TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF GIFTEDNESS
AMONG
STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING
by
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Abstract

This qualitative, exploratory study describes and interprets the perspectives of giftedness of twelve teachers who work with Deaf and hard of hearing students in a variety of educational settings across Canada. Using in-depth interviews, the resulting twenty-five hours of audio tapes were transcribed and analyzed line by line using procedures suggested by Giorgi and Marton.

The supporting literature came from four major areas: (a) the construct of giftedness; (b) giftedness among the disabled population; (c) giftedness among the Deaf and hard of hearing population; and (d) theory related to teachers' knowledge and perspectives. Analysis of the data resulted in presentation of the findings from two perspectives: teachers' understandings of the meanings of giftedness and the process through which these teachers appeared to have gained their knowledge.

Teachers' practical knowledge was portrayed in detailed stories of forty-three hard of hearing or Deaf students whom they believed to be gifted and in the way they described the students' achieving, learning and behaving in classroom interactions. The teachers' conceptually oriented knowledge was described as they reflected upon the meanings they associated with giftedness. The teachers' knowledge of giftedness was compared to that found in the gifted literature at both the practical and theoretical levels.

Through interpretations derived from daily interactions with students and drawing on knowledge gained from personal experience, these teachers constructed perspectives of giftedness. The process that emerged illustrated the teachers' use of comparison groups as ways of gaining insight about the students and teachers' ideas about the use of labeling.

The teachers' perspectives suggest that Deaf and hard of hearing students are gifted in ways similar but not identical to hearing students. The abilities of these students appear to be different from others in the "handicapped-gifted" literature and their needs are unique. The teachers' more conceptually oriented ideas also appeared to be similar but not identical to theoretical definitions of giftedness.
The findings support collaboration between teachers and researchers to explore ways in which teachers come to recognize and understand gifted students. Future research must also explore the special educational needs of students who are dealing with the effects of having a hearing loss and being gifted.
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FOR MY PARENTS
Mary and Bill Warwick
and
FOR MY SONS
Ken and Andrew Bibby
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The purpose of this investigation was to uncover and describe the perspectives of giftedness among teachers who work with students who are Deaf and hard of hearing and to come to some understanding as to how these teachers come to develop their perspectives. Twelve teachers of students with hearing losses coming from different educational settings across Canada participated in face to face interviews. The teachers' stories and the interpretations of their understandings form the basis for this dissertation.

General Background to Giftedness and Disability

Over the last twenty years, much has been written about the needs and the characteristics of children who are gifted; in addition, there is a vast body of literature that focuses on the special attributes of and educational programming needs for those who have hearing losses. It is only recently, however, that attention has turned to those students who are Deaf and hard of hearing who might also be gifted (Whitmore & Maker, 1985).

In the United States, the first national conference on "handicapped" gifted children was held in 1976 and the category “handicapped-gifted” was added to the indices of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) in 1977 (Whitmore & Maker, 1985). Until that time, and in almost all cases, children had been identified and labeled only by their disability and educational programming for them had tended to focus on remedial strategies geared towards the process of overcoming the disability.

Historically, the studies of giftedness and of disability have developed along different lines (Yewchuk & Bibby, 1989c). Some educators of students with hearing loss have had contact with students who are academically talented, but most remain relatively unfamiliar with issues in the field of giftedness; many other special educators, however,
may have had little to do with academically talented children (Whitmore, 1981). In spite of this lack of contact across disciplines, it might be unfair to assume that teachers of hard of hearing and Deaf children are unconcerned with the needs and abilities of these students or that they are unable to recognize them in their classrooms.

In fact, the literature on gifted students who also have hearing losses is scant and most of the information regarding this special population of students is subsumed under the heading of "the handicapped gifted". Those students include the mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically or other health-impaired children, or children with specific learning disabilities (U.S. Congress, 1975). This literature, although at times recognizing the very different needs of children with different disabilities, also tends to group students under the "the handicapped-gifted" label. Because of the unique factors associated with the impact of having a hearing loss and without having more information on the population of students who have hearing losses and who are gifted, it is impossible to say that the claims and assumptions made for the handicapped-gifted are necessarily appropriate for gifted students with hearing losses.

There appear to be three main issues in the existing literature which raise questions critical to the field of deafness and which support the need for this investigation. One is concerned with teachers' abilities to recognize and identify students with disabilities who might also be gifted. The second discusses specific practices which might hinder the recognition and development of these children. The following section first discusses these two issues and indicates the need to investigate their applicability to teachers who work with students with hearing losses. The third issue is more general and has to do with the ambiguity of the meaning of the term giftedness.

**Teachers' abilities in recognizing giftedness.**

One of the important issues in the handicapped-gifted literature has to do with the ability of teachers to identify gifted students. In 1959, Pegnato and Birch published work
which was to have a profound effect on subsequent research regarding giftedness. The purpose of their study was to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of a variety of methods of screening children for giftedness, which included teacher judgment, honor roll listing, creative ability in art and music, student council membership, superiority in mathematics, group intelligence test scores and group achievement test scores. Pegnato and Birch reached two important conclusions. One was that group intelligence tests were the most efficient and effective screening method, but this was not necessarily surprising because as Maltby (1984) notes, “group intelligence tests and the individual intelligence test used as the reference criterion are similar measuring devices” (p.5). They also concluded that teachers do not locate gifted children “effectively or efficiently enough to place much reliance on them for screening.” Clark (1992) still quotes the study as “showing the inability of untrained teachers to identify gifted children accurately” (p. 141) and Richert (1991) cites numerous studies that support teachers as unreliable sources of identification data.

It is interesting to note, however, that these studies fall between 1959 and 1978. In the last decade, the meanings of giftedness have broadened to include much more than abilities defined by scores on intelligence tests. Teachers who participated in these older studies may have been interpreting giftedness in a manner different to that which the researchers had in mind, as Maltby (1984) suggests for example, by taking into account students' attitude, motivation and achievement within the class.

Although Borland (1978) challenged the overgeneralization of Pegnato and Birch (Shore, Cornell, Robinson & Ward, 1991), in the area of the gifted handicapped, work by Eisenberg and Epstein (1981) appeared to provide more support to the assumption that teachers were also unable to identify students who were gifted. They sent forms for nominating potentially gifted and talented students to schools serving over 60,000 handicapped students, but not a single handicapped student was nominated. This somewhat disturbing finding has been used in subsequent literature to provide support for
the idea that teachers must be trained to recognize giftedness in the students with whom they work (Minner, Prater, Bloodworth, & Walker, 1987; Yewchuk & Bibby, 1989a; Yewchuk & Lupart, in press). It is important to note, however, that teachers were not asked for their reasons for not nominating students into the gifted programs and alternate explanations might be possible. The teachers may not have been aware of the goals, or of the content of the gifted programs; they may not therefore have been ready to recommend transfer to a program that was relatively unknown to them. It is also possible that the teachers may have believed that the programs these students were receiving were in fact meeting their needs as gifted students. Since most teachers in the gifted programs would have had little experience with students with disabilities, recommending placement without proper preparation might have influenced their decisions. Whatever the reasons, however, the critical issue is that researchers have not usually asked the teachers themselves about the reasons for their decision making.

The current literature (Shore, et al 1991), however, is reflecting a more positive recognition that teachers' knowledge is especially useful in other ways: (a) in recognizing underachievers (Borland, 1978); (b) in identifying creativity (Kirschenbaum, 1983; Rimm, 1984); and (c) in recognizing giftedness among students who have hearing losses (Yewchuk & Bibby, 1989b). Not surprisingly, teachers were better able to identify these students when they had an opportunity to get to know their students (Denton & Postlethwaite, 1984) and after specific training (Gear, 1978).

Obstacles to identification and programming.

In addition to writing about the issue regarding the importance of teachers in the process of identification, I have also contributed to the literature on the “gifted-handicapped” which makes other claims as to the reasons for the apparent lack of identification and programming. My increasing questioning of some of these claims, became part of the reasons that prompted this investigation.
The gifted-handicapped literature (Clark, 1992; Maker, 1977; Whitmore & Maker, 1985; Yewchuk & Bibby, 1989b) often cites obstacles that impede the identification of gifted handicapped individuals. Among these obstacles are the claims that: (a) until recently this population of students who are dually labeled have been virtually ignored in special education; (b) the gifted handicapped are noticed for their disability and not for their giftedness; (c) teachers of disabled students do not have specialized knowledge about giftedness; and (d) traditional teaching strategies virtually ignore the individual’s higher cognitive needs. It has also been claimed that teachers of disabled students tend to focus on the students’ weaknesses rather than on the students’ strengths (Clark, 1992; Maker, 1977).

Moores (1987), one of the outstanding educators of Deaf and hard of hearing people in North America, cites an additional four general reasons for the paucity of programs for academically talented students with hearing losses. First, deafness is itself a low-incidence condition and since in most definitions giftedness is believed to be manifested by 3-5% of the population (Maker, 1977) there would be minimal numbers of hard of hearing or Deaf gifted students in even the largest school district. Gamble (1985) reports an incidence rate for giftedness in this population in the U.S. as 4.2%. Bibby and Yewchuk (1987) report a somewhat higher rate of 6.1%.

The second reason for a lack of programs for these students is that even the most able deaf students have relatively low scores on standardized achievement tests and Moores (1987) suggests that because of this teachers are not motivated to establish special programs.

Moores (1987) cites the stigma of “elitism” as the third reason. Since the special education emphasis has traditionally been on equality of access and of opportunity, little attention was paid to students with above-average capabilities. When emphasis in regular education shifted to increased academic achievement and the push for excellence began (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983), more concern was given to
students who were considered to be gifted. For Deaf and hard of hearing students, however, the needs of those who were capable of doing the best were seen to be of lesser importance than the needs of those who were average or below average in ability. The Federal government in the U.S. has been slow to give support to special programs for gifted handicapped students and Moores cites this as the fourth reason for the lack of growth of special programs for gifted students with hearing losses. This exclusion is "reflected in varying degrees in state and local education agencies and in university training programs" (p. 308).

There is certainly an apparent lack of special programs for gifted hard of hearing or Deaf students. Gamble (1985) reports that only 15% are being served in the United States. In informal conversations with Canadian educators who work in a variety of different settings, I have not discovered any special programs in existence for these students. Implied in these preceding statements, however, is the assumption that gifted hard of hearing and Deaf students who are not receiving special services are also not in the best educational settings. It follows that their needs are thus probably not being met. This may not be the case.

Many of these students may in fact be receiving appropriate services and challenges in at least two ways. The first is that innovative teachers, on an individual basis in all educational settings, may already be using many of the effective teaching-learning strategies which are being supported in the gifted literature: cognitive mediation, peer-group learning and individualized instructional practices (Feuerstein, 1980; Martin, 1989), for example. They may be providing for the needs of gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students on a one-to-one basis in their classrooms. Since these classes traditionally are relatively small, with usually only between 4 and 10 students, individualization of instruction is not only possible but highly probable.

Some students may be being challenged in yet another way. With the move toward integration and inclusive education, the school settings themselves may be making
unprecedented demands upon gifted students who must keep up with their hearing peers without being able to hear the teachers. Educational options are many and for those who are in regular high school or junior high school settings, academic challenge may exist precisely because of the setting. For those at schools for the Deaf, being educated with their Deaf peers, the challenge may lie in the fact that they are required to keep up with hearing peers on standardized measures such as Provincial examinations.

Ambiguities associated with the term gifted.

The preceding background has dealt with issues related to problems which deal with the perceived lack of identification of and programming for gifted students with disabilities in general and with gifted students with hearing losses in particular. Common to the whole area of gifted education is the fact that the giftedness construct itself is fraught with ambiguity and lack of clarity (Hoge, 1989). From a psychologist’s perspective, Hoge suggests that definitions differ along various dimensions: the breadth of the construct, the content of the definition, the level of exceptionality, the extent to which it incorporates a static versus dynamic view of the characteristics of giftedness and the precision of the definition (Hoge, 1989). These issues are discussed at length in Chapter 3. In addition to the confusion in definition of terms relating to the idea of giftedness, however, we are also being presented with exciting and important theoretical changes which challenge our previous understandings of the terms and meanings relating to the idea of intelligence. Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory, (1984, 1985), the work of Naglieri & Das (1988) and Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983) are among several which are challenging old stereotypes. Theorists admit to ambiguities and changing definitions in the use of the term. What are the teachers’ understandings? In spite of ambiguities, are there commonalties of meaning that allow for clear communication?

In summary, the existence of gifted disabled individuals is now well documented (Shore et al., 1991) as is the existence of gifted persons with hearing losses (Gamble,
1985; Texas School for the Deaf, 1980; Yewchuk & Bibby, 1989a). The existing literature which deals with gifted students and that which deals with gifted-handicapped students, makes strong claims that giftedness must be recognized and that programming must better serve the needs of these groups of students; education must recognize strengths and disabilities (Shore et al., 1991). These statements are positively oriented and few would be able to argue with their validity and their importance to the field of special education.

On the other hand, teachers who deal on a one-to-one basis with the specialized needs of very different disabled students, have very often been grouped together in the literature on the “gifted-handicapped.” Statements made in the literature may not apply equally to all teachers or to all students within this very diverse group. The literature claims that these students as a group are underserved and it has been strongly suggested that teachers of disabled students may be unaware of giftedness among their students. Even if they recognize these students, it has been suggested that they may not be able to provide appropriate programming.

Complicating this situation is the fact that the literature also indicates that the meaning of the label “gifted” is difficult if not impossible to define with any kind of precision.

Statement of the Problem

As the theoretical “experts” debate the issues, the real world goes on inside the classrooms. There must be a link made between what the literature implies and what the teachers think about the issue under investigation: giftedness. Teachers must be asked to share their own perspectives on these issues. Buchanan and Nielsen (1991), in making recommendations for research in gifted education, strongly support the notion of considering multiple perspectives in order to see major patterns in the “fabric of gifted education” (p. 13). They suggest that “in addition to knowing the literature and the published experts, researchers need to be in touch with those on the frontlines, teachers of
the gifted” (p. 13), maintaining that these teachers’ perspectives, gained through interactions with researchers, will provide important new insights.

Smith and Shepherd (1988) suggest that teachers’ ideas are best known by inferences from their case knowledge which is tied to specific events and persons within their immediate experience. This knowledge helps the teacher decide what to do in any given circumstance. According to this belief, people know how to do “without being able to state what they know” (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986, p. 506). My study is predicated on the assumption that teachers will make decisions about their students based on past and present experiences with “giftedness,” and the resulting internalization of its meaning. As a researcher, I can best discover the meanings teachers hold about giftedness by making inferences from their case knowledge.

In informal conversations, teachers of students with hearing losses have no trouble identifying those students they think of as being gifted when they are asked to name students with whom they have worked (Bibby, 1988, Bibby & Yewchuk, 1987). As one teacher said in an interview, “Well, I don’t know if she’d be called gifted, but I know she’s gifted.” This kind of response prompts the following questions: To what extent do the claims that teachers are usually not able to identify gifted students who have a disability, apply to teachers of hard of hearing and Deaf students who are also gifted? What does being gifted mean to these teachers? How do they know that a child is gifted? Are these teachers identifying these children? Are these teachers aware of the needs of these students?

What are these teachers’ perspectives? One would expect that the teacher’s perspective of giftedness would impact in some way on what she or he does in the classroom in interactions with the students. If, for example, teachers view giftedness as a “fixed trait” (Maker, 1986a) then their interventions with these students may be very different from those teachers who see the environment as playing the major role in developing competencies. If teachers see giftedness in terms of a natural ability to
achieve, they may not recognize those who would benefit from assistance in developing to their fullest potential. Whatever their belief systems, teachers make decisions about gifted students based on their personal knowledge about the meanings of giftedness. It is critical that the understandings of these teachers be given a voice.

The purpose of the study.

The purpose of this investigation was to use semi-structured interviews in order to uncover and describe the perspectives of giftedness, held by teachers who work with hard of hearing and Deaf students and to come to some understanding as to how these teachers come to develop their perspectives. "The central task... becomes to reveal what constitutes reality for the participants in a given situation, to explain how those participants came to view reality in this way" (Barton & Walker, 1978, p. 274 in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 78). The interview, with its interactive directive, can help provide "direct data on the wider spheres of influence" (Denzin, 1978, p. 28) acting on the teachers who are involved on a daily basis with their students. These teachers are at the forefront of the decision-making process in educational settings, yet no one has asked the teachers about their ideas of giftedness, or about their ideas about students who are gifted. This research gives teachers an opportunity to share their own knowledge.

As Larsson (1987) suggests, the "use" of such findings can be of two kinds. First, it can be part of a description of an important subculture in our society. The description which arises from the interviews of teachers of hard of hearing and Deaf students will be the first of its' kind in the field. Second, Larsson continues...

...we argue that the described variation can be reflected upon by teachers or student teachers. Their thinking can be broadened as a consequence and they can become aware of new conceptions. In some cases this can mean both a new attitude to their professional world and an improvement of their understanding of other perspectives. In some cases this has an impact on teachers' actions of the kind that (can be described) as a reflexive conception of educational change... (p. 37).
The specific research questions.

Two main research questions guided the interviews and subquestions were generated from the main questions.

A. What constitutes knowledge regarding giftedness among teachers of hard of hearing and Deaf students?

1. What does the concept or term mean to the teachers?
2. What is involved in the use of the label gifted?
3. What are the differences in the perspectives that the teachers hold?
4. What are the shared meanings that teachers hold?
5. In practical terms, how does teachers’ knowledge of their gifted students relate to how they see their students’ needs being met?

B. What is the process involved in gaining perspectives about giftedness?

1. What, in the context of the educational system, helps account for teachers’ perspectives of giftedness?
2. What enables teachers to know students as being gifted or not gifted?
3. What is the role of encounters with gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students in shaping perspectives and making meaning?
4. What is the role of theoretical knowledge in shaping perspectives and making meaning?

Significance of the Study

Given the sparseness of the literature on gifted students who also have hearing losses, this study will first and most importantly serve to provide a descriptive base yielding new information about this population. There have been some programs established for gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students in the United States and there have been a few investigations into how schools should best go about identifying these students by formal means. There is no research, however, which investigates what teachers’ ideas are about these students, or what teachers really mean when they talk
about gifted students. Whitmore & Maker (1985) have published the one case study that was done with a man who has a profound hearing loss and who is also gifted. The stories that the teachers tell about their students then, will provide new descriptions of gifted hard of hearing and Deaf students, in the context of their educational settings.

In hearing the stories of these teachers, about the students they teach, we may begin to reach some important understandings of why the students appear to be gifted and of the factors in each of their individual lives which appear to help or hinder the development of their talents.

From the teacher's perspective, there is a need to investigate this phenomenon, because much of the literature on gifted students in the general population indicates that these students have special needs and that they are not being served. If our field is not serving the brightest students adequately, we are not doing our part in meeting the needs of our students and providing them with opportunities to achieve to the very best of their abilities. Teachers' own understandings of giftedness will affect the way they deal with gifted students. It is critical that these understandings be discovered and brought to our awareness so that, in turn, our programming efforts might be more effective.

Considerations for the Reading of this Study

This investigation uncovered the perspectives of teachers who are working with Deaf and hard of hearing students. These perspectives were collected through the use of interviews which were semi-structured and which were conducted with the belief that each of the teachers had his or her own reality to share. It was expected that these multiple realities on a given topic, that of giftedness, would provide information on the differences that teachers see as they come to understand what giftedness means to them.

No attempt was made to "verify" statements made by the teachers about the students. The teachers of course were asked to check through their own transcripts for meaning clarification and to make any changes, but their own perspectives are the core of this study.
As a researcher, I am totally responsible for any interpretation that has been made in the context of making sense of all the hundreds of pages of data. It must be remembered that “we are always making inferences on the basis of partial information.” (Mishler, 1986, p. 247). The teachers did not tell me all of what they know; they chose to tell me only what seemed to be important to them at the time.

The participants in this study came from a broad range of different experiences and as a result, were able to provide differing perspectives. All of the teachers in this study had worked with students they believed to be gifted; teachers who have not worked with gifted students with hearing losses may well have different perspectives. The more we explore differences in people’s ideas, the better understanding we might have of how teachers come to make sense of their every day lives as they interact with students.

**Organization of the Study**

In Chapter 1, the background to the study in terms of giftedness and disability has been addressed. The problem has been stated, along with the purpose and significance of the study. The questions and sub-questions have been outlined and an overview of the study with considerations for the reader have been presented.

Chapter 2 serves two main purposes. The first is to provide the reader with background information and pertinent issues related to the field of deafness. The second purpose is to provide the reader with the background from the literature which provided initial support for the main areas of this investigation. The literature on the giftedness concept outlines the problems associated with the lack of clear definition for the meaning of the term and briefly reviews dimensions of the concept. The literature which deals with handicapped gifted is then reviewed, followed by a review of literature for hard of hearing and Deaf students who are gifted. The chapter concludes with a review of some of the literature that supports research related to teachers’ perspectives and knowledge.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical perspective contained in the methodology. Part one deals with the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study, along with its
emphasis on the phenomenographic perspective. The second part goes on to describe in
detail the methods and procedures used to carry out the investigation into teachers'
perspectives of giftedness.

Chapter 4 provides the reader with an overview of this study, in terms of both
content and structure for presentation. A diagram illustrates how teachers might come to
develop their ideas about giftedness in their students and where new understandings
might emerge during that process. The second part of the chapter, introduces and
describes the perspectives of two teachers who exemplify the process.

Chapter 5 presents an introduction to each of the remaining ten teachers and their
students, as told in story form by the teachers themselves. The teachers' descriptions
provide the reader with understandings of these students in the context of their home and
school lives. The stories are reported using the words of the teachers themselves.

Chapter 6 describes and interprets the teachers' understandings of giftedness. The
teachers have expressed their understandings in two ways. The thematic analysis
described in the first part of this chapter, comes from the stories the teachers told about
their students, as they watched them achieving, behaving and learning in their classrooms.
These three areas are described in full. This interpretation incorporates references to the
existing literature on characteristics of giftedness among the general population. The
chapter closes with a section which details how the teachers see these students meeting
the challenges of having hearing losses and being gifted.

The second part of Chapter 6 describes the teachers' more theoretical orientations to
the concept as they reflect upon what giftedness means to them. Literature which
describes the viewpoints of 17 different theorists is then described and the chapter
concludes with a comparison of the teachers’ and the theorists’ perspectives.

Chapters 7 and 8 are different from the preceding chapters, in that they have more to
do with teachers' ways of knowing about the students in their classrooms. Throughout
the interviews teachers appeared to use the act of comparing in order to better understand
their students and for purposes of this study, to clarify their meanings of giftedness. This way of becoming informed is described in Chapter 7. In contrast, Chapter 8 deals with the issue of labeling, a practice that is common in special education, but one which does not appear to inform these teachers in any meaningful way. Both of these issues permeated the interviews and provided important findings to this study.

Chapter 8 also presents an overview and example of how each individual teacher's ideas about the issue of labeling contributed an additional understanding to the larger picture; each teacher's individual knowledge added something different to the labeling issue as a whole. The teachers' comments throughout this chapter have also been referenced to the original text which can be found in Appendix B.

Chapter 9 discusses new understandings which have emerged from the interviews with the teachers and presents implications for educational practice and for research.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature in this study has been used selectively in four different ways. First, in Chapter 1, it served to “nest” (Wolcott, 1990) the problem which introduced the research. In Chapter 2 it serves two main purposes. In the first section, the purpose is to provide the reader with background and information related specifically to educational issues related to teachers who serve students with hearing losses and begins by providing definitions of common terms. The impact of hearing loss has many ramifications and these will certainly affect teachers' perspectives of giftedness among this population of students. The second part of Chapter 2, the purpose of the literature is to cover topics which arise directly from the research questions. These topics provide the conceptual framework for the study and have to do with the meaning of the term “gifted” itself and literature related directly to giftedness, disability and hearing impairment. Background for the importance of gaining an understanding of teachers’ perspectives is also presented. The literature in these sections reveals the general focus and nature of prior inquiry and indicates discrepancies and gaps in the literature. The literature in subsequent chapters is used in a fourth way; it is examined in light of the findings which emerged from the interview with the participants. Using this literature in consort with the analysis of the data provides clarification and understanding of the phenomenon as it is presented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Locke et al, 1987; Wolcott, 1990).

Background Issues in Deafness

Teachers of Deaf and hard of hearing students face many demanding challenges as they enter this interesting and varied profession and these challenges are the results of at least three major issues: the types, causes and onset of hearing loss, the different modes of communication used by Deaf and hard of hearing people and the service delivery models
which are in place in Canada. Prior to 1950 people with hearing losses had also been viewed as intellectually inferior to hearing people and since the handicapped-gifted literature claims that, in some cases, this erroneous assumption still exists, a brief overview of findings related to deafness and cognitive functioning will also be presented. First, however, it is necessary to define some terms as they are used in this study.

**Definition of terms.**

**Deaf:** In this research, the term Deaf has been used to indicate those people who are members of the Deaf community. As such, they are for the most part users of a visual language for communication, that of American Sign Language (ASL).

**deaf:** This term, without the capital D, is used when referring to the degree of hearing loss that a person might have. It is usually used in conjunction with the terms “severely” or “profoundly,” in order to signify the degree of loss. A person with a severe loss would have a 70 - 89dB loss; a person with a profound loss would have a loss greater than 90db.

**Hard of Hearing:** The term hard of hearing is used to refer to those people who are primarily dependent upon the use of audition, speech and speechreading for communication. English (or another auditory-verbal language) is usually their primary language as Rodda and Grove (1987) indicate.

The importance of the terms hard of hearing and deaf is not just audiological; it reflects the fact that there are two distinctly separate ethnic groups with different conceptions of the world at large (Spradley & Spradley, 1978). Hearing people may have difficulty recognizing this fact, but hearing impaired people do not. They clearly know if they are deaf, hard of hearing, hearing or in a state of anomie (belonging to none of these groups and existing in a kind of “nether world”). (p. 42)

**Hearing Impaired:** When this term is used it refers in a global sense to all people who have severe and profound hearing losses, including those who are hard of hearing and those who are Deaf. This term is meant to include people who use ASL, Signed English and/or speech to communicate.
Handicapped: Because of its negative connotations this term is used in this thesis only where discussion centers around the literature which refers to those who are "Handicapped-Gifted." This term is being phased out in special education, but remains as a label of categorization in the literature.

Language: In this study the use of the term language is used as described by Armstrong (in Martin, 1985).

It will be understood broadly to encompass human communication via oral or gestural signs (Peirce, 1955) when such signs have a rule-governed system of organization (syntax) and are used in ordinary discourse and social interaction. This definition would...include such oral/aural languages as English...as well as visual languages such as ASL and written English (as distinct from spoken). It is recognized...that a deaf child may have very poor skills in written or spoken English and yet not be language deficient if a rich background in a signed language exists. (p. 100).

Gender issues: I have attempted to use both male and female pronouns equally throughout the study, except where one refers specifically to a known person.

Types, causes and onset of hearing loss.

Hearing losses may be of three types: conductive, sensory and neural (Boothroyd, 1982). Conductive losses can usually be cured or alleviated by medical treatment whereas sensory-neural losses tend to be permanent. In some cases cochlear implants may be beneficial. The students mentioned in this study all have sensory-neural losses and only one student had an implant.

There are many causes of hearing loss, however and these can impact greatly on the development of students' abilities. Causes can be divided into four major categories: those that are genetic, those caused by disease such as rubella or meningitis, those caused by drugs and those caused by a trauma such as anoxia (Boothroyd, 1982). The educational implications of the cause of deafness are important. Students whose hearing losses are inherited are less likely to have other learning problems, whereas those students who have been affected by disease may have multiple handicaps. Hereditary deafness accounts for approximately 50% of early childhood deafness, but only between 5 and 10% of all deaf children are born to deaf parents (Moores, 1987). In many cases,
however, the etiology is still unknown. Etiology can be an important consideration, however; Deaf children of Deaf parents for example, are generally ahead of their peers in school achievement (Moores, 1987).

Children can acquire hearing losses before, during or after birth. This becomes a critical factor when the development of language is considered. Prelingual deafness refers to the condition of persons whose deafness was present at birth or occurred prior to the development of speech and language. Postlingual deafness refers to the condition of persons whose deafness occurred following the spontaneous acquisition of speech and language (Moores, 1987). It is important to note that “language” as used here refers to the English language, or to any auditory-verbal language. It does not refer to ASL, which is a visual language and is often learned as a first language by Deaf children of signing Deaf parents. In this study, all except one of the students were prelingually deaf; one student had a progressive loss which became total when she was in junior high school.

Different modes of communication.

People with hearing losses use different ways to communicate with the hearing world and with each other. Put simply, two systems of communication predominate in the field: the auditory verbal systems and the manual communication systems. Some people are able to and prefer, to develop speech, speechreading and auditory skills to the level that these become the main form of communication with people who are hearing. Many hard of hearing people fall within this category and some people with profound losses are able to communicate orally. Sanders (1993) provides a succinct picture of how a child may or may not benefit from this method of learning to communicate.

The benefits of effective auditory-oral communication are great. When the method succeeds with a child, the advantages include the ability to function and compete in the hearing world; (and) to take advantage of most of the education, professional and social opportunities that require oral communication; ...Unfortunately such opportunities prove not to be realistic for many persons with severe to profound hearing impairment. When the auditory-oral method cannot provide a viable communication system, the cost is extremely high. The profoundly hearing impaired child receives only a small part and in some cases none, of the rich auditory information in which the hearing child is bathed constantly. The reality of sound, its referential
function and its meaning, rather than being learned naturally, must be taught. ...acquisition through speech perception is slow and laborious. At a concrete level, the child may show progress in naming people and objects, but those language constructs that enable us to acquire abstract thought present an extremely difficult learning task. Since experience, cognition and language processing are symbiotic functions, a child delayed in language necessarily will be impaired in the ability to know and think about the world and himself. (p. 247)

In contrast to auditory verbal methods as described above, many Deaf people use ASL as their main language to communicate with other Deaf people. The use of ASL implies membership in the Deaf community, so although members usually have hearing losses in the severe to profound category, some may have quite mild impairments. ASL is a language system in its own right and is very different from English (Padden, 1980).

Other students are often exposed to and use some form of signed English. This manual form of communication attempts to reflect the exact syntax and structure of the English language and is presented visually at the same time as the spoken word. “This manual English has been formalized into systems such as Seeing Essential English (SEE) (Anthony & Associates, 1971) in which each word is signed, in contrast to the concept signs of AMESLAN (ASL)” (Sanders, p. 251). The signed English systems of communication have been used in schools and programs as part of the philosophy of Total Communication. This philosophy means to provide the child with information using “any of several modes of communication that proves successful in a given situation. Thus speech, natural gestures, fingerspelling and AMESLAN may all be used together with a system of signs” (p. 251). Sanders also reflects on the impact of the manual English systems on the educational outcomes for hard of hearing and Deaf students.

Nearly 20 years of almost universal education of profoundly hearing impaired children by total communication method have now passed—a period during which early diagnosis, fitting of amplification and preschool intervention have reached more and more of these children. Yet, as a population, children with profound hearing deficits remain significantly educationally retarded (Jordan, Gustason & Rosen, 1976). The typically profoundly impaired student today graduates from high school with an average third or fourth grade reading level (Allen, 1986)... Allen maintains that signed English systems therefore, cannot tap into or build upon a natural language. (p. 251)
For this reason, some specialists are now advocating the teaching in infancy of ASL to children and the development of family support systems in order to provide assistance to parents in understanding what deafness might mean for their child.

**Service delivery models**

Canada provides a vast array of educational choices for students who are Deaf and hard of hearing, but students who live in larger centers are much more likely to be able to have access to those facilities (Bibby, in press). It was assumed that in this study, teachers who worked in different settings would also have different experiences which would impact on that teacher’s perspective of giftedness. The information about the settings and experience of the teachers is presented in Table 1, Chapter 3.

The **Schools for the Deaf** in Canada have traditionally been residential, with students living in the dorms. During the past 15 years, however, students whose families do not live in the community live in the dorms only during the week; these students go home or to a foster family for the weekends. Day students, who live at home in the community, also attend these schools. The schools tend to have student enrollments ranging from approximately 80 to 300 (Bibby, in press).

Situations in Schools for the Deaf are changing and it is necessary to explain these changes in order to fully understand the perspectives of the teachers in this study. Eleven of the 12 teachers in this study have taught Deaf and hard of hearing students for over 10 years. When they talk about teaching in a School for the Deaf, one can assume that, for the most part, the philosophy of Total Communication has been in effect. English, therefore, had been the main language of instruction and ASL had been used to communicate as needed in the educational situation. It is also safe to assume that ASL was the social, “outside-the-classroom” language for these students.

During the past five years, there have been Schools for the Deaf that have changed their teaching philosophy from that of Total Communication to a “Bi-Bi” approach. This bilingual-bicultural instructional philosophy fully recognizes the culture of the Deaf.
community and provides classroom instruction in ASL. Because this is a relatively new approach which is now in the process of being formalized in the schools, it is safe to assume that the students named in this study were not exposed to this methodology. The students in this study who attended Schools for the Deaf were most likely educated within the framework of the Total Communication philosophy.

Many public schools provide integrated settings, self-contained classrooms for students with hearing losses. These classrooms are usually staffed by a fully trained teacher of Deaf and hard of hearing students. The students in these classrooms are usually either using oral methods of communication, or they are using a Signed English system in the educational environment. In many cases students within these settings are included in regular classrooms with their hearing peers for academic subjects at different times during the day; placement into the regular stream is dependent upon the individual abilities of each student. In some cases students will use an oral or a sign language interpreter when they are placed with their hearing peers.

There are also educational settings that provide itinerant and consultant services on an individual basis to students integrated into their community schools. These students often receive the services of an itinerant teacher who is a teachers trained to work with Deaf and hard of hearing students. The itinerant teacher provides one-on-one tutoring to the student in the school, with the amount of contact time determined by that student’s individual needs. In most cases, these students are communicating through the use of speech, speech reading and audition, but within the last decade there have been more students who have been placed in these situations with a sign language interpreter. More recently, some programs provide consulting services only, which means that the trained teacher does not usually work with the student; her responsibility is to provide support and information to the classroom teacher.

In summary, the complexities associated with educating Deaf and hard of hearing students are enormous. As teachers enter these varied educational environments, they are
faced with children who are in many ways similar to hearing students; in many ways there are also important differences. A host of other variables come into play when the students have hearing losses and these not only affect students’ school outcomes, but impact greatly on students' interactions with people and how they deal with their lives. Mertens (1989) reviewed the literature concerning school outcomes for Deaf and hard of hearing students and categorized those variables uniquely associated with this group of students. They are listed as follows:

1. Family background characteristics (e.g., hearing status of parents; communication mode used in the home)
2. Subject background characteristics (e.g., age of hearing loss, cause of loss, communication skills, degree of loss, presence of additional handicaps)
3. School or school district conditions (e.g., size of hearing impaired student enrollment, expenditure for hearing impaired programs, support services provided)
4. Within school conditions (e.g., hearing impaired student-teacher ratio, process of making student placement decisions)
5. Instructional personnel characteristics (e.g., signing ability, training and experience in working with deaf students)
6. Student attitudes (e.g., impulsivity, attitude toward communication, internal/external control)
7. Student placement (e.g., residential school, day school with self-contained classes, mainstreamed classes)
8. Instructional personnel performance by both teachers and interpreters (e.g., sign mode used)
9. Family support variables (e.g., adaptation to deafness, family involvement/interaction, expectations). (p. 827)

Deaf and hard of hearing people do indeed form a heterogeneous population.

Deafness and cognitive functioning

In spite of and perhaps because of the many variables listed above, teachers generally do not question the fact that people with hearing losses are just as capable as those without. They recognize the difficulties imposed by the loss of hearing, but seldom question the intellectual abilities of the students. Research supports the fact that there appear to be no differences in the cognitive capacities for learning, remembering, thinking and language and that these capacities are not distributed differently from those in hearing people (Bellugi, 1991; Martin, 1991; Rosenstein, 1961; Vernon, 1967). There is no doubt however, that there exist “symbiotic functions” (Sanders, 1993) in the
interplay of experience, cognition and language or, as Marschark & Clark (1993) suggest, "among the cognitive, linguistic and social environments in which deaf children are immersed" (p.22). The following discussion is meant to provide for the reader a brief sketch of some points which serve as important background for this research.

Moores (1987), in a chapter summary on deafness and cognitive functioning states unequivocally that...

...the available evidence suggests that the condition of deafness imposes no limitations on the cognitive capabilities of individuals. There is no evidence to suggest that deaf persons think in more "concrete” ways than the hearing or that their intellectual functioning is in any way less sophisticated. As a group, deaf people function within the normal range of intelligence and deaf individuals exhibit the same wide variability as the hearing population. (p. 164).

Work by Rodda and Grove (1987) confirms these findings. They suggest that in many aspects of cognitive skill deaf respondents are equal to or even superior to hearing respondents. If scores appear to be low, they are more inclined to blame other external factors, such as reduced social communication, poorer reading skills and less exposure to educational experiences. These are not factors which are the primary result of having a hearing loss. They often accompany deafness, but are not inevitable consequences of being deaf. Although Rodda & Grove (1987) conclude that “the cognitive abilities of deaf children, students and adults are essentially normal” (p. 183), they also note that in two specific areas, short-term memory storage and English language skill, deaf subjects consistently score below hearing controls. They ascribe this performance of deaf students to a specific effect resulting from their inability to hear, “a disability that can be overcome by the use of alternative visual coding strategies” (p. 183). Wolff (1985) also suggests that differences in scores are often due to such factors as linguistic competencies and secondary handicaps.

Moores (1987) notes the fact that many investigations which deal with people who have hearing losses are very prejudiced. Often, tests that are developed for hearing children have been used for those with hearing losses; experimenters have limited or non-
existent abilities to communicate with deaf children and investigators often hold
expectations of lowered performance as they begin their studies. Conrad (1979) has in
fact termed these expectations of low performance "the generalized deficiency
hypothesis." In spite of these rather incredible obstacles, research results are now arguing
in favor of similarities and comparability between deaf and hearing populations
(Marschark, 1993).

Historically, perceptions of the intellectual functioning of Deaf and hard of hearing
individuals has changed over the years and Moores (1987) describes these changes in
terms of three stages. Stage One is characterized by research which saw deaf people as
inferior intellectually; researchers in stage two saw deaf people as qualitatively different,
and those in stage three recognize people who are deaf as being intellectually normal. In
stage one, Pintner & Patterson (1917) recognized cognitive deficits in terms of lower
visual memory for the deaf than for the hearing, and later (Pintner, Eisenson & Stanton,
1941) suggested that deaf people were intellectually inferior in intelligence, demonstrated
by IQ scores that were ten points lower on the average than those for hearing people. In
contrast, later work by Vernon (1968, 1969) showed that both deaf and hearing people
showed the same distribution on intelligence tests.

In Stage Two, the deaf were seen not as inferior in intelligence, but as qualitatively
different, in that they were unable to think abstractly; they were seen to be more
"concrete" in their intellectual functioning (Myklebust, 1964; Myklebust & Brutton,
1953). Myklebust's "organismic shift hypothesis" (1964) characterized this period
(Marschark, 1993).

In Stage Three, deaf people were finally seen to be intellectually normal. Martin
(1985) notes that it is a well accepted fact that when using performance rather than verbal
IQ tests, people with hearing losses show a normal range of intelligence.

stage were instrumental in that he reasoned that the poorer performance of deaf
individuals on some Piagetian tasks might be explained either by a lack of general experience or by specific task conditions that favored linguistic habits. He also brought the work of Piaget to the awareness of educators of deaf children. His work contributed to a changing view of deafness that moved perspectives away from the traditional view of seeing individuals on the basis of deficiency or deviancy. He asserted that the majority of deaf individuals get along adequately in the world in spite of the educational obstacles they face and in spite of the prejudices that they encounter. His positive approach to searching for strengths and giving learning to think priority over language instruction greatly influenced teaching methodology. Furth did not deny the importance of language, but he did also emphasize the importance of experience in concrete situations as a way to help the developing mind.

Paul & Jackson (1993) suggest, however, that some of Furth's assumptions must be questioned in light of today's research. Furth believed, for example, that deaf people typically do not know much language; although his overall attitude was favorable to Total Communication methods, he still assumed a lack of language in some fundamental sense (Rodda & Grove, 1987). This statement does not take into account the importance of the nature and functioning of sign language. In addition, Furth (1964) suggests that deaf persons fall short at the formal operative level of intellectual functioning. As mentioned above, Moores' own reviews of the literature suggest that reasons for the poor performance may have more to do with the experimenters' inability to communicate effectively with their subjects (p. 160).

In summary, the research to date agrees that the great difficulty encountered by deaf children in academic subject matter is most likely not caused by cognitive deficiencies. It is recognized that English language abilities and reading scores are generally found to be much lower for students with hearing losses, but this is not seen to be an indicator of lower intellectual functioning. Researchers are beginning to adopt a "contextual/interactionist model" (Clark, 1993) of development which recognizes the
reciprocity between deaf individuals and the worlds in which they live. Many of the causes of learning difficulties among hard of hearing and deaf people are seen to be external to the individual and as educators, we must concern ourselves with giving focus to both the cognitive strengths of the students and to their ongoing interactive environments.

Framing the Research Question

The following section will provide the reader with the framework which served to guide the research for this project. This literature came from four substantive areas: literature relating to the giftedness construct, literature relating to students who are gifted and handicapped, literature relating to students who have hearing losses and who are gifted and literature concerning teachers’ perspectives and knowledge. As is common in qualitative research, (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) much of this literature will be re-examined in light of the findings from this investigation and will be incorporated into the chapters that describe those findings. In addition, new literature related to the findings that does not appear in this section of the thesis, will be explored and incorporated as it relates to the issues and themes which emerge from the data (Locke et al, 1987; Wolcott, 1990). This section then, provides the background which supports the areas of focus for this research: the meanings of giftedness; the literature on disability and giftedness; the literature on hearing impairment and giftedness and the importance of teachers’ perspectives.

The Giftedness Construct

Hoge’s (1989) article entitled An Examination of the Giftedness Construct provides a framework for an investigation of the understandings given to the term “gifted.” Written from the perspective of a psychologist and a theorist, the article served a central role in supporting the rationale for this study. In many ways, it validated my own feelings of confusion about the meanings of the term and encouraged me to seek some clarification from the teachers.
Thirty five years ago, Getzels and Jackson (1958) raised questions related to the concept of giftedness. At that time, the meaning was frequently related to a score on an intelligence test, and they suggested that this presented a very narrow view. Hoge notes that “their paper represented primarily a call for an expanded definition of the giftedness construct” (p. 4).

Hoge (1989) discusses issues relevant to the giftedness construct and the existing variability in definitions. Recognizing that we are not dealing with a unitary and universally accepted construct, Hoge lists and explains five major dimensions on which these terms differ in the existing literature. The first three dimensions concern the breadth of qualities and traits as being narrow (Torrance’s (1965) ideas of creativity) or broad (Renzulli, 1986), the nature of the qualities as being, for example, cognitive, motivational or creative, and the level of excellence as evidenced by a cutoff score on an IQ test of, for example, 130.

The fourth dimension of variability concerns the extent to which the conceptualization incorporates a static or a dynamic view of the characteristics. In the case of narrowly derived cognitive performance, (IQ scores) we might be dealing with “a bright child who will be bright for all time and under all circumstances” (p. 8). At the other end of the spectrum is the child who has potential which may or may not develop. This nature/nurture issue (Maker, 1977) may be especially critical for those dealing with young children who are seen to be gifted. As Lewis and Louis (1991) suggest, a central question for this age group becomes: “Do gifted preschoolers become gifted children and adults or do they eventually level off?” (p. 373). This static or dynamic view may also have an impact on who is labeled gifted: those who demonstrate achievement, or those who demonstrate potential for achievement? (L. Silverman in Maker, 1986).

Hoge’s (1989) fifth dimension of variability concerns the precision with which the elements of the construct should be explicitly stated; those elements should be linked to specific measuring operations and data should be presented on the validity of the
construct (Messick, 1980; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). Hoge gives as an example, a definition that is global and vague (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1984): The exceptional pupil is...

...a pupil whose behavioral, communicational, intellectual, physical, or multiple exceptionalities are such that he is considered to need placement in a special education program... (giftedness is) an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated (p. 9).

These differing dimensions of the giftedness construct play an important role in what is actually done in schools. A teacher who views giftedness as an inherent trait may be more determined to encourage students who have high IQs and less likely to encourage those who do not. If one views a gifted learner as someone who does something faster, or more, the focus may be on acceleration; if one views a gifted student as one who learns things differently, then the focus will be on finding unique ways to teach (Borland, 1978). “Each definition leads to different interpretations of a qualitatively different curriculum” (Maker, 1986b, p. 323).

The label is not value free and people’s construction of meaning is on-going. Maker (1986a) suggests that, at a national level, there may be a tendency to view gifted students as a national resource; the special education perspective views gifted children as having the right to develop their potential. In terms of society’s values, “Yesterday’s context could very likely not be valid for defining tomorrow’s giftedness” (Borland, 1978 p. 326).

Both Maker (1986a) and Hoge (1988) have expressed some concern over the variability of the giftedness construct. Maker is caught in the quest for “the best defensible program” for gifted students to “enable education to make a better case for the provision of special services” (p. 326). Hoge accepts that variability exists, that it will continue to exist and that it is not necessarily undesirable.

...definitions of the gifted construct should flow from assumptions and values respecting the needs of children and of the most effective programming for meeting those needs. These assumptions and values are likely to vary from
one setting to another, and, hence, alternative formulations of the giftedness construct are inevitable. There is, however, one point on which there can be no compromise: ...if children are going to be labeled “gifted,” it is essential to understand what the label denotes (Hoge, 1989, p. 11).

Meanings given to the term “gifted” appear to be fluid and change within contexts. The idea seems to be complementary to the reality of the education system to which Heshusius (1982) refers when she talks about teachers and pupils interacting as “open systems, non-linear, unpredictable, and complex.” It is to that classroom environment, the world of teachers and students, that we now turn.

The Literature on "Handicapped-Gifted" Students

In spite of and perhaps because of, the complexity of the construct of giftedness, there now exists an extensive literature on giftedness among the general population. In every area where children are dealing with special challenges there exists a separate literature which attends to their unique needs and characteristics. There is a large literature on deafness for example, as there is with other areas such as learning disabilities and physical disabilities. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study, the combined focus on and literature related to those who are both gifted and who have a disability, however, has emerged only in the last 15 years.

Although the category “handicapped-gifted” is officially recognized it is unfortunate that the term “handicapped” is used in its title, because in the 1990s it is outdated; there is more willingness to use the term disabled. The use of the term is being called into question by today’s advocates of people’s rights. It is more appropriate to be bringing into focus the strengths of those individuals who have hearing losses or visual problems or who are physically challenged. Our concept of what is the “norm” is being challenged, as it becomes more critical for our society to accept the differences that each of us brings to our communities.

For the purposes of this section of this chapter, however, the term will be used because it is in use in all the existing literature and because it indicates that there are a
unique group of people who are dually challenged. These are the minorities within the minorities. The chapter on labeling in this document more clearly discusses the "pros and cons" of this issue as they are seen by teachers who are working in the field with students who have hearing losses.

**Definition.**

Yewchuk and Bibby (1989b) and Yewchuk and Lupart (in press) provide a comprehensive description of issues related to "gifted handicapped" individuals. A gifted child with sensory or physical disabilities must meet the criteria which have been established for both populations. For giftedness, the standard is that which was established by Marland (1972) where demonstration of potential for high abilities in one of several areas is a prerequisite to being given the gifted label. The child must also be classified as hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, orthopedically impaired, or health impaired (Marland, 1972). Children with learning disabilities are also now included in this group. In Canada, both gifted students and those with disabilities are eligible for special funding when identification procedures indicate that their needs cannot be met in regular classrooms without special services. Because of the variety of handicapping conditions and the multifaceted aspects of currently employed definitions of giftedness, a variety of individuals with different profiles of strengths and weaknesses may be defined as handicapped gifted learners.

**Incidence.**

Various estimates of the incidence of handicapped giftedness range from a conservative 2% of all handicapped children in the United States, or between 120,000 and 180,000 (Schnur & Stefanich, 1979), to a more liberal 5% or between 300,000 and 540,000 (Whitmore & Maker, 1985). These estimates assume that the incidence of giftedness among the handicapped population is similar to that within the general population. In Illinois, Mauser (1980) found 2.3% of learning disabled children to be intellectually gifted and in Alberta, Bibby and Yewchuk (1987) found 5.5% of Deaf and
hard of hearing children to be intellectually gifted as determined by scores on non-verbal intelligence tests. A thorough discussion of the literature on gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students is presented in the next section of this chapter. If the Canadian population of disabled children is proportional to that of the United States, then total incidence in Canada is probably between 12,000 and 54,000, the vast majority of whom have not been identified as being gifted (Yewchuk & Bibby, 1989b).

Identification, nomination and referral.

Issues relating to the abilities of teachers to recognize giftedness, especially among those students who have a disability, have been discussed at length in Chapter 1. Since teachers are directly involved in the process of teaching these students and since, in general, their ability to identify these students has been found to be lacking, the research has strongly supported the need for inservice training. There is, however, no research which has directly questioned these teachers about how they see their students and why they may or may not “correctly” identify those who are gifted.

Identification of gifted handicapped children is, in any case, fraught with difficulty. It has been shown that the same screening and multifaceted data collection procedures used with gifted children in general produce the best results (Whitmore & Maker, 1985; Yewchuk & Bibby, 1989c), although special concessions are required for each area of handicap (Pendarvis & Grossi, 1980). Children with hearing losses, for example, are given nonverbal tests such as the WISCR or III performance scale and the Leiter International Performance Scale, to judge intellectual potential. Other testing considerations such as mode of communication and the experience of the examiner must also be taken into account (Moores, 1987).

Johnson and Corn (1989) report that, since Whitmore’s review in 1981 which called the investigation of gifted children with handicaps a new frontier, “fewer than 10 articles have been written about these students. In addition, few papers addressing the needs of this special population have been presented at national conventions. For example, at the
1988 Annual Convention of the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC), only one session focused on the gifted handicapped” (p. 15). Johnson and Corn, however, don't include articles on learning disabled and gifted children since this focus is on those with serious physical handicaps. These same authors do credit the National Theater of the Deaf with giving increased visibility to people with handicaps who are gifted. In fact, more actors with various disabilities are being seen in major roles in mainstream movies and television series. In spite of the achievements of these people, however, gifted children with sensory and physical disabilities are said to be underserved within the school system (Johnson & Corn, 1989; Shore et al, 1991).

The Literature on Hard of Hearing and Deaf Students Who Are Gifted

The extant literature dealing with Deaf and hard of hearing gifted students consists of 11 articles, one book chapter and one thesis, in addition to six articles recently published by my colleague Carolyn Yewchuk and myself. Even though this appears to be more than Johnson and Corn (1989) suggest, the literature is still sparse. This could be a reflection of several conditions: (a) that not much is being done to identify or to serve these students; (b) that something is being done to identify and serve these students but that dissemination of information about what is happening is a low priority among educators of Deaf and hard of hearing students; or (c) that other concerns such as the debate regarding ASL and Signed English are overshadowing the field.

Many of the papers discuss more than one area, but the following review is organized around the following themes which relate specifically to Deaf and hard of hearing students:


(2) Descriptions of programs and practices (Fleury, MacNeil, & Pflaum, 1981; Krahe, 1984; Solomon, 1981)
(3) Surveys of programs for gifted students with hearing losses (Gamble, 1985; Sarnecky & Michaud, 1979) and

(4) Discussions or investigations of general or specific characteristics and needs of gifted students (Maker, 1981; Murphy-Berman, Witters & Harding, 1985; Whitmore & Maker, 1985; Yewchuk & Bibby, 1988b, 1989a).

