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Gail Pahl Hammond

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THE CONDITION OF REFERRAL OF INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED
CHILDREN FOR APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENT
IN ONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By

Gail Pahl Hammond

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Education Administration
in the Department of Leadership and Foundations

Mississippi State, Mississippi

April 2011

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By

Gail Pahl Hammond

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Pages in Study: 162

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The purpose of this case study was to observe the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children in one elementary school. Experiences of 16 teachers of Grades 2–5 (the grades served by the gifted education program) were examined by responding to a questionnaire to determine their history with gifted education, definition of giftedness in children, and involvement in the gifted child referral process. Existing data were examined to determine which of the teachers had accurately identified gifted children. The 3 teachers who had accurately identified a gifted child were interviewed. Questionnaire and interview responses were analyzed in the context of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners.

Results of the study showed that teachers in this school did not receive adequate pre-service or in-service training in recognition of the gifted population. The study revealed that in this elementary school, students who did not meet a teacher's preconception of the term giftedness went unreferral for gifted testing. The process of selection used by teachers when considering a student for referral was subjective in

nature and influenced by classroom observations, other teachers' opinions, and the teachers' personal experiences with giftedness outside of classroom practices. Data suggest that confidence and accuracy in referring students were positively influenced by years of teaching experience. Recommendations include the following: that colleges and universities prepare pre-service teachers to identify characteristics of gifted children; that in-service teachers receive professional development in identification of gifted traits in students; and that federal legislation include language that provides for the special needs of gifted students and mandates training for pre-service teachers in meeting the needs of this population.

DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to my dear husband, Dan, and my loving family for believing in my dream and encouraging me to make it come true.

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CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

No Child Left Behind (2001): These words resound loudly and clearly in the world of education. Teachers and administrators are all too familiar with the accountability standards that result in public comparisons of schools to one another. Students' scores are published in newspapers as badges of honor or evidence of failure.

Most of the attention toward public education in the United States is focused upon students who are falling below minimal academic standards (Tomlinson, 2002). Even though lower-performing students are indeed deserving of any and all strategies that can be employed to improve their educational dilemma, there is another group of students who also need the opportunity to reach their potential. While their scores are included in the accountability data, these students may have been proficient in many of the skills before the school year even began (Tomlinson, 2002). Their yearly academic growth may have been imperceptible, though their overall results reflected well on test scores (Tomlinson, 2002). These are the gifted students who may or may not be identified and served through a specialized program of enhancement.

Without needed services, these students may not achieve their potential level of educational success. They may even drop out of school through lack of interest or lack of achievement (Cloud, 2007; Gallagher, 1991). Cloud (2007) addressed the drop out issue with the following:

Surprisingly, gifted students drop out at the same rates as non-gifted kids—about 5% of both populations leave school early. Later in life, according to the scholarly Handbook of Gifted Education, up to one-fifth of dropouts test in the gifted range. (p. 42)

Gifted children are found in all demographic groups (Gagne, 1993; Kelly, 1993; Swanson, 2006), yet “many talented students go without recognition or support in our schools and leave discouraged and unfulfilled” (Gallagher, 1991, p. 177). Identifying high ability learners and placing them in programs that assist them in meeting their intellectual potential would address their dropout problem.

Methods of identification of gifted students are numerous but are dependent upon regulations for each state. “Children and youth who are found to have an exceptionally high degree of intelligence as documented through the identification process” are considered by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) to be intellectually gifted (Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi, 2006, p. 1). This identification process begins with referral by an administrator, a teacher, a counselor, a parent, a peer, one’s self, or anyone else who considers the child to be of exceptional intellectual ability. Required data are collected, including two of the following:

Group measure of intelligence that has been administered within the past 12 months; published characteristics of giftedness measure; published measure of creativity; published measure of leadership; achievement test scores; existing measure of individual intelligence that has been administered within the past 12 months; and/or other measures that are documented in the research on identification of intellectually gifted children. (Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi, 2006, pp. 6-7)

A Local Survey Committee (LSC), which consists of appointed school personnel, reviews the data and recommends whether or not the child moves forward to testing (Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi, 2006, p. 7).

Pre-service teachers (individuals who are preparing to become teachers) may have little contact with gifted education in their course work (Grassley, 2008). Novice teachers soon realize that they must differentiate curriculum to meet the needs of a population with diverse abilities. At this point, novice teachers may question how to recognize and serve students who need more challenges (Kirkpatrick, Lincoln, & Morrow, 2006).

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2007) requires teacher candidates to address the exceptional learning needs of elementary school students by planning appropriate instructional activities and tasks. Prior to 2007, teachers who entered the field may not have experienced such training. Recognition of those students with intellectual differences must precede instruction. During the nomination process each school year, teachers are asked to consider nominating or referring for testing those children who exhibit characteristics of giftedness, although many of these teachers may not have received training in recognizing such traits (Grassley, 2008). They may refer for testing those children who perform conscientiously and exhibit compliant behavior. Many intellectually gifted students are not going to be high achieving, teacher pleasing students (Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi, 2006, p. 6). Research is needed to ensure that children who can perform in the intellectually gifted range on established measures not be overlooked in the referral process because they do not exhibit the characteristics many teachers believe belong to a group labeled *gifted*. This study is one such opportunity to collect information.

In this study, the researcher selected an elementary school site in which to conduct this case study of the condition of the gifted education referral process. Data collection instruments were designed, and a total population of teachers for Grades 2–5 in this elementary school constituted the sample studied herein. From the total teacher population who responded to the questionnaire, all teachers who accurately identified gifted children during the research period participated in an interview. Teachers' remarks on the questionnaire and during the interview were framed in the context of their references to Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. The researcher presented data in the framework of Clark's characteristics in order to translate the condition of the gifted education referral process in one elementary school. Clark's list is an extension of the work of Seago (1974).

Clark (2002) listed the cognitive function characteristics of gifted learners as the following:

Extraordinary quantity of information, unusual retentiveness; advanced comprehension; unusually varied interests and curiosity; high level of language development; high level of verbal ability; unusual capacity for processing information; accelerated pace of thought processes; flexible thought processes; comprehensive synthesis; early ability to delay closure; heightened capacity for seeing unusual and diverse relationships, integration of ideas and disciplines; ability to generate original ideas and solutions; early differential patterns for thought processing; early ability to use and form conceptual frameworks; an evaluative approach toward self and others; and, unusual intensity, persistent goal-directed behavior. (pp. 57-58)

Clark's characteristics served as a lens for this study in order to seek deeper meaning.

Statement of the Problem

The problem studied was the disconnect between formal teacher preparation and knowledge needed to recognize characteristics of gifted students. A review of the literature indicated that many elementary school teachers do not know how to identify students for referral to the testing process for classes designed for the intellectually gifted (Elhoweris, 2008; Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; McBee, 2006; Pendarvis & Wood, 2009).

Teachers have a unique opportunity to affect the lives of students. Due to training and experience, they see children through a different lens than do parents and peers. Through this perspective, educators influence the learning of children in their classrooms; however, each child does not have the same needs or abilities (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002). Some students require additional attention in order to reach a level considered minimal by state testing standards, while others achieve beyond their grade level or have the potential to do so (Tomlinson, 2002). The disconnect between formal teacher preparation and the knowledge needed to recognize characteristics of gifted students indicates that not all students who would qualify are recommended for placement in gifted education programs (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Slocumb & Payne, 2000, 2010). Therefore, the education needs of all students are not being met.

Background of the Problem

School use of a specific lens or set of characteristics teachers can use for gifted student identification is needed. Teachers at the elementary school selected for this case study are asked each year to consider recommending children to testing for potential placement in the intellectually gifted program (MDE, 2006). The decision-making process these teachers use affects the results of their choices and ultimately the condition

of the gifted education referral process at the school. Teachers' responses translated the case of condition of the gifted referral process. Responses were framed in the context of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. Clark explained: "Gifted learners show characteristics that are different from their age peers' in each of the areas of function, although all gifted individuals have their own unique patterns of characteristics and no gifted learner exhibits every characteristic in every area" (p. 56). Viewing the teachers' responses through this lens gave a clear vision of their experiences.

Renzulli (2004a) indicated, "The thoughtful judgment of knowledgeable professionals ... should guide selection decisions" (pp. xxiv–xxv). Without sufficient training in recognizing the characteristics of gifted children, teachers may not nominate those most in need. National Excellence: The Case for Developing America's Talent (O'Connell, 1993), a national report on the status of educating gifted and talented students, declared that the talents of disadvantaged and minority children have been especially neglected. The report continued as follows:

Almost one in four American children lives in poverty, representing an enormous pool of untapped talent. Yet most programs for these children focus on solving the problems they bring to school, rather than on challenging them to develop their strengths. It is sometimes assumed that children from unpromising backgrounds are not capable of outstanding accomplishment. (p. 5)

Without the referral of classroom teachers, many gifted students will continue to go unidentified and, thus, not served (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Neihart et al., 2002; Slocumb & Payne, 2000, 2010). This is because fewer students usually are referred by peers, parents, self, or other education professionals than by teachers.

The classroom teacher, with an intimate knowledge of a student's intellectual abilities due to daily contact in the educational realm, is in a position to recognize characteristics if that teacher has been trained to do so (Clark, 2002). However, those who suspect that a student has exceptional intellectual abilities may be reluctant to follow through with a referral due to uncertainty regarding traits of the intellectually gifted (Slocumb & Payne, 2000, 2010). This results in a denial of services to those special-needs students. It is imperative that reasons why many novice and experienced teachers are reluctant or confident about recognizing traits of potentially intellectually gifted children be explored so that these students will receive the opportunity for testing.

This study was initiated to examine the case of one elementary school's teacher-perceived abilities to recognize gifted children. The study utilized a qualitative case study design in order to record the voices of teachers as they proceeded through the task of selecting children to refer to the gifted education program. Sixteen teachers were invited to participate because they taught Grades 2–5, the grades included in the gifted education program at that particular school. All of the teachers elected to participate. Of the 16 teachers, three were selected for an interview based upon their accurate identification of intellectually gifted children as indicated by existing data gathered during the data collection phase of this research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of a school's condition of the gifted education referral process as measured by the teachers' perceived abilities to recognize the characteristics of potentially intellectually gifted children in one public elementary school. Using self-perception of all teachers in one school, the researcher

intended to provide an in-depth view of the potential gifted student evaluation process undertaken in one school. The school is defined as the case, and the teachers of the school are the translators of the condition for this case. The study sought to determine if teachers perceived that they were adequately prepared to recognize the characteristics of gifted children. The study also sought to explain how teachers defined *giftedness* and what part personal experiences played in forming that definition. In particular, using an established, research-based set of gifted identification criteria by Clark as a lens for giftedness identification, the final data set examined was the perceptions of three—all—teachers who had been accurate at referring gifted students.

Rationale for Conducting the Study

During the 2007–2008 school year, gifted student enrollment in Mississippi’s public schools numbered 34, 973, yielding 7.1% of the school population in Grades 2–12 (MDE, 2010). During the 2008–2009 school year, gifted student enrollment in Mississippi’s public schools numbered 35,610, yielding 8.8% of the school population in Grades 2–12 (MDE, 2010). Under the 2008–2009 Mississippi Adequate Education Program, the allocated appropriation for gifted education was \$43,737,617, funding 869.72 teacher units (MDE, 2010). In the school district involved in this study, there were 1,495 gifted education students, equaling 8.4% of the school population in Grades 2–12, in 2007–2008, and 1,404 gifted education students, equaling 9.4% of the school population in Grades 2–12, in 2008–2009 (MDE, 2010).

With increasing numbers in gifted education enrollment and increasing expenses to taxpayers, the school referral process to this program should be examined focusing on those who are most involved in referral, the teachers. In terms of hours involving

paperwork by teaching staff, as well as group and individual testing and scoring by additional professionals, much school time is spent on each referral. Teachers who are cognizant of the characteristics of gifted children may improve the school process by nominating for referral those students who are most likely to qualify.

Research Questions

The study focused on the following primary research question: What is the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children in one elementary school? The primary research question went beyond preparation to application. Teachers were asked to apply what may have been learned in regard to the identification of potentially intellectually gifted children and to express their confidence or reluctance in doing so. The following secondary research questions were used in the study:

1. What educational experiences did participants have to prepare them to refer potentially gifted students?
2. How do teachers define *giftedness* in children?
3. How do teachers describe the development and use of a decision-making process to select students for referral to testing for the gifted education program?
4. How do teachers who accurately refer gifted students explain their involvement in the gifted education referral process?

Definitions of Key Terms

According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2009), the gifted referral process and subsequent assessment with the goal of placement of qualified

students in a program for the intellectually gifted differs from state to state. This study used the definition of intellectually gifted as accepted by MDE. Due to varying verbiage, defining the following terms as they are used in Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi (2006) was necessary:

1. Intellectually Gifted Children refers to “those children and youth who are found to have an exceptionally high degree of intelligence as documented through the identification process” (p. 1).
2. Referral Criteria includes at least two of the following criteria: “(1) group measure of intelligence that has been administered within the past twelve months, (2) published characteristics of giftedness measure, (3) published measure of creativity, (4) published measure of leadership, (5) achievement test scores, (6) existing measure of individual intelligence that has been administered within the past twelve months, and/or (7) other measures that are documented in the research on identification of intellectually gifted students” (pp. 6–7).

In addition, “each district shall establish the local minimal acceptable criteria on each measure used at this stage” (p. 7).

3. Phase I Assessment Criteria includes “(1) a full-scale score at or above the 90th percentile on a normed group measure of intelligence, (2) a score at or above the superior range on a normed characteristics of giftedness checklist, (3) a score at or above the superior range on a normed measure of creativity, (4) a score in the superior range on a normed measure of leadership, (5) a score at or above the 90th percentile on a normed measure of cognitive abilities, (6) a score at or above the 90th percentile

on total language, total math, total reading, total science, total social studies, or the composite on a normed achievement test, and/or (7) other measures as approved by the State Board of Education on the district's Gifted Education Program Proposal" (pp. 8–9).

In addition, "a student who has satisfied the minimal acceptable criteria on any three of the above measures shall move forward to the individual test of intelligence" (p. 9).

4. Potentially Twice-Exceptional Students includes "those students who already have an eligibility ruling under IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] and are being assessed for an intellectually gifted eligibility" (p. 10).

5. Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi (2006) define potentially disadvantaged gifted as follows:

"Potentially Disadvantaged Gifted" identifies students who have satisfied criteria on the Potentially Disadvantaged Gifted Checklist but who did not satisfy minimal acceptable criteria on an individual test of intelligence.

They scored at least in the 85th percentile and may be administered one of the following additional measures to determine eligibility: (1) a test of cognitive abilities with a minimal score of the 90th percentile, (2) a group intelligence measure with a minimal score at the 90th percentile, or (3) existing scores from the assessment stage placed into a matrix that the local district has had approved by the Mississippi Department of Education. (pp. 10–11)

Theoretical Framework

A three-fold method of scaffolding led to the selected framework of the study. First, a review of the literature transpired, recognizing what was known about identification of intellectually gifted children and the role played by classroom teachers. Second, the gap in the knowledge base was identified, and third, the problem statement and the purpose were shaped indicating a need to investigate the role of teachers in identifying gifted children.

Clark's (2002) *Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners* provided the theoretical framework for this study. Intellectually gifted students, Clark (2002) stated, are not a homogeneous group. Clark explained, "As human beings develop higher levels of functioning, many unique patterns and traits emerge...The more gifted a person becomes, the more unique that person may appear. Many characteristics, however, often recur in groups of gifted individuals." (p. 56)

Utilizing Clark's characteristics as an analysis lens examined the responses of the 16 teachers who responded to the questionnaire and focused the responses of the three teachers who were interviewed. The characteristics encased teachers' remarks to address the differentiating characteristics that they had witnessed exhibited by students. In so doing, the teachers described their experiences while teaching gifted students and placed them in the context of an established set of cognitive function traits.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1 provides a graphic representation of the conceptual framework that situates the case study of Camden Elementary School. The graphic shows how all 16 teachers' perceptions were gathered to translate the school's condition of gifted student referral. The conceptual framework shows how all 16 teachers in the school responded to

a questionnaire revealing their perceptions on various aspects of giftedness. Depicted next is the first instance of member checks used to verify accuracy of data. The oval image next in the graphic provides a symbol of how data analysis included Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. Next an image depicts a data analysis step using existing data to determine gifted referral accuracy. Images of three teachers follow in the conceptual framework diagram signifying that from the original group of 16 teachers, three emerged as accurate identifiers. These three teachers were interviewed because of the accuracy of their 2009 referrals of gifted children to gifted placement. The data from their interviews provided the most descriptive statements of the condition of the gifted education referral process in this elementary school. Finally, the conceptual framework shows interview responses were viewed through the lens of Clark's Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners and followed by member checks. Clark's characteristics were used again as an analysis lens.

The research study included one public elementary school. The school was selected from among five elementary schools in the school zone based upon the percentage of students participating in the gifted education program. Percentages regarding gifted education as compared with total school enrollment were obtained from existing school district data. Existing data regarding enrollment by grade and enrollment by subgroup were gathered from Mississippi Assessment and Accounting Reporting System (MAARS). Percentages regarding free lunch status were obtained from existing school district data. This additional data allowed a comparison among the five elementary schools in the district. The comparison yielded a thicker description of the participating school within the context of the school zone.

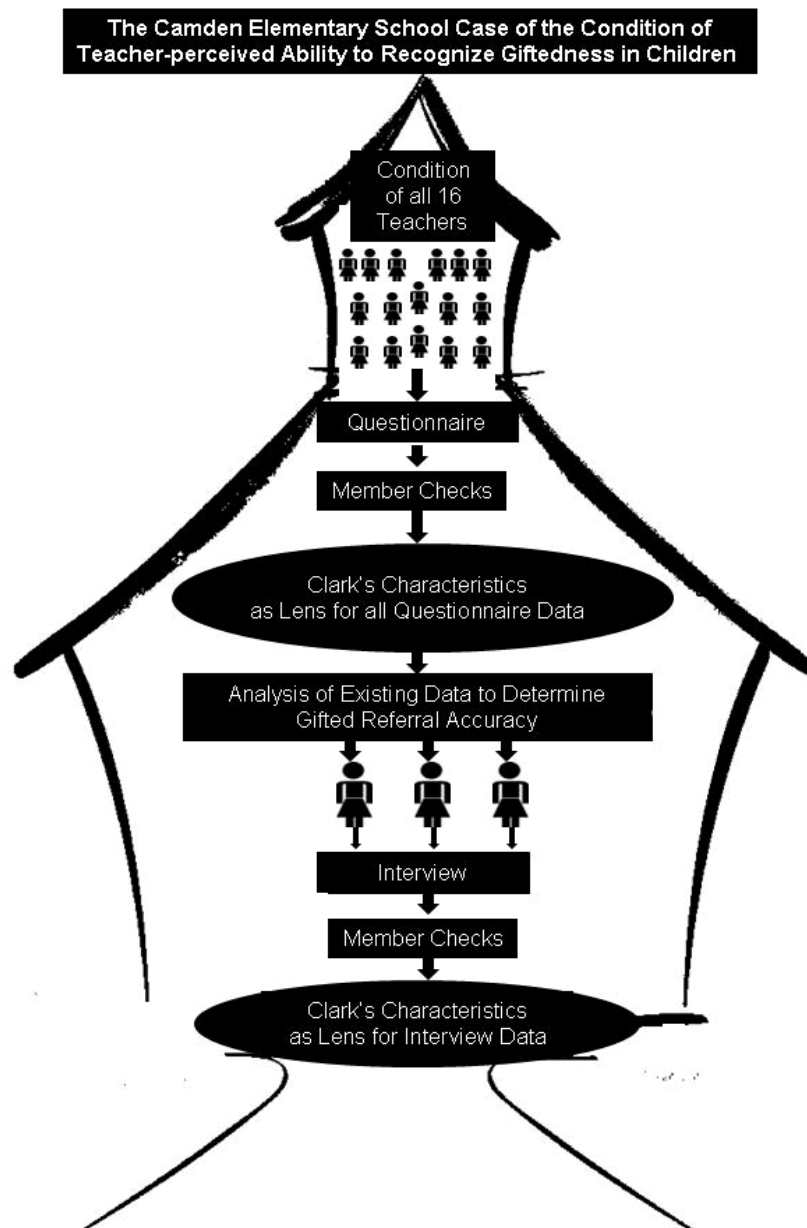


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework Depicting the Condition of Teacher-perceived Ability to Recognize Giftedness in One Elementary School: Overview of the Methodology

The study sought to center on the voices of teachers as they commented on one of many aspects of their responsibilities. Collecting data regarding their experiences and opinions was accomplished through use of the qualitative research design. The method of data collection involved a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Questions were included about gifted education training at pre-service and in-service levels and the influence of personal experiences.

Triangulation of the data was achieved through a questionnaire responded to by 16 teachers followed by member checks of all participants and three teachers selected from among the 16 for interviews followed by member checks. From among the 16 teachers, three were selected for an interview based upon their documented accuracy rate of 2009 referrals. Research was conducted in an ethical manner following Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Multiple efforts ensuring validity and reliability were employed. Analysis techniques were utilized to extract meaning from the data, and the results were recorded in tables and in narrative form using thick, rich descriptions.

Delimitations

The study relied upon qualitative research methods that had delimitations. While the researcher employed procedures to reduce delimitations, the following existed:

- The study was confined to teachers in one suburban public elementary school.
- Only one school in the district was selected in order to study the topic in depth. The school housed approximately 500 students in kindergarten through fifth grade, with four classes per grade.

