back off of that, I said that she does have the family support, and a lot of times, we just assume that she would not be able to participate in extra-curricular activities, like Junior Beta. We know that her parents would provide transportation. Some of the kids that are selected to participate in activities, sometimes we overlook the kids that we think, "Oh, they couldn't stay after school." In actuality, she has good family support.
	413-443	BH: That's when we have to be the advocates. If their Star scores don't show it, and there is no data to back it up. MB: Sometimes, those kids…you know they got it, but everything doesn't point to it… You're looking and saying, "This kid's Star scores really aren't that good; words per minute aren't that great." But in class you see how they are a leader. Not maybe a bold leader, but when it's with a partner…you know, like, and they are a leader in small groups. Who's to say that…then I just feel like it's your word… **LJ: But your word is important. Your voice is important.** R: I think part of it is that teachers don't always realize their role in being the advocate, because if you see something like this, this would definitely be a student that I would go, "Okay, I definitely need to look twice at this, take a double-take at this student, but had I not done this, I might not have." …I think realizing that we are those gatekeepers, in a sense, because if you don't advocate, a lot of times no one else is.

		MY COMMENT: Teachers have to be ADVOCATES (as opposed to gatekeepers); shift in research. RQ's state that teachers become more aware of their role as gatekeepers, but perhaps it's more about them becoming more aware of their role as ADVOCATES. WRITTEN PROTOCOL: BH wrote: teachers document and narrate student performance LH wrote: teachers document and write in detail MB wrote: document in detail what students *can* do!