One general statement with regard to definition can be made before we review the literature. The evidence suggests that for the most part the definitions for gifted students who also have hearing losses, are based upon Marland's 1972 report to Congress (Yewchuk & Bibby, 1989b) where gifted and talented children were defined as...

...those with exceptional abilities in the areas of general intellectual ability, specific academic ability, creative and productive thinking, leadership, visual and performing arts and psychomotor ability (Marland Report, 1972).

Marland's (1972) definition is often used as a standard. The School for the Deaf in Texas, for example, uses the state's definition which was changed somewhat to emphasize the often uneven profiles these children present and to emphasize potential as well as performance or achievement. The gifted student is:

...a student who, by virtue of outstanding mental abilities is capable of high performance. The student may demonstrate, singly or in combination, above-average achievement or potential in such areas as general intellectual ability, specific subject matter aptitude, ability in creative and productive thinking and leadership ability... (Texas Education Code, Section 16.501 in Pollard & Howze, 1981).

Definitions from the literature cited below which are applied to hard of hearing and Deaf children are based on local state definitions for hearing students (Gamble, 1985; Texas Report, 1980) or program criteria for entry which often required IQ scores or performance measures (Krahe, 1984; Murphy-Berman, Witters & Harding 1985; Whiting et al., 1980; ). Some authors do not offer definitions in their writing (Fleury et al., 1981; Hadary & Cohen, 1979; Solomon, 1981).

Identification procedures.

Material published by the Texas School for the Deaf (Pollard & Howze, 1981) is the most comprehensive and the most involved in its treatment of identification procedures.
Having been given a large financial grant and working over three years, the School
developed a complicated but statistically valid set of guidelines for identifying the gifted
student, all of which related to testing criteria. In the first stages of the project,
researchers obtained over 70 test scores on 539 children and through procedures
involving factor analysis established specific identification guidelines.

Informal procedures, ratings and nominations were also used to identify these
students. Criteria for identifying giftedness in the visual and performing arts were also
developed. In their conclusions, the authors state that, “A student’s TAG Index scores and
results from the visual and performing arts procedure should supplement rather than
substitute for common sense, personal knowledge and professional judgment. ...The TSD-
TAG Identification Procedure represents the best selection procedure existing at this time
for identifying talented and gifted deaf students” (p. 19). It also appears to be the most
complicated.

Yewchuk and Bibby (1989b) initially used teacher and parent nominations to
identify gifted students. Teachers were asked to use four forms, one of which was The
Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students, (SRBCSS)
(Renzulli, Smith, White, Callahan, & Hartman, 1976). Consisting of 10 scales with a total
of 95 items, this is the most extensive of its kind and one of the few normed measures of
giftedness available. The items were derived from a comprehensive review of the
literature on characteristics of superior students. For an item to be included on the
SRBCSS, the characteristic it represented had to have been recognized as important in at
least three separate studies (Barbe & Renzulli, 1981). The SRBCSS was chosen because
it is the most detailed in breadth and depth. It indicated performance on ten different
scales: leadership, motivation, learning, creativity, artistic, musical, dramatics,
communication-precision, communication-expression and planning.
The other three forms completed by the teachers were:

(a) Rating Gifted Students, a 15 item instrument used by the public school in Edmonton as a screening tool to identify academically gifted students.

(b) Teacher Observational Items (Pledgie, 1982), a 7 item questionnaire intended as an initial screening tool to identify gifted handicapped students. After examining checklists and lists of characteristics pertaining to four groups of children: the gifted, culturally diverse gifted, disadvantaged -gifted and handicapped gifted, Pledgie selected the seven behaviors common to all four groups; and

(c) Nomination Form for Potentially Gifted Students, a nine-item questionnaire that was developed in an effort to identify gifted students who might otherwise be missed by group testing; that is, those who underachieve, exhibit disruptive, withdrawn and/or other deviant behavior. In addition to the data supplied by the teacher, parents were asked to use a form called “The Parent Nomination Form,” which was in use in the public school system and adapted from Martinson (1974).

The second major phase of our research, however, then tended to focus on those students who were intellectually gifted, whose IQ scores fell above the 90th percentile on performance IQ tests.

Conclusions from this study indicated that several measures, including IQ scores, should be used to identify Deaf and hard of hearing students who might be gifted. In addition, both parents and teachers should be involved in the process. Parent nominations, teachers nominations and IQ scores all appeared “to provide important sources of information” (p. 46).

Identification criteria for two other studies had a different emphasis because of the placement decisions being made for the students. Whiting, Anderson and Ward (1980) described a situation whereby the students participated in a program that had been set up for gifted hearing students. The criteria for identification were the same as those used for hearing students in the State of California: “Identification of mentally gifted is based on
an examination of all pertinent evidence as to a pupil’s general intellectual ability and verified by a score within the top 2% on an individually administered intelligence test” (p. 27). Nominations and a screening procedure were also used.

In a brief description of the American University program developed in Washington DC, Hadery, Cohen and Haushalter (1979) discuss their in-the-classroom attempts to establish criteria for identification based on observable measures in science and thinking skills. In the area of science, they “are developing a series of observational measures adapted to handicapped children to find the ones with high ability.” They go on to explain that they “plan to examine what children do in a given complex situation, identifying characteristics of behavior that show more powerful problem-solving strategies than other characteristic behaviors” (p. 40).

In summary, it appears that identification procedures for Deaf and hard of hearing students have been similar to those for hearing students. Multifaceted methods, which use IQ scores, achievement ratings, nomination forms and observations are being used. Identification of gifted students who have hearing losses also comes from people with varied backgrounds—parents, teachers and psychologists. It is interesting to note that both the Texas identification procedures and those used by Yewchuk and Bibby (1989c) were extremely time consuming and fairly expensive.

**Description of programs and practices.**

Some of the literature has been written for teachers who are interested in issues related specifically to programming needs of Deaf and hard of hearing students who are also gifted. Krahe’s (1984) students were integrated with hearing gifted students in a summer program. Her descriptive account outlines the Pegasus Project for the Hearing Impaired which was developed in conjunction with a program at the University of California Campus. Their Project Explore! UCI “was selected because it is an academic and cultural enrichment program with courses designed to stimulate complex thinking and problem-solving behaviors in high-achieving, gifted, motivated or capable under-
achieving students and this program seemed to meet the identified needs of an unserved segment of the hearing impaired population” (p. 590). Nine students, seven using total communication and two who were oral, all between the ages of 11-15, were chosen to participate in the project.

The students attended courses for a three and a half week summer session and the program was rated as “a highly successful project.” Evaluation was informal, being done by questionnaires, observations and comments by persons working with and observing the program (Krahe, 1984, p. 592). The greatest weakness that was demonstrated by the PPHI students was in the area of written language. Krahe concludes that:

...the intelligence that is demonstrated, the high levels of cognitive engagement with material, the creativity and the developed language skills, all present a unique capability in a small segment of the hearing impaired population that can best be met by people trained to work with gifted individuals in combination with those knowledgeable about hearing impairment (p. 593).

Solomon (1981) too addresses instructional issues when she describes in detail how she used videotaping as a teaching technique to enhance the learning program she used with her five, 8-10 year olds who were gifted. Unfortunately, we have no other information on these students or how they had been identified, but Solomon presents a description of the children’s positive reactions to the use of the video sessions.

In a similar vein, Fleury, MacNeil and Pflaum (1981) provide an in-depth description of the kinds of media designs that are most beneficial to meeting the unique needs of gifted students with hearing losses. They say that these students “need to be challenged in developing advanced cognitive abilities to acquire competencies at an accelerated rate, to integrate large amounts of information and to independently explore specific areas of interest” (p. 15). They go on to say that gifted and talented students should “become active participants in their education and be encouraged to be creators, not just passive learners” (p.16). They provide a fairly thorough description of the characteristics of gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students and then focus their attention on how innovative media designs can be created to effectively meet the needs of the
students. The article does not deal with definitions of giftedness or with criteria for identification. Both Fleury and MacNeil have been involved in teaching gifted students who have hearing losses; Pflaum appears to be the media expert.

These articles offer worthwhile suggestions for implementing programs for students who are gifted and who have hearing losses. The students are able to take a part in programs for hearing students and creative teachers can learn to provide stimulating and creative environments. The reported studies are, however, brief and somewhat sparse in content. There is a need for a strong research base which will assist in developing programs which take into account the multiplicity of contextual factors that impact on each student.

**Survey of programs.**

Work by Gamble (1985), is one of the most extensive investigations into the state of gifted programs for Deaf and hard of hearing students. It is discussed in detail because it provides the only demographic information of its kind in this field. Gamble used questionnaires to determine the number and characteristics of programs available in the United States to intellectually and academically gifted Deaf and hard of hearing school-age individuals. A quantitative assessment of the characteristics of the reported programs for the gifted was made according to what experts in the field consider to be ideal characteristics of successful programs and the data were also analyzed to determine whether parental hearing status was a factor affecting the incidence rate of giftedness among hearing impaired students. Returned questionnaires came from 44 of the 62 residential schools in the United States, 8 of the 15 day programs and 31 of the 53 county special education programs. No attempt was made to collect data on isolated attempts to individualize instruction in schools without gifted programs. The findings are briefly reported below.

1. There are at least 16 programs serving gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students in the United States. The 16 reported represented six residential schools for the
deaf, six county special education programs accessible to students with hearing losses and four day schools.

2. The incidence rate for giftedness among Deaf and hard of hearing students was found to be 4.2% which was consistent with other rates of 3 to 5% among the general population (Marland, 1972). A total of 134 Deaf and hard of hearing students were identified as gifted and being served in the 16 reported programs. Fifty-six percent of those reported were male and 44% were female. Gamble appears to obtain that incidence rate from those who were actually enrolled in programs and who have, therefore, been identified.

The total number of Deaf and hard of hearing students in all the schools that returned the survey was 3,183.

Later in the report, Gamble (1985) indicates that 877 of these students were “identified as gifted or believed to be gifted.” (p.512). If those identified (877) were all found to be gifted, then the actual incidence rate would be around 27.5%. This seems to be excessively high and would tend to indicate over-identification.

3. The incidence rate for giftedness among Deaf students having two deaf parents is eight times as high as would normally be expected. A total of 24% of the identified students, or 32, came from families with two deaf parents.

Gamble (1985) obtains these figures by referring to findings by Rawlings and Jensema (1977) which indicated that 3% of deaf children have two deaf parents, 6% have one deaf parent and 91% come from families with one or two normally hearing parents. He concludes:

Given these figures, it would be expected that only four of the gifted students reported in this study would come from families having two deaf parents. In fact, there were eight times that many (32) reported. (p. 150)

It is interesting to note that Johnson and Corn (1989) later highlight this finding, saying that “One might conclude that, with early intervention, a higher estimate of the incidence of giftedness in the hearing impaired population could be more accurate” (p. 16).
Unfortunately they failed to see that these children were probably among those “believed to be gifted” and not from those having been formally identified as gifted.

4. The gifted programs used identification measures which included the WISC-R Performance Scale, with the average intelligence quotient criterion score being 123, with a range of 112 to 132. Teacher nomination and the Stanford Achievement Test-Hearing Impaired were the most frequent measures for specific academic aptitude. Six of the 15 program supervisors responding indicated that no operational definition was included in their program. Eight of the remaining nine included a definition used in their individual state’s definitions.

5. County gifted education programs accessible to students with hearing losses included more key features of successful programs than either the residential or day schools reported in this study.

6. Only 15% of all gifted Deaf and hard of hearing school-age students reported in the study were enrolled in special programs for the gifted. These percentages are confusing again, however, because Gamble uses the 877 number in his figuring. “From a total of 877 hearing impaired students identified as gifted or believed to be gifted, only 134 are reportedly being provided with a special program” (p. 512). I have already questioned the high incidence rate if the number 877 is used. Nonetheless, whether or not one can eventually “prove” that these students are or are not gifted, the people who did the nominations obviously felt that these students were capable of a great deal.

7. Gamble reports finally that “the percentage of hearing impaired students believed to be gifted (5%) is consistent with the upper limits of the incidence rate for giftedness among the general population” (p. 512). This percentage appears to come from those schools and county special programs that did not provide gifted programs.

Although Gamble’s reporting of his statistics is often confusing and even contradictory, the fact remains that gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students are being recognized and are beginning to be being served. Gamble’s work is the first to take a
close look at giftedness among this population and as such contributes a great deal to the field.

Characteristics.

Several of the authors of these studies indicate that characteristics of the gifted Deaf and hard of hearing population are similar to those of the general population of students (Fleury et al., 1981; Krahe, 1984; Texas School for the Deaf, 1980; Whiting, Anderson, & Ward, 1980). There appear to be two ways in which these characteristics have been described in this literature: the first places the characteristics within a context, the second provides a list.

In the first instance, Whiting et al., (1980) provide a description of the students who were identified as being “Mentally Gifted Minors” (p. 30). They indicated that in addition to their high IQs, they shared the following characteristics to a greater degree than is usually seen in the “aurally-handicapped” population. Although these comments are meant to alert the classroom teachers to giftedness in their students, it is assumed that these behaviors showed up in the testing situation and were noted by the psychologist.

* They are more apt to be working at grade level (as different from hearing gifted who will be advanced for their chronological age level).
* They are self-starters, usually reaching for the next Leiter test or peeking under the cardboard strip to see what test it will be. They may want to control the taking out and putting away of the blocks.
* They evidence a sense of humor. However, it manifests itself in teasing, play-acting or pretending. These children enjoy laughter and go about setting up a situation in which to be merry. They enjoy manipulating their environment. For example, they pretend to be unable to comprehend a specific Leiter task, then complete it successfully and rapidly and usually with a grin of triumph.
* They appear intuitive. These children do not need literal explanations and the older ones usually have the unique ability to know what you are saying—or signing—before you say it.
* They are ingenious in solving problems. Even when their test responses are incorrect, there is an explainable reason why they answered as they did.
* They enjoy the challenge of the testing. Each qualifying student saw the test as a “game,” wanted to continue and did not want to give up on hard problems even when told it was “OK” to go on to another task.
* Without prompting, they check their answers. In the experience of the psychologist, it is unusual for the deaf children to scan or review their
work once they consider a task completed. They are more apt to look to the adult for assistance.

*Finally, their language capabilities are clearly symbolic. At more than an age-appropriate level, the mentally gifted children are at home with inferences and abstractions. (Whiting et al., 1980, pp. 30-31).

In a second example of reporting of characteristics, Yewchuk and Bibby (1989b) briefly interviewed teachers of Deaf and hard of hearing students after they had filled out the nomination forms for students they thought to be gifted. Altogether 36 teachers were asked to talk about the characteristics of giftedness they recognized in the students. The resulting list (Yewchuk & Bibby, 1988a, p. 347) has detailed the characteristics but is totally context free.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Understand quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Superior recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Expressive language: colorful, precise excellent speech and articulation, talkative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Superior vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Superior reasoning ability (critical thinking, logic, analysis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Grasps concepts easily; thinks quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Outstanding academic ability in several areas; surpasses peers on achievement tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Eager to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Inquisitive; thoughtful questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Superior task commitment, work attitude; goal-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Transfers learnings to other areas and situations; applies learnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Confident in self and own abilities; competitive; adaptable, copes well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Observant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Integrates and synthesizes ideas; sees relationships between ideas; sees inferences and insights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Superior reading ability (rate, comprehension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Visual skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Leadership skills; takes initiative; accepts new challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Superior attention span</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Receptive language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Follows directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Many interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Physically very active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outgoing, good sense of humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outstanding artistic ability/skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Good writing skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yewchuk and Bibby (1988a) conclude that "a comparison of the characteristics of giftedness in hearing impaired students... and those commonly reported for hearing students reveals that, in many ways, in both populations, giftedness is manifested in the same ways: quick understanding, superior recall, superior vocabulary, etc. In one respect, however, the two differ: whereas gifted hearing students frequently function above grade level, gifted hearing impaired students are regarded as exceptional if functioning at grade level" (p. 96).

Perhaps the most satisfactory description of giftedness among those with impaired hearing is that provided by Maker (1981) and by Whitmore and Maker (1985). Maker in the first part of the article and in an extremely thorough way, addresses issues related to definition and to characteristics related to areas of giftedness. Following a classification of talents suggested by Taylor (1968a in Maker, 1981), Maker details characteristics for people with intellectual/academic ability, with ability in the visual and performing arts, with planning ability, with forecasting/predicting ability, with leadership ability, decision-making ability and with creative abilities. She then deals with critical issues in the identification of Deaf and hard of hearing gifted students. The last section of the article, however, brings a focus to educational considerations which had been critical in the lives of successful disabled scientists. This focus is important because it is one of only two articles which refer specifically to case study information of Deaf or hard of hearing people who are also gifted. Of the 160 scientists interviewed, approximately 40 with each of the following disabilities were included in the study: hearing, vision, orthopedic disabilities and cerebral palsy. Three categories of information from the study are summarized: (a) the events perceived as significant (either positively or negatively), (b) the causes of success in achievement-related events and (c) coping strategies used to overcome barriers and inhibitors. This is the first study that went directly to the disabled people themselves and asked for their perspectives.
Whitmore and Maker’s (1985) case study research of Myron is also outstanding. Myron is a physician in charge of a specialized center for research. He had a congenital loss of 80 to 90 decibels, but no one knew he was deaf until he was six or seven years old. Although his story is extremely unusual, it allows the reader insight into the experiences of one deaf man who is also gifted. As a result of their research, Whitmore and Maker make several recommendations to educational professionals: (a) the development and communication of realistic high expectations for accomplishments; (b) the use of caution in expecting language skills to be an indicator of giftedness; (c) the development of problem solving approaches to educational concerns; (d) counseling of gifted-handicapped individuals; and (e) the instruction of coping strategies to those who are dually labeled.

Whitmore and Maker (1985) are to be commended for their interest and belief in the first hand experiences of disabled people who are also gifted. My study extends that interest and respect to those who work daily with this special population, the teachers.

The Importance of Teachers’ Knowledge and Perspectives

The work of Sternberg, Conway, Ketron and Bernstein (1981), lends support to the critical importance of investigating the conceptions of not only the experts, but also those of the lay person. They designed three experiments to uncover the two groups’ conceptions of intelligence; their work not only respects the ideas of lay persons, but also sheds some light upon lay persons’ understandings of intelligence which, of course, play an important role in the broader concept of giftedness. Sternberg et al’s studies on intelligence (1981) were in fact important precursors to Sternberg and Davisdon’s (1986) more recent publication on conceptions of giftedness. Sternberg's (1981) work and findings related to laypeople’s conceptions of intelligence are discussed briefly in this section of Chapter 2; his work on conceptions of giftedness is used in Chapter 6 of my study to provide the background for a comparison to the teachers’ own conceptions of giftedness which make up part of the findings of my investigation.
Making a distinction between explicit and implicit theories, Sternberg et al., (1981) suggest that the former "are constructions of psychologists or other scientists that are based or at least tested on data collected from people performing tasks presumed to measure intelligent functioning" (p. 37). Implicit theories on the other hand are constructions of people that "reside in the minds of these individuals and need to be discovered because they already exist, in some form in peoples’ heads...the data of interest are peoples’ communications (in whatever form) regarding their notions as to the nature of intelligence" (p. 38).

In Chapter 1 I have already suggested that teachers will make important classroom decisions based on their perspectives of giftedness which are brought into play as they interact with students. Sternberg et al., (1981) claim that implicit theories of laypersons are interesting because of the importance of the concepts in our society and because these theories do two things: the meanings people hold serve important functions in determining decisions related to practice and in addition "they may suggest aspects of intelligent (or gifted) behavior that need to be understood but are overlooked in (the explicit theories)..." (p. 38). Stating that the opinions and ideas of lay persons are often overlooked, Sternberg et al. go on to note how often assessments of people’s intelligence is made in the course of interviews and informal social interactions and that these evaluations are often valued or trusted by even the experts!

Before describing briefly the experiments and findings of the Sternberg et al (1981), it is worthwhile noting their reference to the work of Neiser (1979) and his conceptualization of the use of a prototype in understanding people’s ideas of intelligence. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that perhaps the most intriguing statement I heard teachers make throughout my research was: “Well, I don’t know what giftedness is, but Jenny is definitely gifted.” The following quote from Neisser, (cited in Sternberg et al., 1981, p. 39) though written in terms of intelligence, may also apply directly to giftedness
and illustrates the resemblance between what a teacher might see embodied in the student in front of her and what a teacher might hold as an imagined prototype.

Intelligent person is a prototype-organized concept. Our confidence that a person deserves to be called "intelligent" depends on that person's overall similarity to an imagined prototype, just as our confidence that some object is to be called "chair" depends on its similarity to prototypical chairs. There are no definitive criteria for intelligence, just as there are none for chairness; it is a fuzzy-edged concept to which many features are relevant. Two people may be quite intelligent and yet have very few traits in common—they resemble the prototype along different dimensions. Thus, there is no such quality as intelligence, any more than there is such a thing as chairness—resemblance is an external fact and not an internal essence. There can be no process-based definition of intelligence because it is not a unitary quality. It is a resemblance between two individuals, one real and the other prototypical. (p. 185)

Sternberg et al. (1981) conducted three experiments. In the first they asked people in a train station, entering a supermarket and studying in a college library to list behavior characteristics of either intelligence, academic intelligence, or every day intelligence, then were asked to rate their own intelligence. In the second experiment laypersons and experts were asked to provide various kinds of ratings of the behaviors obtained in the first experiment; in the third experiment laypersons selected at random in a New Haven area phone book were asked to rate the intelligence of various fictitious people who were characterized in terms of different mixes of behaviors listed by subjects in the first experiments.

Findings which are important for providing important background information to this study are of two kinds: those which compare the ratings of laypeople and experts and those which describe aspects of intelligence. Sternberg et al. (1981) made the following conclusions in terms of people's' understandings of intelligence:

1. People appear to have organized conceptions of intelligence but if it is to be understood in terms of prototypes then there appears to be more than one prototype. People have somewhat different conceptions of the meanings of intelligence, academic intelligence and every day intelligence.

2. Experts and lay persons do appear to have prototypes corresponding to different kinds of intelligence and these "are very similar but not identical".
3. People use their implicit theories of intelligence in evaluating the intelligence of others and of themselves and these implicit theories of experts and laypersons are similar enough so that it makes little difference which is used in predictions.

4. The results of Sternberg et al.'s (1981) research find that both experts and laypersons agree that intelligence appears to include at least four kinds of behavior: "problem solving, verbal facility, social competence and possibly motivation" (p. 54).

Having noted that Sternberg and colleagues respect and value the interpretations and ideas of lay persons as they contribute to a clearer understanding of concepts which often form the guidelines which govern interactions in our society, it is also important to extend this notion directly into classrooms and to focus directly on the teachers' ideas about students who might be called gifted. Duckworth (1991a) expresses the researcher (expert) and teacher (layperson) relationship eloquently in response to the question: "You view teacher knowledge, then, with respect?" (p. 34)

Yes! The main thing wrong with the world of education is that there's this one group of people who do it—the teachers—and then there's another group who think they know about it—the researchers. The group who think they know about teaching try to find out more about it in order to tell the teachers about teaching—and that is total reversal.

Teachers are the ones who do it and, therefore, are the ones who know about it. It's worth getting teachers to build on what they know, to build on what questions they have, because that's what matters—what teachers know and what questions teachers have. And so anybody who wants to be a helpful researcher should value what the teachers know and help them develop that. (Duckworth, 1991a, p.34).

The creatively simple writings of Duckworth, (1972, 1979, 1991a, 1991b) illustrate several other important principles that are supportive of the importance of teachers' ways of learning and of knowing in the context of everyday experiences and environments. Her views encompass several important principles of teaching and learning. One is that people come to learn and understand when they struggle with something that is important to them and that they want to know more about. Solving real problems in real life situations creates an atmosphere for the development of, rather than the receiving of, new learnings. The teachers in this study are constantly in these kinds of situations, attempting on a daily
basis to meet the needs of the students with whom they interact. A second principle has to do with ownership of ideas. Duckworth insists that teachers have a vast amount of knowledge and that "nobody else knows what the teachers know" (1991a, p.33). Teachers often feel that their knowledge is "probably wrong" but Duckworth emphasizes the importance of individual perspectives. She gives as an example her own learning experiences with a group of other adults trying to uncover meanings of a certain subject in common. Her new learning happened because it was meaningful to her and her mind was engaged and because each of her own ideas was recognized to be "a wonderful one" (Duckworth, 1972). Hawkins (cited in Duckworth, 1972, p.224) suggests that teachers don't want to cover a subject, they want to uncover it. She explains that she was able to "find out about" something because she was able to see her own confusions and those of the others in the group. She was also able to see that when each individual contributed their own ideas, "you notice all kinds of things which keep leading to deeper understandings" (1991, p.32). These new understandings keep changing; "six months later you've made new connections and are ready for new understandings" (1991, p.30).

I, too, believe that the teachers' points of view, or perspectives, are of critical importance if we are to come to some understanding of what is happening in classrooms, of whether or not gifted students are being identified or whether or not their needs are being met. In spite of the need to hear the teachers' voices, there is no research which allows us to do that. According to Erickson (1985), this is not unusual, for in terms of research paradigms, the quantitative one has been paramount. As Duckworth too has suggested, questions about peoples' life-worlds and their experiences in a real life context are often overlooked. Erickson suggests that people who hold and share meaning perspectives are often in positions of powerlessness. Their meaning perspectives are also "often held outside conscious awareness ...and thus are not explicitly articulated" (p. 125). If only given an opportunity to describe these experiences, teachers may come to a better understanding of their worlds.
The classroom is an interactive and dynamic social structure. It is "open, nonlinear, unpredictable and complex" (Heshusius, 1982, p. 11). Teachers’ decision making in the classroom is critically important; teachers “teach in a prescriptive, doing environment... a what-ought-to-be-done environment” (Connelly & Elbaz, 1980 p. 111). They must use ‘imagination, judgment, dedicated attention and house sense in daily, sensitive responsible classroom practice” (Heshusius, 1982, p. 12). In order to act in this environment, the teacher must rely on a knowledge base which must be far more than the content of course work prescribed and ingested in any teacher preparation program.

In any pedagogical encounter, there are principles and values at work (Soltis, 1984, p. 8). Connelly and Elbaz (1980) describe what they term the teacher’s “personal practical knowledge” in the following way...

Substantively, the content of the teachers practical knowledge is easily cataloged. There is a knowledge of subject matter, students, milieu of schooling, development and organization of curriculum materials, instructional procedures and self. The latter is often overlooked when one’s perspective is not practical. But when the teacher’s point of view is adopted, personal goals, beliefs, talents and shortcomings come to the fore. These matters affect the teacher’s curriculum planning and teaching (p. 112).

Connelly and Elbaz (1980) go on to present five orientations of teachers’ knowledge: to situations, to theory, to others (social), to self (personal) and to experience. The situational orientation makes evident the fact that teachers work within the context of specific situations. Teachers also shape their work by having some view of theory. This may range from outright rejection, viewing oneself as a pragmatist working by trial and error, to deliberate single minded application of a particular theory. Social conditions and constraints also shape the teacher’s knowledge.

The orientation to self, as described by Connelly and Elbaz (1980), reveals the need to recognize the existence of multiple realities.

Every encounter between teacher and student reveals their divergent perceptions of their common situation, their attention to different aspects of their situation and their different interpretations of the situation. Their points of view and the interpretations which they produce, reflect a personal need to integrate, order and render meaningful one’s experience. The teacher’s
personal orientation rests not only on intellectual belief, but also on perception, feeling, values, purposes and commitment. (p. 116)

Working in conjunction with this orientation is that of experience, where the teachers' knowledge is drawn from their daily interactions, gives shape to their world and allows them to function in it. These experiences are manifested in what Schutz (1973) call "knowledge at hand" (p. 7).

Knowledge itself, however, appears to have two faces; that which is "on call" and thus in teachers' awareness and that which is hidden. This hidden knowledge may be remote, or difficult to recognize or to use and teachers are not often aware of what or of how they know in any explicit way. "...Just as sugar sweetens the tea but is lost from sight and recall, the modes of knowing 'sweeten' one's personal knowledge while disappearing from sight" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, p.183).

This hidden knowledge is not "on call". Instead, as we know from our daily doings, we "do our damnedest" as needed in situations (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, p. 183). Teacher's personal practical knowledge is, however, readily available to be recognized and used. It is experiential, embodied and reconstructed out of the narratives of a user's life.

The knowledge that a teacher has gives rise to different perspectives. A perspective may be seen as a

...point of view, placing observers at various angles in relation to events and influencing them to see these events from these angles. By its very nature, then, a point of view, or perspective, limits what the observer sees by allowing only one side of what is "out there" to be seen. (Charon, 1985, p. 3)

These perspectives sensitize people to parts of the physical reality, they desensitize them to others and help the individual to make sense of the world around them. "This does not mean that, in daily life or in science, we are unable to grasp the reality of the world. It just means that we grasp merely certain aspects of it, namely those which are relevant to us... for carrying on our business of living" (Schutz, 1973, p. 5).
In spite of a recognition that there is a multiplicity of perspectives, each one as valid and meaningful as the next, we must also be aware of the commonalities of shared meanings and shared experiences. There is shared meaning in any pedagogical encounter (Soltis, 1984) and it is this sphere of commonality (Polkinghorne, 1983) which allows for communication of ideas and which is the essence of any encounter (Van Manen, 1990). Schutz (1973) talks about “the individual’s common-sense knowledge of the world being a system of constructs of its typicality” (p. 7).

Schutz (1973) illustrates this idea by talking about the concept of “dog.” Schutz could see his Irish setter, Rover, as an exemplar of the general classification of "dog" because his dog has all those characteristics which allow him to be categorized in that way. He does not need to see his dog in that way, however. He is not concerned with exactly what Rover has in common with all other dogs. He sees Rover as a friend, a companion, of a certain color, shape and size with individual personality characteristics and these, to Schutz are the most important aspects.

In a more general way Schutz (1973) says that any typified object, S, encompasses many different aspects, three of which could be labeled p, q and r. S is not merely p, but also q and r. If I say that S is p, then “under the prevailing circumstances I am interested in the p—being of S, disregarding as not relevant its being also q and r” (p. 9). This idea seems to me to be critical when we are talking about giftedness. The ambiguities of the term gifted do not allow us this clarity of perception when the term is used. In interviewing teachers, however, my main concern was with trying to delineate the “q’s and ‘r’s,” those features which are critical to an understanding of both the idiosyncratic and the shared aspects of giftedness. There is, as Schutz says, a “reciprocity of perspectives” (p. 11), one which is socialized and intersubjective. Teachers of the deaf share understandings and beliefs; they are members of an “in-group” (Schutz, 1973, p. 13) and as members, come to terms with certain accepted behaviors and standards of
meaning. This allows them to make “of-course” statements, believed to be valid by the in-group in spite of their inconsistencies. (Schutz, 1973, p. 13).

The key to these shared meanings is the use, or the misuse, of language and awareness of the position that language is socially constructed. It is our linguistic system which facilitates, or inhibits, understanding and interaction. Categorization and labeling are examples of this phenomenon. Young, (1971, in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) suggests that researchers should…

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treat as problematic the dominant legitimizing categories of educators and should view them as constructed realities which are realized in particular institutional contexts...Existing categories that for parents, teachers, children and many researchers distinguish home from school, learning from play, academic from non-academic and able or bright from dull and stupid must be conceived as socially constructed, with some in a position to impose their construction or meaning on others. (p. 78).
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Whether these categories develop out of need, or out of a need to impose certain beliefs, the “named thing is significant enough to provide a separate term for it” (Schutz, 1973, p. 14).

At any one time and for any one person, however, the knowledge associated with the linguistic label such as giftedness will “manifest degrees of clarity, distinctness, precision and familiarity” depending upon the person’s experience with the concept (Schutz, 1973, p. 14). Language becomes the medium through which a person’s perspectives can be shared and through which meaning can be interpreted. The process of interviewing can draw out the narrative account of the teacher’s experience; and the interpretation of text will help discover the structures by which teachers order their teaching worlds.

**Summary**

This chapter has provided a review of issues in deafness which are pertinent to the focus of this study and which illustrate the complexities that the impact of hearing loss has on students and on their interactions with their worlds. This chapter has also provided the reader with a review of the literature which placed in context the questions for this
research. Hoge's (1989) review of the ambiguities and complexities inherent in the giftedness construct emphasized the need to discover the teachers’ meanings of the term, in order to understand better if and how particular students came to be identified and how programs may or may not be meeting their needs. How teachers understand giftedness, in turn, shapes interactions in classrooms. The literature on gifted-handicapped students illustrated the relatively recent directions which have brought into focus their special needs and abilities. It was suggested both in this chapter and in Chapter 1, that results of studies on the “handicapped-gifted” as a group may or may not be directly applicable to persons with hearing losses. The scant literature on students who have hearing losses and who are also gifted, allows the reader to see that these students have also begun to be recognized and their special needs are, in some cases, being realized. There is, however, no research that investigates students who have hearing losses and who are also gifted, in the context of their daily lives in classrooms. Although teachers are responsible for helping students reach their potential, their views have never been solicited. In the final part of Chapter 2, Sternberg’s research on conceptions held by lay people and literature reflects the importance of perspectives and teachers ways of knowing. The work of Connelly & Clandinin (1985) and that of Duckworth (1972, 1979, 1991a, 1991b) continue to emphasize the importance of teachers' knowledge in classrooms, both in their roles as educators and as learners themselves. This work provides support for the research question: what are the perspectives of giftedness among teachers who work with Deaf and hard of hearing students and how do these perspectives come to be formed? The next chapter provides the methodological framework which was used to answer the question.
Chapter 3

FRAMEWORK FOR THE INQUIRY—METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The qualitative, human science research approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Eisner, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Smith & Heshusius, 1986; Smith, 1983; Van Manen, 1990) has been chosen for this study because the basic philosophical belief system that underlies this approach offers congruency between my own personal belief system and the research perspective. This is the only approach that can tap directly into the first hand experiences of the teachers as they know them and that will allow insight into their personal perspectives. The following themes support the finding of answers to the research questions, underlie all qualitative inquiry and form the basis for this research.

1. Qualitative research is contextualized, inasmuch as individuals are seen as co-constituting the world, having active and interactive rather than passive relationships with their environments (Osborne, 1990; Valle & King, 1978).

2. Understanding becomes the focus for research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Osborne, 1990; Valle & King, 1978). The Verstehen approach is an attempt to achieve a sense of meaning that others have given to their own situations... something which is possible if one possesses a degree of empathy with the other (Smith, 1983).

3. Qualitative research follows the tradition of descriptive science, not explanatory science (Giorgi, 1989). It depends almost exclusively on the power of language for communication and therefore transcription is its main technique. The aim is to capture a detailed thick description of the phenomenon under investigation and to use direct quotations in order to capture the people's personal perspectives and experiences (Patton, 1990).
4. Qualitative research pays attention to the human consciousness, the subjective experience, (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Giorgi, 1970; Osborne, 1990) and it is this consciousness which shapes interaction with the world (Valle & King, 1978). Both the participant and the researcher play important roles: behavior cannot be understood without knowing how it is perceived and interpreted by the participant and the researcher’s personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon (Patton, 1990). The qualitative interview then becomes one of the most creative ways of illuminating meaning.

Basic to the framework for this inquiry is the position that reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

A story is told about Jocko Conlon, a National League umpire, who, when trying to define criteria for calling a given pitch a ball or strike, finally declared, “They ain’t nothin’ til I calls ‘em.” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 70)

Social reality is a construction based upon the participant’s frame of reference within the setting, based upon what we have determined to be the participant’s perspective. Schutz (1967) suggests that reality as an artifact is too difficult to explain unless rooted in the meanings that are constructed and attached to everyday life by individuals. To operate comfortably with the proposition that people construct reality, means essentially that we can allow truth to reside inside our heads as much as “out there.”

Researchers in a variety of disciplines in the social sciences have been and are grappling with the social constructivist approaches, wherein each contribution of each individual in the context of the creation of a reality is recognized. These individual realities overlap on one another, simply because many of them are an effort to deal with the same putative phenomenon, but they differ in meanings that are attached to the phenomenon and in the sense making in which each actor engages in order to keep his or her world whole and seamless (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 70).

People reading the works of Carlos Castenada (1972) for example, will have different reactions to the written words. “What are we to believe about these writings? One person’s reality will undoubtedly be another’s mystical allegory and still another’s
hogwash” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 75). Events and situations are theoretically open to as many constructions as there are persons engaged in them, or as many reconstructions by a single individual as imagination allows (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This acceptance of multiple realities is essential to naturalistic inquiry (Osborne, 1990).

The underlying assumption for the researcher then, is that it is possible to discover the motives and meanings of other persons through our connections with them, through their words as they communicate with us and through our knowledge of our own words and actions as we see them reflected in others. This perspective is at the heart of a qualitative, descriptive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to research (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1970; Guba, 1981; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Williams & Alexander, 1982).

The writings of Ference Marton (1981a, 1981b, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1988) and his description of phenomenography, draw our attention to “first-order and second-order” perspectives, which are reflected by the way in which we ask the research question. Had I accepted the first order perspective for this research, my question could have been: “what is giftedness among students who have hearing losses?”. The research question for this study, however, is a question of the second-order: “What do you think about what giftedness is among students with impaired hearing?”. An answer to this kind of question, is, as Marton says, “a statement about people’s conceptions of reality” (1981a, p.178). It dictates that the researcher “look at the relationship between human beings and the world around them, focusing on the perception itself. For Marton, perception falls between human beings and the world around them.” (Fetterman, 1988. p. 21).

In the first and by far the most commonly adopted perspective, we orient ourselves toward the world and make statements about it. In the second perspective, we orient ourselves towards people’s ideas about the world (or their experience of it) and we make statements about people’s ideas about the world (or their experience of it.) (Marton, 1981a, p. 178).
The purpose of the second-order orientation in phenomenography is to find and to systematize forms of thought in which people interpret significant aspects of reality, aspects which are socially significant and which are shared (Marton, 1981a, p.180).

Marton (1981a) provides two strong rationales for formulating questions which investigate this second-order perspective. The first is that "we consider that to find out the different ways in which people experience, interpret, understand, apprehend, perceive or conceptualize various aspects of reality is sufficiently interesting in itself, not least because of the pedagogical potentiality and necessity of the field of knowledge to be formed” (p. 178). Teachers of gifted students are constantly making decisions about what happens in the teaching/learning situation and yet they have never been asked about what their ideas or conceptions of giftedness are.

The second reason for arguing in favor of these kinds of questions is that...

...the descriptions we arrive at from the second-order perspective are autonomous in the sense that they cannot be derived from descriptions arrived at from the first-order perspective. This means that if we are interested in...how people think about school success, then we have to investigate this very problem because the answer cannot be derived either from what we know...about the general properties of the human mind, or from what we know about the school system, or even from the combination of what we know about both (Marton, 1981a, p. 179).

In terms of this research, we cannot find out about what teachers think about giftedness by our knowledge of what the literature says about giftedness, or by any insights into the real-life experiences of students who are gifted. In point of fact, our knowledge in these areas is extremely limited anyway, because there is very little research about giftedness among students with hearing loss.

The phenomenography of giftedness then, would "refer to anything that can be said about how people perceive, experience and conceptualize (giftedness).” (Marton, p. 181). This research deals with both the conceptual and the experiential, as well with what is thought of as that which is lived. We would also deal with what is culturally learned and with what are individually developed ways of relating ourselves to the world around us.
This research asks about the different conceptions that people have, as much as it asks about the commonness of the perspectives.

Much of Marton's work in phenomenography is discussed as it relates to the process and the content of learning. It is worthwhile to quote directly from a section in which he talks about our knowledge of the content of learning. I have substituted the word gifted for learning and teachers for students, because this statement seems to fit this research so well.

If we think of giftedness in terms of what is in the teachers' minds rather than of what is in the textbook, it clearly seems preferable that giftedness should be described from a second-order (or experiential) perspective. This view is based on the argument that the question of giftedness does not necessarily concern the correct meaning of the (word), ...but rather the meaning the teachers put into (it)...Whatever an individual feels that he knows contributes to his actions, beliefs, attitudes, modes of experiencing etc. ...the conceptions held by the teachers - as a rule - differ from those which the author of a textbook...is trying to make teachers acquire or construct...if we accept the thesis that it is of interest to know about the possible alternative conceptions teachers may have of the phenomena or the aspects present in, related to or underlying the subject matter of their study, it is these questions specifically which we must investigate (Marton, 1981a, p. 183).

As Marton (1981a) points out, all attempts to change understanding of something "must, of necessity, take their starting-point from how this 'something' is constituted"(p.179). This exploratory study takes as its point of departure the particular understandings of the teachers and focuses on their perspectives of giftedness. This research pays attention to teachers' "subjectively reasonable beliefs" (Larsson, 1987) and investigates their common-sense understandings of the phenomenon of giftedness.

In summary, the methodology emphasizes the insiders', the teachers', perspectives. The research methods reflect the underlying principles of a descriptive exploratory approach by: (a) using interviews as the main sources of data; (b) recognizing the ongoing dynamic nature of reality; (c) being concerned with process; (d) attempting to gain a holistic perspective; and (e) using research procedures which are flexible, exploratory and discovery oriented. The following section describes in detail the methods used for this research.
Methods

Background to the study—A personal perspective.

As a researcher, my interests, my values and my experiences were in fact, the source of motivation for this study. Rather than attempting to isolate myself from the ongoing process of "re-searching", (Polkinghorne, 1983), I addressed my experiences directly so that my own perspective could be clarified. The following aspects of my personal background impacted upon how the research problem was viewed, how the interviews were conducted and how the data were finally analyzed and how this final writing was constructed.

I have been a classroom teacher of deaf and Hard of Hearing children for approximately eight years, having worked with preschool and elementary children for seven years and with high school students for one year. I have taught these students in both auditory-oral and total communication settings and in residential, day school and preschool environments. This background served to give me an opportunity to establish rapport with the teachers involved and to develop an empathic understanding of the experiences shared during the interview and to recognize and make sense of the meanings which will be brought to light in their narratives.

In addition to practical experience in the classrooms of the schools, I have been actively involved in teacher education for over 13 years in the University setting. As part of my responsibilities I have done many hours of supervision of student teachers in classrooms. During the past few years, I have become increasingly fascinated by the work that teachers do with hard of hearing and Deaf students. I have developed a sense that teachers are constantly trying to do the very best that they can; they are trying to understand children so that they can assist them with their learning. At the same time they are attempting to find balances between their needs to control learning situations and their wishes to develop independent learning skills in students. I myself am constantly dealing
with these issues at the university level of teaching. Knowing and understanding students is a challenge.

I also get a strong sense that teachers are interested in learning more about themselves as they interact in the classrooms, that they are wanting to be able to have time to reflect on what they are doing. Their schedules are so busy and involved, however, that time does not usually permit this type of self-learning. A focus on “the reflective practitioner” (Schon, 1983) is becoming a pervasive one within the university setting and the collaboration between researcher and teacher can provide opportunities for this reflection. I recognized that the interviews for this research would allow the teachers an opportunity to reflect on what they thought about their gifted students and of what they thought about giftedness.

Over the past several years, as my interest in gifted students has increased, I have been amazed at the responses that I encounter as I speak with teachers about giftedness. Responses are immediate and enthusiastic regarding students they have known and stories abound. Topics center on the behaviors of these students, their abilities to learn, their personalities, their learning environments and the experiences teachers have shared with their students. In contrast, if I have informally asked these teachers what they mean by gifted, their responses are hesitant, self-deprecating and lacking confidence. In one case a teacher reacted strongly: “Don’t try to get me to define that, I wouldn’t even try!” (telephone conversation, November 23, 1988)

My first and more formal contact with giftedness began in 1985 when my colleague, Carolyn Yewchuk and I obtained funding to identify gifted hard of hearing and Deaf children in the Edmonton school system. Research on handicapped gifted students was in its formative stages and very little had been done in this area. This project first brought to my awareness the difficulties involved in defining the term gifted and the confusion that existed among teachers when asked about the term itself. At the same time, I was impressed with the accuracy of the teachers’ nominations (Bibby & Yewchuk, 1986) and,
in many cases, the certainty with which most of the nominations were made by the teachers. This work is discussed at length in Chapter Two. I also became much more interested in the existing literature relating to this field.

Our study dealt mainly with the process of identifying Deaf and hard of hearing students who were also gifted. We did not focus on the characteristics of these students, or on their individual learning needs, nor did we go into depth about why these students had been nominated in the first place. Although the Renzulli Scales were used and therefore allowed for identification across a broad range of characteristics (e.g., leadership, communication etc.), we did in fact focus on those students whose IQ scores fell at or above the 90th percentile. The whole procedure seemed to me to be somewhat problematic. The teachers spent a great deal of time filling out the nomination forms; Carolyn and I spent a great deal of time having the students tested. Some students whose scores fell well below the 90th percentile were nominated as being gifted; others whose scores fell above the 99th percentile were not seen to be gifted. Some students were achieving very well in school; others were not. The issue of language, reading and communication arose repeatedly. By the end of our study, I was pleased with the insights we had gained into the identification process and at the same time was bothered by the many unanswered questions that had surfaced throughout the study. At that time I wondered, for example, if we really needed to go to such great lengths to identify those students who were gifted. I also was very curious as to who these students really were, and if their needs were being met.

Perhaps one of the most interesting discoveries during this period was that although several programs for gifted Deaf and hard of hearing children already existed in the United States, nothing had been developed in Canada. I had opportunities at conferences to talk with teachers across Canada and apart from individual teachers who were trying to provide extra programming for these students on their own, these gifted students were virtually ignored within the system.
My own personal belief regarding the education of any student, is that their individual needs must drive programming considerations. There seems to be a well-recognized tendency in our field for teachers to underestimate students’ abilities (Rodda & Grove, 1987). In contrast, I also believe in the teachers’ abilities to meet the needs of their students. Upon reflection, I realized that I was feeling the need to impose ideas about special programming without first having sought the opinions of the teachers with whom they worked. I began to wonder how teachers perceived these students. For students who were in integrated settings and keeping up with hearing peers, I began to wonder if the placement itself was providing the challenge. Or did these students have to work so hard to keep up that they did not have energy to spend on developing their areas of giftedness? How were the students in Schools for the Deaf being challenged? Slowly there emerged an awareness that these students were unique. The literature had always included hard of hearing and Deaf students in chapters on “the handicapped gifted” population, but was this in fact an accurate portrayal of these students? I realized that talking directly to teachers about their experiences would help shed some light on these perplexing issues.

My initial research with Carolyn, identifying gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students, provided me with the questions that have driven this dissertation. I deliberately chose to discover the perspectives of teachers in terms of the meaning they attach to giftedness. I believed this to be the crucial starting point.

As I began this study, it was with a strong sense of confusion about who the gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students really were. Interestingly, I did not recall ever having worked with a student who was labeled gifted. Since my own school teaching experience all took place before 1980, this may not be surprising; the focus in special education had only just turned to students with handicaps who were also gifted. I did not remember vividly, however, working with students who were very bright and who stood out among their peers. I had seen students who I would have called gifted in art; I knew two students
who were achieving high marks at university, one in law and one in engineering. Two things appeared to be missing for me, however. One was that I had never knowingly had first hand teaching experiences with a ‘gifted’ Deaf or hard of hearing student. The second was that the literature on gifted hearing students, although helpful in terms of knowing more about giftedness in general, did not seem to fit with my understandings of hard of hearing and Deaf students in any meaningful way. So, I turned to the teachers in the field for enlightenment.

**Participant selection.**

According to Becker, (1986) the most basic qualification for research participation is that the participant have “salient experiences of the phenomenon in their everyday worlds” (p. 105). All teachers who participated in this study had direct teaching experiences with those students whom they considered to be gifted and all were able to share a variety of their experiences and stories in a meaningful way.

There appears to be great diversity in the kinds of participants researchers choose for their projects. Some prefer their samples to be as homogeneous as possible (Becker, 1986), while others (Wertz, 1984), have found that contrasting groups of participants or diverse single subjects are productive in arriving at understandings of the phenomenon under investigation. My selection of participants was based upon the assumption that diversity in experience would allow for the greatest differences in perspectives and would therefore allow for a greater understanding of what giftedness means. This diversity was accounted for in three ways: (a) The teachers work in a variety of different educational settings and the 12 participants in this study represent all of those settings; (b) the teachers work with different ages of students and all ages are represented and (c) the communication abilities of the teachers in this study are representative of each of the different methods of communication that are used with Deaf and hard of hearing students.

The participants in this investigation were teachers of hard of hearing and Deaf children who were selected based on the following criteria:
* They were trained teachers of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.
* They had worked with a student or students they thought to be gifted.
* They were interested in talking about their perspectives.
* They were willing to participate fully in the research process.

Access to the participants was facilitated in part because of my professional relationship with teachers across Canada. My research interests and my own work allow me to maintain contact with schools and teachers. In most cases, I contacted the educational setting and asked that interested teachers contact me to participate in my research. Those in my home town were better known to me than those in other cities, though, except for two, I had met all the teachers before. In the qualitative tradition, terms such as co-researcher or participant are preferred in order to emphasize the cooperative and voluntary nature of the research (Osborne, 1990). The participants were fully informed as to the nature of the research and the atmosphere was governed by a feeling of mutual respect and shared interest. My own experiences as a teacher working with Deaf and hard of hearing students and my long hours of observing classrooms and teachers in action increased my ability to listen empathically.

The teachers, three men and nine women, taught in four different Canadian provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Nova Scotia. Of these 12 teachers, two participated as well in the pilot study which is discussed at the end of this chapter. These two teachers had been re-interviewed for this study because of their educational roles in the schools. They came from settings not represented by the other 10 teachers. All except one of the teachers was in the 35 - 60 year old age bracket and their teaching experience with Deaf and hard of hearing students ranged from 6 to 35 years. Some teachers also had experience working with hearing students. Three teachers were parents of Deaf or hard of hearing children and two teachers were themselves Deaf. This information is summarized in Table 1.
Table 1
Teachers' Background Teaching Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years of teaching</th>
<th>School settings</th>
<th>Communication mode</th>
<th>Age of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hearing impaired</td>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>School for deaf</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidi</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Three teachers are parents of Deaf hard of hearing students. Two teachers are deaf. With the exception of Tina who was between 20-35, all the teachers were between 35 and 60 years of age.
In talking about the number of participants used in qualitative studies, Wertz (1984) suggests that the researcher needs as many as it takes to illuminate the phenomenon. Some use one, as in a case-study phenomenological approach. Others use five or less; others prefer in-depth interviews with up to ten while others have used fifty (Becker, 1986). The decision making process is complex but may be guided by the following criteria. Can the goals of the research be accomplished using this number of participants? Is the quality of the interview data good enough to provide a "sense of substantiality" in providing a view of differing aspects of the phenomenon?

In the proposal for this study, I stated that "often the difficulty has not been in getting enough data, but in knowing when to stop." This was indeed the case. After the interview with the second teacher, I realized that some issues and perspectives were repeating themselves. At the same time, new ones emerged. Each teacher shared personal insights and stories in different meaningful ways. Even after the last interview, I was still learning. I decided to stop gathering more data when I felt that diversity had been achieved and a solid data base had been established. This is not to say, however, that new teachers and new contexts cannot provide further insights. Research and understanding, is ongoing. This project is only a beginning.

Data sources—The interview

The notion of method is charged with methodological considerations and implications of a particular philosophical or epistemological perspective... the concept of interview is charged with the reality assumptions, truth criteria and the general goals of the disciplined methodology within which the interview functions (Van Manen, 1990, p. 28).