- The study covered the fall semester of 2009 gifted education referral period.

Despite delimitations, the study provides insight into teacher education preparation and in-service training with regard to gifted education and their affect upon classroom practices through recognition of this special population.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in that it provides needed research into the school-level condition of the gifted education referral process. This case study is translated through the words of teachers. Both pre-service teachers (individuals who are preparing to become teachers) and in-service teachers (individuals who are licensed, practicing teachers) are expected to recognize the characteristics of intellectually gifted children for referral to testing. Students whose traits are not identified are denied specialized services. These children may not have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Additionally, the study is significant in that it contributes to an area of education that has a modest amount of literature specifically targeting the condition of an entire school toward gifted education referral, reported by classroom teachers as they describe their role in identifying children for potential placement in a gifted education program.

Organization of the Study

Chapter II provides a review of the literature that pertains to the characteristics of gifted children and to the training teachers receive in identifying these characteristics in order to refer students to testing for placement in a gifted education program. Chapter III explains the methodology of this study, telling how data were obtained and analyzed.

Chapter IV presents the results of the research. Chapter V summarizes the study, provides conclusions, and offers recommendation.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II offers a review of theoretical and empirical literature related to recognizing the traits gifted children possess. The chapter is organized into the following categories: recognizing gifted children, contextual issues of referral, teacher preparation, difficulties/challenges of/to proper identification, a lens for accurate identification, legislation, and summary.

Recognizing Gifted Children

Each school year, classroom teachers are asked to consider referring students for potential placement in programs of gifted education. This study seeks to understand how teachers at Camden Elementary School (a pseudonym) perceived their preparation to do so. Their knowledge and opinions regarding giftedness affect the referral process and determine which children will have their educational needs met.

Definitions of Giftedness

Perceptions of what constitutes giftedness vary. Some people view academic achievement as the measure of giftedness. Clark (2002) defined giftedness in terms of “academic aptitude, insight and innovation, creative behavior, leadership, personal and interpersonal skill, or visual and performing arts, or any combination thereof” (p. 26). A broad definition makes identification challenging and yet more encompassing, because it includes more than high report card grades. Giftedness may also be defined in terms of a

test score using “the results of a standardized intelligence test administered by a competent examiner” (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], n.d.a, p.1). Silverman (1993) explained, “The concept of giftedness originated in the field of psychology, specifically as a part of the study of individual differences. Over the years, it lost its psychological focus and became embedded in the field of education” (p. 1).

There are as many definitions for *giftedness* as there are authorities on the subject, and these definitions have been debated among them for decades. Teachers at Camden Elementary School formulated their own definitions based upon observations, personal experiences, and years of experience. For the purpose of this study, *giftedness* was referred to using the definition of intellectually gifted children in Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi (2006): “those children and youth who are found to have an exceptionally high degree of intelligence as documented through the identification process” (p. 1).

Characteristics of Gifted Children

In recognizing gifted students, it must be noted that not all gifted children are highly capable in all areas. A child may be mathematically precocious, yet experience difficulty with reading comprehension skills. Another child may be advanced for his or her grade level in the written word, yet confused by abstract problems involving geometric designs.

Kanevsky (1995) noted, “No single observable behavior characteristic...is true of every gifted student in every learning situation.” (p. 157) However, when comparing gifted children with non-gifted children, the characteristics of rate, depth, and complexity of learning have been found to appear more frequently in gifted students’ learning.

Steiner (2006) concluded that gifted children problem solve using a greater number of strategies than non-gifted children. Renzulli (2004b) pointed out that gifted children have high levels of creativity.

In addition to these characteristics, gifted children also originate new ideas and express them in unique ways. Sternberg (2004b) described two levels of tasks.

An entrenched task is one that is natural in everyday experience. For students, tasks such as reading a passage for comprehension or solving mathematical problems are entrenched tasks. A non-entrenched task is one that is unnatural in everyday experience. Generating unusual uses for products or incorporating simple drawings (lines, half circles, and the like) into more complex original drawings are non-entrenched tasks for students. (p. 44)

Sternberg (2004b) continued, “Old things are seen in new ways” (p. 47). The gifted child excels at non-entrenched tasks and thrives on such learning opportunities.

Parke (2001) cited three observations of gifted behaviors as noted by teachers: (a) the quick rate at which students complete their assignments, (b) the probing questions students ask that are different from their age mates, and (c) the interests that are unusual or for more mature students. Borland and Wright (2004) simplified identifying giftedness by looking for any sign of advanced performance that might represent untapped potential.

Contextual Issues of Referral

Significance of Identification

Cramer’s (1991) research identified 12 issues of importance in gifted education. A panel of 29 experts was asked to rate these issues on a scale of one to four, with one as

most important. “Procedures for identifying children for programs” received the highest priority rating in Round 1. This is consistent with the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education federal grant awards (U.S. Department of Education, 1989), which designated *identification* as one of two priorities.

Identifying giftedness in children is important in order to help them reach their intellectual potential. Prior research studies indicated that children reach higher levels of their potential when they are learning in an environment that is appropriate to their needs. Gallagher (1991) asserted the following:

A common, if erroneous, point of view is that these students will do well no matter what kind of education they receive. This is the “cream will rise to the top” argument, which, unfortunately for all of us, turns out to be incorrect. (p. 177)

Coleman (2005) noted that identification of gifted children allows them to be matched with educational services that encourage “their potential move from possibility to reality” (p. 2).

Researchers have advocated how essential it is that students be identified at an early age and that the school system makes every effort to meet their special needs. According to Rhodes (as cited in Franklin, 2004), delaying providing services can only result in stifling the growth process, both mentally and emotionally. Rhodes (2004) stated, “Research has shown that if [gifted] children are not identified by the third grade, they start to digress” (p. 7). Rhodes continued, “Students tend to get that underachievement desire next—where they want to go on easy street because they’re afraid of challenge. Up to that point, they’ve always succeeded” (p. 7). Franklin (2004) concluded that intervention to prevent this tendency is preferred to trying to reverse it. One way to address this problem is to group students for a portion of their school time.

Gifted students need the opportunity to work with and be challenged by their intellectual peers (Kulik & Kulik, 1997). Kulik and Kulik (1997) concluded that challenging gifted students begins with identifying them.

Berger (1991) explained that “gifted students learn best in a receptive, nonjudgmental, student-centered environment that encourages inquiry and independence, includes a wide variety of materials, provides some physical movement, is generally complex, and connects the school experience with the greater world” (p. 2). Berger acknowledged that all students would profit from this type of environment, but that it is essential for gifted children “that the teacher establish a climate that encourages them to question, exercise independence, and use their creativity in order to be all that they can be” (p. 2).

Students who participate in gifted education classes not only enhance learning and problem-solving skills, but also improve social skills (Moon, Swift, & Shallenberger, 2002). Such programs can help to facilitate positive self-concept and self-esteem development (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993). Students learn to hide their intellectual abilities if a particular group does not value those abilities, such as in the regular classroom setting (Slocumb & Payne, 2000, 2010). Placing these children in a group with their intellectual peers for a period of time each week challenges them to strive toward meeting their potential. Students with like abilities, interests, and peer issues provide a support system. Reis (2004) noted that “grouping, enrichment, and acceleration are all necessary to provide appropriate educational opportunities for gifted...learners” (p. xi).

Gifted individuals do not begin their studies at the post-high-school level. They begin as children. Rigor and excellence and learning appropriate to their intellectual levels are not goals to be attained following receipt of a diploma. These qualities form the

structure needed for intellectual success throughout the school years. Gallagher (1991) warned that many gifted students would not reach or not excel at the level of professional training they should. Callahan (2004) answered this dilemma by boldly stating, “The right to a differentiated curriculum cannot be denied” (p. 12).

Impact of Services

Addressing the needs of gifted students requires knowledge and commitment from those in positions to identify these students and provide services. However, not all gifted children are identified. Cross (2002) recognized that diverse populations of gifted students are not identified and, therefore, are not receiving needed services. Cloud (2007) lamented that the education system in our country does not know how “to cultivate its most promising students” (p. 41).

O’Connell (1993) quoted former Secretary of Education R. W. Riley who recognized that gifted students “have special needs that are seldom met” (p. iii). The outcome of not meeting these needs can be devastating to the individual as the child loses interest in learning that can lead to underachievement or undesirable behavior (Cline, 1999). Meeting the needs of gifted students involves direct intervention because these students “do not succeed on their own.” (DeLacy, 2004, p. 1)

Gallagher (1991) pointed out that intellectually bright students receiving education appropriate to their needs is in the interest of each of us. Gallagher called this “enlightened self-interest” (p. 177). Gallagher continued by stating that as adults, they will be the lawyers, doctors, professors, and other professionals to whom others will turn to answer their needs. When people need such services, they seek the most qualified persons. When the country needs talents for economic and technological development, it

will depend upon those who are most capable. Torrance (2004) stated, “We are living in an age of increasing rates of change, depleted natural resources, threats of nuclear war, interdependence, and de-standardization. All of these forces require us to utilize increased ingenuity and creativity” (p. 18). Gifted children are creative thinkers who may eventually help to solve these problems.

Teacher Preparation

All cited studies lead to the display of gifted behaviors as evidence of giftedness. The extant literature suggested that classroom teachers do not recognize these behaviors and, therefore, nominate high academic achievers for consideration for placement in gifted education classes (Rimm, 2004). Professional development training for in-service teachers rarely includes information about gifted students. Therefore, one questions how a teacher becomes cognizant of these traits and subsequently seeks additional services for a potentially gifted child.

Teachers often associate obedient behavior with giftedness, but this is problematic for pre-service teachers when they see a bright child who misbehaves (Tomlinson et al., 1994). Some potentially gifted students exhibit undesirable classroom actions such as underachievement and behavior problems (Rimm, 2004).

Teacher nomination is the most frequent source for the selection of gifted students. However, many teachers mistake high achievers as being the only highly creative thinkers in their classes (Rimm, 2004). This lack of recognition ability prevents potentially gifted students from being identified. According to Tomlinson et al. (1994), pre-service teachers usually equate successfully completing school tasks with potential giftedness, overlooking the child who does not follow directions or whose work is messy.

This conundrum has frustrated gifted education proponents for a long time. Roets (1990) stated, “Our colleges and universities are graduating teachers, on the teacher certification level, with little or no knowledge of the needs of the gifted...and how these needs are met” (p. 13). Noting that Roets drew this conclusion two decades ago and that educators are still addressing this issue points to the need for a resolution to the problem. Some novice teachers would like more preparation to address the unique requirements of special needs children (Kirkpatrick et al., 2006). These children include students who are intellectually gifted.

Teachers need to make accommodations for individual differences in cognitive, social, and emotional development of all students. The classroom teacher is the primary educator of gifted students (Sousa, 2003). Prior research studies indicated that gifted students need to be intellectually challenged through differentiated instruction. Callahan (2004) insisted that educators should look for those characteristics of gifted children that make them different from other children and accommodate the needs those differences represent. Recognizing the characteristics of these students for the benefit of referring them for testing and potential placement in a gifted education program is the responsibility of every classroom teacher.

Renzulli (2004a) contended, “The thoughtful judgment of knowledgeable professionals...should guide selection decisions” (pp. xxiv–xxv). This process begins with nomination by the classroom teacher, an individual who should be a knowledgeable professional. The nomination-to-placement process should also attend to how the information gathered about the referred child will be used, the relationship between placement and the services provided, and the training of those individuals who are involved in the process (Renzulli, 2004a). Renzulli further stated that teacher ratings

provide information about a student's "traits and potentials" (p. xxx). Both Renzulli (2004a) and Birch (2004) recommended training in recognizing characteristics of potentially gifted learners. Birch explained: "Reliance is placed on 'screening' by group intelligence tests and on referral by interested but untrained parents and teachers using informal appraisal and school achievement (tests and grades) to suggest individual children for consideration for special programs" (p. 2).

Birch (2004) recommended instructing teachers through the use of outlines and checklists to become incisive observers of the various qualities of giftedness. Identification instruments such as these can aid teachers in "focusing on the manifestations of these traits, behaviors, and aptitudes" (Hunsaker, Finley, & Frank, 1997, p. 20). Training in the application of identification instruments must precede their use to ensure a clear understanding of concepts and terminology (Feldhusen, Asher, & Hoover, 2004).

Testing the results of rating scales used by teachers as one of their points of inquiry, Endepohls-Ulpe and Ruf (2005) conducted a study to answer the following questions.

1. Which are the criteria that primary school teachers apply for the identification of gifted pupils when they give them independently of predetermined rating scales?
2. Are there any differences between the free descriptions given by teachers who have already taught a gifted child and those given by teachers who have to make their judgment merely on the basis of stereotypical images?
3. Are there any differences between the results of open-ended questions and the results of rating scale descriptions? (p. 220)

Endepohls-Ulpe and Ruf's (2005) sample consisted of 384 teachers from randomly chosen German primary schools, with 317 females, 67 males, and a mean age of 43 years. The researchers used a questionnaire concerning the characteristics of highly gifted students that included two open-ended questions and a list of 90 Likert-scale items. Endepohls-Ulpe and Ruf explained that the open-ended questions included describing a child they had taught and identified as gifted or stating which criteria applied to a gifted child.

The results of Endepohls-Ulpe and Ruf's (2005) study indicated that 41% of the responses placed the main emphasis on features related to the field of cognition, with 33% from the field of motivation. Of these responses, more cognitive features as criteria for identification were named by experienced teachers than teachers without experience. Features from the field of social behavior played a minor role, though teachers with experience named more positive features. More than 10% of the teachers without experience named 'lack of discipline,' 'being an outsider,' and 'general deficits in social behavior' as characteristics of a gifted primary school child. Interestingly, 132 of the children identified as highly gifted were male, and 60 were female. The concluding discussion indicated that "teachers with experience in teaching a gifted child have a much more precise concept of giftedness in the cognitive area than teachers without experience" (Endepohls-Ulpe & Ruf, 2005, p. 224).

Endepohls-Ulpe and Ruf (2005) suggested the following issues should be emphasized in training primary school teachers.

1. Intelligence, good achievement at school, and a high level of motivation do not necessarily appear as a unit.

2. Social behavior is not an indicator for giftedness, neither in a positive nor in a negative sense. When looking for gifted children, teachers should also have an eye on the socially inconspicuous, well-adapted children, especially girls.
3. Diagnostic competence in identifying gifted children must be related to different stages of development. In the primary school sector, obviously, the traits that may indicate giftedness are different from those in the secondary school sector.
4. Personal experience in teaching gifted children obviously results in more precise and realistic concepts of giftedness. Deliberate contact with gifted children and training in teaching the gifted should therefore definitely be part of primary school teacher training. (p. 227)

Brown et al. (2005) conducted a national study regarding the assumptions of educators underlying the identification of gifted and talented students. Included in the sample were classroom teachers, teachers of the gifted, administrators, and consultants from rural, suburban, and urban areas. Surveys containing 20 Likert-scale items were disseminated to teachers and others involved in the process. Of the 6,000 surveys distributed, 2,918 surveys were returned.

Sample items included statements such as the following: “Identification should be based primarily on an intelligence or achievement test. Teacher judgment and other subjective criteria should not be used in identification. Identification should take into consideration the cultural and experiential background of the student” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 72).

Brown et al. (2005) stated that small differences among groups found in this study represent a positive finding in that educators in various roles and from a variety of school settings appear to be in general agreement. However, because most of the educators who responded to the survey were attendees at gifted conferences, their attendance at these conferences was probably indicative of an interest in gifted education. Brown et al. warned against generalizing the results, as this was a convenience sample.

Difficulties/Challenges of/to Proper Identification

Children Who May Be Overlooked in the Referral Process

To determine if children are overlooked in the referral process, one must question whether only “A” students and teacher pleasers are eligible for consideration (Davis & Rimm, 2004). Students with atypical behavior or less stellar grades may also exhibit signs of high intellectual ability (Tomlinson et al., 1994). The higher the level of giftedness in a child, the more incompatible his or her behavior may be within the regular classroom (Clark, 2002; Rimm, 2004). This heightened level of intelligence may result in behaviors that are misinterpreted as problems to correct rather than expressions of needs to be addressed (Webb, Amend, & Webb, 2004; Webb & Latimer, 1993). These children may be overlooked in the referral process as having behavior problems rather than as students who need more intellectual stimulation. Davis and Rimm (2004) observed, “The extremely bright or the creative, curious, and questioning students, who may be stubborn, rule-breaking, egotistical, or otherwise high in nuisance value, may not be the teachers’ favorites, but they sometimes are the most gifted” (p. 85).

Knowledge of words indicates potential giftedness (Clark, 2004; Jensen, 1980; Matarazzo, 1972; Sternberg, 2004a). Sternberg (2004a) explained, “Because so much of

one's learning...is contextually determined, the ability to use context to add to one's knowledge base is an important skill in intelligent behavior" (p. 56). However, less verbally gifted students may also be precocious but may not attract a teacher's attention.

Slocumb and Payne (2000, 2010) cautioned educators about recognizing traits that involve experience and environment. Slocumb and Payne (2000) contended that judgments are often made based upon the child's language and suggested that educators go beyond the slang, seeking those who may not embrace middle-class values such as work ethic and achievement. Slocumb and Payne continued by explaining that gifted students may seek family and peer acceptance by not demonstrating their intellectual abilities.

There is also much concern about identification of giftedness and talent among minority, disadvantaged, and culturally different students (Feldhusen et al., 2004). The number of students served in gifted and talented programs has grown substantially in past decades, in part due to a focused effort by state governments and funding by the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program (1988). However, students from economically disadvantaged families and students with unorthodox talents are not being identified in equitable proportions (CEC, n.d.b). Educators need to make referrals for identification of gifted students who are from diverse cultures or ethnic groups (Joseph & Ford, 2006).

For years, educational professionals have been concerned about the disproportionate under-representation in gifted programs of children from some cultural, linguistic, and low-income backgrounds (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Slocumb & Payne, 2000, 2010). Many of these children show high potential in areas that are not easily assessed by traditional measures of ability (CEC, n.d.b). The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented

Students Education Act (1988) concluded that gifted children from low-income areas and with limited-English proficiency are at the greatest risk of not being identified for appropriate gifted education services. An additional study conducted by O'Connell (1993) went beyond the notion of mere risk and bluntly stated, "The talents of disadvantaged and minority children have been especially neglected" (p. 5).

In January 2003, the National Academy of Sciences released a report on the seeming over-representation of minorities in special education and under-representation of those students in gifted education (CEC, n.d.b). Nationwide, 7.47% of all White students and 9.9% of Asian students are placed in gifted programs. Meanwhile, 3.04% of African-American students, 3.57% of Hispanic students, and 4.86% of American-Indian students are classified as gifted (CEC, n.d.b). The report further indicated that many of these students would not realize their potential without some type of intervention. O'Connell (1993) concluded, "Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor" (p. 26).

Elhoweris (2008) and Elhoweris et al. (2005) explored the effects of students' socioeconomic status (SES) on the opinions of teachers who refer students for recommendation for gifted programs. Elhoweris (2008) had found no previous empirical study that investigated this influence, a surprising revelation given the field's long-standing struggle to identify children from low SES families.

Elhoweris et al. (2005) used a stratified cluster sampling technique to select a sample of teachers for this study from among 16 elementary schools located in three different areas of a large midwestern city school district. Of the 207 teachers who elected to participate, 92% were female and 83% were White. Their ages ranged among 46 years

or older (41%), 36–45 (31%), and under 36 (28%). General educators composed 84.6% of the participants, with 11.1% special educators and 4.3% gifted educators. Sixty-six percent (66%) of them had at least 7 years of teaching experience.

Two randomly constituted groups were given different vignettes, with Group 1 describing a student representing low–middle SES and Group 2 describing a student representing an upper-middle SES. Except for the SES, the two vignettes were identical. After reading the brief vignettes, teachers were asked to respond to the following statements using a 6-point Likert scale (Elhoweris et al., 2005, p. 27).

1. This student should be referred for a comprehensive evaluation for possible placement in a gifted and talented program.
2. I feel this student should be placed in a gifted and talented program.

Results were tested using the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA); the results indicated a non-significant effect for SES. Although the SES main effect was not statistically significant in this study, data suggested that teachers tended to refer and to place “more likely” the student who represented an upper-middle SES. One of the limitations of the study indicated that bias might be more evident in actual practice than in reading a vignette. Elhoweris (2008) concluded the following:

Although the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Act of 1988 provides financial assistance to state and local educational agencies and gives highest priority to students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and students with disabilities, the under-representation of economically disadvantaged students in gifted and talented programs still persists. (p. 35)

McBee (2006) cited a scarcity of SES research in the area of gifted education. To contribute to this body of knowledge, McBee conducted a study involving a dataset of 705,074 students in Grades 1 through 5. As part of McBee's study, the Georgia Department of Education provided data including students' race, free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) status, and nomination through identification for gifted programming information.

Results indicated that students from different racial backgrounds were not equally represented in the gifted programs. Additionally, student participation in the FRL program was strongly related to the proportion of students who participate in gifted programs. Students who did not participate in the FRL program were more than three times more likely to be referred than students receiving FRL. Significant differences in referral rates by race were indicated with nomination of nearly 25% of Asian students and only about 3% of Hispanic students. The final analysis showed the data to be split by race and SES. McBee (2006) concluded that the referral process was a potential source of unfairness in the entrance process.

A case study conducted by Pendarvis and Wood (2009) focused on the eligibility of historically under-represented gifted students (HUGS) referred for gifted education in a rural school district in West Virginia. Components of a new school district policy included disseminating to teachers copies of the policy and lists of characteristics of HUGS, plus presenting a workshop for first-grade teachers to encourage early referrals. In addition, the school district provided the following:

Alternative tests to students who were referred for evaluation and who scored at least one standard deviation above the mean on an individually administered

comprehensive intelligence test, but who did not score high enough to qualify for placement according to state regulations. (p. 495)

Pendarvis and Wood (2009, p. 502) presented criteria for classification as belonging to traditionally under-represented groups.

- Identification as Exceptional in accordance with West Virginia Policy 2419
- Membership in a racial or ethnic minority group
- Economic disadvantage as evidenced by eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch
- Underachievement (which takes into consideration the student's ability level, educational performance, and achievement level)

Pendarvis and Wood (2009) explained, "During the period covered by this study, 57 elementary and middle school students were referred by their classroom teachers for evaluation to decide whether they were eligible for individualized education planning and instruction designed to accommodate giftedness" (p. 501). Of these, 30 were girls compared to 27 boys. All were evaluated.

Five African-American girls and 25 White girls were referred resulting in 8 of the girls determined to be eligible for gifted education services. Only one of these girls was African-American. None of the four African-American boys were determined to be eligible for placement, while 4 of the 23 White boys qualified for placement. Combining the referred African-American boys and girls, the total of 16% was "a slightly higher proportion than the proportion of African Americans in the county population (11%)" (Pendarvis & Wood, 2009, p. 505).

Pendarvis and Wood (2009) concluded, “In terms of placement, students who shared more risk factors did about the same as those who shared fewer” (p. 506). The risk factors on which data were collected were as follows: (a) belonging to a minority race, (b) being economically disadvantaged, and (c) being parented by only one parent. One of the 12 students who qualified for placement had all three risk factors. One student found eligible had two risk factors. Nine of the eligible students had only one risk factor. Of the 29 economically disadvantaged students referred, 7 qualified for placement by conventional standards.

According to Pendarvis and Wood (2009), the primary question of interest in this study was the percentage of HUGS who would be eligible for gifted education services. The analysis found that HUGS were identified to a greater extent than middle class White students in this study. Pendarvis and Wood surmised that the results could have been affected by the fact that the teachers were informed of the new policy and of the importance of referring children from groups that are traditionally under-represented in gifted programs. The combination of increased referrals and perhaps a slight improvement in recognition of qualities that indicate giftedness in these students could have contributed to the result (p. 508).

While populations involving race and SES are of concern in the identification process, there are also other groups that deserve attention. Children with diagnosed attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can be gifted (Webb et al., 2004; Webb, Gore, & Amend, 2007). At times, the characteristics of both ADHD and giftedness that exist in the same child cause the teacher to focus on those effects causing the greater distraction (Webb et al., 2004). The excitement of learning can prompt some children to behave in an overly active manner. Webb and Latimer (1993) stated, “Careful

consideration and appropriate professional evaluation are necessary before concluding that bright, creative, intense students have ADHD” (p. 4).

According to Cline (1999), another group of underserved and understimulated youth is gifted students with disabling conditions. Cline noted that these children might not be identified because disabled gifted children may use their intelligence to compensate for their disability. When this happens, both conditions may appear altered or less pronounced. Such efforts may mask manifestations of giftedness (Cline, 1999).

In a study comparing the results of students referred to gifted programs, Bianco (2005) discovered that labels of emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and learning disabilities (LD) significantly influenced general education teachers. These teachers were much less willing to refer labeled students than to refer identically described students who had no disability label. Of the 195 general education teachers working in one south Florida school district, the mean age was between 40 and 50 years, with an average of 11.42 years of teaching experience. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three treatment conditions: no exceptionality label, LD, or EBD. Each group was provided with a vignette describing a student with gifted characteristics. Approximately one third of each group received (a) only the vignette stem; (b) the vignette stem plus an LD label; or (c) the vignette stem plus an EBD label.

According to Bianco (2005), teachers responded to six questions on a Likert scale. Results showed 9% of those assigned to the no-label group disagreed or strongly disagreed with referral; 29% of the teachers assigned to the EBD group disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 37% in the LD group disagreed or strongly disagreed. The ultimate findings of this study demonstrated that the disability labels EBD and LD

negatively influenced a significant percentage of teachers when making referral decisions for gifted programs.

When considering referral of economically disadvantaged as well as other gifted students, Borland and Wright (2004) suggested using various sources of information including observation, portfolio assessment, dynamic assessment, and case study methods. How this is accomplished depends upon the data-gathering method. One solution is to trade “the objectivity of standardized tests for the sensitivity and adaptability of human observation and judgment” (Borland & Wright, 2004, p. 28).

Misconceptions and Actualities

Common myths about gifted students abound. Berger (2000) noted the myth that “gifted students do not need help. If they are really gifted, they can manage on their own” (p. 1). Other myths include the following:

Gifted students are a homogeneous group, all high achievers; gifted students have fewer problems than others because their intelligence and abilities somehow exempt them from the hassles of daily life; the future of a gifted student is assured because a world of opportunities lies before the student; gifted students are social isolates; the primary value of the gifted student lies in his or her brain power; the gifted student’s family always prizes his or her abilities; gifted students need to serve as examples to others, and they should always assume extra responsibility; gifted students make everyone else smarter; gifted students can accomplish anything they put their minds to if they apply themselves; gifted students are naturally creative and do not need encouragement; and, gifted children are easy to raise and a welcome addition to any classroom. (p. 1)

While these myths flourish, they were countered by Berger (2000) with the following strengths.

Gifted students are often perfectionistic and idealistic; they may equate achievement and grades with self-esteem and self-worth, which sometimes leads to fear of failure and interferes with achievement. Gifted students may experience heightened sensitivity to their own expectations and those of others, resulting in guilt over achievements or grades perceived to be low. Gifted students are asynchronous, having chronological age, social, physical, emotional, and intellectual development at different levels. Some gifted students are “mappers” (sequence learners) while others are “leapers” (spatial learners). (Leapers may not know how they got a right answer. Mappers may get lost in the steps leading to the right answer.) Gifted students may be so far ahead of their chronological age mates that they may know more than half of the curriculum before the school year begins, producing boredom that results in low achievement and grades. Gifted children are problem solvers. (They benefit from working on open-ended, interdisciplinary problems.) Gifted students often refuse to work for grades alone. Gifted students often think abstractly and with such complexity that they may need help with concrete study- and test-taking skills. (They may not be able to select one answer in a multiple-choice question because they see how all the answers might be correct.) Gifted students who do well in school may define success as getting an “A” and failure as any grade less than an “A.” By early adolescence, they may be unwilling to try anything where they are not certain of guaranteed success. (p. 1)

Debunking the myths and understanding the strengths will aid in recognizing and serving this population of students. This can be accomplished through education of those who are in contact with potentially gifted children. Training will benefit both teachers and students.

A Lens for Accurate Identification

Clark (2002) explained, “As human beings develop higher levels of functioning, many unique patterns and traits emerge” (p. 56). While no gifted learner possesses all of the cognitive traits, Clark expressed that many unique patterns of characteristics are evident in gifted children. Clark articulated that gifted learners show characteristics that are different from their age peers’.

Clark (2002) stated, “Cognitive development rests on the understanding and integration of a vast quantity of experiences of the environment” (p. 57). Clark explained *giftedness expressed by cognitive function* as including differentiating characteristics of gifted learners. A comprehensive list developed by Clark as an extension of the work of Seago (1974), encompassed a wide variety of cognitive attributes that aid in identifying the gifted child. The characteristics, delineated by Clark (2002, pp. 57–58), include those listed in Table 2.1. They are explained by stating examples of related needs. This list assists users in recognizing the cognitive traits that characterize gifted students.

Table 2.1 Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners and Examples of Related Needs

Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners	Examples of Related Needs
Extraordinary quantity of information, unusual retentiveness	To be exposed to new and challenging information of the environment and the culture, including aesthetic, economic, political, educational, and social aspects; to acquire early mastery of foundation skills
Advanced comprehension	To be given access to challenging curriculum and intellectual peers
Unusually varied interests and curiosity	To be exposed to varied subjects and concerns; to be allowed to pursue individual ideas as far as interest takes them
High level of language development	To encounter uses for increasingly difficult vocabulary and concepts
High level of verbal ability	To share ideas verbally in depth
Unusual capacity for processing information	To be exposed to ideas at many levels and in large variety
Accelerated pace of thought processes	To be exposed to ideas at rates appropriate to individual pace of learning—often accelerated
Flexible thought processes	To be allowed to solve problems in diverse ways
Comprehensive synthesis	To be allowed a longer incubation time for ideas
Early ability to delay closure	To be allowed to pursue ideas and integrate new ideas without forced closure or products demanded

(continues)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners	Examples of Related Needs
Heightened capacity for seeing unusual and diverse relationships; integration of ideas and disciplines Ability to generate original ideas and solutions	To mess around with varieties of materials, ideas, opportunities for multidisciplinary learning; complexity To build skills in problem solving and productive thinking; to be given the opportunity to contribute to solutions of meaningful problems
Early differential patterns for thought processing (e.g., thinking in alternatives, abstract terms; sensing consequences; making generalizations; visual thinking; use of metaphors and analogies) Early ability to use and form conceptual frameworks	To be exposed to alternatives, abstractions, consequences of choices, opportunities for drawing generalizations and testing them; to solve problems by use of visual or metaphoric strategies To use and design conceptual frameworks in information gathering and problem solving; to seek order and consistency; to develop a tolerance for ambiguity
An evaluative approach toward self and others	To be exposed to individuals of varying ability and talent and to varying ways of seeing and solving problems; to set realistic, achievable short-term goals; to develop skills in data evaluation and decision making
Unusual intensity; persistent goal-directed behavior	To pursue inquiries beyond allotted time spans; to set and evaluate priorities

(Clark, 2002, p. 57-58)

Legislation

Acknowledging that most teachers have gifted students in their classrooms, Clarenbach (2005), NAGC Director of Public Education, emphasized that legislation is needed to provide grant funds to prepare new teachers to identify the unique needs of gifted children, with training during pre-service courses strongly suggested. Proposed legislation that would prepare teachers to meet the needs of gifted children was added to the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA). Senator C. Grassley (Republican, IA) and

Representative P. E. Gillmor (Republican, OH) introduced bills that created financial incentives through the HEA for states and teacher preparation programs and licensure requirements to raise awareness among new teachers. The House and Senate committees that considered education issues included the gifted education language when they drafted their final versions of the HEA (National Association for Gifted Children, 2006).

Representative E. Gallegly (Republican, CA) introduced legislation to create a formula grant for states to support gifted and talented students. The bill, H.R. 2925, was similar to legislation Representative Gallegly and Senator Grassley introduced in 2003 (National Association for Gifted Children, 2007). It authorized spending that included professional development to ensure that school personnel understand the educational needs of gifted students. The teacher training legislation was included in the Senate version of the HEA (J. Clarenbach, personal communication, October 26, 2007). Bills affecting teacher preparation, licensure requirements, and professional development continue to be introduced in the U.S. Congress and speak to the relevance of this issue.

Additionally, Senator Grassley introduced legislation on April 25, 2007, stating that “we cannot neglect the importance of challenging and encouraging students to excel so that they will some day be the scientists, engineers, and researchers that will create the innovations that will drive our economy” (p. S5034). Senator Grassley included the following comment:

Gifted students learn faster and to a greater depth than other students and often look at the world differently than other students. As a result, it takes a great deal more to keep them challenged and stimulated. If they are not sufficiently stimulated, they often learn to get by with minimum effort and adopt poor learning habits that can prevent them from achieving to their potential. In fact,

many gifted and talented students underachieve or even drop out of school.

(Senator Grassley, *Congressional Record -- Senate*, April 25, 2007, p. S5034)

Further, Senator Grassley wrote the following in a press release dated July 31, 2008:

The vast majority of teacher preparation programs do not require prospective classroom teachers to have coursework in gifted education. If teachers aren't exposed to information about the needs of gifted students in their pre-service training, they may never acquire the necessary knowledge. (para. 3)

A legislative update article on the National Association for Gifted Children's (2010) web site included the following:

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 fails to adequately encourage states and districts to improve teacher skills and effectiveness in meeting the needs of gifted and talented students through the Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund in Title II, Part A, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). (p. 1/para. 2)

The issue was explained by the National Association for Gifted Children (2010) as follows:

The education of gifted and talented students requires knowledge and skilled implementation of specialized pedagogical strategies that are generally not part of pre-service teacher preparation programs. However, a national survey of the states shows that more than half rely on the regular classroom as one of the primary methods for educating gifted children. Despite relying on the regular classroom teacher, only 36% have received some training in meeting the needs of advanced students. As more and more gifted students are placed in the regular classroom,

there is an urgent need for high quality, evidence-based professional development to address the gaps in teacher knowledge and skills in working with this population of learners. (p. 1/para. 3)

The proposed solution provided by the National Association for Gifted Children (2010) stated:

Amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to require states to include in their applications for federal funds under Title II, Part A, a description of the strategies they will employ to improve teacher quality by improving their ability to identify and instruct gifted and talented students. The legislative amendment should also reference the definition of teaching skills in Section 200 of Title II in the 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. (p. 1/para. 4)

Support for this legislation is currently being sought.

Tomlinson (2002) advocated that during this time of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and pending new legislation, the special needs of *all* children should be identified and served. Moreover, Tomlinson suggested that educators know that the current legislation is directed at the low-achieving student who is often lost in the educational shuffle and is not intended to address the needs of the gifted learner.

Tomlinson stated:

At present, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 aims the nation's attention and resources at ensuring that non-proficient students move systematically toward proficiency. There is no incentive for schools to attend to the growth of students once they attain proficiency, or to spur students who are already proficient to greater achievement, and certainly not to inspire those who far exceed proficiency. (p. 36)

Summary

Prior research about gifted students indicated that this topic is of interest to a relatively small population. These children generally do not require the services needed to raise school, district, state, and national test scores and are, therefore, not in the forefront of receiving attention or funds. The national legislation that governs public school education in this country does not even include this group. Cramer (1991) noted that interest in gifted children has fluctuated widely and changes with world events at the time. Further, Cramer assessed that when a crisis situation exists, such as the country's defense needs or economic realities of world competition, support for gifted learners increases until the problem diminishes. Researchers have concluded that this attitude is not in the best interest of the country, its schools, or individual learners.

Research studies indicated that intellectual ability in children needs to be recognized at as early an age as possible. Placement of high-ability students in specialized programs promotes development of their potential. Some highly capable students may never have the opportunity to develop their intellectual abilities. One can only surmise the loss to that child as well as the potential loss to society.

Recognizing potentially gifted students in order to meet their specialized needs is not only important, it is essential. The existing research focused the need for teachers to receive training in order to refer children for testing. This study sought to determine the educational experiences of teachers at Camden Elementary School that prepared them to refer potentially gifted students. Teachers need to be educated in identifying universal characteristics of gifted children. Checklists and other methods of identification may be utilized. However, instruction in their use is imperative. This study was conducted to address the issue of teacher pre-service and in-service instruction in recognizing

characteristics exhibited by gifted children in order to refer students to testing for potential placement in a specialized program.

CHAPTER III

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Chapter III explains the methodology that was used in this study and is divided into the following sections: research design, role of the researcher, research questions, case setting and context, participants, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and summary. The methodology was founded on qualitative case study research design with data collection and analysis focusing on existing documents, a questionnaire, an interview, and school, district, and state data records.

Research Design

Rationale for Using the Qualitative Research Approach for this Study

Creswell (2003) discussed the importance of having a framework for designing research by stating, “The framework involves bringing together claims being made about what constitutes knowledge, a strategy of inquiry, and specific methods. Three approaches result from this interconnection: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods” (p. xxii). The qualitative approach was utilized for this study based upon the following explanations from Bogdan and Biklen (2007), Creswell (2003), and Merriam (1998). The focus of qualitative research is on the participants’ perceptions and experiences. Merriam (1998) commented, “Qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole” (p. 6).

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), there are five characteristics of a qualitative research: naturalistic, descriptive, process oriented, inductive, and sense of meaning. Bogdan and Biklen noted that qualitative research is naturalistic in nature. As qualitative researchers spend time in the natural setting of the phenomena, they better understand the participants and the phenomena as it naturally occurs. Bogdan and Biklen concluded that “human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs, and whenever possible, they [qualitative researchers] go to that location” (p. 5).

The second characteristic of qualitative research is that it is descriptive in nature. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) remarked that qualitative researchers “analyze the data with all their richness as closely as possible to the form in which they were recorded or transcribed” (p. 5). This aspect of analysis provided the thick, rich description that the researcher sought to impart.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) continued by listing the third characteristic of qualitative research as being process oriented in nature, emphasizing the actual research process that was used. The fourth characteristic of qualitative research, according to Bogdan and Biklen, is that it is inductive in nature. Qualitative researchers “do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together” (p. 6).

The fifth characteristic concluded by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) is the sense of meaning. Bogdan and Biklen stated, “Meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. Researchers who use this approach are interested in how different people make sense of their lives” (p. 7). Creswell (2003) expounded upon the fifth characteristic by

stating: "...the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives...with an intent of developing a theory or pattern." (p. 18)

Based upon these explanations, the qualitative research approach was selected for this study as it sought to determine the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children in one elementary school. Teachers' perceptions and experiences were sought to determine how they influenced teachers in the selection process used when considering which students to recommend to testing for potential placement in a gifted education program. The researcher conducted the research in a school setting in order to understand the participants and the phenomena as it naturally occurred resulting in a thick, rich description of the perceptions teachers had in recognizing giftedness in children. The process used in the study explained the experiences teachers had that influenced their perceptions. Abstractions were formed based upon teachers' self-perceptions and experiences, yielding a sense of meaning. From meanings, emergent themes were formed.

Rationale for Using Case Study as the Strategy of Inquiry for this Study

Creswell (2003) explained that the qualitative research approach "uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies. The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data" (p. 18). The strategy of inquiry selected for this study was the case study.

The case study is defined as "an in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 754). Merriam (1998) defined a case study as "an intensive,

holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii). Merriam further noted, “Case studies can also be described in terms of their overall intent, whether it be to describe, to interpret, or to evaluate some phenomenon or to build theory” (p. xiii). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) expanded upon this concept when they described a case study as “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (p. 59).

Merriam (1998) stated the following:

A researcher selects a case study design because of the nature of the research problem and the questions being asked...Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon...Educational processes, problems, and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice. Case study has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations, for evaluating programs, and for informing policy. (p. 41)

Case studies allow the researcher to study a phenomenon in its natural context (Merriam, 1998). Both the emic (insider’s perspective) and the etic (outsider’s perspective) may be represented in case studies (Gall et al., 1996). For this study, the case study method was of vital importance to observing the practices and collecting the opinions of teachers who spent their workdays applying the knowledge they obtained through pre-service and in-service instruction. The study provided these teachers the voice necessary to express themselves regarding gifted education referrals while situating their stories within the professional experience of pre-service preparation and applied education (in-service).

Further, Merriam (1998) defined the case study by its special features— particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic:

Particularistic means the case study focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. *Descriptive* means that the end product of the case study is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study. *Heuristic* means that the case study will illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. (pp. 29–30)

This study is *particularistic* in that it focused on a particular program, the gifted education program at one elementary school, and how teachers decided whom to refer for its services. It is *descriptive* in that the end product offers a rich, thick description through the voices of these teachers. It is *heuristic* as it shares with the reader the decision-making process this group of teachers used in identifying potentially gifted children for referral to testing for the gifted education program.

Unlike other forms of research, “case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis. Any and all methods of gathering data, from testing to interviewing, can be used in a case study, although certain techniques are used more than others” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). Merriam continued, “This design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (pp. 28–29).

The case study design allows for the use of multiple existing data sources, teacher questionnaires, and interviews. In this study, the unit was one elementary school which employed 16 teachers in Grades 2–5 within the public school system. Each of the 16 teachers in this group responded to a questionnaire. A review of district data was then undertaken to determine which of the teachers had been accurate at identifying gifted

students. From among the 16 teachers, three had accurately identified students for the 2009 testing to gifted placement process. Using the elementary school as the case of examination, the study allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the process classroom teachers use when referring students to testing with the potential for placement in a program for intellectually gifted students. The study delved into deep issues of the condition of gifted referral, such as determining the amount of training in gifted education pre-service teachers received and how this training assisted them in recognizing the gifted learner traits in certain students. The teachers' unique definitions of giftedness, their development of a decision-making process for gifted referral, and their explanations of involvement in gifted referral were also collected during the study.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher began this case study, she reflected upon her own subjectivity and attempted to view the topic from a neutral viewpoint. Creswell (2003) encouraged researchers to “clarify the bias the researcher brings to the study. This self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (p. 196).

The researcher is a veteran teacher with over 20 years of professional experience in gifted education, plus additional years as a classroom teacher. She wanted to know about one school's gifted referral condition regarding how teachers decided which students to refer to testing for potential placement in a program for gifted children, how that decision-making process developed, and the accuracy rate for placement in a gifted education program. An effective way to investigate this problem was through a school case study of the total number of teachers in Grades 2–5, the grades served in that school by the gifted education program.

The researcher's position as an educator in gifted education provided personal interest in the study. During data collection, the researcher conducted interviews in which the responses were of significance both as a teacher and as a researcher. The researcher's own biases as an educator were examined and recognized prior to and while conducting the study and analyzing the data. Ultimately, they had no impact upon the outcome of the research study. Researchers who conduct a study for a leadership degree often choose a topic in which they have a strong interest. This study was one such example.