The interview is often used as the primary strategy in answering qualitative research questions that are best answered within the qualitative perspective (Osborne, 1990; Patton, 1990; Van Manen, 1990). The interview is the primary source of data for obtaining a "second-order perspective" (Marton, 1988). The interview serves two very specific purposes:
(1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon and (2), the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience.” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 66).

According to Marton (1988, 1981a) it is used to find diversity in people’s conceptions of a phenomenon.

The interview process has been discussed by many researchers (Becker, 1986; Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McCracken, 1986; Mishler, 1986; Osborne, 1990; Patton, 1980; Spradley, 1979). The interview structure can be viewed as falling along a continuum, from standardized to unstandardized (Berg 1989) or from focused to open-ended (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The more highly structured interview, in its most standardized form, can be conceived of as using a questionnaire type format, where all interviewees are asked to respond to the same questions. Implied in this format is that the researcher has knowledge of and control over the areas for investigation. A more open-ended interview allows the participant to expand on whatever is meaningful to the research from his or her own frame of reference.

The interviews for this research were semi-structured (Berg, 1989; Patton, 1990). I developed an interview protocol to guide the process, but encouraged digression and expansion within the framework of the study. Van Manen (1990) discusses the importance of realizing that the interview process must be disciplined by the “fundamental question that prompted the need for the interview in the first place” (p. 66). We did not spend much time discussing things unrelated to the topic of giftedness, but within those boundaries the interview remained open-ended and non-directive. During each interview, I was made aware of the impact of the questions on the participant; some questions were seen to be irrelevant, some were changed in form to allow for easier communication and sometimes new questions were added. The research need to obtain as many ideas as possible and my personal need to understand the participant’s meaning, guided the interview.
In all cases, after the opening question, the participant controlled the direction of the interview. I came to understand the critical importance of empathic listening, using open-ended questions and probes and making non-judgmental statements. Because of my own experiences as a classroom teacher, I was able to ensure that the questions were formulated in ways which were familiar to the participants. We shared common experiences and therefore, a common language which allowed for clearer communication. The questions which served to guide the interviews are presented in Appendix A.

**Interview length and procedure**

The data were collected over a period of two and a half years. For two of the participants, the time between the first and second interviews was two years. These two teachers had been interviewed previously in the pilot study and were re-interviewed because they worked in settings that were different from the other teachers. In retrospect, this time lapse proved to be a very positive one in light of the research findings because it illustrated how one teacher’s original perspectives had changed. This rather serendipitous event shed more light on yet another dimension of the teachers’ understandings of giftedness. The time between the first and second interviews for the remaining participants was between two weeks and two months.

The interviews were approximately one to one and a half hours in length; this appeared to be a length that was comfortable for both myself and the interviewee. The interview concluded when each of us felt that we had exhausted the possibilities for discussion at that time.

Prior to the first interview, about 15 minutes were spent in establishing rapport, informing the participant about the nature of the research, obtaining biographical information and gaining the consent in written form. The tape recorder was turned on for the main phase of the interview. Each participant was aware that I would be making contact again for a review of the manuscript and for clarification and additions. After the
interview was transcribed, a copy was sent to the teacher so that she/he could have time to read and reflect on what said before the next meeting.

The second interview gave the researcher and the participants an opportunity to check for accuracy, clarify meanings and to add to the ideas that emerged during and after the main interview. Because of distance and traveling difficulties, three of the participants did not participate in a second interview. These three participants responded in writing to the initial transcript.

Three teachers were interviewed again after the dissertation had been written and they had an opportunity to read their own words and their stories of the students, as well as my interpretations of them.

For the hearing teachers, the interviews were audiotape recorded. With the deaf teachers, an interpreter was used and the interview was video-recorded as well. Following the interview, a transcription was made of what the interpreter had said; the typist listened to the audio portion of the interview in order to do the word-for-word transcription. Later, with the initial transcript in hand, I then sat down with a second sign language interpreter who viewed the initial interview on videotape and re-interpreted it in into the audio tape recorder. This provided a second transcription of the original signed communication. I compared the first transcription with what the second sign language interpreter was saying and if there appeared to be discrepancies, we immediately stopped the videotape and re-ran it to check for further understanding and clarification. The interpreters were informed beforehand about the nature of the research, the purpose of the interviews and the kinds of questions that would be asked. Licensed and experienced interpreters were used so that original meanings in English (researcher) and in American Sign Language or English (participant) were kept intact. It is important to realize, however, that any indirect communication such as that which happens when interpreters are needed, is never as direct and accessible as direct communication. The Deaf teachers expressed satisfaction with the selected interpreters.
Treatment of the data

The data consisted of approximately 25 hours of taped interviews in which teachers described their thoughts about and their experiences related to giftedness. I found that very often some of the most meaningful descriptions were expressed just after the tape recorder was turned off and in such cases I was able to enter these data into my journal. My own journal was used as a secondary data source, providing insights and reflections on the processes of doing the research and on the possible interpretations and meanings of the data.

I transcribed 10 hours of interviews (five teachers) myself and had a qualified typist do the remainder. When the tape was transcribed by a typist, I then took the original transcription and went through it line by line, listening to the original tape. This allowed me to pick up any errors or omissions made by the typist and also allowed me to become more familiar with the data.

In any interview there are conversations about unrelated topics which often serve as ice-breakers and which occur in the process of establishing rapport. Any information which was deemed to be irrelevant to the research was omitted at this stage of the process. In all of the 21 transcripts, representing approximately 25 hours of interviews and about 1,200 pages of text, less than 10 pages of data were left out.

The mechanics of handling the data were familiar to me: the coinciding and spiraling processes of data collection and analysis; the transcription of tapes; the organization of the data itself into manageable parts; the coding of information; the cross referencing; the necessity for organized and clear file maintenance; the need for contemplation and withdrawal from the data at certain times during the process (Lofland, 1971, 1974).

The thematic analysis of the data itself basically followed procedures suggested by various researchers (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1975; Osborne, 1990) as guidelines and progressed through the following stages.
1. Each individual protocol was transcribed and lines were numbered for ease of recall and reference.

2. Each transcript was read and re-read to get a feeling for the data. Marginal notes were made as thoughts occurred. The transcriptions were entered into Hyperqual (Padilla, 1991) which is a computer program created to handle qualitative data on the Macintosh system.

3. Each protocol was read on a sentence by sentence basis and sentences were grouped into meaning units. No sentence was omitted.

4. A label or tag (e.g., student abilities, environment, terms, meaning of giftedness) was given to each sentence or group of sentences which formed the meaning units. At this initial stage of analysis, the meaning units were often given more than one label or tag.

5. Meaning units were subsequently sorted according to the labels. Labeled meaning units were grouped and re-grouped until topic headings became clear.

6. These labeled meaning units were then grouped or clustered into topics for analysis.

At this stage of the analysis, several topics emerged. For example, all of the teachers had at one time in their interview, talked about the issues surrounding labeling. Each teacher’s file contained meaning units which had been clustered under this heading. These headings, or topics, eventually became the sections for this thesis. Chapter 8, which discusses the issues of labeling, also provides the reader with an opportunity to view the selected meaning units in the context of the original interview. The complete meaning units for each teacher are presented in Appendix B and are fully referenced in Chapter 8.
7. Each topic was then analyzed in detail. The meaning units were again labeled and sorted into groups and these higher order clusters were then synthesized into main themes or conceptions for that topic.

8. The final structure was presented as a written synthesis. Part of this constituted a within-person analysis and is presented in a case study format in chapter 4 (Guba, 1981). This allows for a clear provision of the context, as well as the fuller illumination of the meanings of the individual (Stake, 1978).

9. In addition, a structure for the shared and idiosyncratic meanings of giftedness was abstracted from the individual thematic analyses (Osborne, 1990). The individual clusters were compared to identify shared themes and to highlight differing perspectives, as in Chapter 6. A narrative style is used to make the data available to a wide range of individuals (Stake, 1978).

10. The final organization for the presentation uses a process which emerged from the 25 hours of interviews and which is presented in an overview format in Chapter 4. One section of the data (presented in Chapter 5) was handled differently from above. The student vignettes resulted from a synthesis of all the statements made about that student during the interview process. Hilary, for example, talked about Iris throughout the interview. In some places she talked about her using several sentences, then her thoughts would move to something else. She would come back fifteen minutes later to mention Iris, perhaps in relation to another student she was talking about and then again later, she would remember another story about her that she wanted to tell to illustrate another point. I pulled all the statements about each child into a separate file and labeled it with the name of that child. That individual's file became the source for the stories of each of the children.

In order to write those vignettes, I rearranged the sentences so that they would make sense in the story form. I made a disciplined effort to use the exact words of the teachers in each of the stories, with changes being made only where sentences and
thoughts had to fit together and where words or phrases used during the interview process could be changed to provide a better language for reading without changing the meaning. These stories were left to stand on their own and provided the source for the section on teachers' perspectives of giftedness.

Hyperqual (Padilla, 1991) is a computerized data handling program that was developed to deal especially with qualitative data on the MacIntosh. The program proved to be an invaluable tool during the first six stages of the analysis as described above. The program is not an ‘intelligent’ tool; it cannot do the analysis. Appendix C provides the reader with a sample of the screens.

Ethics.

At all times the researcher must be able to protect the best interest of the participants (Locke, et al., 1987). Perhaps the biggest problem in this area is concern with security and confidentiality of information. Teachers of students with hearing losses are a small and closely knit group and personalities and student characteristics are often recognizable in written material. To deal with these concerns, I have changed all the names of all the participants. This also applies to any students who have been mentioned. In some cases, I have found it necessary to call a student who is female, male and vice versa. I have deliberately not included some information which I felt might identify a teacher or a student and I have deliberately been vague with some descriptions. The teachers come from across the country and identifying features of their places of work have been left out. I do not feel, however, that these kind of changes have in any way influenced the credibility of the data.

I obtained informed consent from each of the participants in writing and the research procedures were given approval by the University Ethics Committee. See Appendix D for a copy of the consent form.
Pilot study.

In the fall of 1988, to fulfill partial requirements for a Graduate course, I interviewed teachers of students with hearing losses about their perspectives of giftedness. I wrote letters to several schools inviting teachers experienced in working with gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students to volunteer to participate in this project. Five teachers responded. I used a roster of questions to guide the semi-structured interviews and collected the data using an audio tape recorder.

The teachers came from various settings and had a variety of experiences with gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students. The interviews with these teachers allowed me to develop my interview skills and to begin to gain some sense of the scope for my research. I transcribed each of the interviews myself and then did a preliminary thematic analysis of the content. The result was a twenty-five page paper which described the teachers' points of view centering around two major themes: the issue of labeling and the teachers' criteria for "who is gifted." (Bibby, 1988).

As a part of another course requirement and using the field research tradition, I interviewed a sixth teacher and obtained interview data. In addition, I also gathered data using observation techniques and documentary analysis. The resulting paper was a synthesis of all three sources of data from the symbolic interactionist perspective.

These experiences allowed me to be more fully aware of the substantive issues which were to surface as the research continued and it allowed me to become more sensitive to the factors which influenced each stage of the research. For example I became aware of the importance of the opening question for the interview. A question which asked for the teacher to talk about giftedness usually met with "well, I don't really know what it means". A question that asked the teacher to talk about herself and the students with whom she worked, however, initiated an enthusiastic response. As I interviewed subsequent participants, I had a better sense of the meanings underlying their statements and was better able to ask for clarification. In addition I also became very open to the
discovery of new ideas as I realized that each person had something different to offer which increased my own understandings of giftedness and of gifted students. The descriptions and analyses which form the findings of this study then, emerged from a solid base. I am indebted as much to the five participants in the pilot study as I am to the other ten participants. The next chapter begins by providing a diagram of the process the teachers appear to go through as they come to understand giftedness; it concludes with an introduction to two teachers who exemplify this process.
Chapter 4

PERSPECTIVES OF GIFTEDNESS-EMERGING UNDERSTANDINGS WITHIN A PROCESS

The following framework (Figure 1) illustrates a process that a teacher might go through as she or he comes to have and change perspectives of giftedness. This preview of the “big picture” allows the reader to see the various products or outcomes of this investigation which lie within a process of perspective-making which emerged from the teachers’ narratives. The structure of the process itself was one of the outcomes of this study and it did not emerge until almost all the writing had been completed. Embodied within the diagram are the answers to the research questions regarding both the perspectives of giftedness that the teachers hold and the process that a teacher might go through as they develop and change their perspectives.

Teachers enter the classroom with their own conceptual frameworks, made up of their own set of assumptions, their own set of values and their own set of ideas. Their perspectives, which may be more implicit than explicit, will guide their perceptions of what happens in their educational settings. The stories of both Liz and Ted provide excellent examples of the influence of experiences on perspectives and are presented in detail in the second part of this chapter (Chapter 4).

The teachers working in classrooms will notice some things and will not notice others. As Charon (1985) says, their perspectives “sensitize the individual to parts of physical reality, they desensitize the individual to other parts and they help the individual make sense of the physical reality to which there is sensitization” (p. 3). What the teacher sees, in turn, will influence the action they take in certain situations which arise and provide challenges in the classroom on a daily basis.
Figure 1. Teachers' perspectives of giftedness: new understandings within a process
At this point in time, the teacher will most likely see that which is most familiar. If the teacher expects to see students who are gifted in certain ways, then this knowledge will probably allow her to see that student if the student behaves in ways that she understands. If on the other hand, the teacher is not sensitized to indicators of giftedness among students who have hearing losses, then it is possible that she will not notice the gifted student. If these students go unnoticed and as a result their needs are not met, then they are greatly at risk within the educational setting. Yewchuk and Bibby (1989a) in their study of the identification of gifted Deaf and hard of hearing students, found that psychologists nominated two older students whose IQ scores fell above the 95th percentile, because their behaviors in the classroom were masking their giftedness. One is left to ponder the question: had these students been noticed earlier, would the results have been different? Noticing, then, becomes a critical part of the process of recognizing giftedness.

The participants in this study were all teachers who took notice of students they believed to be gifted and the remainder of the diagram therefore, deals with a composite picture of the process of recognizing and understanding giftedness in Deaf and hard of hearing students.

Once students who might be gifted are noticed, an informing process begins for the teacher. The best ways for teachers to become informed appear to deal with teachers’ special ways of knowing, which bring into focus their own personal and practical interactions with the students; other ways of knowing, do not appear to be helpful. The teachers in this study for example, did not indicate that they made use of any literature that might have been available to them, nor did they say that they made attempts to become more aware of any definitions that might have existed. The use of labels was also not seen as being very helpful (Chapter 8) and in some circumstances was said to be detrimental to the well being of the students and their families.
Teachers developed and explored their understandings by using their own personal practical knowledge of their experiences as people and as teachers in classrooms. They saw the students achieving, learning and behaving in their classrooms and became aware of certain indicators of giftedness in each of those areas (Chapter 6). The impact of the students' dealing with hearing loss and being gifted was most noticeable in this context. When the teachers were talking about their students, they appeared to use a multiple comparison process; they compared the student they thought to be gifted with other students they knew and had known and with themselves and their friends. At the same time, they compared the students they had selected with their own perspectives on giftedness and their own more theoretical notions about the meaning of the term gifted. (Chapter 7).

As they went through the process of comparing, the teachers did or did not experience, as Tina says, "good old cognitive dissonance." At various times during the interviews all the participants questioned their own abilities to select and to label a student as gifted. Their reflection and openness to questioning allowed me to assume that in some ways, they were comparing new information with established or taken-for-granted ideas. This process permeates all of the findings of this study.

In addition, some of the teachers explicitly described changes in their perspectives which occurred as a result of experiencing dissonance. The most dramatic change occurred for Hilary, who, in the time between the two interviews changed her mind completely about Tarah, whom she had previously determined was "not gifted." Liz's interactions with Bob (discussed in this chapter) allowed her to change her understandings; she became aware that "process" might be an important part of the giftedness concept whereas before she had looked at "product." And Tina spoke explicitly of the readjustments teachers had to make in their thinking as they had to accept that a student might be gifted in one area and very slow (disabled) in another (Chapter 8).
If the teachers saw the students acting in ways that were congruent with their earlier understandings of giftedness, then their own ideas and expectations remained intact and perspectives of giftedness were reinforced. If on the other hand, the students showed to the teachers other indicators which were new, the teachers found themselves modifying and changing their previous understandings of the giftedness concept. The teachers’ student oriented and theoretically oriented understandings of giftedness, either changed or reinforced, are described in detail in Chapter 6.

The preceding paragraphs have been written to provide an explanation of the process that teachers in this study appeared to go through in developing and in changing their perspectives of giftedness. It has been difficult, however, for me to decide how to present the findings from the interviews in a way which allows the reader to understand the interplay between the content, the context and the process. What one sees in Figure 1 is a fairly linear representation of a very non-linear experience; the process of learning, knowing and gaining perspectives is ongoing, spiraling and at the same time backtracking on itself.

The data which follows then have been organized in such a way as to clarify the issues and to allow the reader to build on his or her awareness. The next section of this chapter takes the reader to the place where teachers enter their classrooms, bringing perspectives to bear on their students and on their interactions with the students. The stories of Liz and Ted were chosen because they best exemplified the process.

Teachers Entering the Classroom and Bringing Perspectives

1. Perspectives are points of view - eyeglasses, sensitizers - that guide our perceptions of reality.
2. Perspectives can further be described as conceptual frameworks, a set of assumptions, values and beliefs used to organize our perceptions and control our behavior.
3. The individual judges perspectives according to their usefulness for himself or herself.
4. The individual has many perspectives. Perspectives arise in interaction and are role-related.
5. Some perspectives can be considered better than other perspectives if we can agree that ‘better’ means more accurate and if we can measure
accuracy - a difficult task. In science some may be more accurate than others, but it is probably more correct to argue that each focuses on a different aspect of reality (Charon, 1985, p. 8.).

Of course, my response was, “What is this really?” And, of course, the response by them was that it is all of these things and probably many many more things. Indeed, whatever that physical reality was is interpreted by people in many ways, depending entirely on the perspective they use to see it... Perspectives should not be thought of as true or false (as we might be tempted to do) but as helpful or useless in understanding. We accept or reject various perspectives in our education based on whether or not they make sense to us; that is, do they help us understand people or situations we encounter? (Charon, 1985, p. 4).

A perspective then, by its very nature, is a bias, it contains assumptions, value judgments and ideas, it orders the world, it divides it up in a certain way and as a result it influences our action in the world” (Charon, 1985, p. 6).

The participants in this study have all been specially trained to work with children with hearing loss, but they come from a variety of educational settings, with a variety of experiences both personal and professional. In some of the interviews, teachers chose to focus almost exclusively on their own experiences with students and on discussions which centered around issues like labeling, which are directly associated with ideas about giftedness. Other teachers included some of their own personal experiences and beliefs which had helped to influence how they came to understand giftedness in the students they taught. The following section deals with the issue of perspective, by providing two profiles, one of Liz and the other of Ted. These two teachers’ stories are presented here because their backgrounds are very different, yet they appear to share some common beliefs. In listening to their stories, the reader comes to some understanding of the influences which shape teacher’s perspectives even before they enter the classroom.

**Liz’s Stories**

Liz’s perspective appears to have been influenced by at least three different things: (a) her own experiences and interactions with students as a teacher of Deaf and hard of hearing students; (b) her own personal experiences from her childhood as a young student in a classroom; and (c) her experiences as a young adult married to a gifted man. These experiences together seem to have encouraged her to develop a personal philosophy of
teaching and learning, which in turn, probably affects the way she interacts with her students in the classroom. In addition, Liz's background may offer some understanding as to what her conceptions of giftedness are among Deaf and hard of hearing students and why she has brought a focus to certain indicators of giftedness that she has seen in the students.

Liz's background—Liz's students.

Liz has been teaching students with hearing losses for 15 years. She began her career...

...by teaching elementary school hearing impaired students in a classroom in a regular school. There were 6 kids, ranging in age from 6 to 14. Most of these students were integrated into their regular classrooms. After 3 years, I worked as an itinerant teacher for elementary kids for a year and an itinerant teacher for secondary hearing impaired kids for 2 year. Then I taught grade 11 and 12 hearing impaired kids in a resource room for 5 years. Most of these students were oral and some used oral interpreters, some didn’t.

In addition to that, I’ve also taught adults English as a second language in a private language school and I taught grade 11 and 12 hearing kids Spanish for 4 years.

Liz chose three students to talk about, one who was academically gifted and two who were gifted in mime. The first of these, Cheryl, was a strong all round student, whom Liz spoke of as being both extremely able and also empowered to take control of her life.

Cheryl—Just a really, really nice girl

Cheryl is gifted in the academic areas. She’s a very strong student but she’s also very strong across the board academically, stronger in the sciences. She has the typical problems with language that are a result of her hearing loss but that’s nothing unusual. She’s also very popular with the hearing kids, very profoundly deaf, her speech is harder to understand but she has good hearing friends. She was a cheerleader. She’s really very socially aware and very considerate of other people and responsible.

She’s 16 or 17 and I can’t say that she had any weak areas. She was the photography editor for the school annual so she had some visual awareness
and skill too. One of the places where she had the most trouble was putting too high expectations on herself and allowing stress to build up and then not being able to handle that very well.

She's the oldest of 2 children and her reading level would have been maybe a year to a year and a half to 2 years below grade level. Her English language, spoken, was OK. And her written language would sound, if we didn't know that she had a hearing loss, it would sound contrived because she tries to use too many sophisticated words. She uses them appropriately, but not naturally.

She was integrated in school and in those classes she had an oral interpreter. I knew she was gifted because in class discussion she would come out and put ideas together in an original way. She would come out with things that weren't predictable. It was obvious that she was doing some original thinking. She also had the confidence to take her opinion and find supporting evidence for it, but she also didn't seem to be fixated on holding onto something... she was a flexible thinker.

She knew when she knew something and she won't buy anything until she's been convinced. The teachers would often laugh amongst ourselves when she comes out with something and we'd say that Cheryl's way ahead of us you know, in a lot of ways. It's the kind of thing that she would come out with that we hadn't thought of. I think she's an exceptional thinker and has always been that way. Very observant and so on.

We have an International Baccalaureate program and she was integrated with an interpreter in that program, algebra, biology and physics and she was doing fine. (She was one to two years behind in reading) but she would anticipate what was going to be happening in class, read ahead and then, when it happened in class she was more on top of it. It was very important for her to be prepared going into class and to know what was going to be covered and anticipate. She was on top of what was going on, so she could see what the next subject would be, the direction that the subjects was going in and she would make sure that, of course, any assignments that were handed out, she would have done and she would always read ahead. I think that's probably how she got along. She came with the reputation of being quite an exceptional academic student.

She was also highly motivated. She talked her parents into letting her apply for the IB program. She knew that she could do it and that she would be
Cheryl will always take what she needs out of the situation. If that situation is rich enough, then she will take what she needs and go with what she needs from it. She hungers for knowledge and with the IB Program, she just took it in stride. She took hold of it and ran with it. She was being stimulated and going and going. I think it probably saved her from boredom, I think that she would have been bored in a slower class because that’s so highly accelerated and because secondary school is so highly structured. In regular classes of 30 or so kids, the teaching is frontal teaching and it’s teaching all the kids as one group. Unfortunately that kind of teaching teaches to the average paced learner and I think she would have been bored out of her tree.

Her giftedness allowed her to overcome her disability to a large extent and then be on an equal footing with the hearing kids. She is very mature for her age, very sensitive. She was pleasant to talk to; she’s interested in you and not just self-centered. Cheryl is just a really, really nice girl.

Robin and Zona—Gifted in Mime

I had a girl in elementary school who I thought was a very gifted actress and she was also very gifted in mime. Zona was 12. And there was an older student too, Robin, who was gifted in that area and I mean gifted (to the extent) that I feel that she could have really made a successful career from this. She was in Grade 11. For both these students, their social skills weren’t that good. Maybe it’s just that they were not “other oriented” in wanting to make a good impression on people. Like, people who get along with other people are really “other” oriented. So I don’t know if their social skills weren’t that great or just that they weren’t “other oriented.” Though they were obviously very good mime artists so they were great observers of human nature.

They also weren’t that great academically. Both kids had problems with language and with reading... they just found it harder to put words together and express themselves on paper and to understand what they were reading. Since they weren’t expressive in language, through language, maybe that’s why they were so expressive in mime. I can think of ways that 99 kids out of
100 would mime a basketball player, or a game of tennis, but the gifted person that would really make you drop your jaw and think, of gee, the rest of us 99 people would never have thought of that. So it's originality...

I didn’t see that the school was providing an appropriate outlet for them to grow in that area of their giftedness. So I worked very hard with them and tried to convince both their parents to try and get them into some miming classes or into some extra-curricular activities so that their strength wouldn’t atrophy. (But the parents) weren’t convinced that society placed any value on that kind of gift and couldn’t see why they should put any energy out. I think that if the parents had been really encouraging in that area, they would have really blossomed in that area. But the parents weren’t and I think that they looked to their parents as a reflection of what society’s values are and they weren’t convinced that this was something that should be valued and encouraged. So they didn’t do anything with it. Everyone is admitting now that education has only been focused in the area of the academic. (Now it’s changing so that the focus is more on) emotional, social, intellectual, aesthetic and artistic development. But before it was not like that and these kids suffered. Robin and Zona suffered because of that.

Liz’s experiences as a teacher.

As noted in Liz’s background, she had had a variety of experiences working mostly in integrated school settings with students who were oral. Working within the public school setting would have enabled Liz to keep in close contact with the behaviors, abilities and school lives of hearing students. This group of students became the peer group for the Deaf and hard of hearing students and so when some of Liz’s students stood out it was in relation to their hearing peers. Liz would also have had close contact with the teachers who worked with the hearing students and since Cheryl was integrated, Liz’s perspectives would most probably have been influenced also by the perspectives of these teachers. In addition, Liz had first hand experience with the IB program and so Cheryl’s eagerness to enroll there was a major indicator for Liz that Cheryl was gifted.
Liz’s experience as a young student in school.

Liz also shared with me her personal story of when, as a young child in the school classroom, she had seen the very bright students being singled out for special educational services. (Numbers denote references to themes that emerged and which are noted in the analysis which follows her story).

This one student I knew was in that class because the English teacher had identified him. It wasn’t a class for gifted kids by any means, but it was a class that I think the English teacher had put together, of kids who were thinkers, or who that specific teacher had identified as thinkers. The rest of us of course, just hadn’t reached our potential yet (2). Which is another point that I would like to make here: why neglect (1) those of us who hadn’t learned to think yet (2)? I mean, I feel that the kids who were already thinking, had an advantage over those of us who didn’t (1). For one reason or another, I didn’t know how to think. I was bored out my tree in school and especially in English class. And yet I don’t feel that I got the teachers who were willing to stimulate, or interested in stimulating me (1, 3). I didn’t get those teachers who might be interested in helping me to develop to my potential.

Maybe that’s why I feel so strongly that I don’t think kids should be separated out (1). It’s not fair to those other kids who have the potential to develop as well (4). It’s just not fair that we should continue to bore 75% of the population while only paying attention to the 25% that at that point in their lives, they have achieved some kind of thinking capability on their own. Why should they get any special treatment? I mean, it’s the rest of us, if anything that (a) should get the special treatment and (b) would benefit by being in classes with those kids (4). If we’re concerned about these kids, then let’s do something in the teacher training so that the kids, gifted or not, in the regular class are not bored along with everyone else in the regular class.

The following themes emerge from Liz’s personal and sensitive story…

1. Liz felt that she was being given unfair treatment when she saw that other children were being given special educational services, different from hers and those of the other children in her class. As a result, she felt neglected and disadvantaged. Since she
chose to express these feeling in the interview, it is reasonable to assume that this made quite an impact on her as a young student. Liz explicitly recognizes how this experience has influenced her thinking about pulling students out of the classroom for special help. She does not believe in "separating them out."

2. Liz apparently felt that she "hadn't learned to think yet," which indicated that she is aware of the importance of the development of potential, in terms of thinking skills. Seeing abilities as being strongly influenced by the environment, being brought out by time and situation, is an important conception relating to the idea of giftedness.

3. There is no mistaking the strong influence that Liz believes that teachers have on their students. She recognizes that some teachers are interested in helping children develop their potential; and some are not.

4. The "haves" shouldn't get special treatment at the expense of the "haven't yets."

Liz's learning from her gifted partner.

I asked Liz when she first began to understand and formulate her own ideas about giftedness and she replied with the following story.

It was the fellow I married who was gifted and I just came to realize that by being married to him (2). He wasn't a particularly good student, so my knowledge has nothing to do with that (3). We were in high school together and in fact, I was a better student than he was and I think I'm probably average.

But when I married him, I began to realize there was something different here (2). It had to do with who he was and things inside his head worked differently than mine. It was like there were different sparks going on up there the kind of way that he would think about things, the way he would synthesize information and come up with original ideas (4). He really had a unique kind of knowledge and an incredible confidence in that knowledge and in his own thinking. So that's when I really began to realize that people don't always show teachers the kind of thinking they do, while they are in a school setting (3).
In school, he was less mature than I was and I think that if the educational system did give him opportunities, he made choices (1). He chose to take advantage, or not to take advantage of those opportunities. Something different in the educational system would not have changed that. Although, I do remember that he had a different English teacher than I did and that teacher really stimulated him (1); I think she recognized his abilities. But in general, he took what he needed from school (1) and excelled in the areas that were important to him, the debating club for example. Getting good grades wasn’t really important for him and I don’t think a different system would have changed that. It wouldn’t have convinced him that grades were important. He just took what he needed and wanted (1).

It was actually from knowing my husband, that I developed my own potential you know (2). He really made an impact on me. In fact, he made up for all the terrible education I had because he challenged me to think and develop (2, 5). And it was through my interactions with Bob that giftedness held any meaning for me. I couldn’t really recognize giftedness in someone who is a scientist or someone who is musical because I’m not really inside that subject, I don’t really know enough about those subjects, in order to really see what a gifted person is (6). If I had been a scientist for example, then I could have recognized Einstein’s giftedness because then I would have known his thinking was so different from anyone else’s; my jaw would have dropped if I had been in that field. Since I’m not a scientist, I would have known he was smart because other people would have called him gifted and that’s fine (6).

You look at the product they’ve given, like Einstein and you can see that it’s original, superior. But also giftedness is evident in interactions with people (2). Giftedness in Bob showed up in our interactions (2, 7), not necessarily in a product. It was just this sort of normal stuff that I could see and relate to, not any specific thing, but when I saw that I would say, “Oh my gosh!, Nobody else would ever have thought of that and I would never have thought of that!”

Giftedness really only had any meaning for me when I could interact, went through interactions with Bob. I only realized through interactions with Bob what the difference was between being gifted and not gifted. It was a way of thinking which I am familiar with, so that was my baseline, rather than my baseline being some sort of scientific knowledge or musical knowledge or something (6).
The following themes emerge from Liz's story about her husband...

1. Perhaps one of the most obvious themes here is that of empowerment. Liz talks about how Bob made choices, appeared to have control over the things he did not want to do and the things that he did want to do. He “took what he needed and wanted” and made choices in spite of schools. Once again, however, Liz recognized that teachers did make a difference, this time for Bob in a positive way.

2. Liz emphasizes the fact that knowing Bob was very influential in changing her own ideas about what giftedness meant. He changed her perspective. This impact, probably changed her as a person and as a teacher.

3. Indicators of giftedness such as creative and original thinking, might not show up in the school environment. Liz gives Bob some responsibility for not showing his abilities to the teachers in the school.

4. Liz describes Bob (and perhaps all people she might identify as being gifted), as having different sparks, being a creative thinker, synthesizing information and coming up with original ideas.

5. Liz had a bad educational experiences herself, but because of those and because of how Bob helped her, she now values the idea of challenging someone to think and develop.

6. Liz suggests that perhaps there are two ways to know about what giftedness means. One is to hear it from other people, that someone is gifted in a certain area. Liz is willing to accept their judgment because “they” are the experts in that area who can decide. We know giftedness if someone else, knowledgeable in that area, puts a label on that person. Another way of understanding what it means to be gifted is to actually share that process with someone, as Liz did with Bob when they were interacting and discussing things. She could apparently relate to him then, in a way that she could not have related to someone gifted in science for example. Liz suggests that being “inside the subject” allows an understanding perhaps at a different level.
7. Liz makes a distinction between a conception of giftedness as being product oriented and a conception of giftedness as being process oriented. Einstein and Beethoven produced great works in science and music. Bob showed creative thinking skills in an ongoing, emergent way.

Liz’s philosophy as an educator.

Liz explains her philosophy in the following way...

Each kid in the class is going to be learning at a different pace anyway and so if I can just keep them all interested that’s great. So one is faster or different from the others, it’s still a class and they still have a lot to learn from each other; we all have a lot to learn from each other. I get excited about what I can learn from them. As a teacher you just go with what you have. I think teaching, being a teacher, as being a facilitator, more than a teacher because the kids really determine the direction; I just determine the subject. They determine the direction of the class and the pace that we’re going to learn at.

I know that the learning experiences I provide for them must be varied enough, or rather, open-ended enough so that they won’t be bored. So if one kid is faster than the others, it’s still a class. I wouldn’t change my planning for a gifted student because I believe all the kids in the class should be exposed to what Cheryl would have been exposed to.

The teacher is really the stimulus and the students have to choose to take that stimulus and then decide how far they want to go with it. As a matter of fact, I think that if I had to try and teach very closed ended lessons, where the kids did very little other than sit and absorb information, that I would feel very intimidated because I would anticipate that boredom from the kids.

Every kid wants to learn, has a hunger for learning and I think if you just watch kids, you can see the kind of inquisitiveness and investigations that they do naturally and that’s what we should be facilitating. The kids have to be in charge of their own education. They’ll take the bat, then run with it. They take what they want or need out of any learning situation and they’ll go as far with it as they want to. The teacher would facilitate, rather than try to stand up at the front of the class and impart knowledge. It would only be partly sinking in and for the most part, not sinking in and causing the students endless amounts of boredom. Not just the students really, for the teachers too.
If you think about getting ready for the class, my planning wouldn’t necessarily have been on what to teach, but rather on what to introduce. How to introduce something and how to facilitate learning and curiosity.

You see, I really believe that every kid is a potential genius. I think that it is just us that hold them back, that don’t let them go. I know that especially in my early years, I really felt that I had to know everything in order to be a good teacher. I think that one of the things that teachers are afraid of is that they don’t know everything, or they’re going to be asked a question that they don’t know the answer to. With that fear, the teachers feel that they’re supposed to be something that they’re not and they never will be. If we could only focus on training teachers to be facilitators, to be classroom managers, to provide resources, but not to know everything.

You have to be really careful to make each child feel special, or to let each child know that they’re special and that’s just really important in any classroom. If you see that each child is special, then there’s not a problem.

Let me explain more a bit from real life. Let’s say I introduced a certain project all the kids would have done that project and displayed their understanding of the experience. Each student’s knowledge of that is different and it comes out of that in different ways. So, Cheryl would have displayed her knowledge in a way that was different from someone else in the class. And she could have taken that as far as she wanted and I would have been there then to make sure that she, that all of the resources would have been provided so she wasn’t stumped for resources or information. If she wanted to go further in one direction I could show her, I could direct her where to go. I would have done that with the other kids too. Obviously it is easier to do that in the younger years but even in high school I still think there are ways to do it.

Liz appears to build her philosophy of teaching and learning on one underlying principle: that all children “have a hunger for learning.” She believes that “every kid is a potential genius” and that provided with the appropriate stimulating atmosphere for learning, the students will take control and determine the rate and direction of their development. Not only will the students learn from their environment, but they will also learn from each other.
Liz sees herself as a learner also and in her role as facilitator in the classroom she sees her main responsibility as providing a stimulus for learning. Her role is to keep the students interested, encourage their independence and to provide resources and support where necessary. Gaining knowledge is a process she goes through with the students in her classroom.

**Liz’s understandings of giftedness.**

The following understandings of giftedness arise from Liz’s stories of the students she has known, her personal experiences as a student herself, as a partner to a man who was gifted and as a teacher of Deaf and hard of hearing students. Her personal philosophy of education filters through these meanings.

1. Liz sees giftedness as potential in that students learn to develop their abilities. “Many kids may have gifted potential, but haven’t explored it; for gifted talents to come out, they need to be expressed, or they need to be encouraged, or facilitated.”

2. The existence of these abilities may be seen in some contexts and not in others and both teachers and students have responsibility for making the giftedness known. Liz, as a teacher, wants to try to recognize and encourage potential in her students and is aware at the same time that “we’re bound to see only one side, right? We see from our point of view and we may ostracize or put down the kid that we don’t understand as trying to express himself if we can’t relate to it... we naturally pick up on the things we identify with and we may miss other things.” Students as well take responsibility for deciding whether or not to show their giftedness to the teachers. “What I see as one student’s strength, another teacher may not see that because the student may not show that teacher that strength.”

3. The environment plays a significant role in influencing the development of giftedness. Within the educational context, teachers can “stimulate” students to reach their potential, or they can “hold them back.”
4. The students too play a significant role in developing their potentials. Both Bob and Cheryl took charge and "took what they wanted" from the system. "I think the gifted kids, like all kids, will always take what they need out of a situation and in some cases gifted kids may take more than the others... but if the situation is rich enough, all kids will do the same, get as much out of it as they can."

5. Giftedness is "the way that people think and put ideas together in original ways... they synthesize information and come up with something of their own, which is very recognizably, very obviously their own... it's shown in creative thinking and with artistic giftedness with bringing original ideas to the expression of creativity."

6. Although Liz sees all kids as potentially gifted, she still appears to recognize that there are some who stand out from the others. In spite of that she maintains that students need to learn from each other and that there must be equal opportunities given to all children. She rejects the idea of giving special treatment to those who are gifted.

7. Giftedness is a concept that is socially constructed in that societies decide what kinds of gifts should be rewarded. Mime is not high on a list of priorities in our society.

8. Liz does not believe in labeling students, as discussed in conjunction with other teachers' perspectives at length in Chapter 8. She believes that "if we label something, we stop thinking about it and reacting to it... the label wouldn't give me information I didn't already have about just knowing her as a person."

9. Liz sees giftedness both as a product, that can be seen as "original" or "superior" and also as a process, that can be understood through interactions with gifted people as they share their ideas. Knowing what giftedness means has perhaps two levels: that of knowing from afar, because other people say they are gifted, or society rewards their giftedness and that of knowing from within, actually having the experience of relating to someone who is gifted on his or her own level.
Discussion and summary

Since Liz’s experience up to this point had been in integrated settings and since she had been so actively involved in teaching both hearing students and those who had hearing losses, her whole perspective tended to blend all students together. When I asked Liz to expressly think about Cheryl and Robin and Zona in terms of their being gifted and having profound hearing losses, she responded in the following way.

Let me talk about Robin and Zona first, because I said in the first interview that ‘deafness allowed them to develop’ their gifts in mime. Well, that is interesting, because I wonder if they had not been deaf, maybe they would not have developed this area of giftedness, though the potential would still have been there. They may not have made anything of it because there was not the same need to express themselves. This outlet for expression was needed more because they were deaf, or maybe it was because they were deaf and oral. In a signing environment, their giftedness might not have even stood out so much.

With Cheryl though, I don’t think things would have changed at all. The only course she was taking with the teacher of the hearing impaired was the English and she would have been more at her level, at her age level I suppose. She wasn’t far behind anyway and she certainly wouldn’t have had any problems passing the English 12 provincial exams, but I think it would have come easier for her. The profound hearing loss does frustrate her, but she seemed to really handle it well and accepted herself for who she was and what she could do. I think if she hadn’t had the hearing loss, she would have accepted other things that she saw as things to overcome, her weaknesses or whatever, in the same way that she has accepted herself. Excelling would have just come easier for her. I think her giftedness allowed her to overcome her disability to a large extent and then be on equal footing with hearing kids.

It is interesting to note that the main theme that runs through all of the above discussion is essentially, that all students have abilities, all children should be given the opportunity to develop these abilities to their fullest and all students should be treated equally. As Liz says, “I don’t think one kid is any different at all from another kid.” She says later that...
theoretically, with deaf kids, they should be learning very individually and the teachers should be able to individualize so that their needs would be met in the classroom, in the programming. Because these kids are really individually placed within the system and there are small numbers too. If we had an educational system that enriched all kids, provided a variety of learning, ways of learning that met the different needs of different kids including accelerated classes and if we put decisions on learning back with the students, it seems to me that the word 'gifted' would no longer need to exist.

Ted's Stories

Ted’s perspective appears, like Liz’s, to also to have been influenced by (a) his experiences as a teacher, (b) his personal experiences and (c) his own interactions with other peers who were gifted. These experiences have appeared to influence some clearly defined ideas about what it means to be a teacher and what it means to be gifted.

Ted’s background-Ted’s students,

Ted is a Deaf teacher who has many years experience teaching in residential schools for the Deaf. He has worked with all ages of children in the school and is himself a very active leader in the Deaf community. He describes his background in some detail.

I’ve been teaching, I’m afraid to tell you the number of years I have been teaching! But I’ve been doing mostly the academic courses. When I started with the intermediate age group and that’s between 12 and 13 years of age, I primarily taught them using fingerspelling and speech. Later things changed over the years and the freedom of communication was accepted. I’ve taught all subjects in the Junior high age group as well as chemistry and English in Grade 10 and 11. My role at the school has changed a number of times. I was a teacher senior, a supervisor, a co-ordinator of support services, an educational counselor. In that latter role, I have worked with all the ages of children. I have also been a bilingual bicultural education co-ordinator.

About 10 years ago, I studied something about gifted children and that was at a University. Through my studies I found that gifted students seem to have common characteristics although I don’t want that to influence my
perception of giftedness. I don’t think that the list is really accurate, in terms of how I see the students.

Ted speaks of his own personal interactions with a gifted person who attended college with him, who was profoundly deaf and with whom he has been able to maintain some contact over the years.

Cody—A mover and an advocate.

You know Cody? Well, he’s a gifted person, very bright. We grew up in school together and he was always telling me lots of exciting things. He always had these neat experiences and I felt like I couldn’t have those kind of experiences. Actually, I felt quite inferior because he was always sharing stories with me and experiences too. He moved around a lot and was always changing jobs. He couldn’t seem to hold them down. He would disappear from this place, then show up in that place across the country, so he travels a lot.

I guess he also got into trouble with the law at times, but then he would show up here and he seemed to be able to catch up on everything that had happened since he was gone. He knew everything about the deaf community really. He knew what was going on without being here! But today he’s got a house and that’s great. He’s got satellite T.V., he’s got computers, he’s got a vehicle. He’s got a job. I mean regardless of anything that’s happened this is how he’s ended up.

I’m sure you know he’s found himself doing this by meeting people, myself and other deaf people and has been involved with us, lobbying, really doing a lot of work lobbying with the government for improvement of services, with the CRTC for telephone changes, captioning etc. and all those kinds of programs.

He’s got a great heart and he’s been through a number of things really. I really would consider him a very bright person. He’s a very strong leader, sometimes in good things, sometimes in things that are not good. But nevertheless he’s strong. He’s a leader, period. He does a lot of different things for the community.
Ted talks about another young leader who was once a student of his and is now working within the Deaf community. As Ted talks about Charles, one is reminded of the way Heidi described 8 year old Rob as being “comfortable within himself.” Charles seems to be the adult version of someone who has been able to retain that sense of comfortableness and who has been able to achieve his goals.

**Charles—Confident and easy going**

Charles, well he’s an adult now of course but I knew him in school too some years ago. I remember him as being gifted you know. He always had this carefree attitude; he’s never worried about anything and he always seemed to have the confidence that he would be doing something eventually. He’s just very calm.

Even when he was under a lot of pressure, he could always maintain and achieve good results in his school work. He has good language skills, both in English and in ASL and he never had any problems with the two areas really. He graduated from Gallaudet and found himself at the top of the rest of the members of the community. He found his place to be at the top of whatever he is doing. He gets along really well with hearing and deaf people too. I think that perhaps he got his inner strength through the family dynamics in a nice calm way. He’s very proud of his family and his parents obviously cared about him and his school work while he was in school. He’s certainly gifted.

Ted then proceeds to talk about two other very different students whom he believes to be gifted. The youngest, Michael, he describes in the following way.

**Michael—The Artist**

There’s something more and there’s something missing with Michael, but Michael should be considered as gifted. He’s about 7 years old now. The “missing” part is his language. Even though his language skills are almost nil, I mean, he has next to nothing in English or in ASL; he hasn’t got much. But there’s something still there, there’s more. He’s really very active and he can communicate by pointing and showing facial expression and that kind of thing.
I decided that the best way to start communication with him was by drawing pictures. There was a lot of pointing and trying to understand what he wanted to say. One time I drew a picture, Well I thought it was quite good, but he pointed out almost immediately that a lot of the detail was not there and some little points were missing. He picked out this detail and would not accept the drawing until I had completed it. So if there were an area that he’s gifted in, then it would be perception. He’s got very high perceptive skills and high capability at picking out details and he can identify things very quickly upon looking at it and he’s able to persevere until he sees that something is finished, complete. Actually, the tests showed that he has a higher level of visual perception, above average perception too, so I was right.

Ted also describes a young teenager, Janet, who is now at the school in the senior high. Ted shows that he is able to see beyond the stereotypical “nice” student in the class, the one who “does well” and who conforms to the teachers and the school’s values and ideals. In Janet, he recognizes that her streak for independence, although not always seen positively by the school, might also be her strength. Perhaps he is reminded of his own experiences with his adult friend Cody, who also performed differently from what people might have expected or even accepted. He had no trouble in identifying her immediately when asked to think about a student he knew.

Janet—The rebellious gifted student

Who do I think is gifted? Janet comes right to the top of my mind for one. At the school for the deaf, she’s not the kind of person who obeys rules, she’s very rebellious. I think she would do things opposite to usual expectations and that’s fine. She uses ASL but she does have good English writing skills too. Fantastic in fact. Although she doesn’t necessarily show it. The other kids look up to her. She can read and understand very well and in conversations she seems to be the center of the group. People don’t pass by her or push her aside at all. I feel that she will be doing something, what, I’m not sure. She’s going to go to university but I’m not sure if she’s going to fit in with the normal concept though, of let’s say, the ideal person, quote, unquote,
if there is such a person. She will do things, but specifically what, I’m not sure.

Ted’s experiences as a teacher.

Ted has experienced the changes in the philosophies in Deaf education, both as a student himself and as a teacher. His perspective then has grown from both his immersion in the Deaf culture and his interactions with hearing people. Having been involved at Schools for the Deaf as a student himself and now as a teacher, Ted sees his four students in relation to their Deaf and hard of hearing peers.

Ted’s personal experiences.

Ted earned his Doctorate from a Canadian University and was the first ASL using Deaf Canadian to obtain this degree. When I asked him if he considered himself to be gifted, however, he responded in this way:

No. I worked my way through to achieve this (1). I never considered myself gifted. Nobody suggested I was. I had some problems so if I did not do well in something, I would get angry and just fight my way through. I found it hard to write well for my Dissertation but I struggled and improved and I had an excellent advisor. I guess I’m pretty motivated and stubborn and proud too. I just don’t like to fail and I don’t like to see other people doing better than myself. I don’t want to let anyone down and I always feel responsible for doing the best that I can do. I don’t know; it’s hard to describe myself.

Ted’s ideas about giftedness appear to be grounded in experiences he has had when he was growing up and in his first years of work. As he talks about those first years teaching, as well as the years he spent at Gallaudet, he says:

Let me share with you a myth, a kind of myth that existed back then. I remember how brightness and smartness were often associated with abilities to read and write English. Speech skills too were often related to being very smart and so that made those of us who did not have good speech skills feel very inferior. Teachers tended to show off their best students who could speak
English well. This gave us the idea that you had to have good English to be smart. So I don’t want to associate giftedness with skills in terms of writing English, or having speech, or anything of that nature. I think there’s something much more to giftedness than an ability to use language (2). Michael, for example, I think he should be considered gifted. Even though his language skills are almost non-existent both in English and in ASL he’s still got something. I’ve seen him work with adults and there’s something still there.

In my adulthood, though, I’ve met people who have fantastic English writing skills, literacy skills, but really, they have very little to offer. There is just no substance in some of their written work. I’ve met people who are very talented in speech and they have good signing abilities and yet still, there is something missing. Some people seem to have good English skills, but it’s almost like plagiarism. They seem to be able to write, but they don’t write anything until they get the idea from somebody else. They write what other people discuss and have ideas about. So this person might have the skills to write but just doesn’t have that originality (3). Just like some professors who can speak for hours and really say nothing! I suppose a person could be talented in speech, in English, in writing but without originality, should that person be considered gifted? No!

Let me clarify a bit though. There’s no doubt that good language skills are very important and can be a very important part of being gifted. Having good language can help any student get through their studies, but good language skills should not be and are not necessarily, a measure of giftedness, in my opinion anyway. People who are gifted should have good communication skills, in ASL, in English, in whatever. At least they should have a special way of expression, a way of expressing themselves be it in art, perhaps in signing or in English, or even in Math. My basic language of interaction is ASL; ASL helps me to see and appreciate various personalities.

Through these personal experiences that Ted has shared, the following observations can be made.

1. Although Ted has achieved to a very high level in the field of education and earned a Ph.D. he does not call himself gifted. Being gifted appears to mean more than being a hard worker, or being motivated to persevere.
2. After having seen no relationship between the ability to speak and being gifted, Ted believes very strongly that good speech and English language skills should not be the measure of giftedness. He recognizes the importance of these skills, however, if they can be obtained.

3. He describes being gifted as having “that originality” in expression, which can be in the field of art or language or other areas or endeavor.

Ted’s learning from a gifted peer.

Ted talked about Cody, with whom he had grown up. Cody had had some unusual experiences and had done some unusual things in his life; he had not always been a conforming kind of person. It may not be surprising then, that Ted is able to recognize giftedness in a student in the school who is also not always acting according to people’s expectations. Ted sees Janet as being quite different from other students, in that...

She’s not what you’d call a “yes” person. She’s not necessarily the teachers pet! She’s very clear with herself though, she knows what she wants and other kids respect her. In the social aspect of her life, she’s definitely above average, though her school work does not appear to be outstanding. But I do see something in her that’s special.

So my idea of gifted children may be more complex than what you might have hoped to see. If one were to think that only the so called “good” children would become the leaders and that the “bad” children don’t, then you’re speaking with the wrong person! I think that she will go to university, but I’m not sure if she’s going to fit in with that normal concept of, let’s say, the ideal person, quote, unquote, if there is such an ideal person of course. To me, certain individuals will be gifted because of the way they are, not because of having a certain set of traits.

Ted is able to recognize that non-conforming behaviors may be an indicator of giftedness.
Ted’s perspective on teaching

Later in the interview, Ted was discussing the issue of identifying Hard of Hearing and Deaf students who were gifted. He said that he believed that it was a good idea to know who these children were because then the “teachers could add more challenging activities to their lessons. If you were going to add a specific program to their course of studies, that would be fine; I think they would adapt to that and learn quickly and benefit from the more challenging work.”

He went on to say, however, that although he agreed with the idea of identifying these students, he also believed that “if you don’t identify this characteristic or quality early in life, gifted kids will still grow. They will still manage and make contacts with high ranking people.”

If you look back 50, 100, 200 years, gifted people did succeed, they did become leaders and they did become successful without the benefit of any special programs. So based on that I can say that gifted children, regardless, will go through school and life and will succeed. Some of course may suffer. Perhaps they will have difficult experiences in life and they will struggle more, but I’ve actually seen some very bright people in the deaf community and they have done very well. Those people usually learn from their interactions with other bright deaf people and use that learning to succeed. These people seem to have the ability to interact and learn from each other, maybe even more than the average and so that will help them become leaders. One man for example, he has certainly achieved a lot in life; regardless of anything that has happened, he ended up on his feet and is doing very well. I’m sure he’s found his way by meeting other deaf people and deaf leaders and he has learned from that.