Research Questions

The primary research question asked the following: What is the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children in one elementary school? A review of literature prompted the formation of the following secondary research questions to assist in gathering data to answer the primary research question:

1. What educational experiences did participants have to prepare them to refer potentially gifted students?
2. How do teachers define *giftedness* in children?
3. How do teachers describe the development and use of a decision-making process to select students for referral to testing for the gifted education program?
4. How do teachers who accurately refer gifted students explain their involvement in the gifted education referral process?

Case Setting and Context

The case study took place in a public elementary school. The school district had nearly 3,000 employees and served 19,000 students in 27 schools. The district received a High Performing District designation from the Mississippi Department of Education. In addition to a rigorous academic curriculum, extracurricular activities played an important role, as students were encouraged to develop skills in athletics and the arts.

The district was divided into eight zones across rural, small town, and suburban areas. Three zones had two to five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The other five zones had one or two elementary schools and a middle school/high school combination of Grades 7–12. The zone selected for this study had seven schools, including five elementary schools (kindergarten through Grade 5) that fed into the same middle school (Grades 6–8) and then high school (Grades 9–12). This zone was chosen because it had the greatest number of elementary schools. Electing to study one elementary school from among five choices provided an opportunity for stronger research validity.

An analysis was performed involving the five elementary schools in the chosen school district's attendance zone. The criteria used for selecting the one school for this case study is explained by the data presented in the Table 3.1. For the purpose of this study, each school was assigned a researcher-designated code of A through E.

Table 3.1 Gifted Education Participation in Elementary Schools of One School Zone

School Designation Code	Total Number of Students	Number of Students Participating in the Gifted Education Program	Percentage of Students Participating in the Gifted Education Program
A	575	91	15.83
B	570	80	14.04
C	503	67	13.32
D	480	61	12.71
E	482	55	11.41

The results of calculating the percentage of students participating in the gifted education program at each school as of September 11, 2009, are listed above. As the focus of this study, the target school (C) was selected from among the five schools in the zone because it had the median percentage of elementary students participating in the gifted education program. Selection of the school based on the median percentage of elementary students participating in the gifted education program was an effort to increase validity.

Following selection of the target school, further data were collected as a validity and reliability check on the school selection process. Presenting detailed data regarding the school selection process was intended to substantiate the findings of the study, thereby increasing reliability.

Table 3.2 presents a comparison of students participating in the gifted education program with school enrollment by ethnic group and students eligible for free lunch.

Table 3.2 A Comparison of Students Participating in the Gifted Education Program with School Enrollment by Ethnic Groups and Students Eligible for Free Lunch

School Designation Code	Percentage of Students Participating in the Gifted Education Program	Percentage of School Enrollment by Ethnic Groups *Other = Asian, Hispanic, and Native American	Percentage of School Students Eligible for Free Lunch
A	15.83	White	86
		Black	11
		Other	3
B	14.04	White	77
		Black	13
		Other	9
C	13.32	White	75
		Black	23
		Other	1
D	12.71	White	66
		Black	30
		Other	4
E	11.41	White	69
		Black	21
		Other	11

Researcher's Note: The percentage of ethnic groups for Schools B and C equals 99. The percentage of ethnic groups for School E equals 101. These results are due to rounding.

Table 3.3 provides a data summary of Table 3.2.

Table 3.3 A Comparison of Students Participating in the Gifted Education Program with School Enrollment by Majority Ethnic Group and Students Eligible for Free Lunch: A Data Summary

School Designation Code	Percentage of Students Participating in the Gifted Education Program	Percentage of School Enrollment by Majority Ethnic Group: White	Percentage of School Students Eligible for Free Lunch
A	15.83	86	13.29
B	14.04	77	15.34
C	13.32	75	20.45
D	12.71	66	17.51
E	11.41	69	23.60

As demonstrated in Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3, the target school is highlighted with median percentages in two categories for which data were collected (percentage of students participating in the gifted education program and percentage of enrollment by majority ethnic group—White). School C had a higher-than-average (average = 18.04) percentage of students eligible for free lunch.

By school codes, Table 3.4 presents a comparison of students participating in the gifted education program with school enrollment by majority ethnic group (White) and students eligible for free lunch.

Table 3.4 A Comparison of Students Participating in the Gifted Education Program with School Enrollment by Majority Ethnic Group and Students Eligible for Free Lunch as Designated by School Codes: A Data Summary

Percentage of Students Participating in the Gifted Education Program (Results given in descending order)	Percentage of School Enrollment by Ethnic Groups (Results given in descending order of majority ethnic group: White)	Percentage of School Students Eligible for Free Lunch (Results given in ascending order from least to most)
A	A	A
B	B	B
C	C	D
D	E	C
E	D	E

The data showed the placement of the target school within the overall school zone. The target school was one of five schools in the zone and accommodated students from kindergarten through Grade 5. In its present configuration of grades, the school was in its sixth year of existence. There were 503 students in kindergarten through fifth grade with four teachers per grade. The school was given Camden Elementary School as a pseudonym for this study.

Participants

School district, elementary school, and teacher participants for this case study research were selected based upon a variety of sampling procedures. The school district participant for this case study was derived from a purposeful sampling procedure. The elementary school was selected through a process of validity and reliability checks demonstrated in the previous case setting and context section in alignment with those suggested for strong qualitative sampling practices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Teacher participants were the total population of the teachers in Camden Elementary School in Grades 2–5, since all 16 teachers with the characteristic under examination—gifted education referral practices—were included as participants. In general, both a purposeful sampling technique was used for the selection of the district and school, and a total population sampling technique was used for the selection of the participants for this study.

Since the primary research question in this study sought to determine the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children in one elementary school, all participants were provided the opportunity to state their perceptions on the questionnaire. The number of teachers to complete the questionnaire totaled 16. These were all of the teachers in Grades 2–5, with four from each grade level. They ranged in teaching experience from 2 years to 34 years. All teachers were female, as there were no male teachers serving in these positions at the school involved in the study. Fifteen were Caucasian and one was African American. Two graduated from out-of-state colleges or universities. Four earned Master of Education graduate/post baccalaureate degrees. One received NBPTS' National Board Certification. All but two

were elementary education majors, and those two entered the profession through an alternate route to teaching certification.

The following table summarizes the educational background of the 16 teacher participants:

Table 3.5 Gifted Education Referral Questionnaire College/University Education History of Teachers

Teacher Code (T)	College/University	Bachelor of Science Degree	Master of Education Degree	Major	Alternate Route Certification
1	MSU	2003		El Ed	
2	MSU	2003		El Ed	
3	USM	1981	1985	El Ed	
4	RU	2002		El Ed	
5	MC	1999		El Ed	
6	MC	2005		El Ed	
7	MSU	2001		El Ed	
8	ULM	2001		El Ed	
9	MC	1980		Non-education	X
10	MC	1996		El Ed	
11	USM	2002		El Ed	
12	BC	2005	2008	El Ed	
13	MSU	1987		Non-education	X
14	UM	1969	1987	El Ed	
15	BC	2002	2004	El Ed	
16	USM	2004		El Ed	

Legend for Undergraduate Degree:

- BC – Belhaven College (Mississippi)
- MC – Mississippi College
- MSU – Mississippi State University
- RU – Radford University (Virginia)
- ULM – University of Louisiana at Monroe
- UM – University of Mississippi
- USM – University of Southern Mississippi

After questionnaire completion, the study focused on those teachers who were accurate at referral. There were three accurate referring teachers, so the sampling included the total population of accurate referrers in this case study. Three teachers from among the 16 were selected for deeper understanding through an interview. Selection of these participants was based upon results gathered from a review of the documented accuracy rates of 2009 referrals. These teachers referred students who were ruled eligible for the gifted education program during the period of this study. Based on logical assumption, teachers with greater accuracy in identifying students for referral to testing for giftedness might have additional insights to share.

The accurate referrers were given pseudonyms to provide for clarity of discussion in this study. Andrea, Beth, and Carrie were the accurate referrers, and, therefore, the three teachers who participated in the interview process. Each referred one of their students who was ultimately ruled eligible for the gifted education program during the research period.

Each teacher interview participant was eager to participate in the study and saw the experience as an opportunity to learn more about the characteristics of gifted children. Additionally, the three accurate referring teachers had personal connections to gifted education. Andrea had participated in the gifted program throughout her school years and had a positive experience. Beth had two biological children who were ruled gifted, though the struggles with each offered a compelling view of the social-emotional aspect of giftedness. Carrie had two biological children, but only one successfully tested into the gifted program. The personal stories of each of these teachers offered valuable insights and contributed to the humanity of this study.

Instrumentation

The primary methods of data collection were the *Gifted Education Referral Questionnaire* (Appendix A) filled out by all 16 teacher participants and the *Interview Protocol for Teachers with Accurate Gifted Education Referral Experiences* (Appendix B). The questionnaire and the interview protocol were used to gather data from participants in order to shed light on the primary research issue—the condition of the gifted education referral process at Camden Elementary School. In addition, Clark’s (2002) *Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners* was used to gather interview data and for analysis.

The questionnaire included items about gifted education training at the pre-service level with subsequent experiences involving mentors, in-service training, principals as instructional leaders, and the nomination process. It also included the following: (a) a definition of giftedness in children; (b) a description of the characteristics teachers looked for when considering making a gifted education referral; (c) a description of the process of selection they used to make the decision to refer; (d) a description of how they developed this decision-making process; and (e) a reflection upon their referral history as to the number of students referred and to the results. In addition, participants were asked about possible personal experiences involving gifted education as a student or parent.

Semi-structured “interviews in which the same general questions or topics are brought up to each of the subjects involved” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 275) provided for comparison among responses. Additionally, semi-structured formats “assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74.). The questions were formulated based upon previous research in the field of gifted education preparation as evidenced by the review of literature and allowed “the researcher to

respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74).

The questions on the teacher questionnaire and interview protocol were composed in order to determine the educational and experiential background teachers possessed that enabled them to recognize a potentially intellectually gifted child’s characteristics in order to refer that student for testing. The questions focused on the preparation pre-service teachers received, plus the continuing training that in-service teachers experienced, and how these influenced perceptions. The over-arching case was that of one elementary school’s condition of the gifted education referral process.

The questionnaire and interview protocol were designed by the researcher and piloted with three different teachers. The elementary teachers who participated in the pilot test for the study, one each in Grades 3–5, were employed in the district at a school that was not selected for the study. Two were Caucasian (one a novice teacher, the other a veteran National Board certified teacher nearing retirement) and one African American (with 10 years of service), thus offering diversity of race and levels of experience. As defined by NCLB legislation, all were highly qualified with teaching licensure. As a result of this process, questionnaire items were modified for ease of comprehension and improvement in sequencing.

Teachers’ voices were used as the data for this case study of one elementary school. From among the 16 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, three teachers were selected for interviews based upon their documented accuracy rate of 2009 gifted education referrals. The interview sought to examine each teacher’s responses within the framework of Clark’s (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. Clark stated, “Although all gifted individuals have their own unique patterns of

characteristics and no gifted learner exhibits every characteristics in every area” (p. 56), these characteristics “often recur in groups of gifted individuals” (p. 56). Attributes of giftedness were listed with examples of related needs. Each characteristic and the accompanying example offered a lens for the three teachers interviewed to view their students from a perspective of gifted identification. Interviewees responded to each of the characteristics by giving examples of children they had taught who exhibited those particular traits. During the interviews, teachers were asked to change the names of students who were discussed in order to maintain confidentiality.

Data Collection Procedures

Before data collection began, the protocol for this study was submitted to IRB at Mississippi State University and gained approval (Appendix C). Additionally, approval to conduct the study was received from the superintendent of the school district involved. Approval was also secured from the school’s principal.

In the Camden Elementary School research setting, an introductory meeting of the 16 teachers was held in the library after school hours. The researcher had personally invited each teacher in Grades 2 through 5 to attend the meeting. The cover letter (Appendix D), providing detailed information about the study, was distributed to the teachers. The researcher explained the purpose and procedures of the study and invited participation. A call for questions yielded none; hence the researcher concluded that the written and oral explanations regarding the study were comprehensive. Each teacher then signed an Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research and afterward was given a copy of the questionnaire. For confidentiality purposes, all participants were given large business-size envelopes in which to place their completed questionnaires.

Due to time constraints of the participants, the researcher gave all 16 teachers a choice of completing the questionnaires at that time or in the individual teacher's classroom at a time convenient to each participant. Eleven teachers chose to fill out the questionnaire after the introductory meeting and remained in the library until they completed the document. Five teachers chose to complete the questionnaire in their classrooms due to other obligations (tutoring, Science Fair committee meeting, parent conference, sick child) following the introductory meeting. One of the five teachers indicated she needed time to ensure that her responses reflected her intentions. All of the remaining five participants returned their questionnaires to the researcher within two days.

Member checks involved taking data and interpretations back to the participants and asking them if the results were plausible (Merriam, 1998). Member checking is used to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate (Creswell, 2003). Because the purpose of member checks is to ensure that the respondents' words conveyed the meaning intended, the researcher verified meaning and accuracy of responses to the questionnaire with each participant.

Appointments for member checks were scheduled at mutually convenient times for after school hours when most of the teachers had left the buildings. These follow-up conversations with the 16 participants took place at the school in their individual classrooms. Each conversation lasted approximately 5 to 10 minutes. Privacy from other employees in the school was considered an ethical issue and was addressed by closing the classroom door. Confidentiality of each participant was maintained. At member check meetings, the researcher returned the questionnaire to the participant for review of

accuracy. Every participant expressed appreciation at having had the opportunity to articulate her views and to focus on this particular area of responsibility.

Interviews with three selected teachers were also scheduled at mutually convenient times for after school hours. None of the 16 participating teachers knew who was selected for the interview process. None of the three interviewees knew the identity of the other two. Confidentiality was paramount and was maintained during classroom visits for interviews by closing the classroom door. The researcher was frequently seen visiting the classrooms, so such activity attracted no undue attention. The instrument used was the *Interview Protocol for Teachers with Gifted Education Referral Experiences* (Appendix B). Interviews lasted one to two hours and were electronically recorded for transcription.

During the interviews, a relaxed tone resulted in a steady flow of conversation and ideas. Open-ended questions prompted in-depth thinking, reminiscing, and making connections. As the teachers became invested in the topic, the responses became personal and extensive in both time and scope. Each of the educators seemed intent to share experiences and impressions and have them validated by another interested professional. However, the researcher made every effort to remain objective, asking questions that prompted each teacher to delve deeper into the topic.

The researcher perceived that each teacher wanted to express her personal experiences, to tell her own story. The interview sought responses utilizing Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. The researcher had prepared for each interviewee a written copy and a verbal explanation of Clark's list of characteristics and examples of related needs. These prompted the

interviewee to reflect upon her students, using Clark's list as a lens to identify specific characteristics in children she had taught.

The interviewees' willingness to participate in an interview showed a commitment to the topic and an investment in the research. In order to gain the thick, rich description this study sought, the researcher considered the interviews to be of substantial benefit. The member check following each interview served as confirmation of accuracy.

Employing multiple sources of data adds to the thick, rich description and enhances internal validity. One method of ensuring this, according to Merriam (1998), is through the use of triangulation. Triangulation may be defined as "the use of multi-data sources or theoretical perspectives in a study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 275). Merriam (1998) defined triangulation as "using multiple data, multiple sources, and multiple methods to confirm emerging findings" (p. 204).

Internal validity addresses the question of how research findings match reality. As the primary instrument of data collection, the researcher sought to understand the perspectives of the participants and to present their views accurately. Using Merriam's (1998) suggestion of multiple sources of data to confirm the emerging findings, the data were collected through an examination of existing data via Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Reporting System (MAARS) plus school district and school archives for the participant identification process. Data about school enrollment and enrollment by subgroups were collected through an examination of existing data via the MAARS web site and school district and school archives. Existing school district data about each of the five elementary schools in the zone provided the number of students participating in

the intellectually gifted program plus the percentage of students eligible for free lunch. Triangulation was obtained from these multiple sources of data.

During data collection, the researcher kept detailed, confidential records. Merriam (1998) emphasized the importance of meticulously carrying out research by stating, “To have any effect on either the practice or the theory of education, research studies must be rigorously conducted” (p. 199). The researcher made every effort to maintain a high level of rigor.

Although policies, guidelines, and recommendations for dealing with the ethical dimensions of qualitative research are available to researchers, actual ethical practice comes down to the individual researcher’s own values and ethics (Merriam, 1998). The researcher responded in a professional manner to every interview and observation. All data collected for this study were in compliance with IRB regulations and guidelines.

Ensuring confidentiality, records were held in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home office. All records will be maintained for a period of one year and subsequently destroyed.

Procedures

The data analysis process in this study was guided by detailed procedures designed to establish relationships among categories of data. Concepts may be generated from the data and systematically analyzed to ensure credibility (Merriam et al., 2002). Creswell (2003) suggested examining evidence from the different data sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes.

Data analysis was undertaken in four stages. Stage one of data analysis involved analyzing existing data in order to select the school participant which would serve as the

case to study for this research. Stage two of data analysis was performed to answer each of the secondary research questions using the questionnaire responses and interview transcripts. The third stage of data analysis required an analysis of existing data to determine which of the 16 teachers were accurate in referring gifted students. The fourth stage of data analysis used Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners as a lens through which to interpret the questionnaire data gathered from all 16 teachers and the interview data gathered from the three teachers who had accurately referred a gifted student.

Sources of data and analysis techniques used are listed in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6 Research Questions, Sources of Data, and Analysis Techniques Used

Research Questions	Sources of Data	Analysis Techniques Used
Primary research question: What is the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children in one elementary school?	Questionnaire Interview Member check Clark’s characteristics	Matrix building Frequency tabulation Pattern matching Theme finding Triangulation Description Summarizing Reflective analysis
1. What educational experiences did participants have to prepare them to refer potentially gifted students?	Questionnaire Items 1–9 Clark’s characteristics	Matrix building Frequency tabulation Pattern matching Member check
2. How do teachers define <i>giftedness</i> in children?	Questionnaire Item 10 Clark’s characteristics	Matrix building Frequency tabulation Pattern matching Member check
3. How do teachers describe the development and use of a decision-making process to select students for referral to testing for the gifted education program?	Questionnaire Items 11–18 Clark’s characteristics	Matrix building Frequency tabulation Pattern matching Member check
4. How do teachers who accurately refer gifted students explain their involvement in the gifted education referral process?	District data Interview Clark’s characteristics	Comparison of referred to qualified students Description Theme finding Narrative analysis

Ultimately, the analysis techniques listed in Table 3.6 for each of the research questions yielded emergent themes. As the study developed, the researcher used narrative analysis to study the stories of the participants with first-person accounts by teachers

forming the narrative text for the study. Tables were designed to graphically represent portions of the data. The researcher utilized reflective analysis, which, according to Gall et al. (1996), is a process in which the researcher relies primarily on intuition and personal judgment in order to portray or evaluate the phenomena being studied.

In general, accepted methods of qualitative data collection and analysis were utilized. Data sources and methods were triangulated. The data from the interviews were structured to fit the themes of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners and analyzed using the same instrument. Each teacher responded with personal observations of the characteristics as related to students she had taught. Stories about children's experiences as evidence of cognitive function gifted characteristics were woven throughout the fabric of Clark's themes, yielding a varied and rich pattern.

Summary

This research design was a case study of the condition of the gifted education referral process in one public elementary school. The study sought to include the voices of teachers as they commented on one of many aspects of their responsibilities. Collecting their experiences and opinions was accomplished through use of qualitative research design. The method of data collection involved the use of existing data, a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview and Clark's characteristics. Questions were included about gifted education training at pre-service and in-service levels and the influence of personal experiences. Triangulation of the data was achieved through existing data and member checks.

Teachers' responses to the questionnaire and to the interview were analyzed within the context of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. Research was conducted in an ethical manner following IRB guidelines, ensuring validity and reliability. Analysis techniques were utilized to extract meaning from the data, and the results were recorded in tables and thick, rich description.

CHAPTER IV

THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This case study sought to answer the following primary research question: What is the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children in one elementary school? The results of the data analysis are presented in this chapter. Data gathered for each of the secondary research questions are included in the chapter followed by an overall analysis of the data in response to the primary research question. The chapter concludes with a summary of results.

The study examined Camden Elementary School's condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children. Teachers at Camden are asked annually to consider referring students to testing for potential placement in the gifted education program. Relevant data regarding the case of Camden's 16 teacher participants were collected using the secondary research questions. The data collection procedures included existing data, questionnaires, and interviews with subsequent validity and reliability addressed using member checks and triangulation of data.

Secondary Research Questions

In response to secondary research questions 1 through 3, the following tables are presented regarding responses to the *Gifted Education Referral Questionnaire*. Responses to secondary Research Question 4 include results of interviews conducted with the three teachers who were accurate in identifying gifted students and who also represented a total population of Camden's teachers who accurately identified gifted students.

Research Question 1.

What educational experiences did participants have to prepare them to refer potentially gifted students?

Sixteen teachers—Camden’s total number of teachers whose students are served by the gifted education program— responded to the *Gifted Education Referral Questionnaire* by describing their educational experiences that prepared them to identify potentially gifted children. In Table 4.1, the numbers in the left-hand column represent each of the 16 teachers. The responses indicated gifted identification preparation conditions for each respondent:

1. College/University Gifted Education Course
2. College/University Course about Learning Exceptionalities including a Textbook Chapter about Gifted Children
3. Gifted Education Instruction from a Mentor
4. Gifted Education Instruction from another Teacher
5. Gifted Education Instruction from an Administrator
6. Gifted Education Instruction in Professional Development

Table 4.1 lists these conditions in each of the columns and indicates the conditions by Camden participant with an “X” in the respective cell of the table.

Table 4.1 Gifted Education Preparation of Pre-service and In-service Teachers

Teacher Code (T)	College/ University Gifted Education Course	College/ University Course about Learning Exceptionalities including a Textbook Chapter about Gifted Children	Gifted Education Instruction from a Mentor	Gifted Education Instruction from Another Teacher	Gifted Education Instruction from an Administrator	Gifted Education Instruction in Professional Development
1		X				
2		X	X	X X		X
3		X	X	X		X
4		X	X	X X		X
5		X				X
6						
7		X		X		X
8		X		X		
9		X	X	X		
10		X		X		X
11		X		X		
12		X		X		
13		X	X	X		
14		X		X		X
15				X		
16			X	X X		X

Camden teachers received their gifted education knowledge from a variety of sources. Table 4.2 provides a summary of data from Table 4.1. Totals are given to indicate the number of teachers who responded to each category. Table 4.2 shows the gifted education knowledge condition in Column 1 and the number of teachers who experienced the condition in Column 2. Totals are given to indicate the number of teachers who responded to each category.

Table 4.2 Gifted Education Preparation of Pre-service and In-service Teachers: A Summary of Data by Number of Responses

Description	Number of Responses
Total Number of Teachers Who Responded	16
College/University Gifted Education Course	0
College/University Course about Learning Exceptionalities including a Textbook Chapter about Gifted Children	13
Gifted Education Instruction from a Mentor	6
Gifted Education Instruction from Another Teacher	13
Gifted Education Instruction from an Administrator	3
Gifted Education Instruction in Professional Development	8

Thirteen teachers received gifted education training from a single chapter in a textbook that covered multiple learning exceptionalities. Teachers' responses indicated the following courses included a chapter on education of the gifted child: Child Psychology (1), Psychology of the Exceptional Child (4), and Learning Exceptionalities

(1). Three teachers received no training in gifted education. While few (3) respondents received instruction from an administrator, 13 received instruction from a colleague. Six indicated that a mentor assisted them when it was time to consider students for referral to the gifted education nomination process. Half of the respondents received training during a professional development session. Common themes that emerged were (a) no teachers received pre-service training in gifted education by taking a course in gifted education, (b) most pre-service teachers were exposed to characteristics of gifted children through one chapter in a book used in a course about learning exceptionalities, and (c) most in-service teachers acquired knowledge about gifted characteristics from peer teachers. The condition of the gifted education referral process at Camden was impacted by the nature of giftedness identification preparation all teachers received.

Research Question 2.

How do teachers define *giftedness* in children?

Camden teachers were asked on the questionnaire to define in their own words *giftedness* in children. Personal experiences played a part in forming their definitions. Teachers responded to this part of the questionnaire by noting their prior contact with gifted individuals: as students themselves, as a teacher, as a sibling, or with their own child or children. Table 4.3 explains the perceptions of gifted education from the perspectives of the 16 Camden teacher participants. These definitions express how individual teachers viewed the gifted child and what they looked for when considering a child for referral.

Table 4.3 Definitions and Characteristics of *Giftedness* in Children in Teachers' Own Words

Teacher Code (T)	Definitions and Characteristics of <i>Giftedness</i> in Children in Teacher's Own Words
1	Exceptional thinker; problem solver; creative; leadership skills; responsible; sense of humor; challenge seeker; maturity
2	A gifted student is someone who enjoys a challenge, is highly motivated, and is able to express himself or herself in a unique manner. Gifted students are very analytical and feel very strongly about their belief or choices. They also tend to be very skilled in the arts. Deep thinker; someone who has many interests and ideas about learning and is a very curious learner
3	Thinking "outside the box;" problem solving in a way that others don't think about; focusing on aspects that the majority of people don't notice; creativity; artistry; kids who I "can see the wheels turning in their heads"
4	Above and beyond; can make connections from subject material to real-life situations that show deep thinking; may have difficulty relating to peers of own age; may be scattered or unorganized (seems pointless and mundane); always sharing thinking and connections; humor that peers don't seem to understand
5	Gifted students look at information and the world differently; usually they over analyze (what if); tend to be problem solvers; larger vocabulary in daily language; knowledgeable about the world and aware of events around the world; question things, even authority (mostly respectfully); not necessarily the student that makes all good grades
6	Students that go above and beyond and can think outside the box (more than what is learned in the classroom). They stand out because they have knowledge of subjects that others in the grade are not interested in. He keeps wanting to learn about things, more than what is learned in the classroom.
7	Talented beyond the "normal;" talents may be in one area or many; someone that does an excellent job in their work and artistic observations; a well-mannered and disciplined person that tries to do their best; the type of vocabulary a student may have
8	A child with creativity and able to think outside the box. A gifted child has excellent reasoning and problem-solving skills. Extremely curious; fluent and flexible thinking and vivid imagination

(continues)

Table 4.3 (continued)

Teacher Code (T)	Definitions and Characteristics of <i>Giftedness</i> in Children in Teacher's Own Words
9	Gifted means a student thinks in a more creative way than other students. I do not believe it is a reflection of a student's academic ability. Students that have problem-solving skills, are creative, and are apt to take leadership roles within small group activities
10	A child whose thinking is "out of the box." A child that can think about ideas in different way (abstractly) not concretely. Maturity, all around personality, and rapport with adults; achievement in classroom examples; achievement on state tests; organization
11	The ability to think beyond what others of the same age are able to do; is curious of why things are the way they are; becomes absorbed in a topic of study; elaborates and gives unusual responses; can find ways of solving problems without being prodded
12	Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities
13	Gifted is the ability of a student to look at ideas in a completely different perspective than other students. Creativity; thinks outside the box; has initiative when working with others
14	IQ at or above 120 (in Mississippi); academic achievement; creativity; classroom participation; knowledge outside of classroom activities; vocabulary
15	Gifted is having a set of extra qualities beyond what is expected; a leader who is willing to try
16	Gifted – can concentrate and work independently; can tackle tasks with confidence; inquisitive and willing to learn new things; intrinsically motivated; a leader who takes initiative and makes decisions independently; thinks on his own; relates well to others in any situation

Within their definitions of *giftedness* in children, Camden teachers included additional characteristics of gifted learners. These characteristics are presented in Table 4.4 and designated with the number of times each characteristic was mentioned in the responses. Terms that describe characteristics of giftedness in children are listed in Column 1, and the frequency of their occurrences by teachers is listed in Column 2.

Table 4.4 Characteristics of Giftedness in Children Mentioned in Teachers' Own Definitions: A Compilation

Characteristics of Giftedness in Children	Number of Times Mentioned in Responses
Creativity	8
Deep thinker	7
Problem solver	6
Thinks outside the box	6
Leadership ability	5
Academic achievement/high performance	3
Artistic	3
Curious	3
Initiative	3
Vocabulary	3
Wide range of knowledge	3
Intrinsically motivated	2
Makes connections	2
Maturity	2
Sense of humor	2
Abstract thinking	1
Adults, rapport with	1
Analytical thinking	1
Elaboration	1
Fluent and flexible thinking	1
Imagination	1
Independent worker	1
Inquisitive	1
IQ score	1
Peers, difficulty relating to	1
Personality, all around	1
Reasoning ability	1
Responsible	1
Talented	1

To questions regarding the definition of *giftedness* in children and the characteristics exhibited, the most common response (8 times) given by the teachers was creativity. This involved aspects of creativity ranging from artistic expression to different ways of thinking. Continuing the list were deep thinker (7), problem solver (6), the cliché thinks outside the box (6), and leadership ability (5). Also noted (3 each) were

academic achievement/high performance, artistic, curious, initiative, vocabulary, and wide range of knowledge. To a lesser degree (2 each), the characteristics of intrinsically motivated, makes connections, maturity, and sense of humor were recognized. Fourteen more characteristics were listed by one respondent to each. Overall emerging themes for the teachers' definitions of giftedness in children contained the following descriptors: (a) creativity, (b) deep thinker, (c) problem solver, (d) thinks outside the box, and (e) leadership ability.

A comparison was made between the responses summarized in Tables 4.3 and 4.4 from the 16 Camden teachers' responses to questionnaire items and Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. All of Clark's characteristics were mentioned by one or more descriptors except the following: (a) accelerated pace of thought processes, (b) comprehensive synthesis, and (c) early ability to delay closure. The questionnaire data suggests that all 16 teachers were in possession of at least a minimal amount of terminology that Clark used to classify gifted characteristics. Table 4.5 shows the participants' responses regarding the influence of personal experiences in formulating their definitions of giftedness.

Table 4.5 Perceptions of Gifted Education Based Upon Personal Experiences

Teacher Code (T)	Personal experiences with gifted education programs	Personal experiences with gifted education programs as a student	Experiences from your child/children or others	Further comments * Indicates “no response”
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	I was in the gifted education program as a child, so I’ve personally gathered that academic success isn’t necessarily linked to the qualifications in a gifted student. Rather...creativity, leadership, challenge seeker
2	Yes	Yes	No	I was in a gifted education program from 4 th to 6 th grade, and I had a positive experience. I was able to participate in an Odyssey of the Mind competition team that went to world finals in Boulder, CO. I always looked forward to my class, because my gifted education. Teachers challenged me in ways that my regular classroom teachers might not have.
3	Yes	Yes	Yes	*
4	Yes	Yes	No	I was tested for gifted – missed it.

(continues)

Table 4.5 (continued)

Teacher Code (T)	Personal experiences with gifted education programs	Personal experiences with gifted education programs as a student	Experiences from your child/children or others	Further comments * Indicates “no response”
5	Yes	No	Yes	Both of my children were in gifted programs. My eldest son was a very shy child. He finally relaxed in 3 rd grade and passed [the gifted education test]. He was driven by “how things worked” at a very young age. He always took things apart to see what they did and usually put them back successfully, even a computer. My daughter (youngest) passed one screening, no problem. The only class she did well in at school was the gifted class. She had a hard time [in the regular classroom] with other not “getting it.” She is bipolar and enjoyed and worked best in the gifted class setting and study. Gifted kids do not always make the best grades.
6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Participated in gifted education class during second or third grade; moved to another state
7	No			The only experiences I have are in the past six years referring children. I’ve listened to the students talk about what they are doing in the gifted class.
8	Yes	No	Yes	*

(continues)

Table 4.5 (continued)

Teacher Code (T)	Personal experiences with gifted education programs	Personal experiences with gifted education programs as a student	Experiences from your child/children or others	Further comments * Indicates “no response”
9	Yes	No	Yes	My daughter was tested five separate times because of her academic success. However, she never was able to get into the program. Once I felt that she was becoming discouraged with the testing, I didn't let her take the test any more.
10	No			*
11	Yes	Yes	No	I was in gifted education from 3rd through 8th grade.

Table 4.5 (continued)

Teacher Code (T)	Personal experiences with gifted education programs	Personal experiences with gifted education programs as a student	Experiences from your child/children or others	Further comments * Indicates “no response”
12	Yes	Yes	No	Several things have changed since my time as a gifted student. For one, gifted was called gifted. There weren't any cute names [for the programs]. I was tested for the gifted program twice as a child, once in second grade and again in third. The first attempt resulted in a second test, but no passing score. The second test resulted in my passing both screenings and being accepted into the program. I truly believe that was large due to the fact that I knew what to expect the second time around. As a child, I always excelled academically, and perhaps this was my teacher's reason for referring me. I thoroughly enjoyed my experience as a gifted student because later my referring teacher became the gifted teacher. One concern I do have as an adult is the feeling of disappointment I had when I did not pass the test on the first time around. I am sure many students today experience this feeling as well. This also leads to apprehension in deciding if I should allow my child to be tested if she should take interest in the program. *
13	No			*
14	Yes	No	Yes	Hereditry plays a role; verbal; like to debate issues; creative (usually in some form of the arts) *
15	No			*

Table 4.5 (continued)

Teacher Code (T)	Personal experiences with gifted education programs	Personal experiences with gifted education programs as a student	Experiences from your child/children or others	Further comments
16	No			* Indicates “no response”

A summary of the data shows that of the 16 Camden teachers involved in the study, five indicated that they had no personal experiences with gifted education programs. In addition to these five, four teachers indicated that they had no personal experiences with gifted education programs as a student. Seven teachers participated in gifted education programs as students. Six teachers indicated that they had no experiences from their own child or children or others. Personal experiences with gifted education programs, personal experiences with gifted education programs as a student, and experiences from their child/children or others influenced three teachers’ definitions of giftedness. Eight teachers were influenced by two of those factors.

Of those teachers who had participated in gifted education programs as a student, comments were made regarding what they considered to be characteristics that identified them as being eligible for the program. Among those listed were creativity, leadership, and challenge seeker. One teacher noted that identification as intellectually gifted is not necessarily linked to academic success. A teacher commented that her gifted education program teachers challenged her in ways that her regular classroom teachers might not have done.

Among those teachers whose child or children had participated in gifted education programs, one commented that at a very young age, her son was curious about how things worked. He took things apart to see what they did and usually was able to put them back together. The teacher commented that gifted students do not always make good grades. A teacher with one child who qualified and one child who did not noted that heredity plays a role in giftedness, because each child had a different father. She further noted that gifted children were creative, verbal, and liked to debate issues. A teacher whose child had been tested multiple times but did not qualify noted that academic success did not equal giftedness.

An emergent theme from Table 4.5 includes giftedness as evidenced by creativity. Another theme was that intellectual giftedness does not always result in academic success. Conversely, academic success does not equal giftedness. Clark's (2002) cognitive function characteristics of *flexible thought processes; heightened capacity for seeing unusual and diverse relationship, integration of ideas and disciplines; and ability to generate original ideas and solutions* all include aspects of creativity and reinforce the conclusion that creativity is a trait of giftedness.

Research Question 3.

How do teachers describe the development and use of a decision-making process to select students for referral to testing for the gifted education program?

Classroom teachers are asked each year to consider referring students to testing for the gifted education program. While there is a standard school district referral form, there is also the subjectivity of each teacher in making those selections. Table 4.6 provides a display of the data related to the teacher descriptions.

Table 4.6 Process of Selection Teachers Used When Considering a Student for Referral to Testing for the Gifted Education Program and How this Decision-making Process was Developed

Teacher Code (T)	Process of Selection Teachers Used When Considering a Student for Referral to Testing for the Gifted Education Program	How this Decision-making Process Was Developed
1	[Refers to the characteristics she listed in Table 4.3]	Through the actual [school district referral] form and from announcements at faculty meetings that stressed the separation of academic success versus gifted qualifications
2	I pay close attention to student's work habits and ability to self-motivate within the regular ed classroom. I look for the characteristics that I have mentioned above, and when I see that most of those are present, I decide to refer to gifted education.	I use this process based upon what I've been told about gifted education students [in a college course – Psychology of the Exceptional Child] as well as my own personal experience
3	All of the above [refers to the characteristics she listed in Table 4.3]; I usually refer children who are new to the school district who didn't have an opportunity for the screening in first grade. Parent requests also have to be honored.	I have three children of my own in the gifted program, and I have at least a mom's understanding of these children.
4	The above [refers to the characteristics she listed in Table 4.3]; good or average grades; don't rule out SpEd or ELL learners either; student responses in classroom discussions or casual conversation	Gifted staff development, classroom observations, teacher discussions
5	[Refers to the characteristics she listed in Table 4.3]	Through years of experience observing the behaviors of gifted students, including my own children

(continues)

Table 4.6 (continued)

Teacher Code (T)	Process of Selection Teachers Used When Considering a Student for Referral to Testing for the Gifted Education Program	How this Decision-making Process Was Developed
6	If he or she could not handle the regular classroom work as well as the gifted education class work, I would not recommend them. I don't want to lower their classroom grades. If they can't stay on task, aren't organized, have trouble keeping up with the regular groove of the classroom	It just makes sense as a teacher. Using common sense and using what you're taught in school and what you know you must accomplish as a teacher—that's all you need to be able to decide who should be recommended. If they can't do it all, they shouldn't be recommended.
7	I use the referral form to give me an idea and look at my students. I use special things or events that may happen (drawings, grades, vocabulary, way of thinking). Also, their experiences are a factor.	I thought this was the best way. I asked other teachers when I first started.
8	Observation and grades	Asked other teachers
9	I not only look at academics but also student's ability to "keep up" in class, and take the initiative to study and keep their grades up. I also look to these students to be role models to their peers.	Over the several years I have taught, I have looked at the actions and academics of students that are in the gifted program.
10	I use my intuition. I speak with the child to see if he/she is interested. Take notice of qualities and achievements listed above [refers to the characteristics she listed in Table 4.3]	Speaking with coworkers and the gifted professional
11	I choose students who exhibit the characteristics stated above [refers to the characteristics she listed in Table 4.3]	By observing the students
12	Self-referrals, student referrals, parent referrals	Google and research and just info gathered from classes [taught] over the years

(continues)

Table 4.6 (continued)

Teacher Code (T)	Process of Selection Teachers Used When Considering a Student for Referral to Testing for the Gifted Education Program	How this Decision-making Process Was Developed
13	The process I use is observing students in the classroom working on individual projects as well as group projects.	I developed it by watching the habits of students who are successful in the classroom.
14	Observation of students, check records, and previous test scores	Years of going through the process; experience working with gifted students
15	I monitor students for several weeks to notice any leadership skills and characteristics of gifted. Then I refer the student.	By observation I conference with the students, and if needed, I meet with the previous teachers.
16	Academics; social behavior; “uniqueness”—thinking outside the box; by observing aforementioned qualities [refers to the characteristics she listed in Table 4.3]	Through years of observing truly above-average children; by studying how these children interact with their peers and in particular challenging situations

The process of selection teachers used when considering a student for referral to testing for the gifted education program varied greatly from teacher to teacher.

Characteristics included the following: exceptional thinker, problem solver, creative, leadership skills, responsible, sense of humor, challenge seeker, maturity, thinks outside the box, and artistry. Additional traits included students who the teacher can see the wheels turning in their heads, focusing on aspects that the majority of people do not notice, can make connections from subject matter to real-life situations that show deep thinking, humor that peers don't seem to understand, large vocabulary, and knowledgeable about world events. Teachers also noted that gifted students may not make good grades and that they questions things (even authority), think abstractly, have rapport with adults, and have the ability to think beyond what others of the same age are

able to do. Attributes of curious, becomes absorbed in a topic of study, elaborates and gives unusual responses, can find ways of solving problems without being prodded, can concentrate and work independently, can tackle tasks with confidence, and inquisitive were added to the list. Concluding the responses to characteristics of giftedness were willing to learn new things, intrinsically motivated, a leader who takes initiative and make decisions independently, thinks on his own, and relates well to others in any situation.

Though the verbiage is different, evidence of Clark's characteristics can be seen throughout the responses given by all of Camden's teachers. The wide variety of traits recognized is evidence that, as a whole, these teachers are aware of gifted behaviors and attributes. Again, it was noted that gifted students might not be academic achievers. Children with Clark's characteristic of *flexible thought processes* may question authority, as mentioned by a teacher. Other teachers noted rapport with adults, larger vocabulary, and the ability to think beyond others of their age. These remarks may be associated with Clark's *high level of language development and advanced comprehension*. Being knowledgeable about world events indicates that the student exhibits Clark's characteristic of *extraordinary quantity of information, unusual retentiveness*. Camden teacher T5 (later pseudonymed Beth) recognized this trait of giftedness as defined by Clark.

The process of selection teachers use when considering a student for referral to testing for the gifted education program is often subjective in nature. The school district-provided referral form is supplemented by the teacher's own decision-making process, which may include more than one option. Table 4.7 delineates these data.

Table 4.7 How this Decision-making Process Was Developed

How This Decision-making Process Was Developed	Number of Teacher Responses
Classroom observations by teachers	10
Input from other classroom teachers	5
Personal experiences as a parent of a gifted child or children	2
Announcement at a faculty meeting	1
College course preparation	1
Common sense	1
Gifted professional's guidance	1
Professional development regarding gifted education referrals	1
Referral form used by the school district	1
Research done independently	1

Most Camden teachers (10) stated that the process of selection used when considering a student for referral to testing for the gifted education program was influenced by classroom observations. However, some participants included more than one option. Five teachers sought input from other classroom teachers. Two teachers formulated selections based upon personal experiences as a parent of a gifted child or children. Each of the following was stated once as influencing how a teacher developed her decision-making process: announcement at a faculty meeting, college course

preparation, common sense, gifted professional's guidance, professional development regarding gifted education referrals, referral form used by the school district, and research done independently. The common theme at Camden was that most teachers in this study used classroom observations when considering a student for referral to testing for placement in the gifted education program.

Research Question 4.

How do teachers who accurately refer gifted students explain their involvement in the gifted education referral process?

Based upon their years of teaching experience, Camden teachers were asked the approximate number of referrals made during their careers. They were then asked to evaluate their confidence level in referring students to testing for potential placement in a gifted education program. Reflecting upon their referral history, they were asked their perceptions of success in referring students. Definitions of success were subjective to each participant. This perception was then compared with the documented accuracy rate of 2009 referrals as based upon school district data.

The accuracy of each teacher in referring students who were ruled intellectually gifted according to the regulations of the Mississippi Department of Education is depicted in Table 4.8. The left column gives each Camden teacher's researcher-assigned code. The middle column provides an equation such as $3 - *2 = 1$, which means a total of three referrals minus referrals made by someone other than the teacher equals the number of referrals by the teacher. The third column gives the number of children ruled intellectually gifted. The accuracy analysis data collection time period involved in Table 4.8 was the fall semester of 2009.