As I was reading Ted’s transcript, I could not help but be reminded of one of the major issues discussed in the literature on gifted education:

It can never be assumed that gifted children will somehow rise to the top “like cream”, or that they will always be seen in Plato’s term as “golden children”. Such descriptions apply only to the manifest achievers. …the over-
riding problem for the under-achieving gifted is the lack of provision for them to learn (Freeman, 1985, p. 4).

Ted's assumption, that Deaf and hard of hearing students who were gifted would succeed anyway, appears in stark contrast to Freeman's statement. Upon closer reading of the transcript, however, another of Ted's assumptions surfaced. Ted talks about his philosophy as a teacher in the classroom.

I had never really looked at identifying gifted students, or even which students were average or gifted. I just look at them as individuals and then that's how I deal with them. I understand that the lessons must be challenging, I know what students have to learn and I know how the children develop individually, so that's been my priority in looking at them.

For example in the Academic Challenge program at the School for the Deaf, the students there can handle that program. I could say that all of them are gifted. These students are encouraged to stay in the program because they can benefit from it. Some may be gifted and I'm sure that some are. They seem to handle the challenges very well as they deal with the advanced coursework. But to tell you the truth, I'm not really sure which are gifted and which aren't. Because essentially our goal is to provide adequate programming for all the different kinds of students.

Really, it's the interactions between the students and the teachers which are most critical to the teaching/learning situation. If both have good communication skills then I believe it would be a natural process for the teacher to provide the student more challenging work without even realizing if the student is gifted or not. I would rather see the natural process take place because I think that the most important thing that happens is for the teacher and the student to have clear communication so that they can both clearly see each other. Both are able to assess each other and be very open to each other. I think that's the best way for the teacher to find something more and to provide challenges.

Ted's belief then, that gifted children will do well without being identified, may be predicated on another very basic assumption: the trust or the hope that this very important "natural process" of teaching and learning, based on hear-and-now meaningful,
spontaneous, interactive and open communication and sensitive understanding, is actually happening in the classrooms. Experience indicates to me that ASL makes this type of communication possible.

Ted’s understandings of giftedness.

The following understandings of giftedness arise from Ted’s descriptions of the students, from his own personal experiences as a student and having known gifted peers and from his personal philosophy of teaching.

1. Giftedness is seen as both achievement and as potential for achievement. Ted sees both Cody and Charles as being leaders; they have achieved and are leaders in the Deaf community. In contrast Ted sees Janet as “doing something for sure, but I’m not sure what.”

2. Gifted people do not always conform to society’s or to the school’s expectations, as seen by Cody and Janet.

3. Giftedness means more than working hard, or being motivated to persevere, as Ted has done. It also means more than having good English reading and writing skills and good speech.


5. In this interview Ted pointed out that giftedness can be observed in the areas of leadership, academic ability and art (or visual perception).

6. Ted sees gifted individuals as being able to reach their potential without the benefit of special programs. He sees them as actively learning from their interactions with one another.

Discussion and Summary

Liz is a hearing teacher who had, at this point in her career, worked entirely with Deaf and hard of hearing students who were oral and who were integrated into the regular
school system. Ted is a Deaf teacher who has worked entirely in Schools for the Deaf, where fingerspelling, signed English and now ASL predominate. He says that "ASL has usually been reverted to as the basic social language when not restricted to English". They live thousands of miles apart and have never met, yet based on these interviews, they appear to share some interesting perspectives and also offer differences in their understandings which allow us to extend our own knowledge of the meaning of giftedness.

As teachers, there are similarities in their philosophies of teaching. Both believe that students who are gifted take active roles in their own learning. Liz says “they take what they need” out of situations and Ted refers to their “ability to interact and to learn from each other without intervention.” Both Liz and Ted have focused on the interactive process of learning and on their roles as teachers to be a facilitator as Liz says and as Ted points out, to “provide challenges.” The importance of the focus on the individual student and planning with the student to meet his or her individual needs, appears to be paramount for both of these teachers. Both, in fact, have stated that open communication is essential, that “knowing each other” as Liz says, or being able to “both clearly see each other” as Ted suggests, is an essential ingredient to the teaching/learning process.

Both Ted and Liz see giftedness as involving both achievement and potential and both teachers have said that expression of originality is key to their concept of what giftedness means. In addition to language and thinking skills, Liz has seen this expression in mime and Ted sees it in the art work of Michael.

In addition to similarities, Ted and Liz have also contributed different ideas to the understandings of what giftedness means. Ted’s emphasizes not using abilities in speech and the use of the English language as indicators of giftedness. This perspective is especially critical for Deaf and hard of hearing students and is one that comes directly from Ted’s own personal experiences as a Deaf person. His description of how he was made to feel inferior provides valuable insight. He also reminds us that non-conformity
should also be respected and that it might be an indicator of giftedness in some people. Ted has given us stories of leaders and compares these gifted people with other members of the Deaf community.

Liz provides us with an understanding of a deaf person who functions well among her hearing peers. The achievements made by Cheryl are both academic and social, but she also reminds us of the role that society plays in the meaning given to the concept of deafness; the ability to perform in mime does not rate very high in our culture’s value system.

Charon (1985) suggests that “not only do we undergo basic change in our perspectives many times throughout our lives, but our perspectives change from situation to situation, often many times during the same day. Few of us have one perspective that we can apply to every situation we encounter” (p. 6). It goes without saying that in the context of our interviews, each of these teachers did not share all of their ideas about giftedness or about gifted students. But as Charon continues, “a good perspective gives us insight, (and) clearly describes reality” (p. 7). Both Liz and Ted have certainly done this.

Ten other teachers participated in this study and shared stories about themselves and about the students they believed to be gifted. I consider both Chapters 4 and 5 to be perhaps the most important in this study. These are the chapters where I, the researcher, have intruded the least. The stories are told using the original words and expressions of the teachers and sensitivity of the teachers along with the richness of the context provides understandings about children which can be achieved in no other way.
Chapter 5

AN INTRODUCTION TO TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS

This chapter introduces the teachers and the students whom they believe to be gifted. I begin this chapter with a story told by Robert Coles, in the forward to a book called *The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter* by Vivien Paley (1990). The story captures for me, the essence of the teacher’s role in classrooms and reminds me in every way of the beliefs and understandings of many of the teachers in this study as they talked about their students.

As I read through this extraordinarily touching and compelling account of a teachers’ work with young boys and girls, ...I kept thinking of the last conversation I had with Anna Freud. She was in her eighties... and we discussed her long-standing difficulties with the psychoanalyst Karen Klein... “I have tried to let the children take the initiatives [in her research] and to learn from them. Perhaps I might have deduced more from them than I did... I think if you put me in a room with young children... You’d see me watching them carefully, trying to keep up with them in every way and when I’d left them, you’d find me puzzling over what I saw and heard, not too sure of myself and even quite unsure. With Mrs. Klein it was different, I suspect; I’m reasonably sure she would have a pretty good idea (right away, sometimes) what was happening with the children. She was never reluctant to let us know that she had a keen knowledge of the [psychological] lines of development in young children. A long time ago a colleague of mine asked me how [Mrs. Klein] knew so exactly the moods of infants and pre-school children. I was exasperated then; I remember saying: “go ask her and come back and tell us!” Now, I would be more relaxed; I’d say something like: “She knows what we haven’t yet found out and so we should be impressed.” I’d probably add this: “Mrs. Klein has told us what she believes happens to children and we’re still trying to find out what does happen by watching them and listening to them.” and that’s the difference. (p. viii).

Even as I begin to convey the information about the students whom the teachers have described, I realize that remaining true to the teachers and to their individual perspectives, is of special importance. It is tempting for me to begin to search through the data in order to make a list of characteristics that these teachers see as they talk about the students. It was, in fact, my first intention to do exactly that: to make the list and then compare items on that list to those which abound in all the literature on giftedness.
This kind of analysis, however, would be unfair to both the teachers and to the students. Teachers see their students in a creative, dynamic way. As they talk, they think of the student, of their constant interactions with the student, of situations which help enliven their knowledge and awareness of that student in all his or her complexities. The teachers cannot take these students out of their context, put them up on a table and make them into lists. These students are not lists; nor are they sets of characteristics. As Coles continues in his forward:

[Vivian Paley's] openness to new thoughts and ideas, [are] prompted by the rush of events that take place in the classroom. As she makes clear, for her a classroom is a place where a constantly shifting and edifying series of engagements takes place—between one child and another, between one "them" and another, between someone called an adult, a teacher and others called schoolchildren. (p. viii)

Ms. Paley continues in her preface:

There are labels that might be attached to Sam, but we'll neither define nor categorize him. None of us are to be found in sets of tasks or lists of attributes; we can be known only in the unfolding of our unique stories within the context of everyday events. We will listen to Sam's helicopter stories and offer our own exchange. In this evolving classroom drama every revelation is necessary and equally important, for our goal is more than fantasy. It is fairness. (p. xii)

This next section is an attempt to capture, in the teachers' words, the personal pictures of the children with whom they have spent a good deal of their time in the classroom. Throughout each interview, the teachers spoke of their students; they compared and contrasted them to other children they have known. The teachers remembered things about the students' home lives and experiences and they shared these things because they believed them to be useful in helping me to understand. They told stories that reminded them of something they felt to be important and worth sharing.

The teachers talked about 43 different students, all of whom they thought could possibly be gifted. Each student came to have his or her own distinctive story. It was as though for each teacher, their students were stars in their own right, but each was seen in their own unique context. Each student came, gift-wrapped; each teacher wanted to describe the wrappings. In the interview the teachers named the student, then went on to
describe the surroundings that made each unique. The giftedness was important, but for the teachers and for me, it was the circumstances of their lives that brought each student to awareness in a meaningful way.

In the following section, each of the teachers is introduced to the reader so that their professional background experiences and individual teaching situations might be understood. A perspective is “a point of view, placing observers at various angles in relation to events and influencing them to see these events from these angles” (Charon, 1985, p. 3). The teaching situations and teaching experiences of these teachers provide the platform from which they come to know and understand their students.

The words of the teachers themselves have been used throughout this section of the research. The teachers’ sentences have been rearranged where necessary so that in this written form and out of context of the dialogue of the interview, these stories make sense. Just as Shurkin (1992) has done when discussing Terman’s kids, I too have “adhered to standard journalistic practice in medical and social science reporting and have changed the names and some of the biographical details of the gifted people in the study to blur their identities” (p. 5). I am aware that my “putting together” of these stories is in fact, a way of interpreting. I have attempted to remain true to the teachers’ words, to the teachers’ meanings and to their intent.

Introduction to Heather

Heather was the only teacher I interviewed who was a pre-school specialist. She begins the interview by explaining her teaching background and describing her own involvement as she is now developing it with parents of the students with whom she works. She recognizes well the ongoing and interpretive process that happens when teachers and students interact and is able to describe briefly the process of decision making that she goes through during these interactions.

First of all, I have to qualify myself in saying that I have never taught any group other than kids with hearing losses. So I have to acknowledge that
the Deaf kid, who to me looks incredibly bright may just be average compared to the average hearing kid. ...(but) typically the kids that I have thought of as being very bright have been the kids that I have kept track of and followed and they have later excelled beyond expectations and beyond their peers. So I also have some experience in looking back and saying that what I thought (in the pre-school) was confirmed (by their later experiences in schools).

These kids are between two and a half and five years old now. They are Deaf kids too, because all the kids I’m working with now are primary signers and by that I mean that sign language is always going to be their primary communication mode. These are not kids who are likely to have good enough oral communication skills to be understood by the general public. They are not the 70 to 90 dB kids who are Hard of Hearing. So that’s where my experiences are framed right now and that’s important to qualify. Also, none of these kids have deaf parents. They are all hearing.

I know that because of my background I’m completely immersed in this language learning phenomenon. So for me, that’s where I’m looking and literacy to me is a really important language phenomenon. I’m in a really neat situation right now where I am working in a different kind of program where we do a little thing with kids for half an hour and then we get together with the parents for an hour. They have watched. We sit down, we look at the interaction, we talk about what we saw, what we did. We have some parameters set up, we’re looking for interaction patterns and we just talk and they give me feedback.

For the first time in my life though, I have the opportunity to sit down and say to that parent, Okay, Sara came up here with the ball and I had to make some choices: should I respond by going for the sign language? Should I decide to deal with the behavior or behavior management kind of things? Should I go for speech? What should I do here? If this is my first conflict interaction with this child then I take a risk here, but I decide to go for the language of social interaction. ...I cannot tell you the satisfaction it gives me to be able to relate what goes through my mind with the parent and they come to understand the number of decisions you make every time. ...I can say: “this is the decision making process I went through when that happened”...I can actually dissect the number of decisions and the more experience I have and the more I read and the more I research I do, the more decisions I make every day.
Heather seems to be very aware that with her students at this age level, language learning and development of communication is of utmost importance to her as a teacher. At the same time, other interesting aspects of each child’s context alert Heather to the possibility that this child is gifted. Heather may be watching for certain things which to her are indicators of giftedness, but at the same time, the children are showing her others.

**Karen—Having no tolerance for ambiguity.**

Karen is a child that jumps out at you: I would be able to say that she is gifted without even thinking about it. She is extraordinary; she’s this little teeny child, with cute brown pigtails, who is just full of vinegar. Her parents have worked very hard with her; she is very oral and I think that she is really wired through the mouth! At three and a half, she was wonderfully assertive, she seemed to play really well with her peers.

Of course sometimes if she didn’t get her way she’d get really cheesed off, but you know, she did so well. So well in fact, that we put her in with some other deaf children who were a year and a half older than she was and they were very bright, really a smart group. She competed with them. Some of them had more hearing than she did and she was right up there with them. She was just so far above what you’d expect for a profoundly deaf three year old. She was able to get the abstract concepts first before anyone else did. You only had to explain it once and she had it. Print? Bang! She picks it up! In fact, she inquires actively always; she just has to know everything and has no tolerance for ambiguity. If her hearing aid is missing, or down, she cries; she sits there with big crocodile tears pouring down her eyes as she realizes that she can’t understand. She is just extraordinary. The odds of her being able to read and communicate like a normal hearing kid are so astronomical and she’s right there with them! She’s extraordinary and I think she always will be.

**Sara—The active inquirer.**

And Sara is something the same as Karen too. Again it is that tolerance for ambiguity really. She is marvelously communicative. She wants to know everything; she inquires about everything. She is very adept at getting the information she needs. She is an incredibly active inquirer. Plus, she is a
people person all over the place. I think that her ability to learn to network and take advantage of the people around her may be very helpful in the long run. She is also a kid that is way ahead of herself but her mother has been signing with her since she was tiny and her mother already knew sign because she had another son who was deaf. So Sara knows how to function in a visual/spatial language, she knows about the rules of visual regard, she knows how to get information. She hasn’t had to tolerate the same amount of ambiguity that the other kids have had to.

Jay—The best communicator.

Now Jay is an incredibly bright kid too; he is from an entirely different universe. He’s four years old and he learns things incidentally; he just picks them up and how I don’t know! He watches and just knows what to do all the time. I will do something with one kid and I won’t even explain it to him, he will have been watching and he knows what to do. If he sees something once, the next day he has a linguistic label attached to it. And the thing is, he is doing this in spite of a very difficult background situation.

There’s very minimal communication at home I would say, but here, he is the best communicator I’ve ever seen. So where does he learn this? Where is the model? This kid is behavior disordered like crazy, but he’s just so bright. He is so bright. He would be walking along with me and the things that he says to me. He will be chatting about, well, like he has already told me what he wants for Christmas and he told me Santa hockey pants, skates, blah blah blah... he has got it all planned out. All down the line. Santa is going to come and he made it very clear to me that that is what he was talking about. Time line; (he seems to have) a linguistic knowledge about time lines. This is a four year old kid. Time lines all the way down. We are walking by a bulletin board and he passes by; we were talking about going on the bus and he said me “drive the bus tomorrow” and he uses that tomorrow marker for future at four years old. I don’t often see deaf kids doing that, especially deaf kids who come from a not very stimulating language environment. I don’t often see them talking about future and past: way (in the) future, way (in the) past. They can’t even, most of them can’t even describe, they can’t even describe things; they can’t frame that in language so that anybody could understand it. This kid who comes from this incredibly language deprived background who has everything against him can carry on a conversation; can make contingent
comments; can maintain a conversation. He loves to communicate and my frustration with him is that much of that intellect goes into manipulating behavior. But when he is on, he is so on; you just can’t believe it. To me, I think he is in an entirely different universe from the other two children in his afternoon class. An entirely different frame. His communication and language skills.

I think he is a kid who is very bright, he desperately needs limits, has zero consistency at home and tests every single person he is with every single second he is with them and we are seeing a decrease in it now because we are really tightening up with our behavior management and we are very careful about that. He is spending less of his energy manipulating and more of it learning. But you know that’s a kid I look at and say “wow, he is really bright.” Those kinds of kids you know jump out at me. Kids who can retell stories. Kids who can tell stories period. Kids who can make their own personal experiences understood and I’ve got a lot of five year olds who are deaf who can’t do that. Those are abstract things to be thinking about, to be talking about and most of the other kids are lucky if they come in and tell me they fell down or they scratched themselves or something and usually they don’t volunteer. We have to pull it out of them. I think Jay is a real bright kid. He might be gifted, I don’t know. I mean just when I consider his background and the things that he has risen against and what he is looking at in terms of communication competency. With Jay I would say really bright. (laughter) Because when I look at what he is doing, he is doing it in spite of an incredible number of other things that should be devastating for a profoundly deaf kid.

Scott—The one-trial learner.

Scott is another one that comes to mind. He has a big hearing loss, probably 80 to 110 dB and he was reading, asking questions, telling stories everything. He just picked up language so fast, just like that and you know he wasn’t even aided until he was about three. He was just a one-trial learner and tests high average at that age. But he did great. He did very very well with his peers, but again what that’s going to look like down the road I don’t know, you know.
**John—A real bookworm.**

So John too, I felt he was gifted all the way along. He had this incredible propensity for language and he is reading at about the fourth grade level now and he is eight years old. Reading English at that level! I always thought he was gifted but he never looked gifted on the psych tests. He looked smart but never got up there into the gifted numbers. He also has mild CP., but he was quite physically compromised. He was an unusual kid, socially and perhaps to some extent physically, not really able to join in but he was a real bookworm; he loved reading books. But John is where he is today because everything is right and he is real bright. He’s got all kinds of challenges, but he’s got everything else perfect behind him. Tremendous family support. I mean, his family have always busted their guts to communicate with him; they have become a signing family, siblings, mom and dad, everyone. His mom is a teacher but everyone pitched in to be there for John and so, without that he probably would have done well, but he is looking good now compared to kids who are older than him because of the family support. I believe that.

**Jerry—Socially and communicatively competent.**

Jerry was another one who was wired to communication. I think I’d call him very bright because he couldn’t care less about school when he was here. He would rather have been out playing but the first time I saw him he was oh about 18 months old and he wanted to go outside and I was at his family’s house.

So he wanted to go outside and he kind of pats the window a little bit and that doesn’t work so he does it a little bit more, that doesn’t work he takes his mom’s hand and points to the window, that doesn’t work. His mom and I are talking. He goes and gets his shoes out of the closet brings them over to his mom and this is incredible. He didn’t learn how to do that (to communicate in different ways) from his parents or anyone. He just came that way. He is just so good at this non-verbal communication that he does not need to learn to talk and so probably has decided that he never will. Nobody taught him five different ways to ask a question; he’s just really bright. This little guy almost runs the neighborhood; he is a strong leader. Sometimes he gets his language all jumbled up but it doesn’t matter at all because, somehow he seems to get his message across and that’s fine. They started him using print very young too and now he is also a very good reader. Socially he did incredibly well with
his peers but early on he could have cared less about school. He really likes school now and is doing great—they’ve skipped a grade level with him and he got the highest mark in his social studies class despite the fact that he is with the older kids. So maybe he is gifted, I don’t know. But I wouldn’t have said that in early years because he just was not motivated to learn in this setting at least. But he’s still very socially competent, communicatively competent.

**Penny—Learning like a house on fire.**

Penny is kind of a separate intelligence you know. She just learns like a “house on fire.” She’s miles ahead of most of the kids linguistically in terms of vocabulary she knows and what to do with it; she’s putting two and three word phrases together. She has this incredible propensity for language development. She’s ahead in symbolic play, animating toys while the other kids are just kind of putting them together. She’s motorically involved so she doesn’t have the same access to physical play that the others do. She loves books; she’ll sit and babble with books, fingerspelling all the time. If she doesn’t know a sign she’ll make one up. I mean this is all normal language phenomenon, but she’s doing it in sign.

But in many ways she is a very different kid, unusual. She very often won’t give you eye contact; she often has trouble entering or maintaining an activity that is accessible to her. She is more likely to just let the world pass by her. At this stage, I think she prefers things to people. I’m just not sure what’s going on. She’s just one of those kids who doesn’t have all of the social trappings of communication which are so crucial, but she has this incredible propensity for language development.

**Introduction to Elizabeth**

As Elizabeth began talking in the interview, she talked almost immediately of one of the children in her group who was gifted in art. As a result, she mentioned very little about herself throughout the interview, preferring perhaps to focus on the students. She did mention, however, that she had “actually started teaching in hearing schools” for about four years before she came to the School for the Deaf. She has been teaching in the
Junior wing of the school for about 10 years and during that time has seen a lot of changes.

We’re getting a lot of the students now who have problems, like memory problems and learning problems, who are not just deaf... when I came here we had more students who we might have called gifted then... they were more on a par with the hearing kids out there, or better than the hearing kids, so gifted. They were more academically inclined; you could do a year’s work in the curriculum with them in a year. I don’t know if the whole population is changing or if (these very bright students) are integrated. I don’t know where they are. Maybe we’re just now seeing them.

In spite of the fact that Elizabeth has seen few students who are academically gifted, she is very quickly alerted to the artistic talents of one of her students, Craig, whom she describes in the following way. In a later combined interview with Heidi, the two teachers agreed in their perspectives of his potential giftedness.

Craig—The potentially gifted artist.

Here’s a child, Craig, who could be gifted in art but has never been encouraged in art lessons. Right now it is his best subject; he’s better than any of the hearing kids I’ve ever taught at his age level in art too. He’s 11 now. When I see him doing his artwork, he is very very creative and really interested in it. Not just interested, I mean, he is interested! If he had his way he’s be doing it all the time! He works at the art at home too. I know he’s done this at home because he brings it back to school. Last Easter, he went home and made something and brought it back to school and suggested that we all make this with him. Great ideas all the time.

But he’s also creative. He’s very good at drawing, good at designing things too. He can get a piece of paper and he’ll put it together and make something from nothing. I have a very good art class this year but Craig is by far the top. He has won a few prizes, competing against all the students in the whole school, that means the older ones too. And he’s only 11.

Hopefully in the future he’ll be in some kind of field where he can use his art, because if he has to use his language, in English or ASL, he’s got a lot of problems. He’s really learning disabled in language, he’s got so many problems there. He has memory problems; his recall is very poor. He’s
reading at a grade 1 level you know and going to OT for help too. But the place I would call him gifted is in his artwork. I don’t know for sure though, because I’m not really an art teacher.

Elizabeth goes on to describe another student who has been in her class and who she feels definitely has the potential to be gifted in language. In a relatively small school, where there are between 100 and 150 students, teachers have more opportunity to see students not only in their own classes, but they can follow them through in other classes by continually interacting with other teachers and the classes themselves. Elizabeth has watched Nora grow and change, depending on circumstances which impact on her life in the school.

_Nora—Dealing with the impact of home situations._

Nora, this one particular student, could be especially gifted, just in language. I’m sure she would surpass her hearing peers. She is just very, very good in language you know. She’s always been very bright, like she’s a fast learner and capable, just tops on language, but I couldn’t label her gifted I don’t think. The only problem with her is that she’s had a lot of home problems and when she has home problems they affect her work. So, it goes up and down according to the situation at home.

In my class when I had her she was really good, doing top work. She was always one of the best in the class. When I had her you could really tell the difference between her and the next student, she was just way above them all. But the next year her work just went down because of all the social problems and the home problems. She was one of the lowest ones. You could no longer see that she was anywhere above the other kids in the class. The environment there just hasn’t helped her at all and I suppose that if things were supportive there then I probably could label her gifted because her work would show it. If you’re worried about your family then it affects your work.
Heidi too, works at a School for the Deaf with the elementary aged children. In some ways, her own beliefs and her own life experiences appear to be similar to those indicators of giftedness that she sees in one of her young students, Rob. She speaks of herself and her experiences in this way.

If I just think of the kids I’ve had over the years and I’ve had plenty, I don’t know how many over the forty years of teaching that I’ve done, who I could call gifted. Yes, I actually started with a permit in 1945, the last year of the war when you could start with six weeks learning experiences in teaching. But if I look over those years, there have been a lot of different children that I’d say have gifts in certain areas.

I think it would be a challenge teaching a room full of really bright kids; you’d have to know your own comfort level. For example, I know what I’m not comfortable with: I was comfortable teaching music to little kids at one point in my life, but I wouldn’t be now because I haven’t touched the piano in years. I’ve got a piano at home and what I started out to be was a music teacher. So don’t ask me how I got from being a music teacher to teaching deaf children. Well, when I said music teacher, I don’t mean teaching music all the time. I was teaching elementary, in a couple of schools and I did the elementary music. Growing up in a great music city where they had the Musical Festival, well, you know, you just sort of fell into it. But once I started teaching deaf children, the music sort of fell to the wayside.

This being comfortable is important. I think we, we need to develop healthier children mentally. Maybe I look at my own kids and say that because, maybe I’m comparing my home life which was in the city but extended to a farm community and lots of family around and then I get married and I move away and my kids didn’t have that extended family and I know they had a harder time developing what I think made me strong when things went wrong in my life. There are so many young children now that have got so much anger in them. Cause I think the one thing... If I had a gift in this life and I think I’ve got a couple, given to me, I think I have good common sense and I think that carries you a long way in life. Maybe that’s a gift.
The first student Heidi talks about is a young boy whom she teaches in her classroom; he seems to have shown her that having the ability to live with an inner sense of well being and to do well in class, are both indicators that he may be gifted.

Rob—Feeling comfortable with himself.

Rob is only eight, he’s profoundly deaf and going to the school for the deaf. He’s quite amazing really because he seems to be so comfortable within himself. He just seems to have a natural, well I don’t know how to explain it, except to say a natural comfort level. Like, he doesn’t get so frustrated that he’ll fly off the handle or he doesn’t have that frustration of “I’m deaf, poor me” that I see with a lot of the kids. He just seems to have a good attitude about himself and knows that he can achieve. He seems to be very contented within himself and very mature for his age.

He really loves to read and he tells and can get jokes. His reading ability is almost on a par with any eight year old. His ability to write sentences and long sentences, expanded sentences... he’s good. Sometimes lazy though! He’s got a wonderful family and lots of things going for him. He’s curious about things and interested in everything and anything. I’ve never heard this child say “I don’t want to do this.”

So, that gift of being curious is great and with everything working together. He’s also got a fantastic memory and he transfers knowledge that he learns in one area to another. Like to me if he’s got those three things: a good attitude about yourself and knowing that he can achieve, the memory for learning new things and retaining it and the ability to transfer from one subject to another and generalizing what you’ve learned. Well, he’s got it.

Can’t you have a gifted slow kid though? I don’t mean, slow in the head, but Rob likes to just sit and you wonder what the heck is in that head of his, cause it’s not like another kid writing there with nothing, because when you ask him what he’s doing, he’ll look at you and say, “I’m wondering about...” and he’ll go on and tell you what he’s wondering about. But in the meantime nothing’s been done at his desk. And I’m not sure that you should stop a child who’s thinking like that! Isn’t thinking the whole thing that we’re supposed to be teaching them how to do?

I see that Rob is really gifted, but I wonder sometimes about the need to challenge him and I question if this is the right school for him in terms of
getting that challenge. The family seems to be so content with this school and the fact that he’s getting the deaf role models, that is important to him. On the other hand I just don’t know. I don’t think I can make it as challenging as he needs it to be. He really needs to be challenged.

Success for me I guess for a person means that they’re somehow able to accept whatever limitations they’ve got, live some kind of a relatively happy, well I don’t know about happy, but at least a life that isn’t too distraught with emotional upheaval. Rob just seems to be so comfortable within his own skin.

In addition to Rob, Heidi also mentions two students who are both older now, but who she knew when they were in the younger classes at the School for the Deaf. Brian was an extremely talented and very unusual young man and Lisa appeared to have a real academic and linguistic gift. Brian’s name had been mentioned to me several times informally by many of the teachers at the School for the Deaf. A proficient ASL user, he was also extremely sophisticated in his use of English; he had exceptional creative writing skills. He used these skills in combination with a rare talent in art which allowed him to create imaginative and high quality cartoons. At the same time, he seemed to be insistent at maintaining his aloofness, sometimes at the expense of building interpersonal skills. Heidi describes him in this way.

**Brian - The gifted loner.**

Brian was another one who was very, maybe gifted in art—drawings, cartoons, sketches, things like that. He was also a fantastic writer. He went to Gallaudet and he was smart academically too. I remember seeing some of his pictures and I hear at one point that he might go to this really well respected art school but I don’t think that he did. He’s also very much a loner you know, he just hadn’t developed a lot of social skills I guess and I think that that might not help him find a job however. He was a very independent person and that did not help him out socially, or even with the teachers.

Both Heidi and Elizabeth, who taught Lisa in her primary years, called Lisa gifted in the language area, although in other areas like science, she “wasn’t that great.”
Lisa—Gifted in English.

Lisa was somebody else who I would consider gifted. I mean, she was just right on. Excellent. Really really good. You teach her something and she just caught on. She didn’t have very much hearing either actually and she would just catch on. I think it’s related to the idiosyncrasies of English, I think is what it is. She had it you know. Like she caught on to it and she got it. She had a sense of humor too; she could pick out the idiomatic tendencies in language and things like that. When I had her it was at about 14 or 15 and I was tutoring her for the exams, short stories, propaganda and all that and she just did really well, All I had to do was basically teach her or tell her and she caught on and wrote terrific essays too. She was really good, somebody else that I would consider gifted, certainly. But language was her strength; she sort of peaked in that area. She wasn’t as good in other areas at all.

Introduction to Naomi

Naomi’s experience had been quite varied during her 13 years of teaching Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. She had worked as a itinerant teacher, as a self-contained classroom teacher in both oral and total communication settings and also at a School for the Deaf. At the time of the interview, Naomi had moved out of the area of hearing impairment and was teaching hearing children in a regular Grade 4 classroom in the public system. During the interview she talked about the last class of Deaf and hard of hearing students she had taught during the previous year.

Last year, I had a really neat, but very rare class. I would consider every one of them gifted in some way, because they were all at grade level. If you can have a hearing impaired child at age and grade level and coping really well, I consider them gifted if they’re able to do that. That’s really rare. Usually they’re two or three years behind and I find that if I have a hearing impaired child and their reading is at Grade 3 and they’re handling the curriculum at Grade 3 then that to me is an indication that for a hearing impaired child that is quite unusual. So I was teaching Grade 3 at the time and
I did give them the Grade 3 Public School exams and they did really well. Some of them got 80s.

Naomi then goes on to talk about some of the individuals in that class. The first student she referred to was one whom Heather had mentioned when she had been about three years old. Nancy's story is told by these two teachers: Heather, who knew and worked with Nancy during her pre-school years and Naomi, who taught Nancy in her elementary school class. The following is a blending of the two histories as Heather and Naomi talk. Heather begins.

**Nancy—Gifted despite the odds.**

The first one that jumps out at me is Nancy. She is profoundly deaf, but she was born hearing I think. At about a year, she became very ill and lost most of her hearing, then she became sick again and lost the rest of it at about two and a half years of age. Nancy always struck me as very bright because when she was here she picked things up so fast and put things together so quickly. I have known her from the time she was a year old and now she's twelve! I wouldn't have any trouble in saying that she is really gifted.

Nancy has had incredible disadvantages in her life. She is culturally not only deaf, but she is culturally European as well; her family is from Yugoslavia. They are not able to support her academically or linguistically. There's no English spoken at home. Her family did not speak English and had a difficult time accepting her deafness. In fact, they hauled her out of school for a year when she was in my class and took her to a faith healer. During that year she had no communication, no amplification I'm sure. She's dealing with a lot of deprivation and she's still functioning at a very high level. Despite her family background, she's overcome incredible odds of becoming a very literate person. I think for me that qualifies it. The kid who can overcome. Nancy can overcome anything. In spite of everything, this kid recently got a story of hers published in a kid's magazine so my inner feelings were borne out even though she had these incredible disadvantages in her life.
Naomi now picks up the story because Nancy is a student in her classroom in the public school.

Well, Nancy was the only well rounded gifted child that I ever had, the only true gifted one. I would consider her to be intellectually gifted, you know. In all areas. I mean, she had this grasp of language. She could bring it further than even if I didn’t teach something, she would come up with something that I hadn’t thought of yet, or taught yet and that would be striking for me for a hearing impaired child to do that. She would extend what I taught. If I was teaching, if I started to teach about writing an imaginative story which is really difficult for hearing impaired kids, before I would even get the chance to model it she’d have a different idea already. She’s written some fantastic stories and had them published in children’s magazines even. She picked up reading and writing and meaning quite quickly and that was an amazement for me because she had no hearing. She’s got this great sense of humor too; you know, she plays with language; she’s able to be witty with people and she can catch on to their wit too.

It’s incredible because there’s no English spoken at home; English was the second language for her parents. I think she feels kind of isolated and alone a lot of the time and no wonder!

But Nancy was like that in all areas. She has an excellent memory too so lectures were a really good way to teach her, combined with visuals of course. She was gifted in art...she was a beautiful artist and she is taking piano lessons. So I mean, truly gifted in a lot of different areas, not just intellectually you know.

So in spite of having no English spoken at home, in spite of being profoundly deaf and not being able to use any hearing to help her understand things, she’s doing all this with little family support. Whatever she got she got from the people who taught her and she just got it somehow. And so it’s totally what Nancy has herself and what her teachers offer her is where she can either make it or break it; it depends on that. I mean, when you think of it, where would she be if she had had family support? You know? She’d be way up there.
Naomi goes on to talk about two other students. Both students were ones she worked with the previous year. In telling Josh’s story, Naomi discusses the impact that the label had had on the parents expectations and resulting conferences she had with them about these situations. Because his story deals with the impact of labeling, it is told in Chapter 6 of this study.

Naomi also talks about Sam whom she recognizes as a very strong divergent thinker. It is interesting to see that while she was teaching him with the other students with hearing losses, Sam stood out among his peers; Naomi also believed that he would also be able to compete with his hearing peers. Since she has been out in the system working with hearing students this year, however, she begins to doubt that Sam could compete well with some of the students she has. Compared to Deaf and hard of hearing students she would call him gifted; but compared to hearing students his own age, she is not so sure. Her uncertainty is evident. This provides another example of the impact of the experience of dissonance on our perspectives. Naomi is now caught a bit off balance and must integrate this new information with her previous way of thinking.

Sam—Gifted but compared to whom?

Sam, he’s the one who was really a good thinker, although he’s low in other areas. He’s really strong in divergent thinking; very talented that way. I guess I compare Sam and students like him to hearing kids. If I was going to find a hearing impaired gifted child then I would consider him gifted in comparison to hearing kids. When I think about it, that’s probably why I would consider them gifted. And I guess Sam in that area, compared to hearing kids, he would be right up there with them; I guess that’s probably why I consider that. Yeah.

He’d be right along there with them. I don’t know if he’d stand out this year though. I’m teaching hearing kids and I tell you there’s some bright kids in there. I’m teaching grade 1 and I have kids reading at a grade 3 reading level, working two or three grades ahead and you know in reading and writing and thinking, well, I mean, they’d blow Sam away, you see. You know, Sam, among his hearing impaired peers, stood out.
He really stood out with the other Deaf kids, but put him with the hearing kids and he’s probably fine (he probably did compare favorably) at the grade one level. I’d have to compare him with grade 4 now, that would be something else. I’m sure if I went into the Grade 4 class of hearing kids and talked about something, Sam would be really lost. I’m just not sure if he would even stand out.

He did in my class with the other hearing impaired kids though. With his thinking skills and he had a lot of language too. Being able to say (what he wants to) also puts a different light on it too… a couple of the other deaf kids had little or no speech so everything they said was in sign but when you hear Sam come out with it, with these clever ideas, just coming out with it, it’s sort of a different realm that it’s in, you know. But the other kids wouldn’t have had that kind of thinking that he had, so he’d always come out with those ideas. That’s pretty neat you know. But when I think about it, it’s probably not really what I would call gifted.

Introduction to Tina

Tina has been a teacher for nine years and for the first three of those she worked with hearing students in the public school system. After she received her specialized training allowing her to work with Deaf and hard of hearing students, she began her teaching career as a consultant and itinerant in a large school district. She has worked with students who use oral methods to communicate, as well as those who use signed English and those who have had ASL backgrounds. Some of her students use interpreters in the school system; others do not. During the interviews Tina talked mainly about the students and about her own ideas of giftedness; very little discussion centered around her own experiences as a teacher.

As Tina indicates, Barb certainly seems to have everything going for her. She is in the public school system and appears to be doing extremely well in every area of her life.

Barb—The all round gifted student.

Barb is clearly what I would call a gifted student. She has a sloping loss and is severely to profoundly deaf and it’s genetic. She’s been that way since
birth. She’s currently doing her grade 12 year in high school. Her gift is for anything with rhythm and flow. She plays the slide trombone, the valve trombone, the baritone, the piano. She plays in the extra-curricular band, as well as taking her music courses. She speaks French with a slight hyponasal accent, is athletic and plays on two or three different teams depending on what season it is and has straight A’s. She’s a gifted student. She’s an all round gifted student.

When I look at some of the other things that I’ve used as descriptors for gifted students, she does it all so well, you don’t stop to analyze how she does it, but she is very very intuitive. No, not intuitive, sensitive. She reads interpersonal communication as though it were open sign language, body posture, nuance. She reads communication so well. She’s very quick to respond to that. She’s flexible and adaptable. If you put her in with her peers, no in high school with her hearing peers, you would pick her out as the mature student.

She always has all of her book and papers organized. She’s the kind of person, even with her language difficulties, who understood the puns and the irony and the subtleties of language. You know, the only student in the classroom who understood the joke that the teacher made, that sort of thing. She just processes information very well. She’s also a self-starter inasmuch as if she has a problem, she will seek out possible solutions and pursue them. I think of one time when she was very frustrated with her state band instructor. He’d say “all right, let’s pick that up from C” and she would say “Well, what do I know—C, V, D? I was always looking at my sheet, I wasn’t looking at him.” And so she thought of different ways that he could prompt her, you know...and find solutions to her own problems. Again, that self-reliance.

With Mark, Tina is impressed with his inherent abilities on the one hand and on the other, the apparent problems which manifest themselves when he is faced with certain aspects of the English language. The problems with reading and writing English, however, have not seemed to inhibit his abilities to perform well in the sciences, even when understanding seems to be dependent upon the language.
Mark—the language-blocked gifted student.

Mark's Performance IQ score is way up there, over 130. I knew that, but also watching him you can see the way he can absorb information even when it is not presented to him linguistically. He can take information, internalize it and turn it back out in an application. Like in science, if you present him with a very simple experiment demonstration and you show him basic electric circuitry for example, he could go out and build a very complex electric circuit. He's really got this speedy fast mind and just a wonderful long-term memory. I think that's another aspect of what makes him a quick learner, is that he has this memory to build on.

And Mark is not doing well academically. He just doesn't have a really effective communication system. I mean, he certainly can communicate but there are limits to the subtleties that he can communicate. His assignments have to be done in English and it is very difficult for him to express himself in English. I think the thing which is intriguing is how this child, with these different attributes has succeeded to the extent he has, given that he would probably qualify as environmentally deprived.

Mark really knows that he is bright. He accepts it when I say, “you know, there’s no reason that you can’t do this.” I mean, he knows because he’s bright enough to know that he can manipulate almost any adult he wants to manipulate. He understands the human adults very well and he is also quick to recognize when that won’t work. So you know, when he realizes that is the way, then he is very quick to adapt; he’s very quick to adapt.

Mark is in an integrated classroom in a regular school and he now has an interpreter-tutor with him. He has an ASL instructor who does intensive work with the whole family, with Mark, his brother, his parents because otherwise, we’re working in a vacuum. So all the time now everyone is signing to him consistently...he wants the sign language so fast; he wants to be fluent now. I think that ASL will allow him to complete the High School Diploma and I don’t think that he could have done that using English as his only language.

He’s quite socially aware, as you might expect of a 13 year old. He’s in with a crowd, getting into mischief, has a girlfriend and because he’s learning sign language a lot of his classmates are very interested in learning it too. So he enjoys that celebrity status. Sometimes he doesn’t want an interpreter to sign for him because then he wouldn’t be one of the gang. So he’s very
socially aware and chooses always to be with his class. He never wants to do pullout work.

Tina recognizes the need for all high school students to be well organized in order to achieve the best that they can; this ability is even more necessary with those who have extra needs that must be met in the school setting. Judy seemed to have that ability.

**Judy—The well organized gifted student.**

Judy was post lingually deaf at the age of five and had a severe to profound loss for most of her schooling. But in high school, she lost all the residual hearing that she had and then had a cochlear implant.

She had a wonderful language base and so didn’t really have a lot of language problems; her natural intellect didn’t become frustrated. I mean, if she wanted to ask a question about something that she saw and you know, wanted more information, she could get that. She had language She remained oral and is still oral. But in Junior high school there were characteristics of hers that made her an outstanding student at that point. No one ever thought of her as being an outstanding deaf child, She was just the outstanding student.

I never did look at her file at first; someone else directed me to it simply because I said “Gee, is this girl quick.” I mean, I’ve never had a students who is this quick. I could hardly plan lessons fast enough, or I arrived at the school thinking, well we’d better work on this but she’d already figured it out for herself, to the point where my lesson was obsolete. And then they gently tried to tell me, “well, perhaps if you consulted your file on this child, you would really see what kind of academic potential she has!”

One of her outstanding characteristics was her ability to organize and manage her own time. She had an incredible demand on her day, every single day. She managed her time very, very well and she has that ability to organize and she could streamline things. Like, if something didn’t really need to be done, she would have recognized it immediately and she could set priorities. Her management skills were something that you would never expect to see of a junior high school child. That same sense of priority setting probably helped her with the cochlear implant as well. It has been very successful and I suspect that her ability to process information and to make sense of it, combined with
being able to stream out information that was irrelevant. She’s able to judge essential from nonessential information.

Tina first met Terry after he had moved into the public system from a School for the Deaf at the age of nine.

_Terry—The adaptable gifted student._

Terry has a number of characteristics that would lead me to believe that he’s certainly above average in terms of a lot of areas. One that is outstanding is his adaptability, his quickness, his flexibility. Quickness to grasp things. And this was the student who’d come out of a residential school for the deaf as a sign dependent child, was integrated and in 4 months was standing in front of his class giving an oral report. The child was very, very self-motivated. He asked for information he wanted to learn and he could conceptualize in the abstract.

We think about hearing impaired children who have difficulty with abstract as opposed to concrete and I think... This is the child who said to me on his tenth birthday, “you know, every time you say umthing, something sounds like umthing, but I know umpthing’s not a word, so it must be the s that I can’t hear, so, something.” On his tenth birthday. And I think that the rate of progress that he was able to make, having changed environments, changed communities, in fact, changed provinces and changed the primary mode of instruction and still make that rate of progress means that he had a great deal of innate ability.

**Introduction to Laura**

Laura’s perspective on giftedness is unique, in that she is not only a teacher of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, but she is also the mother of Kate, who has a profound bilateral hearing loss. Laura’s own words provide her best introduction.

I became interested in the field because of Kate obviously and when she was 4 or 5 she entered the public school system and I entered the teacher education program. So we both started school at the same time. I had been a
teacher before but I hadn’t done much teaching and my background was in kindergarten, nursery age and primary.

I’ve been working with the school for the Deaf now for about 15 years. The first couple of years were part time, but since then it has been full time. I’ve been involved in different areas too, teaching nursery school and primary age students and now I’m involved also in parent-guidance. I’ve also worked for several years with deaf-blind and multihandicapped students.

The School for the Deaf where Laura works is responsible for a number of different educational situations involving those outside the school itself. The school also coordinates integrated classes and itinerant services to students who are studying within the public school system.

Laura’s professional experience then comes from having worked within this milieu, dealing with parents who are struggling to do the right thing for their children, teaching students within the School for the Deaf itself and having her own daughter integrated into the public school system. She talks about her experiences with her daughter in a sensitive insightful way and expands our awareness of giftedness by also describing the experiences of another of her students, Daria. Although different in age and backgrounds and abilities, these two students share similarities which stem from the fact that Laura believes both to be gifted.

The following paragraphs tell their stories and illustrate for us those indicators of giftedness that stood out for Laura as she interacted with her daughter Kate and with Daria. Kate is now a young adult in her early twenties. She has completed University having graduated with a major in English. Now, as Laura says, she is taking some time off from her schooling to “recuperate” after working so hard for so long in the school system. Laura tells the following story about her daughter.

Kate—Having “the language gene.”

Kate was born deaf. She had rubella and was diagnosed around a year, although we really knew before that. She didn’t get hearing aids until she was
about three you know, the old fashioned speech trainers, with the headphones? Which Kate called her Bupbaba. That’s what the speech teacher said every time she turned it on to see if it was working properly: “ba ba ba...” So Kate just adopted that. To this day when we refer to it, it’s not the speech trainer, it’s the Bupababa. Endless hours with the speech trainer, with her, me and the teacher once a week showing us what to do. So she developed excellent speech and language skills.

She was an early reader and she loved it. She was always reading above grade level. The reading was actually the key for Kate because it was a way of developing language at the same time as learning how to read and opening up. She became a real lover of reading, a lover of books and it has served her in good stead ever since. It made it possible for her to get some of the information at least, that the rest of the world takes for granted. Deaf kids miss so much background information; so the reading helped Kate get some of that.

But more than that really, she loved language, she loved learning language and because we were teaching it in a more, not structured fashion, but certainly in a more conscious way, she was conscious of it as a thing rather than as an automatic non-thinking kind of thing. So she played with it more than other people might have, more than other children might have.

We have a “Kate story” in our house for example. You know, they strike me kind of funny. She was probably four. We were at the supper table and she takes her fork and sort of pokes at one of the peas on her plate and says “What’s that?” and you know, busy mother, I’m saying “it’s a pea. So what? Eat your supper.” And she said “uh huh. That’s a pea.” and she pushed another one over... “and that’s another pea” and she pushed another one over to the other side. Then she said “That’s a small p and that’s a capital P.” Well, it’s just one sample of the kind of thing that she might do... it’s language play I guess but a fairly high form of it. A fairly high form of punning and she always had that and continued of course to do that. Her favorite kinds of jokes have always been those kind of slightly twisted funny but not funny kinds. And at the age of five or six she was writing the Great Canadian Novel; she was working on it then.

So partly it was home and the home environment and partly it was the work we did with her... and partly, I think, I really think that with some kids there is a language gene maybe. That some kids just are so much tuned into language and the fun of language and reading is an extension of that. And if
it’s nurtured, I think there is such a thing as giftedness in language, not necessarily languages, but giftedness in language in the same way that there’s giftedness in music.

I always thought she could have worked harder in school, but don’t (all parents) always say, if you only tried just a little bit harder, you could have been the top of the class? She actually maintained fairly average grades all the way through and average grades were just fine for her. Now she’s graduated from University and majored in English. She’s still the reader, the thinker, but not really creative in other ways.

I don’t know if she’s seeing it in these terms or not, but she really has worked hard for all those years. It’s hard to imagine how difficult sitting through a class must be when you’re using 110% of your energy to try to understand what is being said. Even with interpreters, that requires concentration that I don’t think a hearing person could ever begin to imagine. And then, just the difficulties of day-to-day living for a hearing impaired person sometimes gets so complicated. Where a phone call would clear up something for us, it might have taken Kate four hours of running back and forth. (Even with TDDs) life is more difficult and things take more time.

When she went to University she was anxious to be in a city where there was an element of Deaf culture present. Her favorite hangout was at a restaurant where her peers who were also hearing impaired, gathered. She wanted to get involved with that part too.

Laura talks about Daria in some detail. She too has a profound bilateral hearing loss and comes from a family where there are three other siblings with hearing losses. Laura mentions that one of her other sisters might also be gifted but doesn’t talk about her because she has “never known her in a school kind of setting.”

**Daria—Dealing with discrepancies.**

Daria is 11 now. She’s fully integrated into Grade 5 in a fairly large school. She’s such a personality, because she is a very stoic kind of person. There’s not a whole lot of animation, more of a deadpan kind of kid. It’s hard to capture Daria with words. She is so funny and yet difficult to deal with because she has no patience for explanations. If for example, you’re trying to explain to her how to do something and you sort of say it’s like this and this
and this. Well, if she’s caught the gist of it by the second “this” then it’s “give it to me and let me do it... back off lady, I’m ready to do this and please don’t interfere with my learning anymore because I don’t need anymore explanation.” (That kind of thing) makes her difficult to deal with sometimes, but if you can adjust your own pace to hers on a one to one, then she can gobble up material just as fast as can be. I figure she’s definitely gifted in order to be able to function normally with the hearing loss that she has.

Dania has this need to know everything, so in reading for example, we are working on picking out the main idea or the topic... she can scan. I’m trying to impress upon her that it’s okay not to know part of it, that it’s OK not to know. Her English reading level is not at grade level, no it’s way down, somewhere around Grade 2. And she’s in Grade 5 now. She’s just coping. She has just been assessed and the IQ testing again showed the usual, with the verbal IQ being low average and the performance is way up around 130 or something. Over the years it’s always been somewhere around 130.

I’m never sure how much faith to put in any kind of testing because if it’s a challenge then she’ll do her best; if it’s too easy, it’s like, “why bother?” And if it’s too hard she seems to sort of, well this isn’t worth working at because I’m not going to do well at it. You have to find material that’s sort of right in there for her. So I’m not sure just how accurate any results are with her.

Daria is in the bottom third of her class at school. Once in a while we get to the end of something that needs to be done and she’s sort of... “lets talk.” And she’ll start on “I’m stupid, I can’t do this, or I’m going to fail.” And it’s really difficult to reassure her that “no Daria, you’re not stupid, but you’re a very bright young lady and you’re doing fine. If you worked harder then yes, you would get better marks but you are doing well.” But the actual truth of the situation is hard for anybody to accept I think. She has to expend so much energy to get to “low normal.” compared with the hearing kids.

There’s a terrific discrepancy and imbalance that she is caught in and I think that’s what she’s feeling often and she doesn’t have the words or the vocabulary, or the concepts to express it very well probably. I’m not sure that any 11 year old would.

But sometimes she is prickly. Sometimes she’s just sort of like a porcupine. You can just see the quills sticking out. Like, “don’t come any closer to me.” I think it’s part of her personality and I really honestly believe
that it's part of being very bright and very deaf and she knows that she is
different and as I say, although she can't express it it's part of her defense
against the world too. Like, don't come any closer because I really don't want
to have to try dealing with communicating with you or even trying to.

She's one of those that we look at and think, what does the system for
hearing impaired kids have to offer her? And you think, well, integration into
a regular public school, that's where she is now, but even for next year, is
there a better placement for her? So you look at the residential school here.
There's not a group of kids there that could be called peers by any means. She
would have to be with much older kids academically and she would be no
more with people than she is now. I don't know if you could manufacture a
group of very bright 11 year olds who are also hearing impaired.