Table 4.8 Camden Elementary School 2009 Gifted Referrals and Eligible Students in Grades 2–5

Teacher Code (T) as Assigned by the Researcher	Number of Referrals	Number of Students Ruled Eligible for the Gifted Program
2 nd Grade		
1	1	1
2	3-*2 = 1	0
3	0	0
4	4-*2 = 2	0
3 rd Grade		
5	4-*2 = 2	1
6	3-*2 = 1	0
7	2-*2 = 0	0
8	5-*4 = 1	0
4 th Grade		
9	2-*2 = 0	0
10	3-*2 = 1	0
11	3-*3 = 0	0
12	1-*1 = 0	0
5 th Grade		
13	5-*5 = 0	0
14	2-*1 = 1	1
15	3-*1 = 2	0
16	3-*3 = 0	*1
Totals	44 Referrals	4 Eligible
	By teacher 12	By teacher 3
	*By parent, peer, other teacher, or self 32	*By parent, peer, other teacher, or self 1

Table 4.8 shows that 32 out of 44 referrals were marked as having been made by someone other than the Camden classroom teacher. The teacher may have considered

recommending that same child, but noted on the referral form that it was a parent (or other) who requested the referral.

From this analysis of accuracy, three Camden teachers were selected for an interview based upon their documented accuracy rate of 2009 referrals. Each teacher referred and had ruled eligible at least one student during the documented analysis of accuracy time period. These three teachers were given pseudonyms of Andrea, Beth, and Carrie so that their interview data could be reported with clarity.

In addition to using existing school data as a measure of accuracy, questionnaire items that gauged all 16 teachers' self-perception of accuracy of gifted referral were also analyzed to answer Research Question 4. Table 4.9 lists Camden teachers' confidence and self-perceived accuracy referral data alongside their actual accuracy data collected from responses to the questionnaire and school district documentation. Also relevant to the data in Table 4.9 is the number of years of experience for each teacher, which seems to have particular impact on the Camden case study of gifted referral.

Table 4.9 Years of Teaching Experience, Self-Evaluated Referral Information, and Documented Referral Information

Teacher Code (T)	Years of Teaching Experience	Approximate Number of Referrals During Career	Confidence Level in Referring Students	Perception of Success in Referring Students	Documented Accuracy Rate of 2009 Referrals
1	6	18	Confident	Not Successful	Accurate
2	7	4	Confident	Successful	Not Accurate
3	17	30	Confident	Moderately Successful	(No Referrals)
4	8	10	Not Confident	Not Successful	Not Accurate
5	11	16	Confident	Moderately Successful	Moderately Accurate
6	3.5	5	Confident	Moderately Successful	Not Accurate
7	9	20	Confident	Moderately Successful	(No Referrals)
8	7	8	Not Confident	Moderately Successful	Not Accurate
9	7	5	Confident	Moderately Successful	(No Referrals)
10	8.5	3	Confident	Moderately Successful	Not Accurate
11	7	10	Confident	Moderately Successful	(No Referrals)
12	5	6	Not Confident	Moderately Successful	(No Referrals)
13	2	5	Confident	Moderately Successful	(No Referrals)
14	34	25	Confident	Successful	Accurate
15	9	50	Confident	Moderately Successful	Not Accurate
16	5	15	Confident	Moderately Successful	(No Referrals)

Years of teaching experience ranged from 2 to 34, with an average of 9.13 years.

The number of referrals ranged from 3 to 50. These responses provided information to

reflect upon the interpretation of the following categories: confidence level in referring students, perception of success in referring students, and documented accuracy rate of 2009 referrals. Table 4.9 allows for comparison of the respondents' opinions and the school district's documentation.

Thirteen teachers indicated that they were confident about referrals. Two teachers indicated that they were successful and two noted that they were not successful regarding referrals, leaving the remaining 12 at moderately successful.

Only one teacher (T14), named Carrie in this research, opined that she was confident and successful, and this was confirmed with an accurate documentation rating. During her interview, she emphasized, "Having over three decades of teaching experience cemented my observation abilities regarding students and their abilities, potential or apparent."

Only one teacher recognized that she was not confident and not successful, with the documented accuracy rate substantiating this assessment. Two teachers rated themselves not confident, yet moderately successful. Neither teacher could substantiate the moderately successful self-rating due to not accurate or no referral documentation.

Of the remaining 12 teachers who rated themselves confident, 10 noted moderately successful. The other two teachers indicated successful or not successful. The teacher who was confident and successful could not justify this with a documented rating of not accurate.

T1, who rated herself as confident, but not successful, was noteworthy based on her documented rating of accuracy. During a member check, she commented that she was confident about recognizing the traits of intellectually gifted children and that, in certain instances, she wondered about the accuracy of the test results or the child's

possible inattention while taking the test. T5 was confident, moderately successful, and documented moderately successful. During her interview, she, too, emphasized that years of experience plus having two identified gifted children of her own made her aware of the “characteristics and eccentricities” of this population.

The remaining 10 teachers rated themselves as confident and moderately successful. However, six of them made no referrals. Of the other four, three had documented ratings of not successful and one moderately successful.

Camden teachers expressed their perceptions of success in referring students to testing for potential placement in the gifted education program. These perceptions were then compared with their documented accuracy rates. Examining how years of experience may affect confidence levels in referring students, perceptions of success in referring, and a documented accuracy rate of 2009 referrals provides additional data. Further information may be gathered from Table 4.10 as the data are disaggregated according to years of teaching experience.

Table 4.10 Self-evaluated Referral Information and Documented Referral Information Based upon Years of Experience

Years of Teaching Experience	Confidence Level in Referring Students		Perception of Success in Referring		Documented Accuracy Rate of 2009 Referrals		
1-5	Confident	3	Successful	0	Accurate	0	
		Not Confident	1	Moderately Successful	4	Moderately Accurate	0
				Not Successful	0	Not Accurate	1
6-10	Confident	7	Successful	1	Accurate	1	
		Not Confident	2	Moderately Successful	6	Moderately Accurate	0
				Not Successful	2	Not Accurate	5
11-15	Confident	1	Successful	0	Accurate	0	
		Not Confident	0	Moderately Successful	0	Moderately Accurate	1
				Not Successful	0	Not Accurate	0
16-20	Confident	1	Successful	0	Accurate	0	
		Not Confident	0	Moderately Successful	1	Moderately Accurate	0
				Not Successful	0	Not Accurate	0
30-35	Confident	1	Successful	1	Accurate	1	
		Not Confident	0	Moderately Successful	1	Moderately Accurate	0
				Not Successful	0	Not Accurate	0
			Not Successful	0	No Referrals	0	

Thirteen teachers from all levels of experience represented in this data sample expressed confidence in referring students to testing for potential placement in the gifted education program. However, one teacher in the 1- to 5-year level and two teachers in the 6- to 10-year level expressed not confident.

Perception of success in accurate referrals resulted in only two teachers rating themselves successful, one each in the 6–10 and 30–35 years of experience ranges.

Twelve teachers viewed their referral history as moderately successful: 1–5 years of

experience range (4 teachers), 6–10 years (6 teachers), 11–15 (1 teacher), and 16–20 (1 teacher). The two teachers who perceived themselves not successful were both in the 6–10 years of experience range.

The documented accuracy rate of 2009 referrals concluded results that differed from the teachers' perceptions of their success in referring. In the 1–5 year range, one teacher was not accurate and three teachers made no referrals. With 6–10 years of experience, one teacher was accurate, five teachers were not accurate, and three teachers made no referrals. In the 11–15 year range, one teacher was moderately accurate. With 16–20 years of experience, one teacher made no referrals. In the 30–35 year range, one teacher was accurate. Of the 16 Camden teachers who taught Grades 2–5, seven did not refer a single child to testing for potential placement in the gifted education program during the 2009 referral period.

The three teachers selected for the interviews gave vivid examples that readily came to their minds. Though they all expected to learn more about the characteristics of gifted children while going through this process, they were generally confident in their previously acquired knowledge.

The interview questions asked for an evaluation of the teachers' experiences in the real world of applied education, while relating the past to the present. Excerpts from their interviews are presented followed by specific responses framed in the context of their references to Clark's (2002) *Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners*. Clark's characteristics served as a lens to seek deeper meaning.

Andrea

Andrea had been teaching in elementary school for six years and obviously loved working with young children. Her quiet demeanor belied her ability to captivate a classroom full of eager learners. Of great joy to her was helping a child unlock the door to reading as he learned to make meaning out of letters and words. Her classroom was well organized and colorfully decorated with many personal touches. A variety of student work hung on the walls, offering evidence of pride in the efforts of her pupils. Her engaging smile greeted each child and let him or her know that this was a place of caring.

Andrea graduated as an elementary education major. The only course she took that included any reference to gifted characteristics was Psychology of the Exceptional Child. This course was required, and the textbook included a chapter about gifted students. Andrea recalled learning little about the gifted, as emphasis was placed upon other special needs.

With personal experience as a participant in a gifted education program as a child and six years of teaching experience, Andrea felt confident in her ability to recognize a child with gifted traits. Those she referred were not always placed in the program; however she persisted, "I still believe that I can pinpoint these students." Andrea's interview offered insights from the perspective of a classroom teacher who is deeply engaged in the learning of her students. She wondered about a former student whose gifts might have gone unrecognized because of other issues. Andrea stated,

I believe as educators we can overlook a gifted child due to his/her behavior, personality, or academics based on bias stereotypes. Shay, one of my former

students, was such a unique individual even as a young second grader. He was in the lowest reading group and had a very hard time expressing himself in writing. However, when Shay opened his mouth to communicate, his vocabulary, expression, and uniqueness were astonishing. His artwork was just as incredible. He often would tell me how he would enjoy taking various mechanical toys or objects apart just to put them back together again. I would tell my co-workers that I truly believed he was gifted...so gifted that he had a difficult time focusing and following through with the standard technical/mechanical aspect of education. ...maybe the typical, traditional picture of what a gifted student looks like caused Shay to be overlooked.

Beth

Beth worked as a teacher assistant prior to becoming a certified teacher. She embraced technology innovations introduced by the school district curriculum department and eagerly shared her expertise with others. Beth dedicated her time to the school environment coordinating school programs, tutoring one to three children every afternoon, helping with all events, and serving on many committees. Her classroom was crowded with materials that she brought to share with her students. She and her students took pride in their academic and behavioral accomplishments as evidenced by class work posted on the bulletin boards. School was a happy place for her to use her talents and be an integral part of the educational lives of her students.

Beth graduated with a degree in elementary education. She took a required course about learning exceptionalities that included a textbook chapter about gifted learners. She

recalled only a single lesson on the topic with the remainder of the time spent on distinguishing among the needs of those children who had learning difficulties.

Beth's two children, Josh and Sarah, were ruled gifted, and she credited much of her impressions of giftedness to her experiences with them. Beth shared the following experience with Josh:

As Josh grew, he became a student the teachers thought was sleeping and not paying attention. He would put his head back and close his eyes. Then when test time came, he would make a 100 or close to it. He told me whatever he hears, he gets.

Beth described the following experiences with Sarah:

In first grade, Sarah passed gifted testing. She began gifted classes in second grade. Sarah did very well in gifted class but VERY poorly in the regular education classroom. If I heard it one time, I heard it a thousand, 'If she is smart enough to be in gifted, then there is no reason why she doesn't do well in the classroom.' Sarah hated any repetitive work. She could master a skill but would fail the task because she would not finish the task.

With all this said, how do I look at students that I think are intelligently gifted? I look for a student that may be considered a problem or spaced out, not always the best grades, but usually have good oral answers or discussion. I look hard at the student that seems to want to argue a point, not behavior so much, but a point. They do not think they are being rude or disrespectful but simply want some deeper answers or views. Some of the students in the past have been ones that cannot sit in class. They may have poor handwriting, but what they do have is insight.

There is another side to this. I see what I consider good students; they can give you back anything in the book about a subject, but they are not those that really question and reach for something else. Their parents think just because they make good grades, they are gifted.

Carrie

Carrie was the most experienced teacher of those interviewed, having taught students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Her classroom was crowded with lab tables covered with experiments. Students eagerly anticipated completing their textbook lessons and delving into the hands-on experiences she offered. Her shelves were filled with books, and the tops of the shelving were stacked high with boxes full of learning materials. Years of experience brought with it years of collecting. Carrie had the knowledge and experience about gifted children that was gained during nearly three decades of working with them in both a self-contained class setting and a regular class setting. She was totally confident in recognizing their characteristics.

Carrie graduated as an elementary education major and returned to earn a Master of Education degree. Neither of her degrees required a course involving characteristics of gifted learners. She recalled that teacher preparation related to exceptional students referred to children who had difficulty learning in the conventional school setting.

Years ago, Carrie had a unique experience of teaching a self-contained class of nearly all students who had been ruled intellectually gifted. This opportunity offered yet another perspective on this population. She attributed part of her expertise in this area to working in that specialized environment. She shared the following story:

Many years ago, I was hired as a classroom teacher to teach intellectually gifted students. My classroom consisted of 24 students, 22 of whom were gifted and two students who were considered high achievers. This program lasted for three years. For this assignment I had no formal training in gifted education, only that of a regular classroom teacher.

During this time, I acquired knowledge of gifted students. From observing students in this classroom environment, I found the typical class to be rather talkative. They were not the quiet studious group one would think them to be. Usually if they had a thought, they would vocalize it to me or to their peers. They enjoyed collaborative learning. Even though they were individually opinionated, they were able to come to a consensus by the end of the period. They were able to play off each other's thoughts. There were only a few individuals who preferred to work alone. All of the students generally asked a lot of questions or had comments about discussions in class. Most of the students did not have to spend a lot of time studying for tests. They were able to listen in class to gain the knowledge to pass. Although they got along with each other, they were equally comfortable with adults. They were respectful but didn't mind questioning the adults if they did not understand a concept or even disagreed with the teacher. They were easy to teach because they enjoyed learning. They were able to work with the guidance of the teacher without always having to be taught by the teacher.

Learning levels varied greatly, and this presented challenges.

I had one fourth grade student who was on a 12th plus grade level in reading. She made "A"s on all of her assignments. It was difficult to find meaningful

assignments for her. Her parents were very concerned about motivating her to the highest levels she could reach in all subject areas. With no training in the area of gifted education, I did not really know what to do with her.

Interviews as Viewed through the Lens of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners

The condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children at Camden Elementary School is most accurately explained using the discourse of those teachers who had accurately identified students for gifted education placement during the referral period. Through their interviews, these three teachers shared their experiences about intellectually gifted students they had taught. Their stories unfolded as told through Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners:

Extraordinary quantity of information; unusual retentiveness

Clark's *extraordinary quantity of information; unusual retentiveness* characteristic was a common theme among interview data gathered from Andrea, Beth, and Carrie—the accurate identifiers of giftedness at Camden Elementary School. Andrea recognized Clark's cognitive characteristic as she described gifted education students who are able to retain and make use of the information taught throughout the school year while applying it correctly whenever it needed to be retrieved. She continued that these students were human sponges that were able to retain the information that is explicitly taught along with tidbits of information and skills that are minimally introduced.

Beth explained *extraordinary quantity of information; unusual retentiveness* through her story about Johnny. She noted that constantly questioned her when she was teaching and seemed to know something about everything. It appeared that he was being

a smart aleck, but Beth assessed that it was just that he had a thirst for knowledge and wanted to know more and to go deeper into the skill or activity. She noticed that Johnny would get frustrated with students that did not “get it.” Beth observed that in a science discussion about landforms and the effect of volcanoes, Johnny wanted to know where on a map major volcanoes were located, questioning why they were located in that area more than in others.

Carrie noted that Steve evidenced *extraordinary quantity of information; unusual retentiveness* because he absorbed an extraordinary quantity of information. She said that Steve knew something about every topic that was discussed in class, having gained much of his information from the Discovery and History channels on television, and would remember such minute details that she doubted their authenticity. After checking on some of his facts, she found them to be accurate. His book knowledge was not so great as his visual/auditory knowledge, so she believed that had to do with his personal learning style. She declared that Steve was so interesting that he held the class’s attention every time he commented on anything about which they were learning. Carrie also told about Kyle, a student who was able to remember almost everything perfectly. She noted that the other students used to make fun of him for being so smart. She told her students to be careful how they judged someone, because they may look up one day and see that person as their doctor. The year Carrie taught him, Kyle made the highest grades in all subjects, winning all of the scholastic awards in the fourth grade. She proudly concluded the story by saying that Kyle became a doctor.

Camden’s condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children according to Clark’s characteristic *extraordinary quantity of information; unusual retentiveness* was assessed to be a strong indicator of giftedness.

Advanced comprehension.

Andrea, who commented, “The gifted students that I’ve had in the past have always soared in the comprehension department, whether it be through reading skills or solving problems in math,” accentuated the second cognitive characteristic, *advanced comprehension*. She stated that these students were able to figure out problems with persistence and somewhat ease. She continued by saying, “Gifted students with this characteristic can retain and comprehend what they read or are told. If they do not understand something, they show initiative by rereading the material to aid in understanding, or they seek other resources.”

Beth returned to her story about Johnny and the locations of volcanoes. She encouraged him to research the topic and report back to the class. She remarked that when he did, “the information made sense to Johnny, but to some of his peers, it was just words.” Beth explained that social relationships with his classmates were strained because “Johnny’s peers thought he was a little strange and tended not to interact with him like they did with each other.”

Carrie stated emphatically that most gifted students are advanced in their ability to comprehend scholastically and that it takes less time for these students to grasp a concept. *Advanced comprehension*, she noted, was evidenced in “their ability to read something or listen to a discussion and catch on to a concept without the teacher having to repeat the concept or use other methods to introduce it.” She extended the basic understanding of this characteristic to include the aspect of interpersonal relationships by observing that many gifted children “also have an unusual ability to comprehend social situations at an earlier age.” In a situation that involved hurt feelings of a child, Carrie explained that the participants were “comprehending an outcome other students would not have bothered to

think about any further than the deed itself.” She brought up a point regarding teacher experience when she said, “I’m not sure such behaviors could be measured by a teacher evaluating whether a child is gifted or not unless the teacher had observed the behavior previously.”

Beth gave an example of how this characteristic can pose problems for the child who lacks social interaction skills, and Carrie expressed that *advanced comprehension* also includes comprehending outcomes of certain behaviors. The condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize Clark’s characteristic of *advanced comprehension* was a strong indicator of giftedness at Camden.

Unusually varied interests and curiosity

Andrea suggested that *unusually varied interests and curiosity* plus creativity are the traits that most teachers and parents at Camden think of when they question whether or not a child is gifted. Most of her former and current gifted students had a wide array of areas that peaked their interests. She said, “I’ve always heard that a toddler with favorite phrases such as “What’s that?” or the infamous, never-ending, ‘Why?’ show signs of great intelligence.” Andrea continued by explaining, “You have to ask questions to receive answers and knowledge, and gifted students’ curiosity causes them to explore and want to learn more!”

Beth told about Sam, a child who read everything—newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. She remarked that his interests were so varied that it was hard to challenge him; his knowledge was so worldly and beyond his years. Though she tried to find ways to approach subjects to get his attention, she sometimes had to ask Sam to listen and not

answer until everyone else had a chance. Since he tended to be impulsive, she commented that this was difficult for Sam.

Carrie told about Allen who liked to take things apart. His parents told her about how they had trouble giving him anything mechanical because he always wanted to know how it worked; so it was not long before the item was in pieces. Sue was one of Carrie's students who was interested in how things looked under a microscope. Carrie told about when students were taking apart chicken wings in science class to learn about how body systems work together; Sue broke a bone, took out some marrow, and studied it under the microscope, even though that was not part of the assignment. John was a very creative person Carrie remembered who pursued his varied, but yet related interests in writing, music, art, photography, and Web design. Carrie laughed when she talked about one of her gifted students who was visiting her own child one weekend. She related that there happened to be a dead animal that had washed ashore from the lake in her back yard. Carrie said the student really wanted to get a knife and cut open the animal to see what was inside. Under those conditions, Carrie said she couldn't let her do that, but was impressed that she was curious enough to want to do it.

Camden's condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children according to Clark's characteristic *unusually varied interests and curiosity* was assessed to be a strong indicator of giftedness. Andrea surmised that these traits plus creativity are the ones most teachers at Camden think of when they define giftedness in children.

High level of language development

Andrea was quick to respond to this characteristic as she commented, “Children who are able to develop the concepts of language and communication at a faster pace and higher level show signs of intelligence.” She continued by explaining that these children have vast vocabulary banks and an understanding of abstract words. In her classroom, Andrea recognized that the language development of gifted students was noticeable through vocabulary usage and high levels of communication. Andrea also noted gifted children who were able to discern the underlying meaning behind what was being communicated, whether by determining unspoken feelings or the interpretation of sarcasm.

Beth related that talking to her gifted student, Sally, was like talking to an adult and that Sally would use the ability to carry on that level of conversation to her advantage. Sally would try to talk her way out of something she did not want to do. Beth found that Sally’s peers saw her as a know-it-all and learned to ignore her. Beth recognized that Sally had problems working in groups because of her immature social skills. Yet, when it came time to present or participate in a large-group discussion, Beth said Sarah was always the child to carry her group.