I guess I feel worse for Dania than I realize. It's the isolation of hearing
impairment that always gets to you and you realize that she doesn't really have
any peers, either hearing or Deaf and it's not just that she's in the wrong place.
She might be one of those people for whom an interpreter at her elbow all the
time might be a real enrichment for her. She's fairly adept at sign language,
they use sign at home, (but)... I don't know if an interpreter would be the
answer or not. There's no such thing as an answer for her, or whether it would
serve to isolate her further. She's not the best worker in the world either. Her
mother's very concerned about her study skills and the lack of studying and so
forth. I don't know. The itinerant service (is not necessarily the best either). If
you're pulling them out of the classroom for too much then all of a sudden
they're not part of the class anymore and why on earth integrate them? For
whatever length of time she's out of the classroom, she's missing whatever
went on there. The continuity gets lost. Now, if I had a million dollars, I don't
know what I'd do with Dania.

As Laura continues to talk about Dania, she compares her to her daughter Kate. As
she says, "it's maybe some of the things that I see in Dania that remind me of Kate and
maybe that's why Dania gets under my skin more so than other kids might...".

Kate (my daughter) and Dania are both gifted but Kate was reading
above grade level. Dania on the other hand is not; she's way below. But they
share that spark. With Dania, it's partly language, it's partly the speed with
which she will get hold of an idea and know what it is you’re explaining and
connect it with what she already knows about either that topic or another one.
You’ll explain something about a camel and it will be sort of like (snaps
fingers). Oh yes. And she’ll tell you about, something that’s the same.

It’s that quickness to grasp a concept when you present it and the ability
to make a leap. I suppose it’s creativity, creativity of thinking. It doesn’t have
to be anything that you can actually see, but it’s that click that happens. Both
with Kate and Daria, it’s also that “well I have it, move on” kind of thing, that
impatience with lesser mortals

Laura also described a “little guy” she knew in the school who was a gifted artist.

Little Guy—The artist.

This little guy was six years old and just one of those people, like I’ve
never seen a child do that before but I’ve seen some adults. You knew he had
the whole picture in his mind and when he was drawing, it was as if he was
tracing on lines that were already there in the paper. You know what I mean?
And he would start in a different place on the picture than you think it should
be. He was very gifted artistically.

He really had only a handful of signs and no oral language at all, very
little in terms of communication skills so for him, this was his way of
communicating and explaining things and telling you what happened last
week and what had happened on the weekend. It was a matter of trying to
figure out and then to find a way of talking back to him. It was like therapy for
him I guess; self-induced therapy. You know, he needed to draw. If you didn’t
provide him with enough paper and pencil, his behavior was just, you know, it
would just sort of explode. He’s really something else.

Introduction to Hilary

Hilary is an itinerant teacher who has worked with Deaf and hard of hearing
students for about 12 years, in addition to working with hearing children for four years.

She goes into some detail about her background.
I’ve probably worked with about 50 students with losses over 70dB and of those 50 I would consider about 10 to be gifted. They are all profoundly deaf. I’ve only worked with oral children. But you have to remember that as an itinerant and an oralist, seeing only oral children, for a profoundly deaf youngster to, put in quotation marks, “make it in the regular stream” you have to be fairly bright. I mean that just goes without saying. So if I see two or three kids in Grade 12 who are passing in the mainstream and are profoundly deaf, that says to me they’re exceptional to begin with. But I would point out that I think there’s a big difference between that and gifted children, which I’ll talk about later, but they’re exceptional.

Then also, I do cater to the high schools where the students are going on to even higher education. A lot of them at that point in time would have dropped out unless they’re extremely bright. And some of them are in private schools too. At one of these private schools, two profoundly deaf students have gone there and they had to even write exams to get in there in the first place. So there is a weeding out process going on all the time.

As far as the concept of gifted goes, I don’t think there was ever a time when gifted wasn’t a concept. Certainly when I went through training they had classes for the gifted. I taught in a “free school” in my first year of teaching which was a very interesting place. You took what you wanted to do and you did it; very avant garde free thinking, for creative gifted children. So that was my first exposure to giftedness, when I became a teacher. I worked with the man who implemented the program for two years and everyone at the school, the whole focus was on the gifted and creativity.

Since working as an itinerant teacher, Hilary is constantly moving between age groups, where children are fully integrated into the mainstream situations with their hearing peers. She talked about six of the students with whom she has worked. Tarah is the oldest of the students and provided Hilary with an interesting challenge. Since Hilary was one of the teachers I had interviewed in my initial pilot study, I had an opportunity to return to interview her two years later. During that time, Hilary had changed her perspective on whether or not she would call Tarah gifted and discusses this in her story about Tarah. At the time of the first interview, Tarah was in her second year at
University. By the time she was in her fourth year, Tarah had achieved things that forced Hilary to change her mind. The first part of the story comes from Hilary’s first interview.

**Tarah—Needing to know and not giving up.**

Tarah attended a private school for girls and I think is a very talented youngster. She read all the time. She worked hard and she was aggressive and she was the kind of youngster who was extremely tenacious, in fact, bordering on being obnoxious. She just wouldn’t give up. If she wanted information, she’d persist. If other students wouldn’t help her, she’d just get notes somehow, she’d leer over their shoulders and run up after class to soak up information from the teachers.

Tarah is a bit of a plodder I think. She struggles and she works really hard to get things. Unlike some of the other gifted kids I know, she doesn’t seem to come out with the really creative thoughts that they do sometimes. She’s not your average deaf kid. She doesn’t have that magic but she has that curiosity. She’s very very interested in a variety of things. She was of course a memorizer too, but not just a memorizer. She can take things that next step. But any kid that goes to regular high school and regular University and gets scholarships, she’s exceptional.

She obviously has above average intelligence and she has this other personality trait, a strength or a weakness depending on how you look at it, determination to get it. She told me she was going to be a vet in Grade 8 and two years later she was still going to be a vet. Even if adults don’t think it’s the best thing for her, there’s no point in fighting it. She will be a vet. She wanted to be a Scuba diver; she got her license last week. She went away for the summer to work and loved it. She loves new experiences. She doesn’t seem to have that innate hesitancy about going into new situations. She has a fabulous time and is seeking out new challenges all the time. Constantly.

She had a terrible time during high school. She was obnoxious, but I don’t think that had anything to do with the hearing impairment. But now at the University, where people are allowed to be more individualistic, she’s really come into her own. She has friends. She goes out every Saturday night. She values friendship very highly.

She really has it all. She’s athletic, academic and creative. She makes all this miniature furniture for the doll house; she’s extremely artistic. She also
has good speech. That’s another area to be gifted in. She has that, with a profound loss.

Two years later, Hilary again speaks about Tarah, she is now in her fourth year of University.

Tarah applied for Veterinary school last year and it was a great tragedy, because she had the marks, just. And you know how high they have to be to get in. Then she went for an interview. They wrote a rather snarky letter back that they thought that because she was hearing impaired that it was almost a “forget it” situation.

But she is as tenacious as ever. She never gives up and is applying everywhere. I think she is going to get in somewhere because she has the marks. She got honors in her fourth year Philosophy course, along with all her sciences. Now is this kid gifted? Honors in philosophy! I’d always had in my mind that she was not necessarily gifted because she spends 6 hours a night studying, but I think I’m being rather harsh on her. There are lots of kids who might spend 6 hours a night and not get honors! You’ve got to have something else going for you.

When she gets to vet school though, in her practice, she’s going to have to hire someone who is hearing to be with her all the time. In order to practice her trade. You can’t tell me for a second that people are going to feel comfortable going in with their pets wondering if perhaps she missed something important that they’ve said. But if she has to have someone with her all the time, is that going to give her the opportunity to get happiness from her giftedness and to share her giftedness with society? For example, she was over at my house the other night and she shut the door and the cat’s tail was in the door. She didn’t hear the cat and she keeps pushing the door because she thinks that something is stuck. It wasn’t really funny because I had to rush the cat to the hospital. I don’t think she sees through all that. She thinks she’s going to get her degree in veterinary medicine and she’s going to. Somehow she’s just going to do it.

Hilary, like Tina when she talks about Mark, is impressed with Iris’s abilities to do well in school while at the same time having difficulties with English. Since all texts are
in English and since these students are participating in English speaking hearing classes, the expectation that achieving in academic subjects and having good English language skills go hand in hand is not surprising. Three students, Iris and Mark, described by Tina and Cheryl, described by Liz, appear to have been able to make up for these language difficulties.

**Iris**—Science is her strength, not language.

Iris is profoundly hearing impaired. Before, I didn’t think she was gifted, but now I do. She’s blossomed in a sense. In school she has just sort of made it through all the way along, making 65’s and 67’s which really isn’t bad considering her hearing impairment. She’s in the regular stream and any kid that’s making it there, you have to look at them and say maybe they’re gifted. Here’s a kid who’s making it but she’s got this horrible English, her written English is really not good. But you know, she’s getting 80 in Math, 85 in Chemistry and 86 in Calculus.

This kid should really go to University; there’s no doubt in my mind. But she can’t get in without her Grade 12 English! Iris has no problem with scientific language, even in problem solving and she’s not really a worker either; she hardly does anything, any studying.

She’s withdrawn a bit I think. To a certain extent, she’s never had the opportunity to relay her ideas, to talk about things, to listen to people talk about things in a very meaningful way and that is in part because of her family environment where other siblings tended to take the limelight. Then again, if you asked her about an idea, she’d be more inclined to say, “I can’t explain it.” That’s her big thing “I can’t explain it.” Lately though she is beginning to change but I think it might be too late. Even if she works at this for 10 hours a night, she is going to fail Grade 12 English. I think that she’s going to come a long way with what we’re doing now, but I don’t think she’s going to pass.

Yet she’s gifted in the sciences and profoundly deaf. The teachers can’t figure her out, they can’t figure out where she gets this information from. Again, osmosis. She’s artistically gifted too. How is she doing the calculus and all the word problems that go along with it? Don’t you find it interesting that her language problems haven’t blocked her so far in the maths and sciences? I don’t help her with the technical language at all because, quite frankly, I can’t do it. So how is she doing that? You know what it says to me
is that her language levels in all this has perhaps developed in this area because she's used it. I always think lack of language might indicate some lack of thinking process, lack of cognitive processing, but in this case it isn't true. All the energy of her cognitive processing is there. It's just that she hasn't had the opportunity to put the little words to it. And when I say bad language it would be good language compared to a lot of what you see. She just hasn't had the opportunity and I think that it has to do with the family set up.

I’ve been blinded because I’ve never been that impressed by scientific things... for me, writing and English and vocabulary are the important things. With the other gifted kids I’ve worked with, usually they are avid readers. They have to be to get the information because they’re hearing impaired. I don’t think all gifted people have to be readers but I think that for deaf kids, reading is really essential. Iris is not a reader. I bet she’s never picked up a book to sit down and read it on her own.

I’ve always thought, God if they’re really articulate, well, if they’re not articulate and their vocabulary isn’t really extensive and they’re not reading all the time, my tendency is to think that they’re not gifted. But Iris is definitely gifted.

Hilary, having worked with a number of gifted students, is quick to recognize Bennie’s giftedness and at the same time, is worried by the isolation which sets him apart from the rest of his peers. Bennie is in Senior High school now, attending a private school. For Bennie, having a hearing loss and being gifted, the isolation Hilary sees seems to come from two sources. The first arises from the difficulties he has had with easy and open communication, being understood and understanding others. The second source appears to come from the fact that even if the easy and open communication were there, Hilary says it would be hard to find someone who could share his advanced intellectual interests. The story is not unlike the frustration that Laura expresses when she talks of finding the most suitable placement for Daria who, at the age of 12, is several years younger than Bennie and is also without a peer group.
Bennie—Where’s his peer group?

Bennie is definitely gifted. He was talking politics at seven years old and his parents weren’t that knowledgeable in that area. You could see it—his little mind was just churning all the time. He has language that is great and it just comes naturally to him. He just sits down with a pen and paper and it’s just there. His speech is lousy though and it’s difficult for someone else to understand him. But he’s a fabulous speechreader, gifted perhaps, in that area. Last year, the physics teacher was standing all the time with his back to him in class. Anyway the whole class was stumped, including the teacher, for this problem. But Bennie writes down the solution on a piece of paper then lets the teacher know where the mistake is. He’s really bright, in the A stream. I just looked at him and said how did you do that? He said “I looked through the numbers and I realized we do not know the right answer. I knew quite quickly that if he added it, it came to that, I mean, you don’t have to be that bright to figure it out.” He and everybody else had been sitting there for 20 minutes.

He’s really brilliant. I do believe that it was there when he was born, but he’s also come from a very pleasant environment too. I wouldn’t call it an overly enriched environment. It’s just there. It’s just a gift. He’s gone off the top with his testing and he won the math prize for all of Canada, but socially he’s the pits. His speech intelligibility is a problem though. I mean, he’s gifted but so what? I mean, I hope that he can get really interested in computers and that he can find one or two people who understand him completely.

How is Bennie going to be emotionally successful? Nobody understands him. I think that socially he is just out of it completely and it’s very difficult. But you know, how does one separate personality and communications skills? I have kids that have worse speech than Bennie and they have no problem socially. With him I think it’s personality. To a large extent he’s aloof, he’s always been very content to be on his own and I do believe that and all of a sudden he realizes that he should belong to something. I should fit in here somewhere! But his own worst enemy has not always been his deafness. I think he would have been like that frankly, whether he had been deaf or not.

If you look at Bennie, let us say that he goes to University and the social thing becomes so overwhelming that he can’t cope and therefore doesn’t function academically. Does he lose his giftedness? Well, I don’t think he loses it, it’s there, but it’s not functioning so it’s gone. The potential’s there,
but if it’s not being nurtured and used in the true sense of it, it’s not there. So it does come and go depending upon the other pressures, or other priorities.

Bennie is in the accelerated stream and is on the honor roll and taking sciences. He actually wrote his grade 12 English in grade 11 and his teacher thinks that he’s the only student that he’s seen in all his 8 years of teaching who might be able to earn a living through his writing. And he’s profoundly deaf. He doesn’t study at all either and it just comes naturally.

Hilary has had years of experience in working with regular teachers who have deaf and hard of hearing students integrated into their classrooms. In telling the story of Sue, she considers how, depending on where teachers are coming from, students may or may not be considered to be gifted. The comparison group the teacher uses becomes an important determining factor for application of the gifted label.

Sue—Gifted, depending on your perspective.

Sue, used to be on my list of ten gifted kids that I knew, but she’s not any more. Most people thought she was gifted when she was younger because she had a way with language, but that wasn’t the only thing. I’ll tell you why most people think she’s gifted. She looks physically retarded. She has very poor balance and she wears very thick glasses. So you take this picture which is the opposite of gifted, the retarded look. So your expectation of what this person is going to produce is very different from looking at sort of the vivacious brown-eyed curly haired alert kid. So she looks retarded. Then she starts producing things that are impressive and you go from retarded to gifted very quickly because of your expectations. What’s coming out of her is the opposite of what you might expect.

Sadly, now, she’s in grade 11 in a regular high school and she’s never failed anything in her life, but now she is. Everything’s falling apart. Now the teachers are surprised that their expectations haven’t been lived up to.

Hilary recognizes the achievements of Bruce, which are quite remarkable, but again, is not sure whether she’d call him gifted because of the fact that he needs to work so hard to achieve the things he wants.
Bruce—A hard worker.

Most people saw Bruce as being gifted and I never did, but then I look at what he’s been doing at University and I think I might change my mind. He did outstanding work in high school and he is up there with the best in law school. He’s also really great socially but he just kills himself to get where he is. He works so hard. But he’s done all these fabulous things so I guess he must be gifted.

Having worked in so many school settings it is not surprising that Hilary recognizes quite easily those situations which are challenging and those which are not for a gifted child. She appears to be aware of the shortcomings of the educational systems trying to meet the needs of those students who demand more challenging interactions. Her concern is evident.

Ned—Gifted and unchallenged.

Ned is also gifted and I’m not happy with his program at the school. Because they’re doing things that are not really challenging him at all. The reading material is so far below his reading level and his interest level that I’m appalled. There are no facilities for this youngster and the program should be able to provide better programs for any child, let alone a gifted child. So to me he’s vegetating. It’s a waste. The point is, that whether he’s gifted, smart, weird or whatever, you’d better start providing something to challenge him, to take him further.

Introduction to Andrea

Andrea is a Deaf teacher who has worked at a School for the Deaf for about 15 years and has taught “math, reading, languages, science and a variety of subjects” mostly at the senior levels. Having grown up in a residential setting Andrea explains that there was “the notion that everyone had to be pretty much the same. That was dorm life. We had to eat, go to school, sleep at the same time and so on. I mean, it was great to be
individuals but there was a preference for similarity in the group that goes way back. It was not necessarily good to be labeled differently from the others.”

She goes on to say that in her fifteen years of teaching there was only one student who she labeled gifted because this student was able to apply everything that she’d learned in the classroom to outside the classroom, “and the other students were not able to do that.” It is interesting to note that Andrea compares Alexis’s accomplishments and abilities to hearing students and recognizes the difficulties she has had to overcome in order to learn English as a second language. Alexis is also fluent in ASL.

Alexis—Fantastic at everything.

I need to emphasize, in my 15 years of teaching I’ve only labeled one student as gifted, only one. My definition of giftedness is as it would be for a hearing child: to be fantastic at everything, able to rationalize, able to make application of what they’ve learned in the classroom to any situation outside and there’s only one who has been able to apply the things that she’s learned in the classroom to outside situations. Others are not able to do that as well.

Alexis moved here from Mexico when she was (in) the beginning of third grade. She must have been nine. Alexis was born deaf and her parents are deaf; they still speak Spanish at home. Their sign language is not bad, but their daughter has definitely mastered it. She knew no English at all when she arrived. Absolutely none. So from age nine till graduation she learned English in that very short time.

Her writing in English is not perfect, but it’s fantastic for a deaf student. (And remember)... she started at nine without any English and has become very good at written English and even better at reading English. To me that indicates giftedness.

Her understanding of her biology and her math are fantastic as well... I don’t know whether it’s because of the English, or whether it’s just something about her mind... she catches (things) immediately in some situations. There’s something about her mind. A lot of the kids are creative but they’re not gifted. She’s not creative but she’s gifted. So there is a difference.

(There’s a) seriousness about Alexis I would say. She’s very conscientious about her work and she’s competitive. I think our curriculum was challenging enough for her. Her biology 30, the provincial exams were
given and I didn’t expect anyone to pass but she passed; 56% was her final score. So we thought that was great. She also passed her Provincial exam in Math 30 with a 56 percent. In my experience I’ve seen (other students get) 20-30% but hers was 56 percent.

Being gifted for her is more than having writing and reading skills in English though. I would say it is her ability to handle, or control, the core subjects. It’s her ability to handle rhetorical questions. Others struggle with it but Alexis has these type of skills.

I think we were able to meet her needs here at the school... I think we gave her enough supplementary work. We wouldn’t have had to move her to another school for gifted children or whatever in order to challenge her. For example, Gallaudet University has a math program on the computer and it’s done through distance, electronic mail. We registered Alexis in that program and she was in the top 10% I believe in North America. There were weekly quizzes in math; the answers had to be sent off to Washington, DC. That sort of thing. But she was at the top 10% of users so I think we were able to meet her needs here at school. She graduated a year, or two years ago and went to Gallaudet where I believe she’s majoring in computers.

She was also an Olympic swimmer who performed very well but I had no expectations of Alexis as far as leadership in the deaf community was concerned. She was probably too busy with her studies, too busy reading things like the encyclopedia. Even though she had no particular leadership abilities I would still call her gifted.

Although initially Andrea has said that she labeled only one student as gifted, when I asked her about others who she thought might be gifted as leaders in the Deaf community she did not hesitate to respond. “Remember I mentioned Angie before? I would say that student is gifted in school and in leadership.” In addition to Angie who is now an adult Andrea is also then reminded of Irene, a student in the school now, who she expects will also become a leader in the Deaf community. She speaks of them both.

Angie—An active leader.

I would say that Angie was gifted in school and mainly in leadership abilities. She’s probably 25 now and lives in Vancouver I believe. But she
came here from another country when she was little and her progress was just amazing. She became president of something, the student council I believe and then was part of a very small group of foreigners at Gallaudet who actually set up a program and then moved back to Canada and developed a new program there. She has set up programs several times. But I would call her gifted. I would say she's gifted. Perhaps that's one adult that's labeled as gifted that comes to mind.

Irene—A leader in the Deaf community.

There's a wonderful leader. I have high expectations for Irene in the Deaf community. She struggles a bit with her writing skills and her reading is OK, but she struggles with learning. I think she has a hard time. She's good in Math but not in other areas; she's just average.

But she loves Deaf rights, civil rights, she's just great in those areas. She shows a lot of concern about the environment and also about other people; those are the kinds of things I would expect in a leader. Not particularly in subject matter, but her concern about other people and what happens to those people. She's 18 or 19 now and in her first year at University but she's going to very possibly be a leader in the Deaf community.

Introduction to Ken and Richard

These two teachers will be introduced together because they were involved in the same program at a School for the Deaf and actually worked with the same students. Ken has taught students who have impaired hearing for over 21 years. He has taught as an itinerant teacher, as a classroom teacher in a self-contained setting and as a teacher at the School for the Deaf. When I asked him what methods of communication he has used, he responded by saying that "what usually happens here is whatever the kid needs or does is what we use." For many of those years, Ken continues...

I worked with multihandicapped students, but for the past eight years we've been doing different kinds of things. A few teachers got together and decided we would like to raise the standards for some of the kids here at the School for the Deaf and so we worked out a specialized course and started
embarking on a high school type of thing. There are many different settings available to our students throughout the province, in integrated settings, self contained classes, that sort of thing. But my work has been out of the school here.

Richard has worked for 15 years as a teacher of Deaf and hard of hearing students, in situations similar to those of Ken. Richard, like Elizabeth, talked about the population at the Schools for the Deaf changing over the years. Richard talks about this in the following way and one is reminded of the same issues that Elizabeth had mentioned.

But the thing about the day school and the boarding program that we have here. The kids that tend to be gifted, or show signs of talent in some respect, it could be art or whatever, they don’t necessarily end up here, because they tend to be integrated. The vast majority of students are out there and the students that we tend to get in the residential program now have overlying problems apart from the hearing impairment. Certainly we’ve had kids here who, considering their handicaps and the way they cope within the integrated situation, they are not the run of the mill kind of kid; they’ve been able to make a successful venture out of it for themselves and that’s great. But now at the school, we don’t see many of them now.

Both Ken and Richard had been involved in a program that was set up in the public school, so that students from the day program at the School for the Deaf could be integrated with their hearing peers in order to take the Senior High School courses. Some of these students used interpreters when they were in these classes; others did not. Ken and Richard often acted themselves as interpreter tutors for the students and were there to offer academic support where needed. These teachers refer to the students who were able to take advantage of this specialized situation. In most cases, their stories are blended because they said many of the same kinds of things about their students.

There is a certain honesty and insight that both Richard and Ken offer as they discuss Andrew. Their story reminds me of the students who go unnoticed as being gifted
in many schools, because other things such as lack of motivation or behavior, mask their abilities. Andrew’s wish to “get on with things” is perhaps not unlike Daria’s impatience with having to follow directions.

**Andrew—Gifted and in trouble**

Andrew was an extremely bright boy; he was born smart. He was even more naturally gifted than the other gifted students but he didn’t have any use on earth for academics. When I had him in science if we did a lab report, you had to do it right. Well he’d scribble it off you know, in five minutes and the content would be right. No problem. My problem was trying to get him to do it, to follow a format, to follow the rules. There is a way to do this type of thing. No use for it.

He showed his giftedness by being a real pain to a lot of the teachers. He just wasn’t being stretched and he found school boring a lot of the time. Sort of like, “I’m not challenged here; I can do that stuff in two minutes” and so he did. He was so fast, just quick as a whip; then it was time to get into trouble. We realized he was a really intelligent kid just by talking to him and he was so quick to pick things up. But he was always in trouble; his potential tended to be used in naughty ways.

But you know, once he was given some direction and his interests were sparked, he’d really take off. He was really able to do anything that you wanted him to do. Unfortunately, later on, his social habits were just not good and that got him into a lot of trouble in other settings. I really think that it was partly our problem though. If we’d been able to give him greater challenges in the school, I think his bad behaviors could have been eradicated.

Another of those students who excelled in the specialized integrated setting, was Donna. When she went on to University, however, things became more difficult for her. Ken and Richard talk about Donna at the time she was in the senior high school and briefly, about what happened the year after she graduated. Once more, the stories of both teachers have been blended to give an overall view of this special student.
Donna—Steaming through...until University.

Well, Donna was motivated and bright; it just all came together with her. She is the most, quote, unquote, normal deaf kid I’ve ever come across. She just shines out as being naturally gifted. God granted her with those abilities and you know, she was really well accepted, socially well adjusted. Just a nice kid. Always socially mature and very personable.

There are three deaf children in her family and she is profoundly, prelingually deaf. She was in an oral program but was really a manual student, but an excellent lipreader. The giftedness also comes from experience you know; hearing kids are exposed to so much and hear so much and get so much general information and knowledge whereas the deaf don’t. So I think that somehow she managed to make up for that experience, for a lot of that lost experience. She was really motivated; she really wanted to know and she had great home support.

Of course she was a hard worker too; she had to be to make up for her handicap but she had good study habits. I think that people who have good study habits, they probably do in five minutes what other people take an hour to do, just because they have good study habits and then she was one that was that way. Now, she’s the top one, okay. And learning, well, (snaps fingers) like that. Once, that’s all it took. She did it all on her own though; no allowances were ever made for her in the school. But she didn’t have any problem with academics or with the social aspect of it all. She was just well accepted and well adjusted. She just steamed through.

And achievement wise, well, if you took away the handicap she would have been in the top, among her hearing age group peers, she would have been close to being Valedictorian. She was really good in all subjects and that included high school English. I think she got a mark of something like 65 in Grade 12 and her history mark was 65 or so. She did everything. It wasn’t that she was just good in one thing, she was good in science and maths too; everything. For example, she got the prize for the highest mark in Grade 11 chemistry and finished her grade 12 with 80.

But she failed first year chemistry at the University. So, there had to be some kind of a problem there; University just wasn’t for her I guess. She just didn’t succeed very well there... but I’ll be as candid as I can be... I have an idea as to what happened. When she was in high school I was interpreting for her and I was a teacher, so I knew and understood all the content of the stuff I
was interpreting for. Well, basically I knew what I was doing. When she went
to University, like if she was in the chemistry class, the interpreters may not
have been able to understand the chemistry themselves. (They’re trained in
interpreting, but how many are trained in first year chemistry?) So how could
they possibly do the job of interpreting?

It must be so hard for her to be that dependent on another person for
getting information; really to be slowed down or even stopped by that… and
really, she was frustrated. I mean, she knew the mistakes she was making, or
the things that were going wrong because of her handicap. I mean, she wasn’t
so frustrated that it was overpowering for her, she was so well adjusted. But
frustrated nonetheless. She’s not going to University now, I think she’s got a
job but I don’t know in what capacity.

Both Richard and Ken talk about Norm and call him gifted because he worked so
hard and achieved so well. Things didn’t come as easily to him as to some of the other
students, but his stubbornness to achieve and to do well put him right up there with the
other gifted students.

Norm—Tenacious and determined.

Well, for one of those kids in that group, Norm, it just wasn’t as easy for
him. He really worked. He worked like stink and he kept up with the other
gifted students and with everybody else and so I’d say, yeah, he’s got a certain
gift and the gift is tenacity, you know. He got in there and he thought, well, I
can do this. I might have to put more effort into this, but I’m going to get it
and he did. He just did.

His gift is motivation I guess. I couldn’t really call him quote unquote
gifted as I was talking about the top 3-5% of the population and what he was
born with and that kind of stuff. He just said “I’m going to work as hard as I
can at this and if I work hard enough it will come to me” and he’s still doing
it.

The funny thing is that if you had looked for gifted kids in elementary
school, you would have gone right over Norm. You’d never have picked him
out because when he was 10, he didn’t really present too much in the way of
academic skills. He was not doing well at all. I mean if you saw this kid and
said he’s going to graduate from high school and go to University, everybody
would’ve thought you were crazy! And then over a six month period you could see that he’s doing something there... he began to catch fire and be motivated and I think in the sense of him being gifted, that was his gift. He was motivated and a hard worker. He went to University and got his first year English.

Although Lee spent some time in the integrated setting, he soon recognized that he was eager to find his place within the Deaf community. Richard and Ken describe his situation.

**Lee—Recognizing his role in the Deaf culture.**

Lee was definitely gifted; I think he had natural abilities to start with and also the fact that he felt, there was no reason on earth why I can’t do this. He moved here from a hearing school and expressed frustration in the fact that he didn’t really have any signing until he came here. At one point he just said, well I know I can succeed but I’m just going to succeed in the deaf world. I’m not going to stay here and finish a hearing high school and then go to university. He didn’t go here for grade 12. He wrote the Gallaudet entrance exams, joined the Deaf community and became a part of that. I’ve heard from him once or twice since but I’ve no idea what he’s doing right now. But I’m sure he would have no problem succeeding.

When a teacher sees a real talent in a student, it must be difficult to see that talent go undeveloped. Ken shows his frustration by calling it “a waste,” at the same time recognizing that only the student has control over what he or she chooses to do.

**Isabelle—Interested in things outside her talent area.**

Isabelle was 19, profoundly deaf and was a terrifically talented artist. She was just excellent and in my opinion had really good talent that could have been exploited. Just by looking at her art you could see that she was gifted. I mean, she drew some really beautiful sketches and things like that and I thought God, this kid is talented. She was very good with pencil, pastels, really nice, nice color combinations, not necessarily realistic but really attractive work.
But she had a poor attitude of an academic nature and really very little self-discipline. She was just more interested in the social life of the school than in exploring career possibilities; maybe typical teenager stuff. But she decided to walk and just left the system. She was old enough to quit, so she quit. She needed to work to develop but she wasn’t ready to do that so she left, which was again, a waste.

Richard had the opportunity to know Joe as a student in school and has been able to keep in contact with him as an adult. He talks about the changes Joe has made.

Joe—Motivation came late.
Joe, like when he was an adult he just changed. When it happens, when it just catches hold it is beautiful to see. But he never managed to get the academic standing that he wanted. He took courses at high school and everything, but I don’t know if the motivation came too late, or if there was just too much lack of language. I don’t know. And then again, maybe if you’re looking at the manner in which the interpreting was done, it was signed English, would ASL have made a difference? I just don’t know.

Summary
This chapter has served to introduce both the teachers who were the main participants in this study and their students, who became, perhaps, the most important players. At the beginning of this chapter, Paley (1990) was quoted as saying clearly that "none of us are to be found in sets of tasks or lists of attributes; we can be known only in the unfolding of our unique stories within the context of everyday events"(p.xii). Through their stories of the students, these teachers have offered us new and deeper insights into the complexities of hearing loss and giftedness. It is through the descriptions of their students that we have come to understand how the teachers see these students achieving, learning and behaving in the context of dealing with the effects of having a hearing loss. The following chapter cannot hope to match this one in terms of the richness of the language and the content; it attempts, however, to extend our understandings of what
giftedness means to the teachers by taking a closer look at their ideas or conceptions of
giftedness as revealed both by the stories of the students and the discussions with me
during the interviews.
This chapter is divided into two different sections, both of which attempt to extend our knowledge of the teachers' perspectives of giftedness by providing a thematic analysis of the data represented in the interviews. Teachers appear to express their understandings of giftedness in two ways: by telling stories of their actual interactions and noticing of the students with whom they work as expressed in the previous chapter and by expressing and reflecting on the meanings of giftedness as they discussed them with me in their interviews. The two sections of this chapter reflect these sources. In part one, the teachers talk about the students they have named and their stories reflect their awareness of what happens in classrooms in the context of their knowledge of the students and their families. In part two, the teachers are more inclined to discuss giftedness in a more abstract way: "well, I don't know if you really have to have that spark in order to be called gifted; I mean, there's lots more to it, don't you think?" I remind the reader that the division of this chapter into a more practical student-centered orientation and a more theoretical one, has been imposed on the data for purposes of analyses. The teachers did not make such an explicit distinction in their interviews.

In both parts of this chapter, I have used the literature of "the experts" to provide a reference point for the teachers' understandings. Recently, writers (Moores, 1987; Sigel & Brinker, 1985) have suggested that research regarding individuals with hearing loss might be more beneficial if it were to focus explicitly on that population, rather than utilizing between-population approaches that compare a deaf population to a hearing population. I agree with this approach even in the writing up of qualitative findings and was tempted to let the thematic analysis and the teachers' emerging conceptions of
giftedness stand on their own. At this point, however, the existing literature, most of which deals with hearing people, can provide the mirror for our own reflections about teachers’ ideas of giftedness among individuals with hearing losses. Because of the importance of their perspectives, however, the teachers’ ideas are presented first in each section.

Part One-Interpreting the Stories of Students Achieving, Behaving and Learning
Within the Context of Hearing Loss

The stories of the students are rich in experiences and very different, yet share common threads of understanding. The following section allows the reader to focus on the student, because it is in seeing and interacting with the students in educational situations that teachers come to create and recreate their understandings of what being gifted means. Teachers see their students learning, behaving and achieving in their classrooms and in this context, the teachers begin to realize the uniqueness of students.

In the interactions between teachers and students, two facets of knowing and understanding are at play. On the one hand, the teacher brings many years of classroom experience into the interactive setting; on the other, the children bring themselves. Each actor plays an active role in the process of understanding.

As discussed in Chapter 4, each teacher brings years of experience, as a former student in the classroom setting and as a trained educator. This experience might consist of thousands of observations of a variety of children, personal knowledge and beliefs about students in general and Deaf and hard of hearing children in particular and theoretical and practical knowledge about teaching and learning. Interactions allow teachers to compare and contrast things that are happening in the present time, with similar instances that happened in the past with other children. They allow the teacher to build a knowledge base, upon which to make judgments about how children are in classroom situations. When Ken was asked how he came to know each student and how
he had come to understand that some of the students were gifted he replied in the following way:

I really don't know. (I guess it's) one of those things that just develop. I probably couldn’t have identified, (or come) close to knowing what my present idea of giftedness is, in my first 5 or even maybe 10 years of teaching. I probably wouldn’t really have that same idea. It’s a developmental thing... because, I suppose, of the number of students that you run into. It’s like stats. The larger the sample, then the more accurate the statistics and I think that probably that’s where it comes from. The more I see, the more I do, the more students I meet and the more I work with them, then my definitions of different groups of them is refined and developed. ...come back and talk to me in another year’s time, I won’t necessarily guarantee I’ll say the same thing.

The children, too, play active roles in these interactions. What they allow each teacher to see and how they act in different circumstances and under different conditions, provide some insight into who they are as people. Would a teacher ever be able to see “the whole child?” It is probably doubtful, but what we see is the best information that we have. Our ability to combine personal knowledge with practical observation is essential to the teaching-learning process. We create a knowledge base and make important decisions based on those judgments. As Liz says about the students:

You know, people know, we know each other and we know what, how we feel about each other and what...where we see that person’s strengths. But what I see as one student’s strength, another teacher may not see that. The student may not show that teacher that strength. He may show another teacher a different strength.

This section is student centered; it emphasizes the student’s role in sharing knowledge of his or her abilities with the teacher. What kinds of things happen in classrooms, what kinds of things do the students do, that alert the teacher to the possibility that a child might be gifted? What are the indicators that a child might show to the teacher? Teachers expressed a variety of ideas as they talked about the students and I grouped these ideas into categories which then formed the basis for three themes: teachers watching students achieving; teachers watching students behaving; teachers watching students learning. The present tense of the verbs is used deliberately to indicate that understanding and coming to know students by watching them are ongoing processes that
continue and change daily for teachers. Achieving, behaving and learning are constantly active and evolving processes for the students.

The reader is asked to remember that these indicators are the dimensions that each teacher chose to highlight in the interview when talking about a student. Something about each student stood out in relief for each teacher. I made no attempt to ask the teacher to remember everything about the student and therefore we do not have each student’s “full story.” We have the teachers’ perspectives of what it is about the students that seemed to be important to them. For Naomi for example, Nancy stood out because she was “so wonderful” in the area of language. Nancy’s giftedness in language caught the teacher’s attention. We actually do not know how Nancy did in her school subjects because this aspect of Nancy’s work either was not most critical to the teacher at the time of our interview or was overlooked in the relatively brief but intense interview context.

The three themes and the signals which serve as indicators of giftedness to the teachers, are described below. Where applicable, these indicators are compared to characteristics of gifted children as outlined by Clark (1992). Her work was selected because her text is widely used in studies of gifted education in the United States. Breiter (1988) surveyed colleges to determine what texts were being selected for use in graduate level courses in gifted education. Sixty two individuals from 52 universities responded and a total of 77 different texts were cited. Clark’s text was among the seven texts most often chosen. The work of Davis and Rimm (1989) was also in the top seven and their work is referred to in cases where it serves to provide a slightly different perspective than that of Clark. The last section of this chapter describes the teachers’ perspectives of how they see their students reacting to the impact of having a hearing loss and to the impact of being gifted.

Theme One-Teachers Watching Students Achieving

The achievements of Deaf and hard of hearing students can be grouped into two parts; those that are special to the students because of their hearing loss and those that are
similar to hearing students who are gifted. The achievements related directly to students with hearing losses deal specifically with language development, which can be broken down into the development of both English (including reading and writing) and of ASL. This area also includes the broader area of communication development, which Heather sees as an ability separate from linguistic abilities. Two skills that are developed specifically with Deaf and hard of hearing students, are those having to do with the development of speech and speechreading. The achievements that are similar to hearing students include advanced abilities in school subjects, in languages, in art, mime, music and athletics.

**Displaying exceptional abilities in English language development.**

Not surprisingly each teacher had something to say about the student’s achievements in the reading or writing of the English language. This is of course one of the key issues in the education of Deaf and hard of hearing students. English reading level of Deaf adults is approximately Grade 4 level (Quigley & Paul, 1986; Rodda & Grove, 1987). Although Moores (1987) suggests that reading levels are improving, language learning is still one of the most critical issues in the education of Deaf and hard of hearing students. Specifically, researchers are investigating the impact of teaching ASL as a first language and English as a second language in order to improve the development of English (Johnson, Lidell & Erting, 1988).

Students who might be gifted stood out among their peers from as early as three and a half years of age, in the area of language. Heather noted things like “having a propensity for the English language” marked by picking up reading skills quickly, having an excellent vocabulary and reading above age level, etc. In the elementary and senior years, high achievement was shown by an ability to read at or above grade level (e.g., Brian, Rob, Sue, Judy, Bennie), by “understanding the subtleties of language” (Barb), by having some writing published in a children’s magazine (Nancy), by being recognized in high school as being a “gifted writer” (Brian), or by a teacher of hearing students...
believing that Bennie “could make a living” with his writing. At the University level, achievements in reading and writing were indicated when Tarah, for example, made an honors mark in a fourth year Philosophy course.

Kate’s mom Laura, makes the suggestion that “with some students there is a language gene... and if it’s nurtured... I think there is giftedness in language in the same way that there’s giftedness in music.” The idea of this so called “language gene” might also be seen in Alexis, who learned English as a second language after coming to Canada at the age of nine and in Barb who was apparently fluent in both English and in French. All of these students had profound hearing losses.

These students indicate to the teachers, that being advanced in language ability is indeed one of the things that allows them to think that the student is gifted. It is well known in the gifted literature that “The overriding trait—indeed the definition—of very bright students is that they are developmentally advanced in language and thought (Davis & Rimm, 1989, p. 20).

It is important to note, however, that there are differences that exist between Deaf or hard of hearing and hearing gifted students. Davis and Rimm (1989) go on to connect conceptual ability with verbalization skills, indicating that “the accelerated improvement in speech and language reflect not only a quickly growing vocabulary and knowledge base, but rapidly improving conceptual and abstract thinking abilities as well” (p. 21). Clark notes that one of the characteristics of gifted hearing students is a “high level of verbal ability” (Clark, 1992, p. 38).

The first point of difference among hearing and Deaf and hard of hearing children then, is that because of the loss of hearing, many students will not have the verbal skills as expressed in spoken language. They also may not have advanced English language abilities. Although some deaf students will have accelerated language abilities as indicated above, the teachers also indicated that some of the gifted students had “very poor” or below average reading and writing skills compared to hearing students. Cheryl
for example, was in the International Baccalaureate program and was one to two years behind her Grade level in reading. Iris was “not a reader,” had “very poor” written English skills, yet was “a scientific genius.” And although Mark’s IQ was way above 130, it was “very difficult for him to express himself in English.” With Deaf and hard of hearing students it is very possible that expressive English language ability will sometimes not “reflect” (Davis & Rimm, 1989, p. 21) the actual advanced conceptual abilities of these students.

Displaying exceptional abilities in American Sign Language.

Another important area of distinction, critical to members of the Deaf community, is that facility with or advanced development in language as represented in the gifted literature, must be expanded to include facility with ASL. At the preschool level, Heather had noted that there were two or three students who were probably not going to develop their verbal abilities and who were giving very strong indications that they would be using Sign language as their primary mode of communication. Even at this early age, these children were indicating skills in this area.

Many of the gifted students in this study attended schools for the Deaf and had learned some form of sign language as their primary method of communication. For some it was Pidgin Signed English (PSE), for others it may have been ASL. I had noticed that not one of the teachers, however, had mentioned that any student was gifted in ASL. Andrea, a Deaf teacher, was one of the last teachers I interviewed. And so I asked her about this. It appeared that from her perspective that being gifted in ASL was an area that was yet to be explored.

Q. Okay. A question. Do you have another student here that you’ve observed perhaps as an outstanding student in ASL? In terms of ASL? Perhaps not you, or perhaps someone else has perceived that student as gifted in that area?
A. Well, let me think. There are a lot of new areas that we haven’t yet explored. And so if someone is (gifted like that) ASL certainly...would be an area of giftedness. That’s certainly another area (to be explored).
Given the recent emphasis on ASL in schools for the Deaf and given the fact that only a few teachers are first language ASL users, we can expect that as standards develop, both teachers and students will come to recognize outstanding users of this visual language.

**Displaying exceptional abilities in speech and speechreading.**

Hilary is the only teacher who mentions a student (Tarah) as being gifted in speech. She also mentions Bennie and Bruce as being excellent speechreaders. It is possible that other students who are achieving and being successful in using these skills, might also be gifted in this area compared to other deaf and hard of hearing peers.

Again, these are areas where students will fluctuate according to individual abilities. Several teachers, (Heather, Heidi, Elizabeth, Liz, Laura, Richard, Ken, Ted, etc.) mentioned that some of their gifted students did not have good skills in this area. We are reminded that Ted cautions strongly that we should be careful not to associate exceptional speech and language abilities with gifted students as there are many gifted students for whom these areas are not developed.

**Displaying exceptional abilities in communication.**

Heather, the preschool teacher noted the differences between facility with English or with sign language and certain aspects of communication.

...it's interesting because I had that pair together, the two Brian's; one incredibly academic, did incredibly well in an academic setting preferred an academic setting and in fact had trouble with social settings; the other one couldn't care less about an academic setting, but was incredibly strong socially. Incredibly good communicator despite the fact that his language was all jumbled up. It didn't matter at all, he got his message across and that was fine.

Heather also talks about some children who seem to have decided that their communication strengths will be non-verbal.

(One of the preschoolers) is not at all motivated for speech and I mean if Deaf people want to make a case for kids making a choice about whether they are going to talk or not when they are young they should see these two kids. They are the only two kids I have ever seen who I really feel made that choice when they were 18 months old. They aren't going to talk. They don't care about talking and in fact, they don't need to talk because they communicate so well
non verbally. This kid runs his neighborhood... He does not need symbolic language necessarily to have a wonderful time. He is also a strong leader.

Ted, who is himself Deaf, believes that “all gifted people should have good communication skills; these do not have to be the skills as taught at school.” He continues to explain:

They should have communication skills, ASL, English, whatever. They should have a special way of expression, a way of expressing themselves be it in art, perhaps in signing or English, or even math. I mean, some people I know who are fantastic with mathematics and so I don’t know why I wouldn’t consider that person to be above average, in a certain way.

Heidi recognized the gift of communication as expressed in the skill of the artist. She talked about Michael as having only “a handful of signs and no oral language,” so that his way of communicating and “explaining things and telling you what happened last week” was his artistic expression.

**Displaying exceptional achievements in school subjects.**

The participating teachers recognized achievement in the school subjects beginning in the teen age years. Several of the students showed high abilities with all school subjects (Judy, Barb, Cheryl, Donna).and several students appeared gifted in certain subject areas but not necessarily in others. For example, Iris excelled in the sciences and Bennie was academically gifted in Math. The teachers mentioned that some of the students got high grades (“straight A’s”, “honor roll sciences”) but at least one, Kate, achieved “average academic grades.” For all these teachers, the marks are compared to those of the students’ hearing peers. Teachers who worked in residential settings and those who worked in inclusive settings, both saw achievements in this area as being indicators of giftedness.

Clark (1992) does not mention high ability in specific subject areas as being an indicator of giftedness, but she does focus on cognitive abilities that would allow students to achieve in advanced ways in their school subjects. When Davis and Rimm (1989) talk about school subjects it is in relation to the appearance of these abilities at a very early age. Except for the artistic abilities displayed by Craig when he was about seven or eight
years old, none of the teachers mentioned the early display of talent in the children. From a teacher-researcher's perspective, several possible explanations present themselves. At a young age the Deaf or hard of hearing child must focus on learning a language and it may be that language learning either masks these other gifts, or it might inhibit the development of these other interests and abilities. The child may have to direct so much of his or her energy towards concentrating on the language, that these other areas may go undeveloped for a time. It is also possible that the teachers in this study simply did not mention early precocity because they focused on other things, or because they had not known the child when he or she was very young. Writing, math, music and art (Davis & Rimm, 1989) and science were all noted as accomplishments by students at a later age however.

Displaying exceptional abilities in learning languages

Barb's ability to speak and to lipread French, in addition to her high level of ability in English was one of the signs that alerted Tina to her giftedness. Since, in addition to her facility with languages, Barb also plays several musical instruments, Tina suggests that her gift is really anything to do "with rhythm and flow." Facility in language learning was also shown by Alexis, who mastered English after being introduced to it at the age of nine. Nancy as well, came from a home where English was the second language and mastered it to the level of having her writing published in a children's magazine. These students displayed their talents well in this area.

Displaying a diversity of interests.

Teachers were also quite admiring of some of the students who showed a high degree of diversity in their interests. Barb for example, did very well in school and played several musical instruments in addition to being athletic and speaking French as a second language. The admiration from the teachers for this diversity, seemed to be heightened by the fact that for both the music and for the language, the loss of hearing had not appeared
to inhibit their development. Tarah too, was said to love new experiences, was highly
curious and interested in a variety of things.

Both Clark (1992) and Davis and Rimm (1989) speak of students having “unusually
varied interests and curiosity” (Clark, p. 39). This is understandable in light of the fact
that these students also often appear to be highly motivated and as Davis and Rimm say,
have an “urge to learn” (p. 22).

Displaying exceptional abilities in art and mime.

Teachers saw giftedness in art in two ways. For some students such as Craig and
Michael in the elementary level and for Isabelle who was in the University age group,
their gift was their art. For other students artistic abilities appeared to be part of general
more all round abilities as with Nancy, who was a gifted writer and an artist as well as a
musician.

The children in the elementary level were seen by Heidi, Ted and Elizabeth as
having potential in that area, although Michael had already won prizes in which the whole
school competed. Elizabeth in particular expressed her inability to competently judge
Craig’s giftedness as she herself was not an accomplished artist. Ken, who was himself an
artist, felt competent to judge Isabelle’s abilities.

In the area of mime, Liz spoke of two students, Zona and Robin, who, had they been
encouraged, might have been gifted enough to make a career in that area.

The literature recognizes achievements in any area of what Clark calls “the visual
and performing arts.” This would involve the areas of both drawing and painting and of
mime as expressed above by the teachers. She also suggests that in screening procedures
for those who might be gifted, professional artists should be asked to make
recommendations. (p. 215). Davis and Rimm (1989) discuss abilities in art under personal
creative thinking.
**Displaying exceptional athletics abilities.**

Three teachers noticed this area of ability in their gifted students. As with the students whose artistic abilities were seen as part of more all round development, Barb and Tarah were noted as "being athletic too." Barb was on two or three teams and Tarah "also excelled in sports." Alexis, who was seen to be an all round gifted student, had also been an Olympic swimmer.

**Summary of areas of exceptional achievements displayed by the students.**

Several important points can be made from the above description which has focused on the students displaying certain exceptional abilities in a variety of areas.

1. These hard of hearing and Deaf students, like most gifted students (Clark, 1992), appear to have very uneven profiles in terms of their abilities. Some indicate strengths in many areas of endeavor, others show strengths in only one area.

2. The range of achievements appears to be just as varied as it is for hearing students and includes areas like music, that might normally be overlooked in this population.

3. There may be special areas of achievement that are unique to hard of hearing and Deaf individuals, those being abilities in ASL, in the ability to develop speech skills and in the area of speechreading.

4. For each individual student, the indicators of giftedness may or may not be the same as for the general population. Linguistic ability for example, may certainly be an indicator, but all gifted hearing impaired students may not excel in this area.

5. Achievements vary with the students. Some are achieving above their Deaf and hard of hearing peers; some are achieving at grade level with their hearing peers and some are capable of achieving above their hearing peers.

**Theme Two: Teachers Watching Students Behaving**

It appears that all the indicators the teachers have seen in the behaviors of their students, are ones that are seen in all students, regardless of whether or not they can hear.
The following is a description of the indicators that the teachers have mentioned as having seen in their students, compared where applicable to those mentioned by Clark (1992) and by Davis and Rimm (1989).

**Feeling comfortable within oneself.**

For Heidi, this was perhaps the most noticeable thing about Rob, who was in her elementary classroom. She talks about it in the following way.

If I look over those years, there’ve been a lot of different children that I’d say have gifts in certain areas. The biggest gift in life I think any of us can get and I think you’re the luckiest person on earth if you’ve got it and that’s the gift of being comfortable within yourself. Like, you can talk all you like about being this great, wonderful mathematician, like, certainly that’s talent and there are some that are gifted in certain areas, there’s the gift of art, or music... But of all, if I had my pick of the talent that I would want, it would be somehow to be able to know myself and to live within myself and be comfortable with myself. I’d call it a comfort level...this child somehow. Well, so far, anyway, he seems to me to have a very, I call it a comfort zone with yourself. That your expectations are somewhere within being met, for all of us, I don’t care whether we’re children or adults. Somewhere, we’ve got to set expectations that we can reach comfortably...(he’s at the school for the Deaf because) his family could not give him the role models that Deaf people can. And they wanted him to have a feeling of people around, Deaf role models. And plus Deaf children, so that he wouldn’t think he was the only one in the world of all hearing people, now whether that gives him this contentedness within himself, I don’t know. I just know this little kid seems very mature for his age. This is his third year in the school.

This feeling comfortable, as Heidi describes it, or having an “inner strength” as Ted describes Charles, may be similar to what Davis and Rimm (1989) discuss as having a good self-concept. As Milgram and Milgram (1976) suggest “Intellectual giftedness is an asset in coping with life’s challenges and is associated with... favorable social and personal adjustment” (p. 23 in Davis & Rimm, 1989). The issue of setting goals and having expectations met is one which Davis and Rimm talk about in relation to children who have what they call high internal control, those children who feel responsible for their successes and failures and who feel in control of their destinies. These higher levels of internal control and personal responsibility “often lead gifted students to set high goals for themselves” (p. 25) and when these are not met, then disappointment and frustration often follow. This does not appear to be the case with Rob.
Tina, Ken, Laura and Ted talk about their students as being very mature or self-reliant (Barb, Donna, Kate, Charles) and Ted mentions that Janet has something in her that's above average, she's "clear within herself" even though in this case, she may not be the teacher's pet either.

**Being motivated, having tenacity and drive.**

Teachers seem to take notice of the student who is motivated, whether it is in persevering, seeing something through to completion such as Michael does in his art, or whether it's in the area of learning (Terry, Mark, Cheryl, Alexis, Donna). Both Cheryl and Tarah appear to have the drive to "go after what they want," Cheryl going into the International Baccalaureate program and Tarah wanting to have a career in veterinary medicine. They "just won't give up." Teachers see Judy and Barb as very skilled in finding solutions to problems. For most of these students, there appears to be some innate ability that is also assisting them in achieving in their areas of endeavor.

Ken and Richard note, however, that for Norm, "motivation is his gift." His level of intelligence according to IQ tests is not above average, but he "works like stink to keep up with the others" and he does it. One is reminded of a study done by Catherine Cox (cited in Clark, 1992, p.105) in which she identified 282 eminent persons and examined their biographies to try and understand more about some of the special traits that they were exhibiting. In terms of the findings relating to intelligence, the range of scores was from 100 to 200, with 43 scores falling between 100 and 120. She concluded that for some individuals, innate intellectual ability was not necessarily a critical factor in helping them to gain eminence, that there are some individuals who can be "characterized by persistence of motive and effort, confidence in their abilities and great strength and force of character" (p. 33 in Davis & Rimm, 1989).

Clark (1992) talks about motivation in terms of "unusual intensity, persistent goal-directed behavior" (p. 39) and several studies (Dunn & Griggs, 1985; Renzulli, 1986) suggest that gifted people who are productive display this trait fairly consistently. The
reason that some of Terman’s students became successful and that some did not was in large part due to motivation (Terman & Oden, 1947). We are reminded of the teachers’ perspectives of three students in this study: Joe, who as an adult is now achieving at a gifted level where in his school years, he lacked motivation and did not do well; of Isabelle who was not motivated enough to continue to develop her artistic skills and of David, whose lack of motivation for school got him into trouble in the educational setting.

**Being organized.**

When teachers spoke of the gifted students in terms of their organizational abilities, they indicated that some students were organized and others were not. These abilities are ones that every good student has developed, but the teachers noted these because they stood out in either positive or in negative ways. Tina has been impressed with Judy’s abilities to streamline things, to set priorities and develop time management skills to their fullest. Cheryl and Donna too were able to know it was important to be well prepared for class and both had good study habits.

At the other extreme, Laura noted that Daria had very poor organizational skills and was concerned because this was interfering with the development of her natural intellectual abilities.

Clark (1992) does not appear to mention organizational skills as a specific area of giftedness, but this ability may be implied by those areas expressed by cognitive function. It may also be implied under the area of affective characteristics, delineated by Davis and Rimm (1989).

**Being a leader and dealing with people.**

Karen, Sara and Jerry demonstrated leadership ability early in their preschool years, being able to organize the other children and for Sara, to “network”. At the teenage level, Ted noticed that other kids really looked up to Janet, even though her ways were not always in line with what was perceived by teachers as valued at school.
By the time the students were older and seen to be heading out beyond the boundaries of the school system, their potential for leadership in the community became more apparent. Andrea for example, noted that because of Irene’s love of civil rights and her concern for other people, she expected that she would become a very strong leader in the Deaf community. As adults, Angie, Charles and Cody all had already “proved themselves” in the eyes of their teachers by what they had accomplished in the community. These students were all seen as leaders in the Deaf community.

Teachers also noticed that several students had “outstanding social skills” (Sara, Judy, Mark, Barb, Donna, Irene, Tarah, Bruce). They showed “concern about other people” Barb was described as intuitive and sensitive to others and Donna as “very personable.” An interest in social issues is definitely seen in Irene, who loved civil rights and who was very much interested in Deaf rights. These indicators were seen in a very positive light by the teachers.

Teachers also saw students use their intuitive understandings of people in less socially accepted ways. The teachers used the word “manipulate,” to describe some of the behaviors and that word carries with it the connotation of something not so positive. Jay’s “intellect goes into manipulating behavior,” and Mark was able to “manipulate people very well.”

In relation to the literature, leadership abilities are seen in Clark’s (1992) model in the areas of giftedness expressed by affective function (p. 40). Unusual sensitivity to the expectations and feelings of others are also included in this area. In some sense this might be tied into what Davis and Rimm (1989) talk about under the heading of “High moral thinking, Empathy and Perspective Taking” (p. 26). Clark also noted that leadership has the potential to be “turned into a negative characteristic” (p. 42).

Having a sense of humor.

Teachers noted that four of the students (Nancy, Rob, Lisa, & Kate) had “wonderful senses of humor” and that this was tied in with their ability to appreciate puns, to be witty
and to manipulate language. As Davis and Rimm (1989) indicate, this "would seem to follow quite naturally from their abilities to think quickly and see relationships and from their general confidence and social adeptness" (p. 26). Brian’s sense of humor was represented in his art, as he was a very talented cartoonist.

**Being adaptable and flexible, being curious, doing things unusually.**

Several of the teachers saw students behaving in other ways. These were not mentioned at any great length but appeared to stand out for these teachers.

Tina has been impressed by Terry’s ability to adapt and to learn in completely new surroundings and in a totally different communication system. She talks about the flexibility he demonstrated in order to achieve so well. Barb too, was described as being flexible and adaptable.

Hilary talks at some length about how Tarah expresses her curiosity by trying new things all the time and Ted appreciates the fact that Janet seems to be breaking away from the expected norm by "doing things opposite to expectations." All of these behaviors can be seen as characteristics listed by both Clark (1992) and by Davis and Rimm (1989).

**Being “impatient with lesser mortals”.

Several of the teachers made mention of the fact that in the teaching/learning situation, their students (Daria, Mark, David, Kate, Isabelle) did not seem to have much patience for explanation. There seemed to be a tendency for the students to grasp something very quickly and then not want to wait for further information or explanation. For Isabelle, this impatience might have meant that she did not develop her talents in art because she did not want to waste time on learning the basic skills. Mark was quick to grasp new information, but sometimes he misunderstood the information and would not wait to be corrected. David did not want to follow the detailed steps required in the sciences and this made that subject difficult for him. For David this impatience, was accompanied by what his teacher thought was a strong sense of being bored in school and as a result, he was "a real pain” in school.
Clark (1992) discusses many possible concomitant problems that are associated with what she calls differentiating characteristics of gifted children. For example, Clark mentions that in the area of giftedness as expressed by affective function, a student may have high expectations of self and others, which often lead to high levels of frustration. As a result, the student “has problems maintaining good interpersonal relations as others fail to maintain high standards imposed by the gifted individual” (p. 41). In addition a student with advanced cognitive and affective capacity for conceptualizing “...might have a tendency for ‘quick’ solutions not taking into account the complexity of the problem” (p. 42).

**Summary of descriptions of student behaviors serving as indicators of giftedness.**

Behaviors that these teachers saw as indicators of giftedness are similar to those in the literature as suggested by Clark (1992) and by Davis and Rimm (1989). As with hearing students, motivation plays a key role in the development of the students’ gift. Perhaps most important is the fact that teachers are able to see beyond some of the weaker areas that are a direct result of having a hearing loss, and appear very able to identify giftedness. The teachers in this study have all worked for a number of years in the field of deafness and have worked with gifted students; their experience may allow them to do this more effectively than teachers new to the field.

**Theme Three—Teachers Watching Students Learning**

In the context of teaching students who have hearing losses, teachers learn how to present information in many different ways and under many different conditions of learning. It is not surprising therefore that several of the teachers noticed immediately when a student grasped new information in ways that were different to the rest of the students.
Being a "one-trial learner".

One of the most obvious indicators for the teacher, was when a child seemed to learn something after only one presentation. This was expressed in a variety of ways: “she’s a one-trial learner,” “it’s that click that happens,” “once, that’s all it took.” This might be similar to what Clark (1992) refers to as having “an unusual capacity for processing information” (p. 38). Teachers noted it at the preschool level (Karen, Scott), at the elementary level with Daria and at the University level with Donna. Being a one-trial learner, however, might be tied into another aspect of the learning situation that was mentioned for almost all of the 43 students, the speed with which they learned.

Learning quickly.

As a researcher and as a teacher, I’ve never heard so many teachers snap their fingers so many times to indicate the speed of learning! The language in the interview was never so rich as when the teachers were describing how quickly their students learned material that was presented to them. The following is a list of the ways that teachers expressed that aspect of the learning process.

Laura: it’s that click that happens; she gobbles up material as fast as can be; quickness to grasp concepts; leaps in any direction; a quick learner.
Ken: (snaps fingers) like that, once, that’s all it took; she’s quick, bright; a fast learner, quick as a whip; how quick she’d pick things up.
Richard: she steamed through; you’d introduce a new concept and it was there.
Ted: can identify things very quickly upon looking at it and see what’s missing.
Tina: keenness of mind; sums up situations fast; grasps concepts quickly; mentally agile; quick; very quick to read communication;
Heather: picks up fast; puts things together so quickly; a one-trial learner; learns like a “house on fire”; incredibly bright; print? bang! she picks it up; explain it once and she had it;
Naomi: you teach her something and she just caught on;
Heidi: waits patiently until the other students have understood it.
Nancy: his progress was just amazing; she catches it immediately
Hilary: brilliant, right on top of everything; where did that come from? it’s just there; his mind is churning all the time.

Clark (1992) calls this “an accelerated pace of thought processes” (p. 38) and Davis and Rimm (1989) speak of it as the “ease and swiftness” (p. 21) with which gifted students learn.
Concept learning.

When the teachers mentioned this aspect of learning, there was a focus on abstract concepts (Karen, Sam) and on the speed of learning them (Daria, Jonathan, Mark, Donna). The children could “get abstract concepts before anyone else” and “can conceptualize in the abstract.” Clark (1992) focuses on the early ability of gifted students to use and “form conceptual frameworks” (p. 38) whereas with these teachers, recognizing that the students were understanding these concepts was important. This is a difficult learning task for most students with profound hearing losses.

Learning incidentally.

Heather was particularly impressed with Jay’s ability to learn things without any apparent formal instruction. In some sense this was also mentioned by Hilary who wondered how on earth Bennie had learned so much about politics at the age of 7 when neither his family nor the school had really introduced him to those ideas. Both Heather and Hilary expressed their amazement’s with this ability, because neither student had residual hearing. One might compare this incidental way of learning to Clark’s (1992) characteristics of advanced comprehension, or to an unusual capacity for processing information (p. 39), or it might also be related in some way to Clark’s understandings of giftedness as expressed by intuitive function (p. 44) She also mentions creativity in this area and it is possible that these students have been able to use creative gifts in order to make up for their lack of hearing.

Transferring learning.

The ability to “transfer knowledge from one area to another” or display “flexible thought processes” (Clark, 1992, p. 38) was also noted by several of the teachers. Heidi saw it with Rob, Laura saw it happen with both Daria and with Kate, whose “pea” story is perhaps the best example! Mark was seen as mentally agile and Andrea said that Alexis was the only student that she had seen who was able to apply things she had learned
outside the classroom. Tarah, Hilary said, was able to take it “that next step.” Clark talks specifically of characteristics such as the flexibility of thought processes and early differential patterns for thought processing such as “thinking in alternatives, abstract terms; sensing consequences, making generalizations” (p. 39).

**Remembering.**

Teachers recognized that three of the students had excellent memories (Nancy, Rob, Mark). Heidi for example, mentions that it was one of the most important things for Rob, along with his ability to generalize and his accepting personality. Memory is seen to be one of the key characteristics of gifted students and Clark lists it as a characteristic whereby the student displays “an extraordinary quantity of information and has unusual retentiveness” (p. 38).

**Other kinds of learning.**

It is difficult to describe these kinds of learning in ways other than what the teachers say about the students. Tina says that Mark can absorb information even when it is not presented to him linguistically, can internalize it and turn it back out in an application. Barb too, she says, can process information very well. Hilary is impressed by “the insight he has!” when she speaks of Bennie and Andrea is convinced that “there’s something about Alexis’s mind” that is most unusual.

These descriptions might fit with Clark’s (1992) characteristic of “heightened ability for seeing unusual and diverse relationships, or the ability to generate original ideas” (p. 39), but there is no doubt that teachers do see some exceptional learning happening in their students.

**Needing to know—Unable to tolerate ambiguity.**

Several of the teachers noticed that their students were reluctant to just sit back and nod their heads when they were confronted with something that they did not understand. They spoke of it as being a “need to know.” Heather for example, says that Karen “just has to know, she inquires actively always and has no tolerance for ambiguity.” Sara is the
same way in her classroom. This part of the learning process might also be linked to the students who were seen as being motivated in their learning: Norm, Michael, Terry, Mark, Cheryl, Alexis and Donna. Being motivated has been discussed previously, but the “need to know” might be something that stands out for the teachers because, there is an expectation for teachers that Deaf and hard of hearing students will be reluctant to ask for clarification. When the child insists on clarification, then that child stands out. This might be similar to what Clark (1992) calls “unusual intensity; persistent, goal directed behavior” (p. 39) as a characteristic of gifted students.

**Summary of descriptions of students’ learning serving as indicators of giftedness**

The most obvious learning quality that the students displayed, that alerted the teachers to their gifted abilities, was their speed of learning. This quickness to grasp new ideas and an ability to understand things holistically is similar to gifted hearing students (Clark, 1992; Davis & Rimm, 1989; Maker, 1989). Deaf and hard of hearing students appear to manifest learning abilities in ways similar to their hearing peers.

There is, however, a difference. The teachers noted over and over again that these students are often learning in ways similar to their hearing counterparts, but in addition, they are unable to hear a language. Several of them have developed sign language as their way of communication and the others are functioning through the use of speechreading. These students are always learning in the context of having to overcome this disadvantage, of having to obtain information and understand the world in ways that are not similar to their hearing peers. The following section provides a brief overview of what the teachers have said about their students ability to learn within the context of dealing with this challenge.

**Having a Hearing Loss and Being Gifted**

I think it’s part of her personality and I really honestly believe that it’s also part of being very bright and very deaf, that she knows how different she is.
Teachers who are hearing cannot and are not expected to, speak from first hand experience of the impact of hearing loss and the impact of being gifted on students. The can only speak from their own observations of that impact, as informed by the behaviors and interactions with students. Teachers are also unable to make statements which will generalize to all students, very simply, because each student is so unique. The factors which combine to influence a student’s abilities to accept and to deal with hearing loss are many and those combined with environmental variables provide the teacher with a complicated puzzle, one that needs careful attention in order to find a fit for all the pieces. When a student is also gifted, new complexities arise.

The teachers in this study made comments throughout their interviews which indicated that they were able, in an empathetic way, to have gained some insights into the challenges which their students faced. These are shared in the pages which follow and are described under the following headings: smart kids don’t have problems; the impact of hearing loss and giftedness on language development and communication; the need for hard work; the impact on career expectations; the duality of being gifted and having a hearing loss; dealing with discrepancies. It is within this critical context, the mixture of giftedness and hearing loss, that teachers come to understand the achievements, the behaviors and the learning abilities of their students.

At the outset, the reader must be reminded that the students are placed and educated in different settings and the setting, the peer group and the mode of communication will all define how the teacher perceives the impact of being gifted and having a hearing loss.

Smart kids don’t have problems.

On the one hand people seem to have expectations that having a hearing loss and being gifted does not cause any problems and on the other, some people believe that students who have hearing losses are unable to do much of anything. In the first instance,
giftedness seems to fuel the expectation; in the second, the hearing loss makes the difference.

Hilary has interacted with some teachers who work with Hard of Hearing and Deaf students who tend to think that if the student is bright, then problems are either non-existent or small in comparison to other students who have hearing losses. She is quick to respond that this is not necessarily so. It appears that Hilary is concerned about Iris's progress, not in relation to other students, but in relation to her own abilities and her own needs to reach her potential.

It’s funny because I always get, Oh, Hilary, you get the smart ones. You know, so you don’t have any problems. Well franky I don’t just have the smart ones...but let’s be realistic. This attitude that the smart ones don’t have any problems or any frustrations that go along with it, is crazy. I mean, Iris, right now, I’m losing sleep over. She has got to pass that grade 12 English. You know, because if she doesn’t pass it, (she doesn’t get to do what she is capable of doing which is going to University), do you know what I’m saying? She has to, because I know that’s where she belongs. Or at least she has to have the opportunity to be there. I know that.

In contrast, as Tina talks about the reaction of Mark’s family to the news that he had a hearing loss, we are reminded of the attitudes which Deaf people react so strongly to and with every right, as they come into contact with people who do not understand Deafness. Tina explains.

Well the parents I think in a less conscious way, reacted to his hearing loss by being over protective. His brother said to me “well, he can’t drive the boat, he’s deaf” and honestly he believed that, that when they were out fishing Mark couldn’t drive the boat...so a number of opportunities to involve him in language stimulating activities were never offered to him because it was assumed that they were inappropriate for him. We’re getting past some of them right now, but it’s had its effect.

Just as there is a danger in thinking that gifted children with hearing losses don’t have any problems, or in thinking they have too many problems that they can’t deal with, there is also the possibility of attributing some thing to the hearing loss, (or to the giftedness), that may really be part and parcel of the child’s personality which has been perhaps more greatly influenced by other factors. Hilary speaks about it in this way.

To a large extent he’s aloof, he’s always been very content on his own and I do believe that all of a sudden he realizes that he’s (missing something). But
really, he’s been his own worst enemy, because whether he had been deaf or not, (he would have been like this I think). I’m tired of his hearing impairment being blamed all the time.

**Impact on language development and communication.**

There is no doubt that the largest impact of hearing loss is on language learning and communication development; the home and family environment play a major role.

Elizabeth and Naomi talk about children who come from homes where there is easy and fluent communication between the parents and the child. In most cases this happens when Deaf children are born to Deaf parents. Elizabeth also mentions the importance of intervention in the development of language skills and Naomi looks specifically at the importance of good communication and background experience in the home.

It kind of depends on where they came from... if you get someone (in your class) who has a profound loss, but they had come from a home where there was no signing until they came to school then (they’ve got a serious language problem). But if they come from a family where there’s some signing, there’s communication, they’ve gone to a preschool, then (in many cases) they can stay pretty well on a par with hearing kids; but they will still have a problem because of the language, they will still have an (English) language deficit.

- Elizabeth

The thing that allows those three students to perform at a very high achievement level is that they have communication at home. It’s what makes them above the others. Because the others in my class, they don’t have the same kind of communication at home where in this particular Deaf family, there is communication all the time. All of those kids do well because of the good communication at home. I can’t compare these kids to other Deaf children of Deaf parents because they’re the only ones that I have, but it’s a definite advantage for them. It’s a language and conceptual development that they have with their parents. And their parents are the type that travel, so their vocabulary is high because of (the experiences they get); they have a great family

- Naomi

Laura sees another situation arising from the fact that the students have hearing losses and are gifted. Related to communication, Laura describes it as isolation. She realizes that with some teachers of students with hearing loss, there is perhaps a tendency to blame the method of communication for the child’s isolation; there are people who would strongly argue that if the child had been brought up with ASL and within the Deaf
community, then the isolation would not exist. Laura sees it as being much more than this, however, for the students who are also gifted.

For Daria, it’s the isolation of hearing impairment that always gets to you I guess. You realize that she really doesn’t have any peers but it’s not as if she’s in the wrong educational setting; I just don’t know how far you would have to go to find peers for Daria.

There has to be more chance for more of the leaders, the gifted, to get together, because I think they can learn a lot from each other. In a way, it’s kind of like, the support that parents of exceptional children need in terms of support from each other. I think when you’re part of a very small minority group, that there’s a necessity, not just a need, but a real necessity to know that you’re not the only person that’s going through something. And there’s nobody else really who … it’s not that other people don’t understand and it’s not that they aren’t empathetic and it’s not that they aren’t caring and all that kind of thing, but there is an instant between two people who share and there’s no other. I think the proliferation of all the support groups for everything from family of Alzheimer’s patients to whatever. It’s a measure of that need that we all have to find someone who knows. I mean, when you’re pregnant, what’s the first thing you do. You run and find somebody else... you need to, I don’t know, touch base. Assure yourself of your own normalcy. Somehow I think that the gifted hearing impaired probably feel the handicap of the deafness more so than normal intelligence hearing impaired. I’m not sure but I have the feeling that they do. That they sense more of what might have been...

Heidi too mentions the fact that for Rob, finding a peer group is somewhat of a problem. Unlike Dana, who is in an integrated setting, Rob goes to a School for the Deaf.

Rob is here because his parents want him to have the Deaf role models and the signed communication, but I think that he needs more stimulation than we can give him here, but I’m not sure if there is an appropriate environment like that for Rob. He might get it by being with an interpreter in the public school for some of the subjects he is good at but I don’t know... I think that kids need a challenge from each other as well, from their peers. One day in here, one of the others knew an answer that he didn’t and that’s probably the first time in the 3 years he’s been here that somebody else knew something he didn’t know. He plays his role very well, he waits patiently for everybody to get it, but he needs more challenge from other kids like him.

Hilary talks about the same kind of thing with her students, again emphasizing the fact that our ideas about communication must be broadened to include the communication of ideas.

You know how some people say, well if you just give her sign language, they’ll do fine. But I’m not sure, because there’s Sue and she can sign as well as anybody in the city, but who is she going to communicate with? There aren’t other hearing impaired teenagers who are signers who are that interested in the same kinds of things that she’s interested in. They haven’t got the same kind of language that she has, so who’s she going to communicate with?
Being gifted and having a hearing loss—working hard.

Several of the teachers mentioned the fact that their students appeared to be really hard workers and were empathetic to the challenges they faced in this regard. Laura spoke first about her daughter Kate.

I think at this point Laura is taking a vacation. She’s not in school now. I don’t know if she’s seeing it in those terms or not, but she really has worked hard for all the years. It’s hard to imagine how difficult sitting through a class must be when you’re using 110% of your energy to try to understand what is being said. At University she had interpreters for all her courses, but that requires a concentration that I don’t think a hearing person could ever begin to imagine. And then, just the difficulties of day-to-day living for a hearing impaired person sometimes gets so complicated. Where a phone call would clear up something for us, it can take four hours worth of running back and forth. Life is more difficult for someone with a hearing loss.

Even with all the hard work, for some of the students there appears to be a huge imbalance in terms of rewards. Laura for example, sees Daria “having to expend so much energy in order to get to low normal” in terms of achievement with her hearing peers. Her energy goes to keep up with the hearing kids in her school and as Laura says, “it’s like all the bad jokes about women having to be twice as good as men in order to get half as far; it’s the same kind of thing.” Ken even suggests that because of the hearing loss itself, even if the students are very bright, “you’re talking 10 to 20 points on her average. You have to accept that; that’s just the way it is.” He goes on to talk about Donna who, like Kate, because of their hearing losses, was dependent upon an interpreter in the system...

Oh, she had to work hard, there’s no doubt. To make up for the hearing loss, she had to work hard. But she had good study habits and I think that people who have good study habits probably do in 5 minutes what other people take an hour to do.

But she was also dependent upon an interpreter and that didn’t work out for her at the University because I don’t think that the interpreter knew the subject matter all that well. Having an interpreter is not always the answer either.

Because the students are gifted, teachers are concerned about providing appropriate challenges. In some way it might seem that gifted students with hearing losses are being challenged by the educational context itself: just keeping up to hearing peers provides the challenge. As Hilary reminds us, “that youngster is working so hard, getting 90% and
he’s profoundly hearing impaired, but frankly, he’s a basket case!” Another view to this issue was illustrated when one of the teachers relayed to me a conversation they had had with a friend about educational placements in the public schools and whether or not she might benefit the gifted students.

I was talking with a friend who said, well, okay, so you’re saying that we’re putting these kids out in the public school system and they’re being challenged; maybe just by putting them into the public school system, that’s where their challenge lies. But I’m thinking and she was thinking of a student and she just had a question and there’s nothing resolved… I’m not sure there’s a right or wrong here at all, but she was saying, I’ve got a child who is out in the public school system and she has to work so hard. I mean her energies go into, you know, passing in some subjects and you know, making 80% or 85% in others. I wonder if we had kept her where the pressure to achieve the high marks was less, what might have happened? Then maybe some of her other talents might have developed more. In other words, putting her in that environment may have impeded some other development of other gifts. And I just thought, well that’s an interesting comment, cause I hadn’t thought about it that way at all.

Naomi talks about Nancy, who has done well so far in school. Now she begins to question her ability to continue to be able to do well in school. Already dealing with a difficult situation where she is getting relatively little home support, Naomi explains:

I have a funny feeling that things will probably get harder for her. I just don’t know if she’s going to be able to continue at this rate or if she’s going to start falling behind because of course the grades get harder. So she’s kept up till now, but I’m not so sure that she will be able to continue at that pace. I really think that she’ll need tutors, because I think she needs someone to communicate with her at the different levels of the grades and at her ability level. She won’t be held back because of her intellectual ability; it will be because of her deafness and her background.

Career expectations.

Students who are mentioned in this study have already proved that they can learn and achieve, in ways that are equal to and in many cases better than their hearing peers in the educational context. The teachers also see, however, that when the students leave the educational setting and plan their careers they will have to deal with new challenges. Tina tells the story of Judy who wanted to become a Medical Doctor.

Judy was working hard but loving it. She had her heart set on being a medical doctor. And she was quite convinced of this. In fact, planning her grade 10 courses, you know, taking the biology and chemistry into account. So we went
and interviewed a doctor who was hard of hearing and wore hearing aids and she was quite distressed when he told her, "I'm sorry, but based on my experience you can't be a doctor." He said, "You will never get through your surgical residency because everybody wears masks and you can't lip read." He said, "I only got through mine because I was just beginning to lose my hearing then." It was as a resident when he was doing rounds and began to realize he couldn't hear and people weren't going to shout medical conditions out across the ward for him.

So, at that point in her life, with her hearing being a severe to profound loss, she was very dependent on lipreading skills to supplement what she was hearing. She was looking at alternate careers, medical research careers, that sort of thing. Then she lost all of her hearing and decided to go for a cochlea implant and so now she's functioning very very well with residual hearing. If she can't be the surgeon she wants to be, somehow she'll find something else. I think she intends to pursue her medical career and she's so determined that even if she has to take her interpreter into the surgery, she'll do it.

Hilary tells another story of Tarah, who has really aimed high for getting what she wants and faces special challenges because of the hearing loss.

She was over at my house the other night. This sounds so trivial but to me it pointed out something to me. She shut the door and the cat's tail was in the door. And she didn't hear the cat And she keeps pushing the door because she thinks there's something stuck.

Now this is all very amusing except it wasn't because the poor cat. I rushed it to the hospital. I thought, she wants to be a vet but as smart as she is, she doesn't see through all of this. She thinks she's going to get her degree in veterinary medicine but she doesn't want to be involved in the research side of it. ...If they ask her to do something less than what she's capable of intellectually, just because of her hearing loss, she's not benefiting from her giftedness cause that's not what she wants. So Tarah is gifted, but limited still because of a hearing loss.

She actually applied for veterinary school after that incident and it was a great tragedy because she just had the marks to get in. But after the interview they wrote a rather snarky letter back and said that because of the hearing impairment it would be difficult. I've no doubt in my mind though that she'll try other places and will get in.

Some of the teachers see the potential in the students who are gifted and although they accept the differences they see between the potential and seeing that potential realized, they wonder how the students themselves feel about it. Some of the teachers say, if the students didn't have a hearing loss, then he or she might have been "a politician," "a valedictorian," "in a gifted program for sure," "...things would have come easier for her." Hilary for example, sees that Iris is perfectly capable of achieving well in University, but because of the difficulties she has with the English language, she stands a chance of not getting in.
So here’s a kid who’s making it except she’s has a horrible time with written English. If I were to focus just on the English, I’d say to myself, forget it. She doesn’t even have any ideas in her head with this kind of language. But she’s getting 80 in math. She’s getting 85 in chemistry and 86 in calculus...But this kid should go to university. There’s no doubt in my mind but she can’t get in without her grade 12 English. That’s the problem with the system. I wonder how it hits them when they realize that there might be a lot of doors closed to them. So giftedness, what’s her giftedness going to do for her?

**Dealing with discrepancies.**

Part of being very bright and very Deaf is also dealing with discrepancies...

- having a sharp mind and a great deal of knowledge in some areas, but not being able to communicate these ideas because of difficulties with communication skills: “he’s got this speedy fast mind but there are limits to the subtleties he can communicate.”

- having a brilliant scientific mind but not being able to communicate because of poorly developed social skills.

- being gifted in the Sciences or some other area and not being given the opportunities to develop to potential because of society’s emphasis on the use of highly developed English reading and writing skills.

- being able to thrive and absorb information as fast as we can give him in spite of “having very little input from his environment, being linguistically isolated.”

- being gifted in art and learning disabled in language.

- having to work so hard to overcome low reading abilities; having an IQ of over 130 and reading two or three grades behind.

- having no social communication competence but a propensity for language development.

- wanting to have peers who are at the same intellectual and communicative levels, but because of belonging to two minority groups, feeling isolated because peers are hard to find due to the small numbers in the populations.

- having high potential in an area which is not accessible just because of the hearing loss.
- knowing that some of the mistakes that are being made, or things that were going wrong, were going wrong because of the hearing loss, not because of the intellectual ability.

- knowing that on IQ tests, the performance result is in the gifted range and the verbal score is borderline "dull normal." "What is so difficult to get around with Mark is that he grasps concepts so quickly that his language delay is an incredible problem for him. He is one of the most frustrated students you could ever want to know. He can’t be bothered to take the time to write out a report because it’s so self-evident for him and he won’t sit still for any kind of language intervention either."

- being very bright but still having to work so hard to achieve only average grades: “She says, I’m stupid, I can’t do this or I’m going to fail. And it’s really difficult to reassure her that no Daria, you’re a very bright young lady and you’re doing fine and if you worked harder then you’d probably get better marks but you are doing very well I think she really feels that discrepancy.”

- being caught in a double bind and having to deal with people who don’t understand the impact of either the hearing loss or of being gifted, not understanding that it’s possible to “be gifted in one area and very slow in another area.” Having to deal with people who might say well “if this kid’s gifted then they don’t need to go to the resource room... it’s for kids who have trouble; if this kid’s gifted, he’s just not trying hard enough, if they’re only getting B’s then that’s their problem.”

As Liz said so clearly: “These kids really have to do quite a balancing act in order to survive; and some of them, in fact most of them, do it extremely well!”

Summary—Part One

As educators these teachers’ insights leave us with certain unanswered questions about what is in fact happening to these students. How can students with hearing losses who are also gifted students find appropriate peer groups, in terms of age, in terms of mode of communication and in terms of intellectual stimulation? Given the fact that this
population is so small, answering this question provides perhaps one of the most difficult challenges.

We also must question, along with the students, the placements in which they find themselves. While wanting to increase their chances of being properly and adequately challenged so that their gifts may flourish, it is also necessary to take into account how to best provide these challenges while at the same time, recognizing the possible negative impact of too much pressure.

This section has described the teachers’ perspectives of the impact of having a hearing loss and of being gifted. The teachers have offered accounts of students who face challenges from both directions. Hearing loss impacts on communication and language development skills, which in turn impacts on personality and social skill development and eventually on career placement. Both hearing loss and giftedness affect people’s attitudes and expectations and students must also deal with these. Giftedness, in some cases might allow a student to deal with or compensate for a disability; in others, it may become a source of frustration. Whatever the case, the tone of the teachers’ comments is that they not only attempt to understand what might be happening for their students, but they also have the utmost respect for their accomplishments.

The first part of this chapter has provided an overview of the many strong and admirable achievements and capabilities of students who have hearing losses and who are perceived to be gifted. In addition it has indicated that although there are similarities between these students and those gifted students who are hearing, there are also strong and important differences.

It is very evident that these teachers come to know their students in an in-depth way. During the interview process, it was easy for them to relate stories of the students they knew; it was easy for them to provide evidence of achievements, behaviors and learning abilities that had informed them about their exceptional abilities; it was easy for them to attempt to describe their perceptions of the effect of dealing with two labels. The teachers
also offered insights into their struggles with the meanings of giftedness as they discussed issues on a more theoretical level. Although the teachers did not stop making references to students, there were times during the interview that they appeared to step back a bit and to reflect on their ideas as they came to the foreground of their thinking. The next part of this chapter introduces the teachers’ more theoretically oriented conceptions of giftedness and uses Sternberg and Davidson’s (1986) research to highlight similarities and differences between teachers’ and experts’ conceptions of giftedness.

**Part Two—Conceptual/Theoretical Orientations to Giftedness**

Halcolm will tell you this: “Because you can name something does not mean you understand it. Because you understand it does not mean it can be named”. And this: “What you do not see you cannot describe. What you cannot describe you cannot interpret. But because you can describe something does not mean you can interpret it.” (Halcolm in Patton, 1990, p. 369).

In this part of the chapter, teachers explore their understandings of giftedness, influenced perhaps more by their own beliefs and biases, than by their interactions with students in classrooms. In the interview situation, sometimes the teachers expressed uncertainty; they explored what giftedness meant by asking questions and then by making connections to their stories of the children. At other times during the interviews, the teachers appeared to be very clear about aspects that assisted them in creating meanings for the term gifted. What follows is a description of teachers understanding of the more general term, gifted. The issues they discuss apply to any person who might be labeled, not only those who have hearing losses.

One might organize teachers’ thinking of giftedness by placing our ideas about it as a process, having a beginning, a middle and an end. Teachers wonder where giftedness comes from, how it develops and what are the end results of being gifted. As a beginning to the process, teachers talk of some kind of innate ability which gives the child a special gift; in the middle, teachers focus on a variety of elements in the child’s environment which enhance or inhibit the development of those special gifts; and in the end, there is
the final product, the achievement, (or non-achievement), of potential as defined by our
society’s values as they are embedded in our culture. One of the most interesting aspects
of this conceptualization of giftedness is that the end result, that of achievement or of
reaching potential, might be seen at any time in the person’s development. Heather sees it
in preschoolers; Ken sees it in adults. As Richard explains:

I think I’d leave (the meaning of giftedness) really, really open... I don’t think
you can turn around and say, “You’re gifted now and you will be gifted for the
rest of your school life,” or “you’re not gifted and you never will be.” I mean,
you can’t do that, number 1, because the child, I mean we all kick in at
different stages of our development and a child may suddenly develop a talent
or an interest and take off and well, if he’s not in the gifted program (are we
supposed to say) he can’t do it? I mean you can’t do it that way. We shouldn’t
be doing it that way anyway, you know...it’s a question of flexibility.

Teachers’ Understandings—The Beginning and the Middle

Where does giftedness come from and how does it develop? The nature/nurture
dimension.

There appears to be strong support among the teachers for the idea that giftedness,
or at least some aspect of what we label giftedness, is due to innate factors. “There are
just some children that have special gifts,” says Heidi and this conceptualization is
supported in several different ways by a number of the teachers.

There’s another girl that I only had the opportunity to work with for one year
...who is clearly what I would call a gifted student. if you think of somebody
having a gift.
- Tina

The thing about giftedness is that you have no control over it. It just happens. So
from that point of view, I think it’s great. I mean, if you have a kid that is
gifted, it is a gift. It’s like playing the piano; it is a gift. But I don’t look at it as
being positive or negative... it’s just that it’s something that you have no
control over. It happened...(it’s) innate ability, the synapses up here are all
firing and they’re doing it right. If I had to define giftedness then I would put
it to innate intelligence. That’s what I would say, what you’re born with.
That’s the gift.
- Ken

He’s gifted; there’s no doubt about it. And it is just a seed, a communication
seed that he has in there. I mean, he comes in and he can communicate in 10
different ways, you know. If I don’t understand the first one, then (he’ll try
something different). Nobody’s taught him that, it’s that seed that was there.
- Heather
I think of Alexis who learned English after she was 9, from Europe. I don’t know whether it’s because of the English, or whether it’s just something about her mind. She catches it immediately in some situations. No, I don’t know. A lot of the kids are creative but they’re not gifted. She’s not creative but she’s gifted. So there is a difference. There’s something about her mind.
- Andrea

The really gifted kids just do it; it’s just there, it’s inbred or it’s inherited...it’s there or it’s not there. It’s just a gift. Certainly they had families that helped but there’s still that little seed that was there; the others don’t have that magic.
- Hilary

In spite of there being some kind of innate factor, however, the teachers also recognize that the environment plays a considerable part in whether or not that child will develop his or her gifts to their maximum potential. Elizabeth recognizes that a few gifted people might reach their potential without special help, but that for the most part, gifted people will benefit from receiving assistance in several areas of their lives.

It’s the gift; I think it’s the same as the hearing. I think it’s born. Some people have the gift and I think it’s born, but I also think a lot of gifted people out there do need some help from home and help in the community to succeed with their giftedness... Unless you’re really, really gifted and you could surpass any obstacles. I don’t think there are too many of those people. But I know there are some out there who could bypass any obstacles and they could still do it in spite of everything but I think they’re pretty rare.

Laura and Heather both recognize that there appears to be some interplay between factors which are innate and factors which come from the child’s environment. Laura, as a mother, indicates that there was a balance there for her daughter: “I mean, partly it was home and partly it was the work that we did with her and partly... I really think that with some kids there is a language gene maybe. It’s something that’s not teachable.” Heather too says that “I think it had to do with early intervention, exposure and probably some sort of innate, I don’t know what you’d call it, genetic or not, ability... I believe that it was there when he was born and it hasn’t been stifled...”. Other teachers are a bit more specific about which environmental factors might impact on the student’s development.

...a child who maybe is showing potential when he’s 5 or 6, may have been labeled gifted; ( but then ) that child may be sitting in the senior wing at the age of 16 twiddling his thumbs and doing nothing; he’s not nominated for any gifted things...But is it because we’ve bored him to death, or given him the wrong programs, or, like who knows what happens?
- Heidi
Ken remembers Joe, who developed his giftedness when he was an adult and speculates on the factors in his environment that may have hindered him from developing his potential earlier.

I remember Joe who just didn’t have the academic skills in school. I don’t know whether the motivation came too late, or there just was too much of a lack of language. I don’t know. And then again, maybe if you’re looking at the matter in which the interpreting was done, it was signed English then, would ASL have made a difference? I don’t know.

Elizabeth relates her own experiences with a student whose school performance was quite drastically influenced by changes in the home environment. She begins with a response to my question:

Q. What would she have to have in addition to allow her to have a gifted label; what would it be?
A: ...A different home. When I had her in my class she was good; she was very good. She was always one of the best ones in the class. The next year, her work just went down. She was one of the lowest ones from what I gather from the teacher. Not the lowest. But she was no longer tops. Like, when I had her, you could tell the difference between her and the next student. She was way above them. The following year, because of all the social problems and the home problems, you could no longer see that she was anywhere above the other kids in the class. So, I do think home plays a great part. If you are very worried about your family, it usually affects your work.

From Naomie’s perspective, it becomes difficult to judge whether or not a child will be able to reach her full potential without having the advantages of a strong family supporting system. This is especially critical to children who have hearing losses because of the importance of communication development.

In this case, the influence of the home, there is none. It’s none. It’s totally what Nancy has herself and what her teachers offer her is where she can either make it or break it; it all depends on that. I have no idea if, 5 years from now, Nancy will be able to develop her potential. It’s hard to say...It’s hard to say because she’s not from a home background that could be of any support to her at all, really. So, she doesn’t have a lot going for her. So it’s hard...that’s really a difficult question to answer for her. If she had (really supportive) parents, I’d say there would be no doubt in my mind.

Although teachers have recognized that development of potential happens through an interplay of both hereditary and environmental factors, they have also seen that some students can achieve their potential and realize their giftedness without strong positive
environmental factors. Heidi, however, believes that without the hereditary component, students may do well, but are not gifted. She speaks of herself as a writer, as an example:

...But I don’t have that potential within me. I would love to be able to write, but it’s not within me. and the same with this child. Is this child gifted, gifted, gifted? Or is this child just got the gift of a wonderful family? But I’ve seen other wonderful families who have tried their best and their children didn’t have all the other things going for them. The good memory and the ability to be so curious about things and interested in anything. So like, that gift, of being curious, I think is... probably comes from a family plus the child being so receptive somehow. It’s all of those things working together. There is another child in here who’s got a mother that really signs well and is trying really hard but the little guy hasn’t got the memory, the innate ability... For Rob, everything just all fits together, innate ability, family everything. So what does that make him, gifted? Or does it make him very bloody lucky?

In summary, the teachers recognize the importance of both heredity and development and tend to emphasize the latter when they talk about gifted people. As Heidi notes, one might be able to be gifted with little or no environmental support, but without innate ability the teacher does not see the child as being gifted. In contrast to Heidi’s perspective, Richard is eager to call a highly motivated student gifted.

Teachers’ Understandings—What does Being Called Gifted Really Mean?

Teachers mentioned several aspects of giftedness in relation to whether or not they might call someone gifted. Often their ideas were posed as questions rather than clear statements of fact which indicated perhaps that trying to fully understand the meaning of the word appears to be an ongoing process. In many cases the issue is left unresolved. The nature of the teachers’ perspectives might simply be this: that their ideas are continually changing and evolving in a dynamic way, as teachers and students interact with each other and with others outside of the school setting. Their conceptions of giftedness are dynamic, rather than static.

The teachers saw giftedness in different ways; each teacher made a contribution to the larger picture of what giftedness means. The issues they discussed are presented as follows: giftedness viewed as relative, as lying on a continuum; giftedness viewed as potential in relation to achievement and success; giftedness viewed as being good for something; giftedness viewed as a process or as a product; giftedness viewed as a school-
based concept; the other, unseen and unknown, definition of giftedness; giftedness seen as a national resource; and giftedness viewed as the little “g” big “G” philosophical dimension

**Giftedness as relative, as lying on a continuum.**

Teachers identify gifted people by comparing them to others they have known; this has been discussed at length in Chapter 7. These students are placed in a position relative to someone else, or relative to several other people. As Richard says, “if a child in fact does exhibit a talent or an ability towards a gifted end of the spectrum, then we should have a look at what she can do and enhance those abilities”. This idea of giftedness with its underlying implication of relativism places it squarely at one end of a continuum: at the high end. This end of the spectrum, however, might also bring with it problems in terms of how people are seen. Laura for example, expresses the hesitancy that teachers have when they use the term gifted. She suggests that gifted people are usually “the leaders, the gifted, whatever you’re going to call them, the leaders, the gifted, the elite, the cream of the crop,” and there’s...

...probably a resistance amongst most people to even identify or label gifted or to do anything about them... It’s because it’s a democracy and we’re all supposed to be equal and it’s okay for people to be not quite equal to us that way. But it certainly isn’t all right for them to be more equal? I don’t know.

Once a student is labeled gifted, however, teachers deal with another kind of relativism. As Naomi says, “there’s gifted and then there’s truly gifted!” Even within the gifted boundaries there may be some who are more gifted than others. Heidi tries to deal with this issue as she discusses degrees of giftedness.

I’ve also wondered how people could make their children, well, like be great pianists. I couldn’t even get mine to practice for 15 minutes! But I know some parents that you don’t get out of my house unless you practice for 2 hours. Are there degrees? My conception of somebody like that is like a child prodigy, or Beethoven, like his work has lasted for years and Einstein... a lot of people. But are there degrees of giftedness?... Did you see that article in the paper about that girl who was a musician playing the, what did she play? the violin at 8 years old. She, to me is gifted. That is a gifted child. But does gifted have to mean genius? It seems that just as people mark differently, some harder, some easier, some people have more stringent criteria of what gifted is.
Giftedness viewed as potential in relation to achievement and success.

Heidi offers a perspective of giftedness which has to do with the concept of contribution which is also tied in with the idea of being gifted as having the potential to be gifted. As she tries to explain what she means by gifted in terms of what people can contribute to the world, she also thinks about Rob, who is very young. In their interview, Elizabeth questions her on this point and Heidi realizes that Rob cannot have reached his potential yet. Heidi then questions the timing of when she might be able to label someone as gifted.

Well, I guess I think of Einstein and whatnot, but I'm not sure what we're talking about. Those people have furthered our lives in some way, even our environmentalists, if they can save this old world I guess that's a gift... so to me if you've got this talent, you'd better use it somehow. ...Well, I think gifted means you've got to be creative. Somehow, you've got to contribute more to this world than just little old me is ever going to do. So, I think you have to have ideas in your head that are going to add to the knowledge, or the beauty, or the something.
- Heidi

But I'm not sure whether or not only success or achievement indicates giftedness. Maybe we do have to wait for them to be successful or to achieve something or to give something back to society before we could really label them. Is that what you were referring to?
- Elizabeth

Well, sort of. I suppose a definition of what a gifted person is doesn't mean that the child couldn't be gifted in the future. Now Rob, he's not going to give much back yet. So how can I tell if Rob's going to do that? He's just 8. Maybe you just can't say that a person is gifted until they've grown up and started to use this wonderful gifted potential... they could be gifted all through high school and they get to be 20 and they become a beach ball. So are they still gifted, or are they just a gifted beach ball?
- Heidi

Ken is ready to label a child gifted even without that ability being manifested and Ted appears to be able to do the same, talking about a man he knows who is gifted and not successful. Ted's final comments remind us of the impact of society's values on the giftedness concept. Ken explains first.

No, you don't have to associate giftedness with achievement. I mean, it can be there eh? Like we were talking about David. It wasn't manifested
by him, but it was obvious that he was gifted that he had...he was born smart.

Q: Just from his behavior? And interactions? And what he was doing?
A: Yeah. Conversing with him and how quick he would pick up things. Definitely gifted but didn’t do anything positive with it.

...This ability to push oneself. See, is giftedness necessarily going to make someone a success in life in terms of a job or money? I know a man who’s extremely gifted, brilliant. He’s an unemployed lawyer and has been for 5 years. He balked at the system. He is not a success in our social system. But the drive, he doesn’t have the drive. Compare him with someone else who has both ability and the drive and he would probably be classified in society as a huge success. He has all the paraphernalia, little house in a classy neighborhood and stuff. Whereas another person who is truly gifted, may not necessarily be successful in terms of our criteria, which is often money and houses and all that kind of stuff, jobs. So that drive is extremely important if you want to be gifted and successful...
- Ted

Naomi too wonders about giftedness in terms of a person living up to his or her potential.

...Well, kids who have really high IQs, they’re intellectually gifted, yeah, they are. I mean they’re labeled as gifted. On their CUM file they are gifted because they reach the IQ for giftedness. They are. So that gives them the label. But in reality would you call them gifted, if they’re not living up to their potential? I guess the dimension there is whether or not they...if you consider achieving potential to be a part of that label. Yeah...Achieving potential, or you’re gifted but there are other problems in the way so that you can’t actually get there. That prevents it. I don’t know...

Elizabeth makes an interesting contribution to this issue when she refers to the fact that in many cases where people are seen as gifted, this happens after they have died!

This example also underlines the importance of cultural values and society’s ways of recognizing talent.

...I can’t say that I necessarily think that gifted and success have to go hand in hand either. There were lots of people way back when who, they didn’t become successful until after they were dead. I still think they... and we think now they were definitely gifted but they didn’t think so in their own times. Writers and artists, well, a lot of those people. They couldn’t tell. They died in poverty. Their own contemporary stuff, they were not successful. They may have felt in their own mind they were. But who knows about what’s in their mind back then? So I don’t necessarily think they have to go hand in hand.

Heather sees giftedness in terms of potential “rather than outcome.” She goes on to discuss what she means, especially in terms of the educational implications for her decision making, or her recognition of giftedness.
...Here we get to something. I mean, is gifted the potential or is gifted the product? Is gifted what the kid actually looks like, or is gifted the kid's actual learning capacity? We gauge the child's learning capacity by what we see, so there's a dimension to the definition then, there is a real dimension. One is potential and one is output, outcome. I'm just trying to throw away everything of what I would, how I would look at it. Is he gifted? How would I know? How would I know if he was gifted or not and what implications would that have for that kid's education? I don't know.

OK. Let's make a scenario here. We have a profoundly deaf kid who's 6 years old and has been basically in a situation where nobody has communicated with him in his family for 6 years (pause). He gets into school and we see that his ability to function nonlinguistically is strong. He's a survivor. Within the realm of what he has been able to figure out, within the realm of what he's been able to learn all by himself, he has... he's obviously performed well. Within the realm of what he's been able to learn, he looks very strong. What that tells me...what I'm going to look at and say, "Oh this kid's really bright, he's survived this stuff." I guess the implications for programming there would be for me to press and shoot high, but whether that kid would be able to overcome that deficit in terms of what he'd look like academically and literally, I don't know. Would he still be gifted? Yeah, I guess so. I think of giftedness in terms of potential rather than outcome and maybe part of the reason I do is because I work at preschool level.

Giftedness viewed as being good for something.

In some ways, Hilary agrees with Heidi in that she sees giftedness as being good in terms of what use can be made of it. The concept is also similar to Laura's, who talks about giftedness as being seen as a valuable resource.

...And will his giftedness be stifled or be, not be allowed to develop because of this? I don't know. It depends on the area that he chooses to go into. It depends on... well, giftedness is only good in terms of what it gives to society and what happiness and fulfillment it gives to the individual, really. So if it gives Bob a great deal of happiness because he becomes some fabulous engineer or comes up with some technical wonder and gives something to society and therefore he gets something back from society, good.

- Hilary

...the other side is, of course, we need them. God help us, we need them... the gifted. And need them nurtured, because it's a waste of too good a resource not to use them; not to groom them for service. (laughter)...I was out with the horses in the barn this morning so I guess that's where that language comes from!

- Laura

Giftedness viewed as a process or a product.

Many of the teachers in this study have experienced the results of their students' giftedness. These results have been displayed in areas such as art, athletics, mime,
reading, language skill development, science, grades in school etc. and are discussed by
the teachers as they talked about their students in Chapter 5. It is Liz, perhaps, who makes
the most clear distinction between seeing giftedness as a product and recognizing it as a
process. She mentioned that before she had met her partner, she was aware of giftedness
among people who were being called gifted, the famous people; these people had been
labeled especially because they had made their mark in society. In terms of what she
knew then, she saw giftedness in terms of the product it produced. Her thinking changed,
however, when she interacted with Bob and then with other students, when she saw the
creative thinking processes that these students displayed. As she says, “giftedness really
only had any meaning for me when I could interact with Bob, because when I could see,
‘Oh my gosh!, nobody else would have ever thought of that!’ ...so also giftedness is
present in interactions with people... it’s a process too.”

Giftedness as a school-based concept.

Andrea contributes to our understandings of the giftedness concept by indicating
that she believes it to be a school-based concept. She explains.

I tend to associate giftedness with the learning process. We don’t tend to label
people as gifted after they’ve left school, so I would identify students in terms
of their learning abilities but if they can learn, if they’re fast moving, if they
could learn after once being taught. That sort of thing. I would relate it to how
fast and how easy they learn.

I never really thought about teachers, adults I know who might be gifted,
you know. Gifted seems to, giftedness seems to disappear on graduation. We
don’t term people gifted after they graduate. No, I can’t think of anyone. So if
someone graduates, becomes an adult and after you’ve had some interaction
with that person as an adult. No I don’t think of it as gifted; no label is needed
for them at that point.

In the working world it’s who you know, not what you know. Giftedness is
nothing. It doesn’t even figure into it. In the working world giftedness has no
value. It’s who you know. It’s not what you know. That’s the truth.

The other, unseen and unknown, definition of giftedness.