Years ago, Carrie’s son was ruled eligible for the gifted program. Carrie recalled that when Ben was just a baby, he was interested in words. She recalled that Ben learned words by pointing to the pictures that interested him in Richard Scarry's *The Best Word Book Ever*, especially the page about bugs. She reminisced about sitting together looking at that book “forever” and tiring out well before Ben did. She said that his intensity for word knowledge continues even today when they play “words” on their iPhones and Ben

“comes up with amazing words and also uses foreign words from his exposure to friends from different countries.”

Camden’s condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children according to Clark’s characteristic *high level of language development* was assessed to be a strong indicator of giftedness. Andrea also noted the significance of gifted children having the ability to discern the underlying meaning behind words. Once again, Beth was the one to point out the behavioral problem that is concomitant with this characteristic, “poor interpersonal relationships with less able children of the same age” (Clark, 2002, p. 57). Carrie’s remarks emphasized that signs of giftedness do not begin to manifest themselves when children arrive at the kindergarten door but are apparent at an early age.

High level of verbal ability

Andrea said that these students are able to use vivid vocabulary through written and oral expression. “They have a mature ability to communicate their thoughts clearly and explicitly,” she observed. She believed that she had covered this characteristic in her response to *high level of language development*. Beth also had nothing more to add to what she had commented to *high level of language development*.

Carrie determined that gifted students are usually very vocal. She did not recall teaching many who were shy. In fact, she emphasized that they have opinions about everything and said what they were thinking. Matt was one of her former students who, she said, talked all of the time about anything and could argue on just about every subject. She could tell that his language skills were well above average. Matt joined the debate team in high school and won many awards. John was another student she taught

who did not necessarily stand out scholastically but was good at presenting projects to the class. Carrie said that he was always chosen as the spokesperson in group work. She learned that when he grew up, he became president of the Chamber of Commerce.

Andrea and Carrie saw the distinction *between high level of language development and high level of verbal ability*, but Carrie expressed it to a greater degree. Beth did not comprehend the distinction. Camden's condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children according to Clark's *high level of verbal ability* was assessed to be not strongly distinguished.

Unusual capacity for processing information

Andrea determined that she had covered *unusual capacity for processing information* in her description of *advanced comprehension* and had nothing more to add.

Tom was one of Beth's students whom she first thought was lazy and not paying attention. Beth learned that he was processing the information being presented by listening but participating very little. She remarked that his daily work was minimal; but when it came time for assessment, he knew everything they had discussed and could apply the knowledge correctly. Beth then told about Susan, a child similar to Tom, but different in that she would not complete work that she felt was mundane. If the class was working on math, Beth continued, and it was a skill that required some drill, Susan would not complete the task. However, Beth said that any errors Susan made on tests were not from lack of knowledge, but usually because she rushed.

Carrie was puzzled by this trait when she answered, "I'm not sure how to answer this one, but I do know that gifted students do not "think" like other students." She commented that she was amazed how they knew things that they had not been exposed to

or how they came up with the conclusions that they did. “I don't have any concrete examples of this characteristic, but I do know that the thought process is different,” Carrie summarized.

Andrea and Carrie were both perplexed by this trait with Andrea assuming that *unusual capacity for processing information* and *advanced comprehension* were synonymous. Carrie was unable to pose any examples from students. Beth understood the characteristic and proffered appropriate examples. It may be assumed from these results that the condition of teacher perception of giftedness related to *advanced comprehension* is not clearly distinguished at Camden.

Accelerated pace of thought processes

Andrea described Bayleigh as a vivid writer who “oozed with creativity and original ideas” and could easily create an intricate story or a worthy project. Andrea related the story about how her class was working on a class book. As students were proceeding through the writing process, it came time for the teacher/student conference. Andrea remarked that she and Bayleigh edited and revised the finishing touches together so Bayleigh could work on her final copy. However, when Bayleigh turned in the paper, it was not the same story they worked on. Andrea quoted Bayleigh’s reply: “As I was rewriting it, new ideas came to my mind.” Andrea realized that Bayleigh could not simply rewrite the same piece because her mind was constantly racing to all the many new thoughts and ideas that were entering her mind.

Rachel was one of Beth’s students who she described as “wonderful as long as she was engaged.” However, Beth continued, if there was down time, Rachel became a

behavior problem. Beth planned worthwhile tasks for Rachel knowing that she would finish earlier than the others and needed something constructive to occupy her mind.

Carrie had an unusual experience of teaching some children in a pre-kindergarten class and again in fourth grade. She told of certain 3-year-old students who were interested in sitting still and listening to stories. She didn't know at the time that they were gifted, but when Carrie moved to teaching fourth grade, she taught some of the same students again. Laura was one gifted student Beth remembered as being especially responsive to learning at an early age. Laura had loved story time as a 3-year-old and would listen to Carrie read a story, knowing all about what happened when Carrie questioned her. Carrie said that in fourth grade, Laura had the same ability. Sometimes Carrie could just look at Laura and see her thinking. Carrie said that Laura did not have to wait to come up with answers because thought processes were engaged from the beginning of an assignment.

Camden's condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children according to Clark's characteristic *accelerated pace of thought processes* was assessed to be a strong indicator of giftedness.

Flexible thought processes

Andrea commented that, "Children with a flexible thought process are able to discern sarcasm and humor and see outside what's obvious." She went on to explain that these students with flexible thought processes possess a variety of problem-solving strategies that they readily use and move between when solving problems. Andrea noticed that the gifted students are able to problem solve using different techniques until

they achieved their desired result which she associates with this theme of flexible thought processes.

Matt, a student from Beth's experiences, helped her to provide data that articulates the flexible thought processes theme. Beth explained how Matt's ability to flex between problem solving techniques left her wondering about how he had solved particular problems in her class. In Beth's observation of Matt, he could solve problems "beyond the way she showed the class to solve a problem" which, at times, she "took as him being disrespectful." In time, Beth described learning from Matt and allowing Matt's flexibility of thought processes to help her class grow.

Beth's description of flexible thought processes connects to data gathered from Carrie on the condition of recognizing giftedness at Camden. Carrie seemed to believe that flexible thought processes probably occur within each individual child. Her assessment was that gifted children "were able to verbalize what they were thinking, sort through their thoughts, and come to a logical conclusion. Carrie explained that the flexible thought processes in her students made them able to reason *through* their thoughts.

Camden's condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children according to Clark's characteristic *flexible thought processes* was assessed to be a strong indicator of giftedness.

Comprehensive synthesis

Andrea hesitated when she replied, "These children are well rounded." Beth related about the child that moans, "I am not through, just a few more minutes." She had taught students like this who were not playing or procrastinating but had been analyzing

the idea and trying to develop the best solution. Madelyn was one of Beth's students who had a difficult time with group work because the others would want to "get it finished" and she wanted to complete it without being rushed or forced. Beth shared that she used timers to help students like Madelyn. "I would give several time warnings," Beth explained. "I found it helped her deal with having to complete something within a set time frame."

Wes turned in "one of the worst projects in the class," Carrie bemoaned. She knew he had hurried to do this project because he participated in many activities after school. Carrie continued telling that when Wes saw the other students' projects, he asked if he could do his again. The second time his efforts reflected a much better understanding of what he was to do. Carrie said that she didn't think that it was seeing the other projects that made the difference but that he needed more time to come up with a good idea.

While Beth and Carrie clearly understood Clark's cognitive characteristic, Andrea did not. It may be assumed from this outcome that the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize *comprehensive synthesis* was not clearly distinguished.

Early ability to delay closure

Andrea responded: "These students are witty and can come up with ways to manipulate parts of a schedule, routine, or deadline that they desire to postpone (bedtime, other responsibilities, or tasks)." Phillip was one of Beth's gifted students who did not want to be bothered by projects or activities that gave a demonstration of his knowledge. Beth lamented that he would choose the easiest and least challenging activity just to get

the job done. Beth recognized Phillip's *early ability to delay closure* and allowed Phillip to develop a product of his own rather than set boundaries for him, within reason.

Carrie asked her students to try studying for a test a little every night. She acknowledged that most students, even gifted ones, would wait until the last minute to study. Brett decided to try her idea. Carrie said that he was so excited when he made the highest grade in the class.

In response to *early ability to delay closure*, Andrea and Carrie missed the mark entirely. Beth not only comprehended the meaning but also gave an example of how she dealt with Phillip's attribute. Camden's condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children according to Clark's characteristic *early ability to delay closure* was assessed to be not clearly distinguished.

Heightened capacity for seeing unusual and diverse relationships; integration of ideas and disciplines

Andrea indicated that she had found from experience that gifted children are able to make connections across the curriculum and apply the concepts to different situations. In math, she related that a few of her students were able to solve numerical problems by breaking them down into groups of numbers or seeing the numbers and their relationships in their minds. She gave this example: $27-4 = 23$. Someone who sees this in an unusual way may say, "I know that $30-4 = 26$, so I'll just take away the extra 3, causing the answer to be 23." She sincerely expressed "Our minds are so diverse in the way we think. Gifted students usually see through different eyes and are able to travel a road to solving problems that others may not understand."

Mary Anne was one of Beth's students who used the knowledge she had gained for one subject and applied it to another. Beth explained that the other students would tell

her at times, “We are not talking about that.” Beth understood that they did not see the connections between the two topics like Mary Anne did. Beth said that she usually would have to intervene, have the group listen to Mary Anne’s explanation, and then interject to help others see her point of view and how it did apply to what they were doing.

In one of Carrie’s students’ science textbooks, part of each chapter test was a puzzle that required transfer of knowledge to be able to answer the questions. Carrie observed that most of the gifted students were able to complete this part of the test without much trouble, whereas other students struggled with it.

Camden’s condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children according to Clark’s characteristic *heightened capacity for seeing unusual and diverse relationships; integration of ideas and disciplines* was assessed to be a strong indicator of giftedness.

Ability to generate original ideas and solutions

For Read Across America week, Andrea’s students honored Dr. Seuss by dressing up like favorite characters in a book written by him. One of Andrea’s early elementary age students walked in and realized she had forgotten about wearing a costume. Andrea laughed when she related, “Before I could blink, it seemed, Meredith had whipped up a paper *Cat in the Hat* hat and a platter of green eggs and ham. With pride, she wore it the rest of the day.”

Cliff was one of Beth’s students who problem solved in math without showing his work; he had only the answers. When Beth asked Cliff why he did not followed her directions, he told Beth he didn’t know how to do what she was asking. Instead, he could

analyze the problem and solve it without having to work it out step-by-step on paper. At first this was a maddening experience for Beth until she accepted that Cliff understood the concepts and could function successfully his way, but not the “normal” way.

Carrie told about her students entering projects in an invention fair. She stated that the children usually had excellent ideas for inventions and the problems the inventions would solve.

All three teachers said that they had many examples of this characteristic and selected only these to share. Camden’s condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children according to Clark’s characteristic *ability to generate original ideas and solutions* was assessed to be a strong indicator of giftedness.

Early differentiating patterns for thought processing

Andrea said she had included information about this characteristic in *high level of language development* and *unusual capacity for processing information*. She told the story about one of her early elementary students who lost her special pencil. The child discreetly posted a sign in the classroom that stated a reward of three cheese puffs to the person who could find her special pencil. Andrea concluded that the child eventually found her lost pencil, but that Andrea thought it showed very clever initiative to implement this solution. Andrea surmised that gifted students are able to problem solve on their own without finding the need to quickly tattle or give up easily. She recalled that most of her gifted students in the past were extremely artistic and visual or kinesthetic learners (visual thinking).

Johnny, the student Beth referred to in *extraordinary quantity of information*; *unusual retentiveness* was an example of a child who thought beyond general references.

She explained that if the class were discussing rocks and minerals, Johnny would question the kind of rock and where it came from. Beth stated, “He would compare and contrast it with a different type of rock we had studied.”

Carrie noticed many of her students using analogies and metaphors when explaining a concept or arguing a point in a classroom discussion. She said that Susan was an extremely good writer whose talent came naturally. Carrie remarked that Susan did not have to be told how to write and that the only guidance Carrie could give her was to better arrange her thoughts on paper.

Andrea said that she had included explanations or examples of this characteristic in her earlier comments. She mentioned *unusual capacity for processing information* as one of the two places where she had covered these traits. When asked about that characteristic earlier, she mentioned that she had answered it in a previous characteristic. This confusion evidenced that she did not fully comprehend this characteristic and may have been unclear about others. Beth’s and Carrie’s responses were only slightly on the topic. It may be concluded that the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize *early differentiating patterns for thought processing* is not clearly distinguished at Camden Elementary School.

Early ability to use and form conceptual frameworks

Andrea’s response was that these children are able to think abstractly and on deeper levels at an early age.

Beth told about a student who analyzed new information in her head or verbally and then expected to move on, having little patience or empathy for students that did not understand the skill as fast as she did.

Margaret was an excellent writer in Carrie's class who would make an outline before she began any writing projects, even without being instructed to do so by the teacher. Carrie remarked that although Margaret's outlines may not follow the correct procedure, she was able to use what she wrote as a guide to the way she wanted her story to progress. Students at Carrie's school were taught about thinking maps at an early age. Carrie noted that Margaret was one of a few students who would actually use a map without being instructed to do so and often designed a bubble map to help her with her writing.

Comments served as evidence that Andrea and Beth did not understand this trait, while Carrie clearly did. The condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize *early ability to use and form conceptual frameworks* is not clearly distinguished at Camden.

An evaluative approach toward self and others

Andrea opined that gifted children are able to self-evaluate when it comes to performance. She recognized that they might, at times, put too much pressure on themselves or criticize others (academic or social).

Beth commented that she had addressed this characteristic in *early ability to use and form conceptual frameworks*. She indicated in that response about a student who lacked empathy for less cognitively capable students. That remark fits in with *an evaluative approach toward others*.

Trying to find himself, a former student of Carrie's spent years going through the whole spectrum of family, friends, feelings, thoughts about religion, philosophy, etc. deciding his path in life by self-evaluation and the evaluation of others. Another student of Carrie's evaluated himself quite often. She said that Cody was extremely intelligent

and came from a broken home. Carrie saw him recently working as a waiter in a restaurant. Cody commented on another student in his same class and that he always knew that student would go far in life. Carrie said she wondered what happened that made Cody not excel to the extent he should have but to recognize that someone else would do quite well.

Though their responses were brief, Andrea and Beth did recognize the trait, with Andrea in both self and others and Beth in others. Carrie's examples were more comprehensive, including both self and others. Camden's condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children according to Clark's characteristic *an evaluative approach toward self and others* was assessed to be a strong indicator of giftedness.

Unusual intensity; persistent, goal-directed behavior

Andrea noted that gifted children seek challenges and are focused on obtaining the goal. She said that she had previously discussed this characteristic in *flexible thought processes*. However, her responses under that characteristic do not fit this trait.

Megan was one of Beth's students who tended to be an over-analyzer and wanted to over-manage the situation. Within small-group work, Beth said that she had to be very careful about placing Megan. While Beth encouraged groups to work out their differences, she had to intervene when Megan was involved. As it turned out, Megan was not trying to be the downfall of the group but was making sure the work was correct and went beyond the required work. Beth realized that Megan wanted her group to do as she thought best.

When undertaking a task, many of Carrie's students would work with intensity until their project was exactly as they wanted it. She said that it didn't matter that the teacher was there as a facilitator; they were self- and goal-directed. She exclaimed that a project wasn't complete until they deemed it complete.

Although Andrea recognized goal-directed behavior, her additional remark did not match this trait. Beth and Carrie both understood the attribute. The condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize *unusual intensity; persistent, goal-directed behavior* was not clearly distinguished at Camden.

Andrea: Analysis of Responses

Andrea shared examples of her interpretations of each of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. Andrea appeared to be skilled at recognizing all of the characteristics except the following: unusual capacity for processing information; comprehensive synthesis; early ability to delay closure; early differential patterns for thought processing; early ability to use and form conceptual frameworks; and unusual intensity, persistent goal-directed behavior.

She saw overlaps of the following characteristics: high level of language development overlapped with high verbal ability; advanced comprehension overlapped with unusual capacity for processing information; early differentiating patterns for thought processing overlapped with high level of language development and with unusual capacity for processing information; unusual intensity and persistent, goal-directed behavior overlapped with flexible thought processes. Overlapping responses may have been the result of misinterpretation of the meaning of particular cognitive function

differentiating characteristics. Of Camden's three accurate referrers, Andrea's responses presented as the least closely related to Clark's themes.

Beth: Analysis of Responses

Beth shared examples of her interpretations of each of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. Beth was skilled at recognizing most of the traits and at giving concrete examples of students she had taught who exhibited those attributes. She also offered suggestions on how to deal with concomitant problems related to some traits.

Characteristics that Beth did not recognize were the following: early differential patterns for thought processing and early ability to use and form conceptual frameworks. She determined that there was overlapping meaning between high level of verbal ability and high level of language development. She also said that there was overlapping meaning between an evaluative approach toward self and others and early ability to use and form conceptual frameworks. One explanation of her determination for overlapping meaning of traits was a lack of understanding of the meaning of that characteristic. Of Camden's three accurate referrers, Beth's responses presented as in the middle range of being closely related to Clark's themes.

Carrie: Analysis of Responses

Carrie shared examples of her interpretations of each of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. Carrie seemed skilled at recognizing nearly all of Clark's characteristics except unusual capacity for processing information and early ability to delay closure. Carrie also had a weak response to early differentiating patterns for thought processing. Her detailed and varied responses

evidenced knowledge of these characteristics of gifted learners. Of Camden's three accurate referrers, Carrie's responses presented as the most closely related to Clark's themes.

Summary of Interviews

Teachers' responses were framed in the context of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. In the beginning, none of the teachers were familiar with Clark's work. Teachers interpreted the meaning of the characteristic and gave examples as exhibited by students. Each teacher remarked that she was challenged by Clark's terminology and its application. However, after analyzing the meaning of each characteristic, all teachers agreed that the characteristics represented traits they had observed in gifted children.

Though two of the teachers cited overlaps of characteristics, none of Andrea and Beth's overlaps matched one another. Overlapping responses may have been the result of misinterpretation of the meaning of particular cognitive function differentiating characteristics. Carrie did not note any overlaps, though both she and Andrea responded incorrectly to unusual capacity for processing information and early ability to delay closure. Andrea and Beth did not recognize the characteristic of early ability to use and form conceptual frameworks. None of the interviewees gave strong responses to early differential patterns for thought processing. All three teachers were adept at giving vivid examples of students who exhibited various traits.

Each one of Clark's characteristics gives a picture of a condition. While there are weaknesses among the three teachers in their understanding of certain characteristics, the strengths noted by these teachers is a positive indicator of Camden's teacher-perceived

ability to recognize giftedness in children. All three teachers recognized the following characteristics: extraordinary quantity of information, unusual retentiveness; advanced comprehension; unusually varied interests and curiosity; high level of language development; accelerated pace of thought processes; flexible thought processes; heightened capacity for seeing unusual and diverse relationships, integration of ideas and disciplines; ability to generate original ideas and solutions; an evaluative approach toward self and others.

Two teachers recognized each of the following characteristics: high level of verbal ability; comprehensive synthesis; early differential patterns for thought processing; unusual intensity; and persistent goal-directed behavior. Only one teacher recognized each the following characteristics: unusual capacity for processing information; early ability to delay closure; and early differential patterns for thought processing.

Primary Research Question

The primary research question asked: What is the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children at Camden Elementary School? This question was explored through the secondary research questions that yielded the following common themes: The majority of Camden's teachers learned about gifted children from a single chapter in a textbook used in a college or university course about learning exceptionalities or received gifted education instruction from another teacher. When defining *giftedness* in children, the majority of teachers responded with the following: creativity, deep thinker, problem solver, and thinks outside the box. The process of selection teachers used when considering a student for referral to testing for the gifted education program varied greatly from teacher to teacher. The decision-making process

teachers used for referring students to testing developed through classroom observations of children.

Thirteen Camden teachers from all levels of experience represented in this data sample expressed confidence in referring students to testing for potential placement in the gifted education program. However, the documented accuracy rate of referrals indicated results that differed from the teachers' perceptions of their success. Only three teachers were accurate in referring at least one potentially gifted child to the testing process for the intellectually gifted program.

The primary research question asked about the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children in one elementary school. It was apparent through the voices of these teachers that the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children at Camden Elementary School according to Clark's Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners was assessed to be diverse.

Summary

This qualitative case study examined the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize intellectually gifted children in one elementary school. After review of collected data regarding number of students attending the school, number of students participating in the gifted education program, percentage of students participating in the gifted education program, percentage of school enrollment by majority ethnic group, and percentage of students eligible for free lunch, a target school was selected for in-depth study. Sixteen teachers participated by responding to a researcher-made questionnaire. Three teachers were selected for an interview based upon their documented accuracy in

referring students for gifted education testing and placement. Interview responses were framed in the context of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners.

From these data, the Camden Elementary School condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children was found to be diverse. The educational experiences of all participating teachers at Camden were widely varied, none having a complete course to prepare them to recognize or work with a gifted child.

Definitions of giftedness among the teachers at Camden were equally diverse. Camden's teachers' perceptions of giftedness aligned most closely with Clark's characteristics of ability to generate original ideas and solutions; extraordinary quantity of information, unusual retentiveness; and heightened capacity for seeing unusual and diverse relationships, integration of ideas and disciplines. Camden teachers used an array of descriptors to relate their development and use of decision making when selecting students to refer for gifted testing. Those descriptors most consistent with Clark's characteristics were ideas of creativity and problem solver which aligned with ability to generate original ideas and solutions; deep thinker with extraordinary quantity of information, unusual retentiveness; thinks outside the box with heightened capacity for seeing unusual and diverse relationships, integration of ideas and disciplines.