When teachers talked about their students, they often felt unsure about their abilities
to label students as gifted. It appeared that teachers believed that somewhere out there,
beyond the confines of their classrooms, the theoreticians, the other experts, had a ready-
made definition and the teachers didn’t know what that definition might be. There seemed
to be the implication that there was a right and a wrong way to use the term gifted. The teachers appeared to have no difficulty talking about their students, but when they were asked to talk more formally about the concept, they did not trust themselves.

I asked Hilary what her thoughts were about giftedness itself, the concept, what it meant to her. Her reply was...

...Oh, I was afraid you were going to ask that. I wouldn’t even want to try. I don’t even want to go off on that tangent. I really wouldn’t know if Bennie was gifted, but to me he is!

Heidi too speaks very plainly:

I don’t know what the term really means. Like, we’ve talked about that before, about what does gifted mean? Does it mean gifted in art, or in music, or IQ, or what is a gifted person? Sometimes there is a fine line between someone who may be gifted and someone who may be very bright.

Even after Elizabeth has talked about students whom she believes are gifted she hesitates and Ted too calls for some clear criteria. There is a reluctance for the teachers to trust their own judgments about who is and who is not, gifted.

...Well, I said that Craig may be gifted but if you remember correctly, I said it depends on the term. Until we decide what the exact definition is, I don’t think my own definition, well, I don’t really know if they’re gifted. I just nominated them because right now I don’t have the definition
- Elizabeth

...Would I call them gifted? Well, it depends on what your definition of gifted is. First, I would have to know what the criteria would be that would determine giftedness...I consider them to be way above average on my gut level; that’s my feeling, that there’s something with both of them. If you’re able to give me some criteria, perhaps I could check off the certain aspects. But I don’t think you’ve got such a list yet!
- Ted

In some sense, the difficulty teachers have with choosing the criteria for who is gifted and who is not, is well illustrated in the issue related to the Nature/Nurture issue and manifested in the concept of the hard worker. That concept is tied in with achievement. It seems that it is not only important to teachers that a child achieves; what also seems to be important to whether or not a child is labeled gifted, is how the child achieves. From the teachers’ perspectives it appears that students might fall into three groups:
1. A student may be gifted precisely because he is a hard worker and is highly motivated to achieve. In this case the teacher believes that there are possibly two kinds of students: (a) one who works hard to achieve and (b) one who is “naturally gifted.”

...There were other students who were in the program that I would say, yeah, they're probably gifted, but she really shines out as being naturally gifted. In other words, she was...God granted her with these abilities. And the others...Some of the others got them through hard work only. Norm, for example. It started...I really don’t know what would be the reason for it. It appeared and it was sort of like a six month to a year period that you could see that he’s doing something here, you know. Something has happened. I’d call him gifted from that point of view, because of his motivation.
- Ken

2. A student may be gifted and may or may not have to work hard to achieve.

...I’ve always had in my mind that Tarah’s not gifted, because she spends 6 hours a night working...but I think I’m being rather harsh on Tarah because there are lots of kids who could spend 6 hours a night and honey, they’re not going to be getting honors in fourth year philosophy and honors in all their sciences like she’s doing. You’ve got to have something else. You have to have something else going for you.
- Hilary

3. Even if a student works hard and achieves, she still may be seen as “not gifted.” In this case, the teacher believes that there is something more to giftedness than hard work.

...But there are a lot of what we might call gifted children who are really children who are pushed by their parents sometimes to the breaking point;...you could have pushed me since I was one year old and it wouldn’t have worked I’m sure
- Heidi:

...And there’s a gifted youngster who I think probably is of average intelligence, but because of the motivation factor this kid will spend seven hours a night, every night studying. So his marks reflect that he is gifted. His vocabulary level would indicate that too, but of course you have to remind yourself that he’s spending 7 hours a night studying. So that to me doesn’t put him in the same category as a kid over here who’s doing it and doing zip. The really gifted ones just do it.

Now if you saw these two pieces of writing - just look here. They just look like writing - a very small part of gifted I agree. You would think, you may say, oh gee, here are two really gifted writers. But there’s no comparison, because this kid has been stabbed a million times to get him to write this...whereas this one the writing is just there, nobody sat down with him. There’s a kid who’s working 7 hours a night and here’s one who sits down with a pen and paper and it’s just there.
The other big difference is the exceptional deaf child, or the child that makes it, that’s not bright, is a memorizer. They rote memorize it. Smart is hardworking, doing well, showing mastery, but it’s not necessarily gifted.
- Hilary

Giftedness viewed as the “small g” and “big G”—A philosophical dimension.

This conceptualization of the term has to do with how the teachers view students in their classrooms. It seems to come from the philosophy that all children have special talents and is tied into views regarding the provision of specialized programming for certain children and not for others.

Most kids with a small “g” of gifted, they all have talents. Some kids have more talent than others. It’s...I don’t know how you can...I don’t know whether you should in fact, identify them. I’m just thinking out loud. Whether we should say this kid’s got this particular talent so he deserves x amount of resources whereas this kid has this much talent in this area, so he only deserves so much resources?
- Richard

you could almost look at any hearing impaired child I guess and find one area that you consider them to be gifted in.
- Naomi

I consider every child to be a potential genius.
- Liz

Theorists Understandings of Giftedness

Giftedness is something we invent, not something we discover. (Sternberg & Davidson, 1986, p.2)

Giftedness is what one society or another wants it to be and hence its conceptualization can change over time and place (Sternberg & Davidson, 1986, p. 4)

There is no one theory-based definition of “gifted and talented” that is universally accepted and that will fit all programs and circumstances. Further, common usage of the terms even by experts, including teachers of the gifted, is ambiguous and inconsistent...one’s definition of gifted and talented is indeed important, yet delicate and complicated. (Davis & Rimm, 1989, p. 9)

The term gifted can mean different things to different people and often causes confusion and miscommunication...despite widespread recognition of the gifted, psychologists and educators have had difficulty reaching a consensus on the precise definition and measurement of giftedness...the way particular investigators view giftedness, influences the types of research questions they ask, the methodology they use to answer those questions and even the nature
of the sample selected for a study. Thus the definition of giftedness is itself a prime area for investigation. (Horowitz & O'Brien, 1985, p. 3)

This section provides an overview of conceptions of giftedness as outlined in a recent book edited by R. Sternberg and J. Davidson, *Conceptions of Giftedness* (1986). As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this study, Sternberg's (1986) ideas of implicit or explicit theoretical approaches appear to have been initially developed when he compared lay people's and experts conceptions of intelligence (1981). Sternberg and Davidson (1986) bring together 17 different conceptions of giftedness and an examination of their categorization is useful in terms of this study, because it provides an up-to-date framework for understanding the very different ideas that make up the giftedness concept and helps shed some light on some of the confusions that the teachers saw as they talked about gifted students with hearing losses.

The idea of usefulness may be the only test we have of what makes for a better or worse conception of giftedness. If our conceptions are useful, then as Sternberg and Davidson state, our reactions to these understandings may lead to favorable consequences of many kinds both to society and to its individuals. The authors state emphatically that "giftedness is arguably the most precious natural resource a civilization can have" (p. ix) and they remind us that in looking back upon the great civilizations, the reasons that some had more gifted individuals than others was probably not because of genes. The society had probably structured the environments of their citizens in ways that facilitated rather than inhibited the expression of gifts.

**Implicit theoretical approaches.**

The implicit theoretical approaches are embodied in five chapters of the book, the authors of which all present a different understanding of giftedness within the implicit theoretical approach. Tannenbaum (1986), for example, proposes a psychosocial approach to defining giftedness. This societal perspective, classifies talents into four types:
scarcity (those always in short supply that make life easier, safer, healthier and more intelligible); surplus (those able to elevate people’s sensibilities and sensitivities to new heights through the production of great art, literature, music and philosophy); quota (specialized, high-level skills needed to provide goods and services for which the market is limited, such as those of physicians, lawyers and teachers); and anomalous (reflecting prodigious feats that show how far the powers of the human mind and body can be stretched and yet be recognized for excellence, for example, speed reading or gourmet cooking. (Reis, 1989, p. 399).

In contrast to Tannenbaum’s (1986) conception of giftedness which arises from the standpoint of society, Renzulli’s (1986) “three-ring” conception of giftedness is also seen to be an implicit theoretical approach, but focuses very much on the individual. His definition includes three elements: above-average but not necessarily exceptional, ability; creativity; and task commitment. Renzulli emphasizes the interaction of these three elements and, believing that they can be encouraged and developed in childhood, advocates educational programming specifically designed to meet their needs (Reis & Renzulli, 1982).

Gallagher and Courtright (1986) make distinctions which I believe are important ones for educators to notice. They suggest that there are psychological and educational conceptions of the construct. The psychological conceptions are based primarily on individual differences, “(a) consider a full range of mental abilities, (b) use batteries of measuring instruments touching on much or all of this range, (c) more or less ignore ecological factors, (d) have as a primary goal the discovery of the nature of cognitive processes and (e) have as an outcome the label of ‘gifted’” (p. 5). In contrast, the educational conceptions are based primarily on school performance and assessment, (a) limit the range of predictors considered to those relevant to academic success, (b) use instruments that measure these school-related abilities, (c) are dependent on school and cultural environment for their conceptualization, (d) seek to place children and occasionally adults in their proper educational environment and (e) yield as a label something like ‘academically advanced’” (p. 5). Their elaborations of an educational conception appears to be very much in line with those of the teachers in this study.
Feldhusen’s (1986a) conception lies within the psychological domain as outlined above and has four main components: (a) general intellectual ability, (b) positive self-concept, (c) achievement motivation and (d) special talent(s). Like Renzulli (1986), he talks about the importance of motivation, but is more specific about the kind of motivation, achievement motivation. In contrast to the others, the work of Haensly, Reynold and Nash (1986) proposes a four component conception that is much more ecologically based. The four components are (a) coalescence (the way that abilities come together and work to produce significant products); (b) context (the situational factors that determine the worth of the product, or how valuable it is to society); (c) conflict (the idea that gifted individuals respond in certain special ways to the “press of the environment”) (p. 6) and the ways in which they respond becomes a significant factor in the development of their giftedness) and (d) commitment (similar to Renzulli’s task commitment, the ways in which a person will persevere and stick to something. Commitment is “persistence in the fact of conflict and in the fact of obstacles to arrive at the high level of performance of which one is capable, but only in the long run, after much work and travail” (p. 6).

Themes of the implicit-theoretical approach.

Sternberg and Davidson (1986) summarize these implicit theoretical conceptions of giftedness by identifying five themes which appear to run through each of them. The first is that one must identify the domain that serves as the basis of one’s definition, such as the educational subset of the societal domain. The second is that cognitive abilities are seen as an essential part of giftedness. The essential prerequisite of motivation is seen as the third theme, in that without it giftedness will probably not develop. Each of the theorists recognize the importance of the developmental course of one's gifts, in that development must determine whether and how giftedness will be expressed. The fifth theme is that of coalescence, made explicit by Haensly et al. (1986) This deals with how
everything all comes together and implies an interactive process and a combining of one's abilities so that giftedness might be realized.

**Explicit theoretical approaches - cognitive.**

It will be beneficial to explore the Explicit-Theoretical Approaches of both the cognitive and developmental theorists before making a comparison with the conceptions proposed by the teachers in this study.

The cognitive theorists, those who draw on explicit theories of cognitive psychology, are presented by Sternberg & Davidson (1986) in the works of four different papers: Jackson and Butterfield, Borkowski and Peck, Davidson and Sternberg. All of these theorists indicate that the isolation of single variables is critical for any study on giftedness, although there is no indication from any of the authors that a single variable can account for all of intellectual giftedness.

Jackson and Butterfield emphasize the role of metacognition in giftedness, arguing that there appears to be evidence that superior metacognitive ability may be a key component to giftedness. Borkowski and Peck emphasize a specific aspect of metacognition, that of metamemory, meaning one's knowledge or one's control of their memory.

Davidson's work emphasizes insight as a single variable which is relevant in the study of giftedness. She suggests that there are three kinds of insight: (a) selective encoding (involving distinguishing information that is relevant for one's purposes from information that is irrelevant); (b) selective combination (involving putting together the relevant pieces in just the right way) and (c) selective comparison (which is relating these relevant pieces of information to information already stored in memory).

Sternberg's chapter discusses his triarchic theory of intelligence, which emphasizes the centrality of cognition in giftedness and which is used as the basis for understanding giftedness. Some gifted individuals may be particularly adept at applying components of
intelligence, such as metamemory, but only to academic kinds of situations. Others may be particularly adept at dealing with novelty but in a synthetic rather than analytic sense; their creativity may both be matched by analytic power. Yet other gifted individuals may be “street-smart” in external contexts, being able to apply processes of intellectual functioning, as “mediated by experience, to functioning in real-world contexts” (p. 9).

**Themes of the cognitive theorists approach**

Unlike those who use implicit theoretical approaches to investigate giftedness, Sternberg and Davidson (1986) claim that cognitive theorists tend to agree among themselves. They suggest that at least three major themes can be drawn from their work.

1. The explicit theorists drawing on cognitive theory do not concentrate on the use of the term giftedness, but rather focus on the internal, cognitive antecedents of it. The emphasis in their work is on mechanism rather than lexical use.

2. In attempting to come to a clearer understanding of the cognitive mechanisms of giftedness, the cognitive theorists rely on the isolation and study of individual variables. In contrast, Sternberg and Davidson (1986) claim that the implicit theorists put more emphasis on lists of variables. In addition, areas like motivation are dealt with by the implicit theorists, whereas the cognitive theorists deal more with intellectual forms of giftedness.

3. The cognitivists emphasize the importance of theory-driven empirical research as the primary means for advancing our understandings of giftedness.

**Explicit theoretical approaches—developmental**

The developmental theorists draw explicitly on psychological developmental theories in their work on giftedness and are represented by Sternberg and Davidson (1986) in the works of Gruber, Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, Feldman, Walters and Gardner and Albert and Runco.
Gruber (1986) makes four points. He believes first that giftedness must be understood in the light of understanding the processes of both child and adult development. In order to do this, he recommends the intensive study of a small number of gifted individuals, his second point. The third point made, is that the main force in development of an extraordinary individual is that person’s own activities and interests. Giftedness does not just “happen” to people. Like Tannenbaum (1986), Gruber believes lastly that giftedness is developed in the context of the historical and social circumstances which surround the individual.

Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1986) argue that talent cannot be understood or observed except against a background of cultural expectations and values. They view giftedness as a trait that is not stable, being influenced both by an individual’s capacity for action and the cultural demands placed on that individual for performance over a lifetime. They suggest that four kinds of timelines will influence the development of giftedness: (a) life-span transitions; (b) time lines associated with cognitive development; (c) progression in a given domain of endeavor such as music and (d) progression in the field of endeavor as seen as part of the social structure, meaning that one’s gifts may be developed according to the supports offered within the system, i.e., courses in art, for example.

Feldman (1986) emphasizes the processes of intellectual functioning, rather than placing emphasis on the development of individual traits. He also views development in terms of a sequence of stages and as domain-specific. Child prodigies for example, “show extremely rapid development through nonuniversal stages whether or not they show extremely rapid development through the universal ones” (p. 291). He believes that the number of stages or levels that the average person will master in a given domain is obviously fewer than for the 'gifted' individual.

Walters and Gardner (1986) emphasize the “crystallizing experience” as a feature of domain-specific development. They define this as “an experience involving remarkable
and memorable contact between a person with unusual talent or potential and the materials of the field in which that talent will be manifested” (p. 13). This experience is seen in the light of Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences where there are at least seven different forms of intelligence: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intra-personal.

Albert and Runco (1986) derive their conception of giftedness from seven basic assumptions: (a) at high levels of mental ability and talent, intelligence and creativity are not strictly separable; (b) for a gifted person to achieve eminence, his or her early giftedness must be transformed into an appropriate set of values, drives and skills; (c) transformation of gifted creativity into eminence begins within one’s family structure but is steadily refined through one’s formal and informal education as well as through one’s early career efforts; (d) whether a potentially gifted person will actually become gifted will depend in large part on the “informing opportunities” in one’s life that enable one either to be steered, or to steer oneself, toward a certain kind of career; (e) the experience-producing and experience-selecting attributes of a family reside primarily in the socioeconomic status, personalities and values of the family members (f) family history, as it unfolds in the full interaction of all members of the family influences the development of each family member including the potentially gifted one; and (g) the family is a biological and interpersonal organizer of the individual’s gifts, focusing and mobilizing both the individual and the surrounding environment in ways that may be more or less favorable for the eventual display of giftedness.

Themes of the developmental theorists’ approach.

The themes running through these arguments, as suggested by Sternberg and Davidson (1986) are listed below.

1. The importance of development, especially life-span development, to the emergence of giftedness.
2. The emphasis on the domain-specific nonuniversal aspects of development.
3. The belief that the individual is always interacting with the environment in order to develop his or her giftedness; giftedness is not "just inside one's head" (p. 14).

4. The importance of the case study as a research method.

5. The importance of the role of observation in naturalistic settings, in order to understand giftedness.

6. The emphasis on socio-emotional factors as well as cognitive aspects of development in terms of the "interaction of systems that involves motivation and affect as well as cognition" (p. 15).

**Summary and Integration—Teachers and Theorists**

This chapter has described the understandings of giftedness as shown by two different groups of people: teachers, who work on a daily basis in classrooms and theorists, who work for the most part in settings other than schools. Comparisons between the conceptions of giftedness in these two groups may be made at two different levels. On the one hand, each group appears to use different ways of coming to know and understand giftedness; on the other, despite their different ways of approaching the study of giftedness, both teachers and theorists address substantive issues that are remarkably similar. Teachers ideas both parallel and differ from those of the theorists. This next section highlights the similarities and differences between the understandings of the teachers and the theorists.

**Differences in purpose.**

The purpose of understanding giftedness for the teacher is quite different from that of the theorists. The teacher must focus on meeting the educational needs of the students and thus any search for giftedness is in fact a search for understanding what the learning needs of the students might be. The teachers, at least those in this study, do not appear to use or employ any definition of giftedness, unless they are asked to identify students who
might fit into certain educational programming, or who might be eligible for special funding. Their understandings come from the students and any discussion of the meaning of giftedness relates back to their practical knowledge about the students. Teachers appear to be satisfied with understanding behaviors students display in their classrooms, in regards to the context of educational settings. There is a sense of immediacy to the teachers' ways of knowing.

In contrast, the theorists have been studying the meaning of giftedness for many years and will most likely be doing so for the long term. The implicit theorists, according to Sternberg and Davidson (1986), focus on understanding the meaning of the term by proposing "a definition or kind of definition of giftedness and then seek to show that this definition is consistent with the way they and others use the term giftedness... Giftedness is an invention and a major goal of an implicit theorist is to define just what has been invented: What does the invention look like and how does it function?" (p. 10). Although teachers too ask the questions, they then attempt to take the answers to those questions and apply them to programming.

A cognitive theorist on the other hand, does not focus so much on the term giftedness, "but rather on the cognitive antecedents of it. What is it that a person can do well to be identified by this term? In effect, what are the cognitive bases of giftedness? The emphasis...is on mechanism, not on lexical use" (p. 10).

**Differences in source of information.**

The teachers' understandings of giftedness are informed from their involvement in context, in ongoing interactions with their students. Teachers tend to accept the multiplicity of factors which are at play in classrooms and which affect the lives and learnings of the students; they also are perhaps more inclined to accept ambiguity, constant change and complexity. The implicit theorists' understandings are informed by the definitions which they create in order to provide some order to their situation. The explicit theorists understandings are informed by studies which isolate variables, then
relate findings back to their knowledge from other studies or variables associated with giftedness. In this kind of knowing, there appears to be a need for precision, exactness and conciseness.

**Similarities in understandings.**

In spite of these differences in how people come to know and understand giftedness, there appear to be remarkable similarities in their understandings. Neither the teacher nor the theorist of course, remains isolated from the world of the other and both share some commonalties of perspectives. The following eight statements, offer examples of understandings that seem to parallel each other. The first statement of each number in the list, comes from the teachers' understandings as described in the first part of this chapter. The second statement comes from the theorists' conceptions of giftedness as described in the second part of the chapter. Because of the risk of repetition, they are kept brief, so that the reader might return to the original text for clarification.

1. Teachers emphasized developmental stages; Heather recognized gifted behaviors in pre-preschoolers, Richard and Ted in adults. As Ken said, they "kick in at different stages." Teachers also recognized the importance of early intervention with all the students. The work of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1986) (explicit developmental theorists) refers specifically to four timelines of development. Their introduction to the idea of life-span transitions might best fit in with the emphasis for early language intervention, and with the emphasis on working with and supporting families in the education of deaf and hard of hearing children, especially at an early age. For people with hearing losses timelines provided by the stages of cognitive development will obviously be affected strongly by interactions with the students' environment, and the interplay of linguistic and social influences. Ken and Richard refer to the fact that Isabelle appeared to be reluctant to move through the stages that would have allowed her to develop her drawing and artistic skills to their fullest potential, and the influence of society's role can
be seen when Liz talked about Robin and Zona not developing their mime skills because they were not valued. There appears to be a close congruence between the perspectives of the teachers and those of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson.

2. Teachers emphasized the importance of interaction with the environment and this emphasis probably takes on especially important meaning because of the importance of language and communication development with students who have hearing losses. Teachers talked of “families that helped” and “families that hindered.” They talked of the importance of early intervention, of educational programming and on the impact of mode of communication (ASL, signed English, oralism) on a student’s development of abilities.

Haensley et al. (1986) (implicit theorists) emphasize the ecological base to giftedness, especially that of “conflict.” Their ideas about the way children react to the “press of their environments” seems to be especially relevant to understanding giftedness among Deaf and hard of hearing students. Renzulli’s (1986) work emphasizes the importance of educational intervention and the work of Albert and Runco (1986) (developmental theorists) stress the importance of the family influence on the development of giftedness.

3. Heidi talks about “how it all just seems to fit together with Rob: innate ability, family, everything” and we are reminded of the term Haensly et al (1986) use, that of “coalescence”, what and how abilities come productively together. Perhaps one of the abilities that relates most closely with a person who has a hearing loss and who is also gifted, is the ability to "maintain sufficient intensity to overcome obstacles over a sufficient duration of time" (Haensly et al, 1986, p.132). We are immediately reminded of the many times that the teachers referred to the many obstacles that their students had to overcome, and of the many challenges they faced as they learned to develop their skills and knowledge to the best of their potential. Of all the 17 conceptions of giftedness in Sternberg and Davidson’s book, the chapter written by Haensly et al perhaps most closely describes those aspects which result as a combination of giftedness and disability.
4. The concept of motivation plays an important part for the teachers; they have seen students who have not reached their potential because they have not been motivated ("he's an unemployed lawyer; he just doesn't have that drive"); others have gone on to reach their potential because of sheer "doggedness and persistence": "she'll become a Doctor in spite of all odds because she wants to". From Liz’s perspective, students who are gifted do best when they are able to take responsibility for their own learning, when they are self-motivated.

Gruber, (developmental theorist), notes that giftedness does not just "happen" to people. Feldhusen’s (1986) work (from the implicit theorist’s perspective), emphasizes a positive self-concept and the importance of 'achievement motivation'; both Renzulli and Haensley et al (1986) talk of "task commitment," and achievement as Haensley et al say, "after much work and travail."

5. Andrea explicitly talks about giftedness as being a school based concept. The work of Gallagher and Courtright (1986) emphasize the importance of clarifying the domain of inquiry e.g., educational, psychological, etc. What is of special interest here is that all of the teachers in this study focus almost entirely on the everyday interactions with their students, and how these interactions alert them to the possibilities of the special abilities of the students. These teachers have not been interested in using batteries of tests, or of having as an outcome the label of 'gifted', at least two of the ideas associated with psychological conceptions of giftedness. The teachers have truly responded from the educational domain of inquiry, that which, according to the authors, is essentially student centered and practically driven in terms of assisting the students to reach their potential.

6. The teachers talk about both adults who have made high achievements and children who have the potential to do so. Ted in particular talks about the importance of 'even the gifted students' going through the stages of development so that they can build on their knowledge and learning. Their ideas relate to those of Gruber (1986) (developmental theorist) who emphasizes the importance of understanding both adult and
child development in order to understand giftedness. We are also reminded of the work of Feldman (1986) (also a developmental theorist) who emphasizes the importance of the processes of intellectual functioning and recognizes special development through nonuniversal stages. Feldman emphasizes three features in his developmental view of giftedness: the processes of intellectual functioning, development as a sequence of universal stages and giftedness as domain-specific. In addition however, Feldman talks about nonuniversal stages of development, those that may be specific to a certain domain and progressions through which might lead to giftedness. This investigation into nonuniversal stages of development tries to understand "how extraordinary achievement differs from more ordinary performance" (Feldman, 1986, p.289). He goes on to maintain that the introduction of nonuniversals is the key for developmentalists to become more interested in giftedness.

7. Heidi offers a perspective of giftedness which includes the idea that someone who is gifted will give something back to the world. Her ideas appear to be relevant to Tannenbaum’s (1986) (implicit theorist). His proposed definition of giftedness in children is that "it denotes their potential for becoming critically acclaimed performers or exemplary producers of ideas in spheres of activity that enhance the moral, physical, emotional, social, intellectual, or aesthetic life of humanity" (p.33). In contrast, Liz’s expectations of someone who might be gifted is somewhat less demanding. She maintains that it might be most important for the gifted individual to become satisfied with themselves, and in so doing, might contribute to this world in more quiet and less outstanding ways.

8. Liz talks specifically about the importance of the values of the society, on the development of special gifts, when she talks about the students she knew as gifted in mime. Her ideas are similar to the work of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1986) who see giftedness against a background of cultural expectations. They maintain that no matter how well or how rapidly special abilities or talents advance in a specific area, they will
not lead to giftedness unless society provides opportunities for both development and expression.

There are obvious parallels in the substantive understandings between the teachers and the theorists. It is also important to see where the teachers stand in relation to the themes that come out of both the implicit and the explicit approaches to giftedness. There appear to be more similarities among the teachers and the implicit theorists and the explicit developmental theorists, than between the teachers and the explicit cognitive theorists. Teachers and implicit theorists both appear to support the need to identify the domain of investigation (i.e., educational, societal, etc.); both recognize the importance of cognitive abilities; both recognize motivation as playing a vital role, both recognize the importance of development and both talk of the concept of “coalescence.” In addition, in looking at similarities with the developmental theorists, the teachers in this study would support the idea of life-span development but would probably put more emphasis on child development. Teachers would also more than likely support research methodology which recognizes the case study approach, emphasizes observations in naturalistic settings and the importance of socio-emotional factors.

Teachers’ perspectives appear to differ most from those of the cognitive theorists. No doubt information gleaned from the cognitive research can and does assist teachers in understanding their students, but their work remains at a level a few steps removed from the world of the classroom. It is most likely that teachers’ knowledge of the work of these theorists comes into play as they come to notice how their students learn in the classroom. Looking back to Chapter 5 we see the learning characteristics of gifted students in the contexts of the classrooms; these characteristics are those that the cognitive theorists isolate in order to examine them in a more controlled setting.

It has already been mentioned that the teachers in some way believe that ‘out there’ in the world beyond the school, there is some standard which is perceived to be the one that clarifies, once and for all, the meaning of giftedness in all its aspects. The theorists,
like the teachers, however, do not provide the answer to the question, "What is giftedness?" Ambiguity belongs to both teachers and to theorists. If Sternberg and Davidson's (1986) work does nothing else, it shows that theorists' conceptions are multiple and varied; there is no consensual definition; there is only the hope that "different approaches to giftedness are in the process of coming together" (p. 18). Neither a teacher nor a theorist has the whole picture; each teacher and each theorist contributes a part from his or her unique perspective.

This second part of the chapter has described understandings of giftedness from two perspectives: those of the teachers in this study and those of theorists who contributed to chapters in Sternberg & Davidson's book Conceptions of Giftedness (1986). The teachers' understandings of giftedness arise directly from their own reflections on their personal experiences and on their interactions with students in their classrooms. It has been shown, that the meanings of the giftedness term, for these participants and in the context of working with students with hearing losses, are very similar in content to those of the theorists, studying the meanings of giftedness from a completely different perspective. This finding is not unlike the conceptions of lay people and experts as reported by Sternberg et al (1981), "very similar but not identical."

**Summary**

The teachers' understandings of giftedness appear to be informed by two essential sources. One is the teachers' own beliefs and biases which have been influenced by personal and professional experiences outside the classrooms. The other source comes from their ongoing dynamic interactions with the students. As these teachers notice the things the students are doing, they compare them to other students and to their own preconceived notions of what a gifted person "should" be like. In the act of comparing, they question and refine their ideas about giftedness. In the understandings shared by the teachers in this chapter, the reader sees the combination of knowledge and uncertainty
and hopefully comes to appreciate the struggles the teachers face as they try to make sense of the label gifted.

This practical way of knowing appears to be one of the ways in which teachers come to understand themselves as teachers and their students. None of the teachers made any reference to the literature; the literature does not appear to be used by these teachers as a daily source of information, at least not at a conscious or obvious level. Teachers in classrooms have valuable and valid ways of informing themselves about issues they face daily. The next two chapters deal with two themes that ran throughout each teacher's interview. The first topic deals with the teachers' use of comparison groups, in coming to decide who they believe to be gifted; the second topic deals with the teachers ideas about the use of labeling. These two themes emerged from the data and provide valuable insights in coming to an understanding of teachers perspectives of giftedness and how they come to have and develop their perspectives. Chapter 7 deals with the use of comparison groups; Chapter 8 deals with the use of labels.
Chapter 7

TEACHERS' WAYS OF KNOWING- USING COMPARISON GROUPS

They stand out from the crowd.
  - Tina

For me, if I'm looking at a child, at all children, I look at the child and ask is he above, like Beethoven? It doesn't matter, deaf, hearing, blind, he was way above everyone.
  - Heidi

In a general scope, I just compare kids with kids. You know, all kids have strong points and weak points and for these kids, the strong points were stronger than the strong points of other kids, cause all kids have strong points.
  - Liz

I think a label of gifted comes from what the kids can do against other kids. I think it is a ratio, for me. Those things are determined in a ratio based on what we think of as normal. This kid jumps out at me because he’s different from his peers. He’s different because he’s faster, or he learns incidentally, or he retains better, or he generalizes faster, or she. She jumps out at me because she’s in a ratio to the other kids I’m working with and the other kids I have worked with. She looks extraordinary to me. So it’s not really in relation to herself if I’m thinking about gifted. It’s in relation to others. He or she is very different from most of the kids in my experience.
  - Heather

If there was someone gifted in comparison with just their hearing impaired peers, then I would pick some of the other students, but if you ask for just giftedness period, then I compare them with the whole population of their age. I would treat each differently. So, which way are we doing it?
  - Elizabeth

Introduction

Being gifted, or having the potential to be gifted, inherently invites comparison. When the teachers were asked to discuss students they believed to be gifted, they were in fact, being asked to discuss that student in relation to someone else. The teachers’ comparison group was influenced by the kinds of students they had worked with and by the kind of settings in which they were involved. Some of the teachers had experience with both hearing students and those with hearing losses; others had worked only with Deaf and hard of hearing students. The teachers compared their students to themselves, to hearing students and to students who had hearing losses.
Making decisions about comparison groups was not clear cut and easy. The following sections describe the process of making comparisons and is followed by a discussion in relation to the literature. Important considerations in the comparison process are described under the following headings: the teachers’ perspective in choosing comparison groups; comparing to the teacher; comparing to hearing students; comparing to other students with hearing loss for purposes of understanding or for purposes of labeling. The difficulties in defining a peer group for Deaf and hard of hearing students are also described.

**Teachers’ Perspectives in Choosing Comparison Groups**

Some of the teachers indicated that their choice of comparison groups have been influenced by their own experiences in terms of the children they have taught and in terms of the educational setting in which they have worked. Heather for example, acknowledges that “I have never taught anyone but deaf kids. So I have to acknowledge that the deaf kid who, to me, looks incredibly bright or gifted, may just be average compared to the average hearing kid.”

On the one hand, Heather’s comparison group is other children who have hearing losses. Her gifted students may stand out compared to other Deaf and hard of hearing peers, but appear to be average among their hearing peers. Yet Heather has known students in the preschool who have gone on to compete readily with their hearing peers. Her years of experience have allowed her to follow up on some of these “incredibly bright or gifted kids,” and they have “excelled beyond expectation and beyond their hearing peers. So I have some experience in looking back… so I have some confirmation of what my gut is telling me there but whether that means others who stand out among their hearing impaired peers are gifted or not, I don’t know”.

Naomi too, talks about how her idea of what is gifted, or exceptional, or good, is influenced by the experiences she has had in the educational setting she works in.

It’s good to compare them to hearing kids, because I think we tend to get lost and think they’re wonderful and they are, of course. But you have to get back
to reality and consider what wonderful is you know. If you’re going to be out there in the hearing world with some really average, above average and then extremely bright people, the you know, what we consider then to be bright is probably even below average in the hearing world. So I think it’s really important to keep it in perspective and I think that’s why working in a public school and having a hearing impaired class in a public school helps you keep in mind what a bright, average, or gifted child really is.

Richard and Laura both work in a residential setting and see the benefits of always being aware of what is happening in the regular schools:

Richard: “there is a comparison going on all the time and I think there should be, inasmuch as teachers should bear in mind, especially in residential situations, what kids are like out there in the school system. Because sometimes you begin to think that you’re doing a rotten job and then you get out there and you realize you’re not doing that bad… I think you get an inflated perception of what level the kids should be on which has nothing to do with reality.”

Laura: “And then you wonder if you may be way off in left field because you’re out of touch with what’s normal, like we were talking about yesterday. And what’s normal normal and what’s normal hearing impaired and what’s normal for that age group?”

Naomi is able to give a good example of how her perspective changed when she moved from teaching Deaf and hard of hearing students in the public system in integrated sign classes into the regular stream, teaching 25 hearing children.

I compared him to the other hearing impaired kids I had in my class and he really stood out with the other kids. I always thought, put him with hearing kids and he’d probably do fine as well. But if I compared him to the Grade 4 class now, that would even be something else. I’m sure if I went into a Grade 4 class of hearing kids and talked about something, Sam would probably be lost.

Hilary is working in a mainstream setting as an itinerant teacher. She has seen several Deaf and hard of hearing students who are gifted and notices that teachers always have different ideas about who is and who is not gifted. One of the main criteria for some teachers of the Deaf appears to be that the students are able to read at grade level. Hilary indicates that she has seen some students who are not gifted, being able to read at that level, but who do not have the other aspects of giftedness that she has seen in some other students.

Giftedness to them (some other teachers) probably would be, the kid’s reading almost at grade level. Well I mean it. These teachers have no
expectations. The majority of them only see kids who are struggling...they don’t see the kids who I’ve seen who are hearing impaired and who are so far above and beyond the hearing kids in their thinking... these are the really gifted hearing impaired kids.

Hilary sees some students who are getting Bs in English in the regular system and has seen some teachers of Deaf and hard of hearing students and some teachers of hearing students think that that is a real accomplishment. She maintains that these teachers are unaware that there may be other reasons for their doing well in English.

...either someone is writing the English essay for them, or it’s been programmed so much that the kid is just going in and writing it from rote. I know there’s a severe language disorder but they’re going on about how bright this child is. And that’s because to a certain extent the criteria is different. They haven’t seen DG, who is so gifted in that area and it all comes naturally to him. They just haven’t seen what some of the really gifted kids can do...They haven’t seen DG, who is standing in the top ten percent of the A stream in a private academic school. So whether you’re hearing impaired, or whatever, you’re definitely gifted if you’re able to do that kind of work.

It appears that it is not only the teachers’ experiences in teaching which influence the choice of the comparison group; it is also the teacher’s knowledge about certain fields of endeavor. Elizabeth, for example, is reluctant to call Craig gifted because of her own lack of knowledge in the area of art even though other teachers also believe that he is

...one of the best students in art. My indecision comes from the fact that I don’t know enough about art. I could probably say if I saw a really gifted student in language or math or something, if she was way ahead of the pack. I could recognize that. But the art, I can’t say for certain. (You really need) someone who is teaching art, maybe at a University or even at a high school. Someone who did a lot of art and had a lot of kids come to the programs.

Comparing to the Teacher.

It seems that one of the easiest indicators or giftedness for teachers to see and one that perhaps contains the least amount of ambiguity, appears when teachers see the students doing things that they know they could not possibly do themselves! Some of the participants may themselves have been gifted and still compared students to themselves. When Naomi’s student “can come up with all different kinds of ideas on the subject, more than I could come up with then I’m thinking, yes, this kid is gifted in that area.” Hilary too explains that...
When my gifted children reach a certain level I realize that we’re not going to be relating academically because they’re so far ahead of me. There’s no doubt about it. I mean, I wouldn’t be able to touch the one youngster I’m referring to in Grade 10 physics and with the younger one, it’s a spatial thing. I knew that as soon as we sat down there was very little point. I’m not competitive. I cannot even play a game with this youngster and be competitive. He’s just way ahead of me.

Liz also mentions the outstanding abilities of Cheryl when she says that in the staff room, ...the teachers would often laugh when Cheryl comes out with something and amongst ourselves we’d say that Cheryl is way ahead of us, you know, in a lot of ways. It’s the kind of thinking that she would come out with that either we hadn’t thought of or...she’s always anticipating I guess. She’s on top of what’s going on all the time and she can put things together in really surprising ways.

Comparing to Hearing Students.

At one point Andrea, who is Deaf herself, was talking about the concepts of comparison groups. I mentioned that the literature says that if an adult or a child is to be labeled as gifted, then that person should always be compared to people within his or her own group. Andrea disagreed and responded in this way:

I understand where it’s coming from and I see merit in doing that, but where are the criteria for deaf students? Where is that criteria coming from? I guess at this point we need to select the criteria from another source and so that’s how I’ve come up with my position on what I see as gifted. My criteria is the same as it would be for hearing kids. In the deaf field we haven’t come up with criteria on what deaf giftedness means. Why develop one that’s different from the other? Why do that?

A lot of people call gifted children gifted because they are so good for a deaf child. That’s not giftedness to me. An above average child, well, many hearing children are above average and they’re not called gifted, but sometimes an above average deaf child is called gifted. That’s not gifted to me. My definition of giftedness would be the same as it would be for a hearing child.

Many of the teachers in this study have witnessed Deaf and hard of hearing students achieving very well among their hearing peers, competing academically, socially and linguistically. This appears to be a critical issue because it is these students who seem to have set the standard, the criteria for judging who is gifted and who is not among students with hearing losses. By their actions, we know them. Ken explains:

I see a lot of kids, being involved in the high school so much in addition to the school for the deaf. You see hundreds of kids that way as well as the kids that are hearing impaired. And you see their work habits and you see their attendance in class and you see their dress and their attitudes. You see the way
they associate with other people. You know some of their family background and all this stuff. So when you see someone who wants to do it and they will do it, you can recognize that.

For Richard, comparing Deaf and hard of hearing students to hearing students is the way to identify gifted students because he considers the norm to be the hearing students. He also has experienced working with students in the public setting and believes strongly that the students who are integrated must be able to stand on their own.

Initially I guess a gifted student would be one who is nearer to the norm, the norm being academic equivalency, intellectual ability as measured by IQ and using the standards for hearing kids. When I see someone like Donna do really well, finishing top in chemistry and all that sort of stuff, what’s really nice is that these kids do it with the additional help of the teacher of the deaf interpreting, but not with any additional help from the system, that they are equal to the other hearing kids as far as marking and all that is concerned. They’re on a level and there’s no consideration made for the fact that they’re deaf. That tends to be number one, dishonest and number two, doesn’t do anybody any good especially the student. The same criteria is used as for hearing kids. And I think they’re got to. If they’re in an integrated setting or in the public school system, then they’ve got to stand up against everybody else and follow the same criteria and if they can’t then, ok, find another appropriate setting.

Ted talks about a Deaf adult he knows who has done very well in the Deaf community and I asked him how he might compare with members of the hearing community.

He went through Gallaudet and graduated and at the time he seemed to find himself at the top of the rest of the members of the community. So I would consider that Charles was a gifted person, as he had the tendency to find himself at the top. He would likely get along with hearing people as well and he does have the ability to get along with both deaf and hearing individuals equally.

It appears that teachers use hearing students as a comparison group for some students but within that group there might be two sets of criteria for being called gifted. Rob calls Daria gifted because she performs equal to the average hearing student. Other teachers see Deaf and hard of hearing students performing better than the average, near the top of the hearing group. That kind of performance also allows them to be labeled gifted. Laura talks about Daria.
Well, I know her IQ score and it's very high on the Performance scale. I definitely figure she's gifted in order to be able to function normally with the hearing loss that she has. She is profoundly deaf. But it always makes me feel bad with Daria, that she has to expend that much energy to get to low normal, compared with the hearing kids.

To Heather, the gifted child will compete either at par or well above his or her hearing peers.

I look at the gifted, profoundly deaf child as the one who can compete across, across spheres, compete globally with normal hearing peers because the odds are so great against them being able to do that I think they need, they need giftedness to surmount that. And that, I think, that jells for me as far as what that means. For the average bright kid, I think those blocks are insurmountable unless there is giftedness.

The gifted compare well with their hearing peers. They are competing with their hearing peers despite the fact that they are deaf, deaf, deaf deaf. The kids who are gifted are competing very well with their hearing peers whereas the kids who I say are very bright?...(pause), that has just come clear to me. The kids who I say are very bright are the kids who are competing very well among their hearing impaired peers, who are in the top 5% of their hearing impaired peers. So I think that is for me what qualifies it because the odds of them being able to achieve like a hearing kid are just so great.

Some of the teachers have seen Deaf and hard of hearing students who stand out beyond their hearing peers. As Tina says of Donna, “there were characteristics of hers that just made her an outstanding student at that point. No one ever thought of her as being an outstanding deaf child. She was just the outstanding student.”

Elizabeth considers “someone gifted not just equal to the hearing peers, but above them in some respects. And I know their language is always a problem, but they can still be above in other areas.” Naomi too has known kids who were far above their hearing peers. She speaks of one student who came out very high “on the IQ test even normed for hearing kids. And even compared to hearing kids, in a lot of areas she was above. So that to me is truly a gifted hearing impaired child. If you can compare them with a hearing child and they come out above, then I really consider that to be truly gifted. That’s why I would consider them gifted.”

Hilary has also seen children who are achieving at the top of hearing peers and so for her, to be gifted means being able to do what those students are doing.
For a profoundly deaf hearing impaired child to make it through the mainstream educational process, to Grade 12, that to me is an exceptional youngster. Not too many of them do. Now to me, a gifted child is that sort of child, but goes even beyond that.

Even as these students are achieving with their hearing peers, the teachers wonder about the impact of the hearing loss upon their academic performance. Naomi for example says that she thinks that Nancy is just a “truly gifted child. I think that if she was hearing, she would be in a gifted program, definitely. She would have been identified and been in a gifted program for sure.” In other words, there is a giftedness within Nancy that is there no matter what and the loss of hearing has prevented her from being at the top of peers her own age. Heather explains in the following way:

So I tend to see that the things that make a deaf kid look gifted are being able to perform in some kind of comparison with hearing peers despite their other difficulties and to me I guess that the deaf kid who has average intelligence, unless he has an absolutely phenomenal family and educational support system, is always going to be at a very significant detriment for English language function which is always going to impact significantly on his or her life. It’s got to impact on the choices he has to make because of his difficulty in English language learning and I think it takes an above average bright kid with an above average support system to be really able to compete on an equal footing in the hearing society. I really think that’s how it is.

Ken too talks about what the gifted kids might be doing if they did not have a hearing loss. He sees giftedness as existing quite apart from the hearing loss.

I don’t make any distinction. If you’re talking about giftedness, I’m not going to say deaf gifted, hearing gifted, you’re gifted. The only problem is, as I explained before, was the fact that you don’t have the experiences, but you’re still gifted.

The only thing that I’m saying is that, of the top 3 to 5%, or whatever it was, who were deaf and are gifted, take away their handicap and they would be there with the hearing kids. If, for example, you took away Donna’s hearing loss and put her in a high school, in your average high school, she would probably have been the Valedictorian. When you’re talking probably a 10 to 20 point difference in their grade levels because of their hearing impairment, then, well, Donna graduated with an 80% average. Well, put 20 points on that.

I think I’m right on that one. The problem is the more you talk, you see, the more you think about it and you start to wonder about your own values and just whether that’s really what you mean or not.

Liz too sees giftedness as being separate and distinct when she indicates that “Cheryl would have still been the same person with a gifted potential in the academic
area. Because of her giftedness, she would have been able to compete with hearing kids; I could see her having excelled.

Comparing to Hard of Hearing and Deaf Students.

It appears that teachers compare students in two ways: they seem to compare them one-on-one, or to other students, when they are talking about a specific child in their classroom and when they are trying to obtain a clearer picture of how that child is doing. There appears to be little problem in making comparisons for those reasons. When, however, the teacher is asked to label the students, they see the need to compare to a standard and they become unsure of what that standard should be. For those teachers who believe that comparisons should be made to hearing children, the task seems to be less confusing. But for those teachers who think that the comparison should be made to their Deaf and hard of hearing peers, it is not easy.

For purposes of understanding.

Teachers use Deaf and hard of hearing students as a comparison group when comparing for the purpose of trying to understand how that student is functioning in relation the others.

Heather…

She is so competent communicatively that if you tested their language out I think that Penny would get the higher language score but Sara’s…ability to learn and network and take advantage of the people around her may be stronger in the long run.

It will be interesting to see what happens with Penny… you know kids who prefer things more than people… Penny is on an extreme here (raises hand) and Brian was about here (raises hand higher than the first time).

As Heidi tries to think about the abilities of Rob, she compares him to another child who,

...has a mother that really signs well and is trying really hard but this little guy hasn’t got the memory (that Rob has). For Rob, everything just all fits together. So what does that make him, gifted? Or does that make him just bloody lucky?

Teachers also compare a student with “other children,” ones they are working with now, or others they have worked with before.
Heather...
(These are) kids who can make their own personal experiences understood and I've got a lot of five year olds who are deaf and who can't do that... they usually don't volunteer and usually I have to pull (the language) from them... so kids who can do that are really bright.

Elizabeth...
When I see him doing his art work, he's very very creative and he's probably, of all the kids that I've seen coming to the school, he's one of the best ones that I've seen when it comes to art... I have a good art class this year but Craig is by far the tops and he's won a few contests in the school. We've never really had him tested against a lot of kids in the public school so I don't know how he'd do.

Heidi says that Rob, "by far, has the better language, the best language and the skills and some of these children are two years older than he is. He's the youngest one in the group."

Teachers talked about gifted students in relation to other gifted students as well. They appreciated the contrasts that the students presented to them. It seemed to be a way of helping them understand the abilities of the students and to differentiate among each students' strengths and areas of weakness. Not surprisingly, the gifted students appeared to be very different from each other. Heidi talks about Dick and Vince:

I've had other kids but I remember 2 who've been in school since I've been here and they were different. Dick was slightly different. I never saw the sort of wonderful sense of humor that Vince had, at least he and I could laugh together. I never saw that in Dick. But he was a good student. I think he probably had to work harder maybe.

Laura compares her two gifted students along the lines of their learning skills.

Kate, yes, I would consider her gifted also. It's maybe some of the things that I see in Daria, you know, that remind me of Kate and maybe that's why Daria gets under my skin more than other kids might. Those two just share that spark I've talked about. It's partly with language, it's partly just the speed with which she will get hold of an idea and know what it is you're explaining and connect it with what she already knows about either that topic or another one

Tina too compares the traits of two of the gifted students. "What's really interesting for me," she says, "is that these two students have next to nothing in common aside from the IQ testing and even on that they have very different profiles." She goes on to compare to others.
Barb, for example, finds her own solutions to problems. Again, that self-reliance. Maybe that’s what Terry didn’t have quite so much of. He was... well, it might have been developmental like I said. But he was still adult dependent in a lot of senses where she’s so self-reliant.

Ken uses his knowledge of other gifted students to help him decide about the giftedness of David.

There’s one kid possibly who might have been gifted, if he’d had a little more help when he was younger. I don’t know that he’s what you call gifted. That’s my problem, when you get to that. In comparison with Donna, Lee and Norm I could not call any of my kids that I have at the present time gifted. So I guess not. Average, or so.

As Ken goes on to talk about Donna in relation to the other students he has called gifted we get a sense that there appears to be a kind of hierarchy among these students.

There were other students who were in the program that I would say, yeah, they were probably gifted but she really shines out as being naturally gifted. In other words, God granted her with these abilities and the others, some of the others got them with lots of hard work... but then if you thought Donna was gifted, this other kid, David, was even more naturally talented than Donna! But he didn’t have any use for academics.

Hilary strongly supports the idea that there is a hierarchy even among the gifted students.

Well, you know Bruce, he’s always been sort of supposedly the top of gifted hearing impaired students that I have been around. And I guess that’s always true until you meet other students who are so far above and beyond where he is. Bennie is just so far above and beyond Bruce; that’s not to say that Bruce isn’t gifted... it’s interesting because it’s being a different kind of gifted. Iris is a different kind from Bennie. It comes easier to Bennie; he doesn’t study. Iris just kills herself but she has a heck of a lot going for herself to begin with you know. But in my mind there’s gifted and there’s gifted, gifted, gifted. Let’s face it, there are degrees of being gifted.

For purposes of labeling.

When asked to use other Deaf and hard of hearing students as the comparison group for purposes of labeling, however, the teachers indicated that this was more difficult to do because of the very mixed abilities among any group of students with hearing loss.

Q If you were comparing them to their peers who are hearing impaired would they be gifted?
A There, there you go, Mary Ann, trying to find peers for them.
Q Yeah, right. Who are their peers exactly?
A No matter what, they’re always out of step.
Just what is “the deaf comparison group” or “other kids who have hearing losses?”

When I asked Elizabeth who she was comparing a gifted student to, she replied that for her, it was with hearing kids. She then went on to explain her difficulties in comparing any of these students to any other students at the school for the Deaf in which she worked. Implied in the words comparison group, is the understanding that the similarities of that group outweigh the differences. As Elizabeth points out so well, in some cases the differences among these children would seem to far outweigh the similarities and so comparing becomes an almost impossible task.

When we’re talking about a comparison group, it is so easy to say, well, if you compare them to their deaf peers, or their hearing peers... but that is just a global concept. But you see Mary Ann, I don’t think that we’ve seen that many really gifted and especially now we’re getting a lot of students that have other problems, that have memory problems, that are not just deaf.

We get so many kids. Like, I would consider a kid who came in here with only deafness as...if that was the only disability fine. Then you could call that the comparison group. They would be the population that we’re talking about. There is one class and basically deafness is their problem. But we’re getting a lot of other kids in here that are deaf and they have learning problems, they have, well, you name it.

So we’re seeing less and less of what we’d call gifted. When I first came here, say 10 years ago, we had more of those kinds of students then. We had more of the really bright ones, the ones who may have been on a par with the hearing kids out there or better than the hearing kids; they were so gifted. But we don’t see them any more, or at least, we see very few.

I don’t know if the population is changing or maybe they’re being integrated. Maybe we’re just not seeing them, but back then I did see a population that was more academically inclined than now. There are one or two interspersed among the classes that may be gifted but... it does get complicated, it really does.

These other kids a few years ago, they were what I would consider a good class, on par with the hearing kids. Like you could work, you could do a year’s work in a year. Most of the kids that you get right now, you try to do a year’s work in the curriculum and there’s no way. I’m teaching a grade 4 science, health and social studies but I’m modifying everything. They can’t read grade 4, so they have a lot of learning problems. So is there any “normal” population out there?