In reference to the three teachers who had accurately referred a gifted student during the referral period, Camden's condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness was assessed as diverse. Though none of the teachers interviewed were familiar with the Clark's list of cognitive characteristics prior to data collection, they each interpreted the meaning of the characteristic and gave vivid examples as exhibited by students. The terminology challenged each teacher to analyze the meaning of each

characteristic. Though two of the teachers cited overlaps of characteristics, none of Andrea's and Beth's overlaps matched one another. Overlapping responses may have been the result of misinterpretation of the meaning of particular cognitive function differentiating characteristics. All three teachers agreed that the characteristics represented traits they had observed in gifted children. Among the three teachers who were interviewed, Carrie's responses most closely matched Clark's characteristics, closely followed by Beth's, and then Andrea's. This is also the order of their years of teaching experience from most to least.

CHAPTER V

THE SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V is divided into three sections: summary, discussion, and recommendations. The discussion is framed based on the findings to the secondary research questions. Recommendations include pragmatic suggestions from the researcher and suggestions for policymakers and other stakeholders. A call for further research culminates the chapter.

Summary

The study examined teachers' perceptions at Camden Elementary School to determine the condition of the referral process for intellectually gifted children for appropriate educational placement by measuring teacher-perceived ability. The study followed a case study research design wherein the school was defined as the case and the teachers of the school were the translators of the condition for this case. A variety of validity and reliability measures were used to select Camden as the case for study.

Each teacher of Grades 2–5 (the grades served by the gifted education program) at Camden filled out a questionnaire that asked her experiences related to gifted education, definition of the gifted child, the gifted referral decision-making process, accuracy of gifted child referral, and involvement in the gifted child referral process. Existing data were examined to determine which of Camden's 16 teachers had accurately identified gifted children. Those teachers who had accurately identified a gifted child at Camden were interviewed. All teachers of Grades 2–5 in Camden Elementary School participated

in data collection including validity and reliability measures via member checks with questionnaire and interview data. Questionnaire and interview responses were analyzed in the context of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners.

Results of the study showed that teachers at Camden did not receive adequate pre-service or in-service training in the recognition of giftedness in children. Neither did in-service professional development provide consistent instruction for recognition of gifted children. The study revealed that at Camden, students who did not meet a teacher's preconception of the term *gifted* went unreferred for gifted placement, even though many may actually have met the legal criteria for intellectual giftedness, and many who were referred were not gifted. The process of selection used by Camden teachers when considering a student for referral to testing for the gifted education program was subjective in nature and influenced by classroom observations, other teachers' ideas about particular children, and the teachers' personal experiences with giftedness outside of classroom practices. Data suggested that confidence and accuracy in referring students to testing for potential placement in a program of gifted education at Camden were positively influenced by years of teaching experience.

Accepted methods of qualitative data collection and analysis were utilized. Data sources and methods were triangulated. The data from the questionnaires and interviews were structured to fit the themes of Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners, and the interviews were analyzed using the same instrument.

Discussion

The primary research question shaped the focus of this study: At Camden Elementary School, what is the condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children? Camden's condition of teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children was found to be consistent with the findings of Elhoweris (2008); Elhoweris et al. (2005); Gallagher (1991); McBee (2006); and Pendarvis and Wood (2009). The majority of Camden's teachers learned about gifted children from a single chapter in a textbook used in a college or university course about learning exceptionalities or received gifted education instruction from another teacher. In general, Camden Elementary School teachers utilized a variety of sources to identify students for referral to the testing process for classes designed for the intellectually gifted.

Based on Clark's (2002) Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners as a framework, the questionnaire data showed that all 16 of the Camden teachers had at least cursory knowledge of one or more of Clark's themes of giftedness. Extending use of Clark's characteristics as both a tool for interviews and a lens for the interview data with Andrea, Beth, and Carrie resulted in a finding that much professional development can be done at Camden using Clark's work as a central tool for better preparing teachers to identify gifted children.

Thirteen of 16 Camden teachers from all levels of experience represented in this data sample expressed confidence in referring students to testing for potential placement in the gifted education program. However, Camden's documented accuracy rate of referrals concluded results that differed from the teachers' perceptions of their success. A total of 12 children were referred by teachers during the fall semester of 2009, but only three students were identified. Only three of all 16 Camden teacher participants were

accurate in referring one potentially gifted child each who actually qualified for the gifted program at Camden. Of particular concern is that 7 of the 16 teachers at Camden referred no students at all. Callahan (2004), Coleman (2005), Franklin (2004), Gallagher (1991), and Reis (2004) warned of the specific stifling effect non-identification may have on a gifted child. The recurring lack of a culturally and economically diverse gifted population highlighted by empirical evidence of Elhoweris et al. (2005) and called for by Cross (2002) may be thwarted at Camden due to lack of referral.

The primary research question asked about the condition of Camden's teacher-perceived ability to recognize giftedness in children. The voices of Camden's teachers demonstrated a wide, highly varied range of understanding about giftedness when examined alongside Clark's Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners. A major theme resulting from the study was that Camden teachers perceived that they were not adequately prepared for referring the potentially gifted during pre-service or in-service training.

Research Question 1.

What educational experiences did Camden Elementary School teachers have to prepare them to refer potentially gifted students?

Camden teachers' higher education learning experiences regarding the identification of gifted children were found insufficient in preparing them for the real world of public school. Thirteen of 16 teachers indicated that a chapter in a textbook in a course about learning exceptionalities did not offer in-depth exposure to this population. Those who conjectured reasons that teachers were not sufficiently trained emphasized that college curriculum generally followed a textbook. Therefore, if the book offered

only cursory coverage of a subject, especially in a course that included a wide range of exceptionalities, that was all the attention dedicated to it in the entire college course.

Professional development was rarely offered to assist in recognizing characteristics of gifted children and, thereby, aid the teachers in their referral process. When no professional development was offered, novice teachers sought input from peers, gifted education teachers, administrators as instructional leaders, and mentors. Only one teacher referred to a published checklist that she had used. Szabos's *Bright Child/Gifted Learner* (1998) had been given to her by the gifted education professional. Camden teachers have little training to prepare them for the task of referring potentially gifted students. Kirkpatrick's (2006) finding which noted that some novice teachers would like more preparation to address the unique requirements of special needs children is consistent with the findings of this case study with Camden teachers.

Research Question 2.

How does Camden Elementary School define *giftedness* in children?

Just as at Camden Elementary School, perceptions of what constitutes giftedness also varied among authorities in the field of gifted education. Clark (2002) defined giftedness in terms of "academic aptitude, insight and innovation, creative behavior, leadership, personal and interpersonal skill, or visual and performing arts, or any combination thereof" (p. 26). Giftedness may also be defined in terms of an IQ score (CEC, n.d.a).

The questionnaire results indicated that Camden teachers held no single definition of giftedness. Each Camden teacher approached the topic from a different vantage point based upon pre-service and in-service training, personal and professional experiences,

and varying years of teaching experience. All of this confounded the perception of what traits to seek when considering which children to refer to testing for gifted education.

However, common themes emerged that resulted in describing the gifted child as creative, a deep thinker, a problem solver, and a leader. The majority of participants responded with the following when defining giftedness in children: creativity, deep thinker, problem solver, and thinks outside the box. Camden Elementary School seems to be consistent with the literature on defining giftedness. As Borland and Wright (2004), Clark (2002), Parke (2001), Renzulli (2004b), Steiner (2006), and Sternberg (2004a, 2004b) claimed, defining giftedness is complex.

Research Question 3.

How does Camden Elementary School describe the development and use of a decision-making process to select students for referral to testing for the gifted education program?

Camden's process for considering a student for referral to testing for the gifted education program varied greatly from teacher to teacher. Mostly, Camden's decision-making process for referring students to testing developed through teachers' classroom observations of children. Teachers considered gifted characteristics (listed in Tables 4.3 and 4.4) as the characteristics derived from among the following: (a) general behaviors exhibited by students in the classroom environment, (b) student work habits, and (c) student academic achievement.

Though the participants were not aware of Clark (2002) and her work, Camden teachers seemed to use many of Clark's characteristics as they attempted to determine which children to refer to testing for potential placement in a gifted education program.

For Camden's teachers, understanding Clark's characteristics may take training in gifted education terminology and philosophy. Not all of Camden's teachers had exposure to this or any other gifted traits' identification device.

Research Question 4.

How do Camden Elementary School's accurate referrers of gifted students explain their involvement in the gifted education referral process?

Camden's accurate referrers' explanation of their involvement in the gifted education referral process can best be explained as organic and generative, derived from each teachers' personal narrative. Neither a researcher's summary nor comments on observations were as compelling as the Camden Elementary School accurate referring classroom teachers' personal stories. The three Camden teachers who were selected for an interview shared real-life experiences of gifted children.

Camden's accurate gifted referrers framed their responses in the context of Clark's (2002) *Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners*. None of Camden's accurate referrers were familiar with Clark's work. Each accurate referring teacher was able to interpret Clark's meaning and give examples as exhibited by students. Camden teachers had not previously used Clark's terminology, and each accurate referring teacher remarked that she was challenged by Clark's classifications. Each teacher also agreed that Clark's characteristics represented traits they had observed in gifted children. Equipped with Clark's characteristics as an interview tool, Camden's accurate referrer's existing knowledge of gifted traits, coupled with their observations, provided ample evidence to conclude how Camden teachers and teachers as a profession might be more effectively involved in the gifted education referral process. As Birch

(2004) and Hunsaker et al. (1997) claimed, the use of an outline or checklist is helpful to teachers in recognizing the characteristics of gifted children. However, it is important to note that training in the use of these instruments is essential (Birch, 2004; Feldhusen et al., 2004; Renzulli, 2004a).

Limitations

The study relied on qualitative methods that had limitations. While the researcher employed procedures to reduce limitations, the following existed:

1. Ethnic and gender diversity among the participants was restricted. Among the 16 female teachers, there were 15 Caucasians and 1 African American.
2. The study provided results of a single year (2009) of documented accuracy rate of referrals. This may or may not have been representative of past results.
3. The gifted criteria referred to in this study were limited to regulations from the Mississippi Department of Education.

Despite limitations, the study provides insight into teacher education preparation and in-service training with regard to gifted education studies and their affect upon classroom practices through recognition of this special population.

Recommendations

Beyond the scope of this dissertation, there exists the work world of public school teaching with its myriad responsibilities. Classroom teachers have so many initiatives and pressures imposed upon them that there is little time for additional self-education. As a result of this study, both pre-service and in-service training in recognizing the characteristics of gifted children are recommended.

Needs of Classroom Teachers

The study sought to include the classroom teachers' voices as they commented on the issue of referring students to testing for potential placement in a program for gifted education. The majority of teachers who responded to the questionnaire expressed a need for more training at pre-service and in-service levels about recognizing the characteristics of gifted children. The suggestion warrants consideration as a recommendation from those whose perceptions this study wanted to record.

Pre-service Training

Each school year, Mississippi classroom teachers are asked to consider referring students to testing for potential placement in the gifted education program. General agreement among gifted education researchers has been reached that grouping, enrichment, and acceleration are all necessary to provide appropriate educational opportunities for gifted learners (Reiss, 2004). These interventions begin with identification. Providing the pre-service teacher with tools to assist in recognizing specific characteristics would be the natural next step.

Findings from the study suggest that colleges and universities examine the preparation pre-service teachers are receiving to determine the strengths and weaknesses related to the identification of gifted children. Only in this way can it be ascertained whether or not pre-service teachers are ready for the rigor of this aspect of their classroom teaching duties. Endepohls-Ulpe and Ruf (2005) strongly suggested, "Deliberate contact with gifted children and training in teaching the gifted should therefore definitely be part of primary school teacher training" (p.227).

In-service Training

Gifted education teachers can provide classroom teachers with instruction in identification of gifted traits in students. Their specialized training would be an asset to a professional development program on this topic. An annual professional development session could be held at the beginning of the school year, prior to the call for referrals to gifted education program testing, giving classroom teachers adequate time to observe cognitive function characteristics.

For Educational Leaders

The educational leaders of any school system are in a position to influence the learning experience of every student. Since all children deserve the opportunity to reach their learning potential, these leaders must take the initiative to ensure that potentially gifted students are identified and provided with services. Only then can it be determined that mission statements and other documents regarding meeting the needs of students are addressing this population.

Through this study, evidence has been provided that pre-service teachers are not prepared to identify potentially gifted children. The scant amount of training these teachers may have received at the college or university level must be evaluated in terms of quality. Receiving a degree in education from an institution of higher learning should include requisite knowledge regarding meeting the needs of gifted children.

For Policymakers and Other Stakeholders

All children deserve the opportunity to reach their intellectual potential. The federal government has enacted a law that purports to guarantee that all students will have the school environment necessary to meet this noble goal: No Child Left Behind

(2001). However, not every child's educational needs are addressed by this Act.

Tomlinson (2002) explained:

At present, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 aims the nation's attention and resources at ensuring that non-proficient students move systematically toward proficiency. There is no incentive for schools to attend to the growth of students once they attain proficiency, or to spur students who are already proficient to greater achievement, and certainly not to inspire those who far exceed proficiency. (p. 36)

The public must seek the meaning behind those words in the Act's title; indeed, the public must seek the inclusion of these highly capable children. If gifted students go unchallenged, they, too, may be left behind and not reach their potential. NCLB needs to be amended to include language that provides for the special needs of gifted students. It should mandate training for pre-service teachers and provide grants for professional development to ensure that in-service teachers understand the educational needs of gifted students. NCLB needs to be enhanced regarding teacher training.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 fails to adequately encourage states and districts to improve teacher skills and effectiveness in meeting the needs of gifted and talented students through the Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund in Title II, Part A, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). (p. 1/para. 2)

Legislators need to strengthen the intention of this Act to provide training for in-service teachers or write new legislation that includes addressing the educational needs of gifted children.

The National Association for Gifted Children (2010) recommended amending the ESEA to require states to include in their applications for federal funds under Title II, Part A, a description of the strategies they will employ to improve teacher quality by improving their ability to identify and instruct gifted and talented students.

A Call for Additional Research

Further investigation may offer insight into existing paradigms of thought by teachers and their effect upon this population of students. More research is needed in the area of identification of potentially gifted children by classroom teachers for referral to testing for the purpose of placement in a gifted education program. Students who are not identified and receiving appropriate services are not having their educational needs met. Research is also encouraged to aid in designing professional development programs to address the identification of giftedness in special populations of children, including those who are economically disadvantaged, those from minority groups and diverse cultures, those who have disabilities, and those with social/emotional problems.

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APPENDIX A
GIFTED EDUCATION REFERRAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Gifted Education Referral Questionnaire

Name _____

Directions: Please respond to all questions that apply to you.

1. From which college did you graduate? _____
Where is it located? _____

2. In what year did you graduate with a Bachelor Degree? _____
Master Degree? _____
Educational Specialist Degree? _____
Doctoral Degree? _____
3. Were you an elementary education major? _____
If not, what was your major? _____
Did you enter teaching through the alternate route process? _____
4. Including this year, how many years have you taught school? _____
5. What grade(s) have you taught? _____
6. Which of the following did your gifted education training at the higher education level include:
A chapter in a textbook _____
A college course _____
More than one college course _____
Other _____
Were these electives or requirements? _____
7. What courses did you take at the undergraduate level that involved learning about the characteristics of gifted children?

At the graduate level?

8. Do you have gifted education certification? _____
If so, in which state? _____
What were the requirements? _____

9. Have you received instruction regarding recognizing the characteristics of gifted children from any of the following:
- A mentor _____
 - Another teacher _____
 - A principal or assistant principal _____
 - Professional development or in-service _____
 - Other _____

10. In your own words, define *giftedness* in children.

11. During the school year, classroom teachers are asked to consider referring students to testing for potential placement in the gifted education program. What characteristics do you look for when you consider making a gifted education referral?

12. What process of selection do you use when deciding whether or not to make a gifted education referral?

13. How did you develop this decision-making process?

14. Have you ever referred a student for testing for placement in a gifted education program? _____

If so, approximately how many students? _____

15. Have you found your results to be successful, moderately successful, or not successful? _____

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS WITH GIFTED EDUCATION
REFERRAL EXPERIENCES

Interview Protocol for Teachers with Gifted Education Referral Experiences

Researcher: During the school year, classroom teachers are asked to consider referring students to testing for potential placement in the gifted education program. Let's have a conversation about your experiences working with this program. I have a few questions in mind, but am open to ideas you'd like to share with me. May we begin our discussion with the first question?

- a. How do you define *giftedness* in children?
- b. What characteristics do you look for when you consider making a gifted education referral?
- c. What process of selection do you use when deciding whether or not to make a gifted education referral?
- d. How did you develop this decision-making process?
- e. How many students have you referred during your career?
- f. Have you found your results to be successful, moderately successful, or not successful?
- g. Do you feel confident referring a student to testing for potential placement in a gifted education program? Why? Why not?
- h. If not, what do you need to enhance your knowledge about the characteristics of gifted children, thus improving your ability to select students for referral?
- i. Our perceptions are often formed through personal experiences. Do you have personal experiences with gifted education programs? Were these experiences from when you were a student? Were these experiences from your child (children) or others? Would you share them with me?
- j. Using this copy of Clark's (2002) *Cognitive Function Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Learners with Examples of Related Needs*, would you give examples of these traits from your experiences with gifted learners?

APPENDIX C
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN
SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY

Compliance Division
Administrative Offices
Animal Care and Use (IACUC)
Human Research Protection
Program (IRB)
1207 Hwy 182 West
Starkville, MS 39759
(662) 325-3496 - fax

Safety Division
Biosafety (IBC)
Radiation Safety
Hazardous Waste
Chemical & Lab Safety
Fire & Life Safety
70 Morgan Avenue
Mississippi State, MS 39762
(662) 325-8776 - fax

<http://www.orc.msstate.edu>
compliance@research.msstate.edu
(662) 325-3294

May 12, 2010

Gail Hammond
103 Twin Oaks Drive
Brandon, MS 39047

RE: IRB Study #10-133: The Condition of the Gifted Referral Process in One Southern Suburban Elementary School Attendance Zone: A Case Study

Dear Ms. Hammond:

The above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 5/12/2010 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The IRB reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Please note that the MSU IRB is in the process of seeking accreditation for our human subjects protection program. As a result of these efforts, you will likely notice many changes in the IRB's policies and procedures in the coming months. These changes will be posted online at <http://www.orc.msstate.edu/human/aahrpp.php>. The first of these changes is the implementation of an approval stamp for consent forms. The approval stamp will assist in ensuring the IRB approved version of the consent form is used in the actual conduct of research. You must use copies of the stamped consent form for obtaining consent from participants.

Please refer to your IRB number (#10-133) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at cwilliams@research.msstate.edu or call 662-325-5220.

Sincerely,

[For use with electronic submissions]

Christine Williams
IRB Compliance Administrator

cc: Kay Brocato (Advisor)

Office of Regulatory Compliance • Post Office Box 6223 • Mississippi State, MS 39762

APPENDIX D
COVER LETTER TO QUESTIONNAIRE

Your opinion matters!

I'm a doctoral student at Mississippi State University conducting a study to gain an understanding of the identification process classroom teachers use when considering referral of children to testing with the potential for placement in a program for intellectually gifted students.

You're invited to participate!

What are you being asked to do?

Participants will respond to a questionnaire about gifted education training at the pre-service level with subsequent experiences involving in-service training, student teaching experiences, veteran teacher mentorship, and principals as instructional leaders. I will meet one time with each participant for a member check concerning responses to the questionnaire. Based upon district data regarding teacher referrals, three participants will be selected for subsequent interviews.

How is your privacy protected?

Confidentiality of records will involve using codes and pseudonyms for the school and each teacher. My faculty advisor will have access to data collected in the event that she needs to assist with some aspect of the project. All records will be held confidential for one year in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. At that time, records will be destroyed with a paper shredder.

What's the benefit to you?

Benefits include heightened awareness of the characteristics of gifted children. You will receive a \$20.00 gift card to Wal-Mart or Target (your choice). The three teachers selected for interviews will be given additional \$50.00 gift cards.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary. You may stop at any time. Would you like to join the study?

Gail Hammond

APPENDIX E
RESUMÉ

Gail Pahl Hammond

Education History

Mississippi State University
Bachelor of Science 1971 with Special Distinction
Master of Education 1980
Educational Specialist 1985

Certification

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
AAA Certification
Endorsements

Elementary Education (1–9)
Gifted Education (K–12)
Certified Provisional Educator Evaluator

Professional Experience

Educator for 37 years of students in Grades 1–9
Teacher of intellectually gifted students for 23 years

Professional Organizations

Past President of Mississippi Association for Gifted Children (MAGC)
Past Member of the Board of Directors of National Association for Gifted Children
Delta Kappa Gamma International Society of Women Educators

Honor Societies and Lists in Higher Education

Phi Theta Kappa
Phi Kappa Phi
The Gamma Beta Phi Society
The National Chancellor's List
The National Dean's List

Select Honors

Mississippi Hall of Master Teachers
Frances A. Karnes Award for Excellence in Gifted Education (MAGC)
Outstanding Teacher - Metro Jackson Chamber of Commerce
Who's Who Among America's Teachers
Community Hero – Mississippi Children's Museum
Vine Street Elementary School Teacher of the Year
Northwest Rankin Middle School Teacher of the Year
Northwest Rankin High School Academic Foundation Excellence in Education Award