Laura works at another school for the deaf and is also an itinerant teacher in the public system. As she talks about the difficulties of choosing comparison groups for these kids, she too echoes the difficulties expressed by Elizabeth.

There’s no such thing as a child with no other difficulties in the residential schools these days. So I suppose it is a theoretical comparison group that you are talking about...you know, in my own mind there would be sort of a
theoretical 11 year old hearing impaired child with perhaps approximately the same kind of hearing loss and the same level of intelligence and the same...then you would compare her with that child rather than with an actual group, because there is no actual group.

The “group” is difficult to describe because, for example, there are many causes of deafness and each cause impacts differently on the child. Some children have hearing losses because their mothers contracted rubella during their pregnancies; some have had meningitis. Both of these etiologies are likely to cause several problems. Very few children with hearing losses have Deaf parents, yet teachers also try and understand giftedness by comparing the students to Deaf children of Deaf parents. The underlying assumption is of course that these children already have a strong language base, usually in ASL and are therefore at a distinct advantage when they enter the school system. The teachers seem to wonder in what way this impacts on the child’s performance. Will the generally higher performance of these students, give the teacher the false impression that the child is really gifted? Or is the child gifted, when the facility with language allows him or her to perform above the other kids in the school?

Elizabeth:
If the children come from a home where there’s some signing, there’s communication, they’ve gone to a preschool, then that’s different from someone who is just deaf but who comes from a home where there was no signing, no communication until they came to school.

Naomi:
Well, what they have is communication at home. It makes them way above the others. If they come from a deaf family, there’s communication all the time in that family and all of those kids do really well because of the communication at home. It’s a definite advantage for them. It’s a language and a conceptual development that they have with their parents.

Nancy for example, would be the only deaf gifted child who would be able to compete with hearing kids. She has next to no communication at home. But you know, the kids from the deaf family, well they’re not gifted, they’re very bright though. They’re very with it, compared to other hearing impaired kids because they’re at an advantage. They have an advantage, just like kids with more hearing. It’s the same idea I think. The kids with more hearing pick up the idiosyncrasies of the language a lot quicker and understand concepts a lot quicker because of the hearing. So that’s a real advantage to them of course and sometimes you sort of get these kids intermeshed together so it’s hard to tell who’s really gifted

You know, it’s not that they’re gifted, cause if you compare them to hearing kids they’re not gifted. I mean a gifted child in the Public School system has to pass an IQ test and they have to pass in the academic areas,
show potential; it’s very cut and dried for a child in the system...But then these kids are probably gifted hearing impaired in that respect. It depends on how you define giftedness.

Discussion

This chapter has described issues related to the process of comparing, which teachers appear to use for two purposes: to inform them about the abilities of their students in relation to other students and to label the student as gifted. The teachers can compare the students to themselves, to Deaf and hard of hearing students, or to hearing students, depending upon the educational placement of the student and the teacher’s own experiences. It is helpful to discuss the important points these teachers raise against the background of the literature on the identification of giftedness among disabled populations.

The extant literature focuses on the use of formalized testing as one method of identification, (Karnes & Johnson, 1991; Maker, 1985; Shore et al, 1991) and also supports the use of multiple forms of identification (Yewchuk & Bibby, 1989c). Although these are important issues they will not be discussed here since the teachers are the ones who were asked to identify and discuss their gifted students for this research. There appears to be very little available information on the use of teacher nominations, other than descriptions of the nomination form content.

The literature does, however, support the use of teacher nominations for the identification of all gifted individuals indicating that “nominations can identify able children missed by tests and that children readily identified by tests might also be identified by focused nomination procedures” (Shore et al, 1991, p. 65). The teachers in this study have demonstrated insight in their abilities to do this and have also allowed us to observe the process by which this is done.

When discussing the use of teacher identification procedures for gifted handicapped students, the literature also suggests that the students should be “compared with others who have the same handicap” (Maker, 1977). Not surprisingly, Yewchuk, Bibby and
Fraser (1989) asked teachers to compare the students they wished to nominate as being
gifted with their Deaf and hard of hearing peers. There appear to be mixed messages here.
On one hand, Karnes and Johnson (1991) have noted that one of the barriers to
identification of many handicapped children is “expecting these children to demonstrate
the same characteristics and at the same level as the non-handicapped gifted” (p. 430). On
the other hand, Whitmore and Maker (1985) suggest that “the most important needs that
can be met by both educators and families are high expectations for success and an
environment that facilitates achievement” (p. 59).

Summary

The teachers in this study have clarified the comparison group issue on several
points:

1. Deaf and hard of hearing students who are gifted have demonstrated that they
can have “the same characteristics and at the same level as the non-handicapped gifted”. The students can be found in different settings and their abilities appear in many different ways. Many students have already set a standard for what might be called gifted; they have achieved extremely well among both groups, their Deaf and hard of hearing peers and their hearing peers. In order to label a student as gifted, the teachers appear to find it appropriate to use both groups as comparisons, depending on where the student is placed. At the very least, it appears critical that Maker’s (1977) suggestion, to use Deaf and hard of hearing peers as the comparison group, be modified for these students.

2. Peer groups for Deaf and hard of hearing students are small and often difficult to find. In terms of the affect of hearing loss, the many varying characteristics of this group of children does not allow for very trustworthy comparisons. These students often differ radically in many areas:

(a) The cause of hearing loss: genetic, disease, drugs, trauma
(b) The type of loss: conductive, sensory, neural
(c) The time acquired: before birth, at birth, after birth (pre and post-lingual)
(d) The degree of hearing loss: mild to profound and the degree to which each person makes use of residual hearing
(e) The stability of the loss: stable, progressive, or fluctuating. (Rodda & Grove, 1987).

In addition, these students have different exposure to different forms of communication and are placed in radically different settings in the school systems. Family background and support vary a great deal. The aspects of differentiation often outweigh aspects of similarity. It is difficult enough to find an appropriate peer group for students with hearing loss; to find an appropriate peer group for children who are gifted, one must look to both the Deaf and hard of hearing population itself and to those who are hearing. The numbers in the population of students with hearing losses are so low that finding age appropriate peers is very difficult; if one finds intellectual peers in the hearing group, differences in communication make comparisons almost impossible.

3. These teachers only appeared to have difficulty in comparing students when I asked them to label the students as gifted. If they compared students in order to more clearly delineate their learning abilities, or their behavioral characteristics in the classroom setting, the teachers appeared not to have any trouble. It may be that "labeling as gifted" only happened because of this research; in ongoing classroom interaction, the need for comparison in this way may not arise. It may be important to question the validity of comparing the students for purposes of labeling.
ISSUES IN LABELING—A COMPOSITE AND QUESTIONABLE PICTURE

Label: n. & v.t. . . . slip of paper, card linen, metal, etc. for attaching to object and indicating its nature, owner, name, destination, etc.; (fig.) short classifying phrase or name applied to persons etc.; adhesive stamp; . . . (Vb.) attach l. to; assign to a category.
- Oxford Concise Dictionary (1929)

Label, n. v.t. -beled, -beling. n.1. attached paper with information. -v.t.2. designate with a label.
- Webster’s Dictionary (1983)

GENERALITY... VERBS... 9. generalize, universalize, catholicize, ecumenicize, globalize, internationalize; broaden, widen, expand, extend, spread.; make a generalization, deal in generalities or abstractions; label, stereotype
- Roget’s International Thesaurus (1992)

You know, people know each other, we know each other and we know what, how we feel about each other and where we see that person’s strengths. But what I see as one students’ strength, another teacher may not see that. The student may not show the teacher that strength. He may show another teacher a different strength and so it’s very important that we stay multi-dimensional and I think that labeling makes us cardboard figures. It makes us uni-dimensional and we stop, once we put a label on something, we stop thinking about it and reacting to it.
- Liz.2

Issues regarding the wisdom of labeling arose repeatedly in the interviews. As a researcher, I wanted to explore this issue with the participants but it was often not necessary for me to open the discussion. The teachers made points about labeling, spontaneously, as they were thinking through answers to other concerns. The following section presents an overview of the many dimensions that, put together, form a composite picture of teachers’ understandings of what labeling means to them. This is followed by a discussion of the existing literature in which similarities to and differences among dimensions are noted.

The data were analyzed in the following way. During a line by line analysis of each interview meaning units were selected that had to do with the labeling theme. One teacher spoke about labeling three times during the interviews; another teacher spoke about the
issue 19 times. I collected the meaning units from each of the twelve teachers and put them into one folder. To begin to analyze the data, I chose a teacher’s meaning units and read through them. The only reason for selecting Richard’s first was that his computer printout happened to be on the top of the pile. I organized Richard’s meaning units into categories or themes. I then chose another teacher’s units, analyzed those and compared them to Richard’s. This happened consistently until all the teachers’ units had been categorized. This method of analysis is similar to that suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990) when they talk about the method of constant comparison. They discuss this procedure in relation to an approach to research called grounded theory, but instead of comparison for the purposes of validating an emerging theory, I was looking for differences in the data in order to find as many dimensions of the way that teachers conceptualized this issue.

As I read through the meaning units I was struck by the fact that each teacher added a new dimension to the issues of labeling. Table 2 illustrates this process. Richard, the teacher whose discussions about labeling were first analyzed, introduced three ideas: that teachers talked more about individual plans and did not use the term gifted; that the label was useful for getting money; and that people at the ground level did not need the term. Heidi added two ideas to the first two of Richard’s, then extended the themes by discussing the impact of the label on the students themselves. In the end, all twelve teachers had contributed a new understanding either by expanding on a theme which had been raised previously or by adding another theme to those that already existed. Although each individual teacher might have been fully aware of all these different dimensions, each teacher chose (consciously or unconsciously) to highlight only one or two dimensions throughout the course of our interviews. The dimensions are discussed under the following headings: teachers use of the gifted label; the work that the label “gifted” does; the impact of the use of the label on teachers, students and parents.
# TABLE 2

**Labelling: The Emergence of themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use teachers talk about students not labeled</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>impact on students</th>
<th>society's value of terms</th>
<th>reference to labels in general</th>
<th>risk to program</th>
<th>impact on teachers &amp; hi teachers</th>
<th>hi gifted focus</th>
<th>use at small school</th>
<th>hierarchy of students</th>
<th>when labeled at 5 but not at 16</th>
<th>hesitancy of term</th>
<th>g kids stand out anyway</th>
<th>origin</th>
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<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>hiP's</td>
<td>for 5</td>
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<td>'ground' people don't use it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heidi</td>
<td>can &amp; can't do</td>
<td>for program</td>
<td>not good 'hellions'</td>
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<td>Laura</td>
<td>don't use label</td>
<td>over inflate</td>
<td>ego</td>
<td>minimal egotistical perception</td>
<td>laughably changes</td>
<td>could deprive student of program</td>
<td>panic</td>
<td>ability imbalance</td>
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<td>'small has problems' 'similarity r.s. differ.'</td>
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<td>Lisa</td>
<td>focus on problem solving not label</td>
<td>+ on Barb</td>
<td>allow write-offs</td>
<td>reduce stereotype</td>
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<td>label ambiguity of meaning school based</td>
<td>-catch dropout categories</td>
<td>don't want to be singled out</td>
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<td>what kids designated gifted in what way?</td>
<td>- to provide opportunities -not push vs. mandated</td>
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<td>Naomi</td>
<td>g is + comp. to other terms</td>
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<td>not as much worried with gifted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>natural process I'm not sure</td>
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<td>False expectations of students</td>
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<td>uses it with parents hi-OK focus on program</td>
<td>Sue e.g.</td>
<td>false expectation Sue e.g.</td>
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<td>25 programming delimitation focusing</td>
<td>other students -send note -ignore</td>
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<td>boxes</td>
<td>can begin to discuss program</td>
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*hi = hearing impaired*
Issues in Labeling

The label "gifted"—Do teachers use it?

In listening to teachers I came to realize that I, the interviewer, tended to use the term "gifted" a great deal during the time of our discussion but they, the teachers, used it very little. Almost always, when talking about a student, if teachers used the term gifted it was used in conjunction with some other phrase such as "really smart" or "very quick to learn things." I asked the teachers the following question: "What might happen if I were in the staff room listening to teachers in conversation? Would I likely hear the word "gifted" being used? The overwhelming response was "no."

For some of the teachers not using labels appeared to be a rather conscious decision based on their personal belief system. Ted, for example, stated it very simply:

I don’t want to label anyone as gifted. That’s not something I like to do. I prefer to look at people as (people)... on an individual basis and just see what they are able to manage. (Ted.1)

Heather’s use of the word "extraordinary" seems easier because as she says, extraordinary is not a label, it is a descriptor. Gifted, to me, is a label (whereas) extraordinary has a broader range. Gifted to me means that absolutely, the kid is up there... and to me it hems them in. It makes it concrete. Very bright, for example, means I can expect more of this kid and (indicates) that there is a broad range there but to me ‘gifted’ cuts off here and goes here and it doesn’t extend down here (as she draws a box like shape with her hands). (Heather.3&4)

Rather than use labels, the teachers preferred to look at the phenomenon of giftedness itself as it was manifested in the students. In practical terms this preference seems to be carried out by the teachers who say that they prefer to discuss things that reflect, in a more meaningful way, the behavior, attitudes or abilities of the student. Hilary states that “they would say: ‘she’s wonderful’ or ‘she’s doing very well,’ but the term gifted would not specifically be mentioned, at least it hasn’t been in our discussions.” Richard elaborates and indicates that he sees the term as having more application as a label for a program than for a student.
...if you take the teachers here for example, you talk about individuals, you don’t talk about a particular program. Teachers tend to talk about the kids; they don’t talk about the class that they’re in. It’s more individually directed...you know, this kid can do this, he can’t do that. This one’s a real pain in the neck because, or are you having that problem with that one?.

(Richard.2)

Liz believed very strongly that there was no need for a label because “I think that gifted people stand out to other people without a label and the label doesn’t really serve any purpose other than getting money.” Ken thinks that teachers might “mention the fact that they’re (the gifted students) very smart, or that they’re able to do this very well” but “I don’t think (the word gifted) would ever be mentioned... the word isn’t used but the connotation is there: people know the ability of the kid, they accept it. They don’t need a label.” Even if the label gifted disappeared Heather agrees with Ken when she suggests that people would still struggle in order to meet the individual child’s needs.

...in the case of the real bright (student), one who is so far above what their peers are, they’re going to require special solutions and teachers are just notorious for wanting to find special solutions for those kids. It’s one of the wonderful things about teaching. So I don’t think it would matter. If we didn’t have a label tomorrow, I still think that (teachers) would... deal with (programming issues). (Heather.9)

In addition to his philosophical belief about the need to see students as individuals, Ted also stated that the meaning of the label itself was problematic and in fact prevented him from using the term. By the time he was near the end of the interview, Ted had spoken freely about several students, some of whom he had identified as being “gifted” and some of whom he had said he thought were not gifted. At this point, Ted expressed doubts about his own ability to use the term with any sense of validity.

As I’ve said before. I hate to label because I’m not sure. Maybe I should have labeled Janet and Cody both as gifted. I don’t know. Maybe I shouldn’t have labeled Michael and Charles as being gifted. Maybe I shouldn’t have done that! (Ted.4)

Although Hilary does use the term “gifted” sometimes with the students or with the parents, she adds that she’d “have to be pretty sure.”
I’ve told B that he’s brilliant. I’ve told him he’s gifted. I told his parents he’s gifted. See. I don’t have a problem with that. They can sort of take it. I tell them it’s my opinion. In my opinion. And I know that I have done testing if they want testing. (It) doesn’t really mean too much. If they want testing I can show you testing. I can show the father he’s brilliant. (Hilary.10)

Hilary does use the term with parents but is quick to point out that the context in which she uses it might be different than teachers of regular hearing kids. The reason is that her relationship with the parents “is very thick.” Because of the almost constant contact with parents in her role as teacher of deaf students and because she has known the families for a number of years, she has been able to build up a sense of trust and rapport with the families. “If I were a teacher with 20 kids in the class and saw the parents once or twice a year, I probably would have to be very careful before I came out with (the term gifted)” (Hilary.3). She goes on to explain the caution because she “comes out of the era where you can’t label... because you give false expectations, or you pigeon hole” (Hilary.1).

Elizabeth’s perception is also that teachers hardly ever use the term, saying rather that “they’re incredible in math, or incredible in whatever their field is... or she’s a very good student.” Teachers might say “you really enjoy having that student, he really wants to learn, he just soaks up everything that you hand him, or whatever.” So “the people working with the kids... don’t really say gifted.” The people who use “gifted” maybe are “the people on high, the psychologists... the people doing the administration or those in the universities or whatever... usually they use all the terminology that teachers don’t use” (Elizabeth.7).

Some of the teachers talked about the term being used as a necessary though perhaps undesirable result of the way our educational system works. In the (perhaps) ideal world the educational system would be such that labels no longer served a useful purpose and in their place, individuals differentiated learning needs would be able to be recognized and met. Liz too indicates that the term is created by adults, for adults, because
they’re the ones that identify students and they’re the ones who pull the students from regular classes and they’re the ones who set up gifted programs and they’re the ones who make decisions about student learning. They, being the teachers, the adults, the parents, anybody but the kid... (but) if we had an educational system that enriched all kids, provided a variety of learning and ways of learning that met the different needs of different kids, ...if we put the decision on learning back with the students then (we wouldn’t need the term). (Liz.4)

If there were a well developed IEP, it “wouldn’t matter what you called him” agrees Richard. The IEP would allow you to “see what he can do and what he can’t do, or what he’s achieved or what he needs to achieve” (Richard.7). “They speak about the plan for the individual but they don’t mention any labels” (Andrea.8). Ted extends this process of individualization beyond the planning and writing of the IEP to the “interactions between the students and the teachers. In fact, sometimes IEP’s are too artificial and too teacher controlled!” If “this natural process” takes place, however, both teacher and students “are able to see each other, assess each other, be very open with each other... and it would be natural for the teacher to provide the student more challenging work without even realizing that the student may be gifted or not. I would rather see the natural process take place” (Ted.5).

The work “gifted” does.

Although the teachers hardly ever use the term in the practical every day context of their schools and classes several of the teachers recognized that in today’s educational system, the label can serve a useful function. The helpfulness of the term can be seen at the administrative level and also, for some teachers, at the classroom level.

At the administrative level, categorization “has to do with the efficiency of service delivery” (Heather.9). Heather suggests that when students are grouped, it becomes easier for educators to plan appropriate programs. These children, who “are so far above the norm” she suggests, “may not reach their maximum learning potential in (the regular school) environment... There are going to be kids whose learning needs are so different and, in the case of ‘real bright,’ are so far above what their peers are, that they’re going to require special solutions.” She continues to indicate that she believes that “a lot of (the
need for using a label) is dictated by Western culture” and that Eastern cultures might be quite different. “Isn’t part of this a North American scientific Western categorization compulsive, labeling, categorizing, scientific method kind of thing?” (Heather.12) In our society she sees the labels as serving a function when special needs children were first identified and found to have needs that were not being met. “Now (however), ...we are at this extreme where they’re not serving the function,... the label now defines the service as opposed to the service defining the label...”. She suggests that " with this Western passion for systems driven stuff which makes us generate labels, (we seem to have to be able) to pull out the right program from the shelf and (that) leads to lack of individualization. (That concept) supports our hurried time (society)”(Heather.17, 16)

Richard continues:

“It’s easier to go to the financial director and try and stomp up some money for a particular identifiable group of people than to say, well I’d like to institute this program for these kids...it’s like Special Olympics. People that go into the Special Olympics have a particular persona and you can attack people’s wallets by using that... they’ll put money into (helping) gifted (students) who are going to be next year’s leaders, right?” (Richard.2)

Two other teachers indicate that there may be a progression in the use of labeling however. The label may be useful at the administrative level, but if carried into the classroom there may be problems; the label might have some non-beneficial effects on the student. Andrea teaches in a school for the deaf and is very aware of the small numbers of students within that setting compared to the public school setting. She tends to agree that the label “deaf”, for example, can be beneficial because “then we can find out who is and who isn’t and we can do more checking where we need to and can categorize the individuals into smaller and smaller groups.” At that level, the label itself indicates a degree of sameness, “conformity.” As the groups get smaller, however, this aspect strikes Andrea as being somewhat negative. “I don’t support conformity. Individualization is what we need so normally there’s not a use for labeling because a person is already an individual” (Andrea.4).
Liz sees the labels from the historical perspective of identification. In the 1950’s the “gifted” students were not really recognized in the educational system so the use of the label allowed educators to “delineate more clearly” among students and to identify their special needs. As Heather says, “we could put (children) under the umbrella called giftedness and so we started limiting it, which you kind of need... because you’ve got to figure out how you’re going to serve that population” (Heather.18). In fact, this same need to identify a group more clearly is happening again in the field of hearing impairment, where groups of people who are Hard of Hearing are asking that they be singled out from those who are Deaf. Organizations of the “hearing-impaired” are changing their names to include both groups: Hard of Hearing and Deaf.

Liz is hopeful that at some point educators might “have no more delineations to make. Maybe we can take all those labels away and then we’ll be aware of all the different kinds of needs that have to be met and all the different teaching strategies that are (necessary) to meet those needs” (Liz.8). Heather supports Liz’s concern with a warning: “but if you get too wed to that label, then you’re going to be ...cutting off possibilities and making mistakes” (Heather.18).

**The impact of the label on teachers.**

You know, too often, all the stereotypes that come with the label make it difficult for people to see the real child and make it too easy for them to jump to conclusions. So I’d rather that they just work with Mark. I don’t want them to work with a gifted child, or a language delayed child, or even for that point, a deaf child. I just want them to work with Mark. (Tina.2)

The label “gifted” does have an impact on teachers, students and parents. In comparison to other labels in special education, however, “gifted” is a positive label; ...when a child comes in ‘gifted’, it’s not derogatory” (Naomi.1). In fact “it’s so positive that it’s great... ‘gifted’ I can see helping the student” (Elizabeth.4).

Teachers also mentioned that one of the benefits of having the label might be so the teacher might “become inclined to provide more challenges (to the gifted students) than for the average student” (Ted.5). Andrea has in fact seen some students who may not
have been "challenged enough" and she suggests that the label might "single out the students who perhaps are gifted... maybe the system is not meeting their needs (so the label might) make sure that they will finish school and go through the system" (Andrea.5).

The idea of "pushing" (Elizabeth.3) the student, helping her to achieve to the best of her ability, can be viewed in a positive light. Richard recognizes that "expectations change with labeling, obviously," and in the case of gifted students, expectations would be higher. "I think the teachers (of) the hearing impaired, their expectations are too low. They tend to be too low... he can't do this, he can't do that... when in fact they can do a damn sight more than they do." (Richard.3, 5). After working in the public school system where a number of Hard of Hearing and deaf students had been integrated, Richard continues to talk about this problem in terms of all teachers.

It's not just our perception as educators of the deaf, but it tends to be a professional perception through the teaching population...(they might say, for example), he has... very poor social skills, his communication skills are very poor and then you read the report... he's been swung through the public school system because he's a poor quote, unquote, poor little deaf kid and ...I get really annoyed with that one... But it's not only the teachers in the public school situation that still do that,. I mean it's getting better...(Richard.6).

Elizabeth, who teaches at a school for the deaf, says that if you label a child gifted at this school he's going to have all the advantages he can get... he's going to be pushed because... you think he's gifted, whereas if it wasn't there, you may not push him as hard. You definitely want him to go to Gallaudet, or to some kind of University if he can... (Elizabeth.3).

As Heidi says, "Why label them gifted if we aren't going to challenge them in some way, or offer them something different?" (Heidi.3). And as Richard says, "perhaps we ought to say they're all gifted. So everybody's gifted!!" (Richard.4).

On the other hand, "pushing" can work against the student because the impact on the teacher influences actions in a more negative way. Liz states that the only impact that I can see is negative... in relation to teachers having either unrealistic expectations of the kids or being disappointed then in the kid (if s/he didn't do as expected). The kid’s not allowed to be human, to just be himself” (Liz.1).
Ted, too, is fearful that, “If I label them, perhaps that will set false expectations for the person.” He goes on to discuss these expectations in terms of what it might do to the learning situation.

It doesn’t matter how gifted a person is, each person has to go through various stages of development in their life which means that they will have to experience various kinds of activities, learning situations. If (teachers) expect them to be able to handle more information or different concepts at a certain (higher) level, (it’s possible) that they’re not ready for (that level) and that could be difficult. If you expect too much, I think you can cause confusion and perhaps that would be (only) due to the student’s lack of experience with that kind of learning situation, (not due to her ability to learn or understand the concepts). (Ted.2)

For example, let’s say if I had this gifted person in my class. Let’s say they haven’t learned physics, the concept of physics at the grade 11 level. If I were to give this student a lesson, in grade 7, expecting that they would be able to figure it out, I don’t think that would be a good thing at all. You have to remember that giftedness does not necessarily mean that they can do it; they still have to go through the stages of learning. (Ted.3)

The use of the label gifted also impacts on teachers who work in the public school system with hearing students. Tina experiences this as she works as an itinerant teacher and sees it as being more negative than positive, especially when the student also has hearing difficulties.

Many teachers see a gifted (hearing) child as someone who creates extra work for them because they have to keep doing, finding more new ways to challenge them. They cannot simply just teach the mainstream curriculum. So this child creates extra work. This child upsets lessons. You know, instead of being able to draw the class through step by step (the gifted student) shouts out the answer from the beginning. (These students) do create a factor in the classroom that the teacher can’t predict, therefore can’t manage or control within their plan. And so, a lot of teachers do not enjoy having gifted children.

(Let me tell you) an anecdote which does not relate to a gifted hearing impaired child, but just a gifted child, where she was quite thrilled with the teacher she has this year. She says, “you don’t really mind that I’m gifted do you? Lot’s of teachers don’t like to have me. I know they don’t like to have me. They said they liked to have me but they really don’t like to have me in their classroom. I had a teacher who really didn’t want me last year because I just made extra work for them. You know, they felt like they had to do something different for me and you don’t mind having me, do you?” You know, that acceptance (is critical); the child feels accepted or not accepted because of the way they learn. (Tina.9)

Tina goes on to illustrate how the teachers’ feelings of being overwhelmed might be heightened when the student, who is Deaf or hard of hearing, is now also labeled as
gifted. If you say that this child can be part of the regular classroom, if they’re “the A student in the classroom,” without the label, the regular teacher will still say, ‘Aha, I can teach this child. I can be relaxed around this child. This child does not throw me.’ You put a label on that child that falls outside what is perceived as the regular traditional classroom and you’ve got a teacher in panic. I mean, isn’t it enough that he’s deaf? ‘And I have to wear this equipment and now you want me to do enrichment or something too?’” (Tina.7)

Unrealistic expectations then can be of two kinds; those which are placed on the students as a result of some stereotypic notions that teachers might have about the gifted student’s abilities and those that teachers might place on themselves in terms of their own responsibilities for that student. In all fairness to teachers, however, there is no denying that attempting to meet the specific needs of a student who has a disability and who is also gifted is a very real and demanding challenge. Simply identifying what those needs are is a huge undertaking.

Tina goes on to discuss teachers who try to deal with children who have two labels. Teachers who work with a gifted person who has cerebral palsy for instance,

would never question whether or not that person might need the wheelchair. But for a gifted person with a hearing aid it isn’t as obvious that they still need their assists, their technical assists, their educational assists or whatever. It doesn’t become that obvious... so, to give them this set of assumptions because the child is quote/unquote gifted, may deprive them of something else, just because of the stereotypes that go with the label.” (Tina.4)

…it’s very difficult for a lot of professionals to recognize that you could be gifted at one thing and almost retarded in another area... this is a huge discrepancy for them to fathom. They’re going to throw one or the other out. Good old cognitive dissonance here... it just doesn’t make sense to have a gifted child who can only read at the Grade 3 level. (Tina.5)

The danger here is that the teacher may have a hard time recognizing that the child does indeed need remedial time and might be inclined to remove them from “access to language remediation... saying ‘if this child is gifted, why should she get resource room time?’ Resource room time is for kids who have trouble.” (Tina.3)

Therefore what am I going to believe? That he’s gifted and should be able to do it, or that he really can only read at the Grade 3 level? Now which makes more sense? ...If this kid’s gifted he’s just not trying hard enough...I’ll believe that he’s gifted and lazy. Because then I don’t have to remediate. If I believe that he’s really reading at the Grade 3 level, I have to take responsibility to
remediate. So it’s easier to believe one or the other than to try and reconcile the two. (Tina.5)

I would rather have them focus on remediating his reading problem than to say, oh by the way, he’s gifted (so) I’m off the hook. No (The teachers) still have responsibilities but it’s very hard for some of them, for a regular classroom teacher, which is where these children for the most part are, in the regular classroom. (It’s hard ) for them to accept that they not only have a special needs child, but he’s multiply classified... This is just too unusual for the regular classroom teacher at this point, in our systems. (Tina.6)

It is interesting to note here that Heather has also illustrated her concern of labeling children by referring to the discrepancies that exist when teachers expect children with hearing losses to be reading at a very high level. Heather speaks of the fear of using the term, because of her ideas about it’s ability to limit the way we look at children.

That’s the fear of it. It’s that box. It’s putting that kid in that box. The label takes the attention off what the kid is doing and what he actually needs and puts it on to this category... The label has more of a predetermining value; it has more power to predestine that kid than a description like ‘that kid’s got smarts’...We expect him to do this because he is in this category. Not, we expect him to do this because he did this yesterday. (It would be more like): I expect him to read at age level because he’s gifted as opposed to I expect him to read at age level because this year he’s showing me that he’s learning... print is making a lot of sense to him and he can remember words in print. Then you’re programming to the kid instead of to the label. (Heather.5,6)

Heather has also talked about her concerns about labeling in general, in terms of teachers (and others) relinquishing responsibility for really getting to know the individual. She says that there’s a real danger in thinking that...

...if we label (something) we understand it. And because of that, we relinquish the responsibility of really understanding it. And we have seen that happen with every label we’ve used. It’s like, Oh, I’ve got this label and something about that...that’s why I’m scared of labels...Something about that label allows us to relinquish the responsibility of looking at that kid exclusively and saying, “This is what he’s doing. This is what he needs. He’s doing this in reading, this is where I go next. He’s doing this socially. This is where I go next, you know. Something about that label makes us think, “oh, okay, I got it. I can put it in a box.” When you put that in a box, you put the kid in the box with it and you lose something. You’re going to lose something. I don’t care, regardless. (Heather.13)

Because the label is gifted, that means that his needs are above. But that doesn’t tell you what (to) put in a program for the gifted kid. That’s why I’m afraid of that label. Oh, well, here’s this program for gifted kids over here and we’ll just (put him into it)... this is the stream you’re going to be in. I’d as soon we didn’t have the label. I’d as soon we didn’t have any of those labels. I would rather we had a descriptor of how that kid is functioning. This kid is now reading at a grade 4 and 5 level. He’s in grade 3. We’ve got to do
something about this because this kid is not going to be challenged in this situation. (Heather.11)

**Impact of the use of “gifted” on the students themselves.**

Richard shows concern for the fact that if students are labeled as gifted, they will probably react to any pressure that comes to them from the teachers and from themselves as well. He believes that...

...any gifted program I think has got to be a cooperative program between the teacher and the student, so any pressure that’s coming should, in fact, be coming from the student and not from the teacher. But...if (the student) is getting to a situation where they are in fact flogging themselves to death over it, then the teacher should intervene and say, “look, okay, relax a bit, you don’t have to do this” Or (the teacher) should readjust the program in some way....I think it could be a problem but it depends on the individual. It really will depend on the individual. They can cope with a problem of, if it is a problem, of people having these expectations but people have expectations of you anyway, you know (even if you’re not gifted). That’s part of the learning process. (Richard.8).

Tina indicates that what the “gifted” label does to a student is very much an individual thing. She does not seem to have any hesitation in labeling Barb for example, because she is very mature. This is not going to upset her self-concept. It’s not going to give her new and unrealistic expectations or lead her into any paths down, you know, the direction of snobbery. This will not happen with Barb...(If I said) 'Barb, look. You and I both know you’re gifted', it would be in terms of reinforcing her self-concept and saying, 'yes, I know you can do it. I know who you are'.”(Tina.7,8)

On the other hand there appear to be students who react in more negative ways to the label. Laura suggests that there might be a fear that “you’re going to over inflate the child’s ego by perhaps letting him think that you think he’s smart. I don’t know.” Rather facetiously, Laura speaks from society’s viewpoint.

We wouldn’t want him to be proud and puffed up would we? I mean, it’s wonderful to have a good self-image, but that’s what you get from playing basketball. It’s not what you get by being brilliant in school. I think maybe there’s still the old-fashioned kind of notion that being gifted means being an egg-head and out of balance? A brain kind of person... (Laura.5)

Both Ted and Hilary relate their experiences with some people who have been labeled as being gifted. One is a deaf adult friend of Ted’s and the other, a deaf teenager who is a student of Hilary’s.
Ted:
I remember one day at University with my roommate, his name was Lockhart. He told me, he said, ‘oh, I’ve got an IQ of 144.’ So he considered himself to be gifted and I thought, well, that’s fine, okay. He never completed University. He dropped out. He never studied and now he works with computers somewhere. Maybe he lost his incentive to push himself. You know, he figured, maybe he figured he was bright enough, why study? And so I’ve seen that happen with a few students at University.

My other roommate was very bright and never studied; he played card games every night. He boozed it up all the time and, you know, eventually dropped out. A very bright person. A leader. So I’ve seen this happen as well. And so it makes me wonder if the label in fact removes the incentive for somebody to push themselves. They may be over confident. (Ted.6)

Hilary:
Sue is a very very proud hearing impaired youngster. Doesn’t even wear a hearing aid (though she could benefit from it). She has the world’s worst speech. She is extremely bright. She was one of those children who was reading at a grade 6 level when she was about 10 years old. (Because of that, people) decided to call her genius. It’s been a very difficult label for her to live up to... Well I’ve come to the conclusion that this particular youngster is having a really rough time living up to this image. (Hilary.4,5)

Hilary goes on to relate that Sue is really working only “moderately hard” to keep up grades that are mediocre. She appears to have very unrealistic expectations of what she might be able to do in the working world, thinking that being gifted will give her an extra edge and override other difficulties she might have. Hilary also mentions that “because of this image of genius she will not allow me to tutor her”. Although she could benefit from remedial help in the language area, “because of her attitude and her sensitivity towards her being a genius” Hilary can’t really help her at all. Sue figures everything she does is “a lot better” than it really is. (Hilary.6,7)

Ken also mentions that one of his students is having a lot of social problems and talks about “a couple of (other) kids that think they’re gifted. Socially it ruins them. They end up trying to express themselves, or telling their peers that they’re smarter than they are. It just doesn’t work socially, or otherwise.” (Ken.4) Liz too had expressed that “other kids might be intimidated by someone who’s labeled as gifted” (Liz.1). How students will deal with the label appears to be very much an individual reaction.
It might be partly because of students reactions to the label of giftedness that Liz speaks strongly about the negative aspects.

I’m thinking out loud here, but if kids could make decisions about their own learning... I can’t see that they would label themselves or each other in that way. As a matter of fact it could be considered oppressive or discriminatory. I’m kidding now, but you know, really, to be labeled... would it be any different than being labeled Jewish, or being labeled female? I mean labeling is really quite a restriction. It’s a pigeon hole.” (Liz.5).

Ken reinforces what Liz has said: “I don’t like labeling kids anyway. I don’t like labeling anybody. When you label them something comes with it. A stereotype comes with it.” (Ken.5).

Andrea, a deaf teacher herself, addresses specifically, the impact that the label has in the context of schools for the deaf. Her perspective is not only influenced by her role as a teacher, but also, of course, by the fact that she was educated in small groups, in residential settings. Her words stand on their own.

Gifted as a label is fine for the general public, but do we need it for Deaf children? We’ve already got so many categories: hearing loss, this and that. I think that most Deaf people wouldn’t appreciate a further label being used. We don’t want to be singled out. (Andrea.6)

(Perhaps this comes from) an older mentality from the residential schools for the Deaf. People like myself who grew up in a residential setting. There was the notion that everyone had to be pretty much the same. All the boys and the girls had to do everything the same way in the same time. That was dorm life. We had to eat, think, go to sleep at the same time and so on. And so that... it’s great to be individuals, but there is that preference for similarity in the group that goes away back. (Andrea.10)

There might be benefits in a school with 500 children perhaps, but not with only 90 or 120. So if we have one student then, you know, what is there to be done? That student would have to stay in the classroom anyway. But possibly if there were a large number, 500, 600 students, it would be nice to have that kind of identification system. If there were 600, yes. If you’re in a school with a larger number of students, then you could do things in groups for them and they would identify with each other. (Andrea.12)

...Deaf students are already different from the beginning so they have difficulty with a second label. There’s just a smaller community, smaller culture. We might have perhaps one student. If there’s one that’s making very good marks, that child might not be accepted and that child knows it. The others would not appreciate them. That sort of thing. So there has to be similar type of treatment for all of them (Andrea.9)

One thing that I believe. Like you, as a teacher, if you’re working with a small number of students, the teacher really knows each student individually and knows how they do. The teacher knows what their abilities are, knows who they are as people and can look at their strengths and weaknesses and so on. So I think that it might be a lot different if it was a very large number. I
understand, yes it would be definitely a different situation. But if you were
given 5 or 6 students and one was labeled, I can see that as a problem. In
public schools it's an honor to be singled out but not so here. (Andrea.13)

**Impact of the use of “gifted” on parents.**

Parents are affected when their child is labeled as being gifted. Heather says that
gifted is “not a word that she uses with parents... because I’m scared of it... because if
you say the word gifted to parents... then right away it gives them unrealistic expectations
or there’s a danger of (giving them wrong information)” (Heather.1). Heather works at
the pre-school level and recognizes that sometimes it is difficult to be sure about whether
or not the student might be gifted. Again, as others have said she would prefer to talk
about what the child is doing:

How do I know? I don’t know. I mean I can say, look, he’s functioning way
up here. Look at all the things he’s doing. He’s really very bright. I’ll say to a
parent he’s very bright and you need to push him because he can do it. But I’m
careful with gifted because I don’t want to set that kid up for failure...I don’t
want a parent sort of saying, oh well, he’s gifted. I’ll put him in a regular class
with regular normal hearing kids and ...he’ll make it because he’s gifted.
(Heather.2)

Heather’s concerns are reflected in a story that Naomi tells, of a child, now about 11
years old, who had been labeled gifted at an early age. Naomi works in the public school
system and had opportunities to discuss issues with the parents through home-school
meetings.

I had a parent come in and say that she was very disappointed in the report
card because her child was gifted and was told by the University at age 3 or 4
that he should be in a gifted class when he started school... I said that was
really wrong. They should never have made that prediction at that age... your
child is not what I would consider a gifted child. I said he’s doing average
work. I mean, sometimes (when I’m marking) I have to force that pencil over
there into the average (range) because I wasn’t so sure if he was... a bit slow,
but when I had this sheet come to me in the September registry, she said this is
a very bright child. He’s been diagnosed as a very bright child and he’s not
you know. So I had to tell the parents that.

The child was there (in the interview) by the way... he’s a very uptight
child and scared to do anything and I think it’s because he knows his parents
think that he’s really bright. So at this interview last week, the child came with
his parents and the parents said to me with the child there “I was expecting all
above averages because we were told at the University that this child was very
bright and should be in a higher academic class.”
I told the parents that Josh is doing well in school, he’s doing fine, he’s doing average work... there’s nothing I would be worried about, you know. He’s fine... and ever since that talk, the interview with this child, he is a totally different child in my room... I think it was out in the air that no, I’m not gifted Mom and Dad, you know... leave me alone... I told Mom today after school that he’s a different boy now and I think it’s because he heard us. And she said, “yes, that’s true.”

They noticed that he was very insecure and very uncertain and they were asking what they could do at home and I said just treat him like, not like you expect him to be always right with everything cause you think he’s above average; I don’t think that she realized what she was doing... she figured that she had a bright child and (expected him to) show her all the time that he was bright. I think that the Mom and Dad had a long talk about this after our interview and he’s a different boy. In one week!... well, you know, he might be gifted, who knows? The pressure that was put on him to be gifted probably blew him away. All of a sudden he’s quite a neat kid. He’s starting to talk more and I thought to myself, it flicked across my mind today, you know, he might be gifted, you never know. It’s just that he was so uptight about proving something, that he could hardly move.” (Naomi.2)

Discussion and Comparison with the Literature

We do not create meaning in a vacuum; meaning always has a context. In the case of teachers the context of their understanding of labeling is determined perhaps most importantly by their daily interactions with their students. Teachers’ own personal experiences and life histories and their pedagogical belief systems also help them make sense of their worlds. The issues which arise in the course of talking with teachers have come from their own personal practical experiences, but to a certain extent they have also been addressed in the literature. The following section takes the teachers’ themes and provides a brief comparison with the recent findings in the literature. Differences between the two sources of information are noted.

There is no extant literature that discusses giftedness from the perspective of teachers of Deaf and hard of hearing children. Research that brings a focus to gifted people who also have a disability has been discussed at some length in the literature review at the beginning of this paper. We are, therefore, left with the need to contrast findings for studies dealing with hearing gifted people to the themes which arise from these teachers with respect to Hard of Hearing and Deaf people. In many instances the perspectives are shared; in others, teachers alert us to issues specific to the Deaf and hard
of hearing population. Each of the following quotes expresses concerns raised by teachers in this study and each is followed by references to the literature.

1. "People working with the kids don't really use the term 'gifted'. People doing the administration, those in the Universities, psychologists or whatever, the 'people on high' use all the terminology that teachers don't use."

Robinson (1990) claims that labeling as a social process has its roots in the well known work of Becker (1963), who intensively studied people on the "edges" of society, those who deviated from the norm in terms of their social behavior. Labeling theory, drawn from this sociology of deviance was initially employed to explain rule breaking behavior and its consequences and it has been applied to the mentally ill, the physically disabled and the mentally retarded (Guskin et al, 1986). The field of Special Education is notorious for labeling practices and its dependence on categorical models for understanding children. Becker's work with counterculture deviance, however, did not explore the issue of deviating from the norm in any kind of positive manner and the label "gifted" is predominantly seen to be a "positive label, with strong emotional and social connotations" (Cornell, 1989, p.59; Robinson, 1986). The label is at once a public acknowledgment of a promise; however, as Coleman (1985) has argued, it is also a stigma.

In Special Education the issues surrounding labeling have been studied rather extensively because of the negative stereotyping that occurs when people with disabilities are grouped and therefore separated from the mainstream of society. The negative effects of labeling are widely recognized (Bogdan & Taylor, 1982; Jones, 1972; Rist & Harrell, 1982). The socially constructed label "mental retardation," for example can have devastating effects on people.

While it is assumed to be neutral and value free, it implies moral inferiority as well as intellectual deficiency... (to be so called) is to be certified as "not one of us"...labeling and testing provide a cloak of scientific legitimacy to social control and oppression; it is a sociopolitical, not a psychological construct.(Merton, 1957, p.7).
In spite of this fact, however, labeling has become an integral part of the educational practice. In the North American educational system, "categories and labels have the power of making services, opportunities and programs available for exceptional children, can facilitate passage for legislation in their interest, supply rallying points for volunteer organizations and provide structures for organizing government programs" (Hobbs, 1975, p.13). "Labeling means assigning a categorical descriptor to a child or youth in order to secure needed educational services" (Robinson, 1986, p.11; Shore et al, 1991). In fact, "people on high" can and do make use of labels in order to access benefits to people who might otherwise remain powerless and live without their needs being met.

2. "Labeling boxes people in," "it makes cardboard figures of them, makes then uni-dimensional," and "relinquishes us from the responsibility of really understanding the kid".

"What's in a name?" "Sticks and stones may break our bones but words will never hurt us." Although these sayings are part of conventional wisdom, labels and names "structure how we think about and act toward others... they direct our attention to specific aspects of designated people. They suggest how we should think about and treat them as well as provide a justification for action directed toward them" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1982, p. 4). Stereotyping is widely recognized as one of the side effects of labeling children, when the child often becomes identified with the label and the group is said to have certain characteristics some of which carry positive connotations, some negative (Cornell, 1989; Hobbs, 1975; Robinson, 1990).

The "gifted" label, though seen by many to be a positive term, carries with it its own positive and negative connotations. As a concept, giftedness is socially constructed. It exists, like Bogdan and Taylor (1982) say of "mental retardation,

"in the minds of those who use it as a term to describe the cognitive states of other people. It is a reification--a socially created category which is assumed to have an existence independent of its creators minds (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). To name something, in a sense, is to create it..." (Bogdan & Taylor, 1982, p. 7).
We infer that behavior appears as if it were gifted. We cannot see giftedness.

A recent study by Halpern and Luria (1989) looked at the impressions that adults formed as a function of labels of giftedness and gender-typicality. Their work was inspired by the fact that in spite of the growing knowledge base that exists in the area of giftedness, negative stereotypes of gifted individuals still persist (Tannenbaum, 1983; Terman, 1925). In 1979, Zaffrann and Colangelo wrote that gifted is often defined as being removed from the norm and problems of isolation, boredom, nonconformity and resentment are often attributed to individuals who are labeled gifted. In Halpern and Luria’s (1989) study, participants read about a child described as male or female, “gifted” or “average” and gender typical or gender atypical in academic interests. The resulting data indicate that participants see “children as gifted as more likely to be odd than to fit in well than typical nongifted children” (Halpern & Luria, 1989, p. 309). In general, participants were more likely to see both the positive and the negative characteristics of these children and the picture that emerged as gifted was one who is “ambitious, diligent, intelligent, intense, objective, odd, perfectionistic, preferring adults and self-confident.” As noted in the study, the context for these results was “a bare, experimental study” (p. 309), the participants having read a rather sparse description of a hypothetical child and having responded on 30 adjective scales.

A study such as Halpern’s and Luria’s (1989) is perhaps a good example of how research tends to reinforce the idea that people, given certain labels, are regarded as a bunch of group characteristics rather than as individuals. Their research is about stereotyping; the reader of their research, is drawn to the group characteristics. As Halpern and Luria say at the end of their study, “no real child is being judged” (p. 309). These lists do provide the readers with information about the topic under investigation and they are representative of one way of knowing. To gain fuller contextual knowledge it is also useful to focus on the fact that gifted people are individuals and can be
understood also in the context of their everyday lives. Individual case studies and work on individual differences needs to be highlighted.

Shore et al (1991), in a discussion of the current knowledge in the area of stereotyping, lists some of the more prevalent (and sometimes conflicting) stereotypes teachers hold about high-ability children:

1. They are odd and bookwormish, with few social interests.
2. They have no emotional difficulties or learning problems and will be successful in any educational environment.
3. They are white and middle class (Kauffman & Castellanos, 1986, p. 178).

The last two statements are especially troublesome when one applies these attitudes to children who have handicaps and of course to all minority children. “Students who are black (Rubovits & Maehr, 1973) or from working class backgrounds (Maltby, 1984) also may be subject to less favorable treatment by teachers than other gifted program students” (p. 179).

If we are concerned about stereotyping and if we are concerned about individualizing programs to meet the needs of these very diverse students, then research which highlights these diversities is surely needed in the field. Shore et al discuss the work of Busse, Dahme & Wieczerkowski (1986) which compared American and German teachers' perceptions of highly gifted students. These teachers were asked to talk at some length about one gifted student with whom they had worked. There appeared to be a very noticeable absence of negative stereotyping, in fact the teachers emphasized their “reasoning abilities, independence and good adjustment” (p. 179).

In trying to explain this outcome, Shore et al (1991) state that “if teachers quite understandably described their favorite students, ratings would be biased in a positive direction and not reflect their attitudes toward high-ability students as a group” (p. 179). The latter part of that statement is probably true; similar to the participants in this study, these teachers talked about individuals, not group characteristics. But why would the
descriptions of these students be “biased in a positive direction?” Surely these teachers knew their students and their descriptions of them reflected their knowledge of them gained from face to face interactions. What Shore et al (1991) might have said is that their descriptions probably accurately reflected their knowledge of the students; this personal knowledge and the special characteristics of each individual student tended to be at odds with the characteristics which are presented as group data in the stereotyping literature. In fact, when one gets to know the students as individuals, then the negative stereotyping may no longer hold true. The literature shows that perceptions of gifted children improves the more that people get to know a gifted person, or gifted people (Clark, 1992; Hershey, & Oliver, 1988).

3. “You put a label on that child... and you've got a teacher in panic. I mean, isn't it enough that he's deaf?”

Tina was talking about teachers of regular students who are attempting to deal in their classrooms with students who are multiply classified deaf and gifted or gifted with cerebral palsy. Gallagher’s research (1988) concludes that in fact, teachers of regular kids do feel threatened by the very high abilities of these gifted children. If teachers feel threatened by these gifted students, then imagine what they must deal with when faced with the multiple challenges of students with two labels.

4. “I'd use the label with parents, but very carefully.”

“No, I'd never use the label with the parents.”

A great deal of research has been done with parents of gifted youngsters; no research deals with parents who have children who have a disability and who are gifted. Maker (1986) mentions parents only in terms of giving them advice, (recommendations, p. 231), encouraging parents cooperation in making changes in terms of “the general tendency to underestimate ability “ (p. 243) and working to modify their own behavior so that more realistic expectations are made. She also strongly recommends that they be included in the identification process.
It is difficult to comprehend what a parent of a disabled child might experience when told that the child also has been labeled gifted. Already dealing with the handicap and adjusting to the impact of that condition of the family and on the child, the parents must again deal with another “classification.” In fact, they might also have to deal with another whole set of professionals who are “experts” in the area of giftedness. One can only imagine that sorting out all the feelings and conflicting expectations as one goes through this process, must be, at the very least, almost totally overwhelming. The teachers stories of the children in this research indicate vividly the many unbalanced features of the children’s existence and dealing with the hopes and frustrations for their children must be a tremendous challenge. Research is needed in this area so that the stories of these special parents can be heard. We have no right to advise; our first task is to understand.

The extant literature is summarized by Shore et al (1991) and several findings are highlighted here to give the reader some indication of parents reactions.

a. The term gifted implies great potential and parents may magnify the normal hopes and dreams they have for their child (Greenstadt, 1981; Miller, 1981; Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982). How does this balance itself out for the parent of a child who has a disability? On the one hand, the child experiences physical or sensory challenges; on the other, the child is expected to do very well.

b. The most commonly noted negative reactions among parents of hearing gifted children are anxiety and guilt that the parent will not know how to nurture and facilitate the child’s talents (Greenstadt, 1981; Ross, 1979; Webb et al., 1982). LaSasso (1985) talks about children who are learning disabled. She suggests that some parents tend to promote the label 'learning disabled' (LD) for their child, in order to lessen the guilt that they feel over their child’s lack of progress. In some sense the use of the LD label transfers the cause to some unspecific brain disorder unrelated to intelligence and upbringing. How do parents of Deaf and hard of hearing children make use of the term
gifted? Is it used in a similar way? Parents of children who have hearing losses already are reeling under the impact of finding the best way to nurture their child and to learn to communicate with him/her (Moores, 1987; Luterman, 1984). How do they deal with this double edged challenge?

c. Numerous case studies describe parents whose emotional over-investment in their child’s giftedness led them to dominate the child’s life with constant training and pressure to excel (Shore et al., 1991, p. 181). One is reminded of Naomi’s interactions with Josh’s parents, whose expectations in fact may have been inhibiting his development in school.

d. Cornell (1989) found that parents who perceived their child as gifted, described much greater feelings of pride in the child and a much closer relationship with the child than did those who did not perceive their child in this way. How do parents of gifted children who have disabilities react?

e. Because of the emphasis on under involvement of parents which predominated the developmental literature, the effects of parents who become over involved has not been thoroughly investigated (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

f. Unfortunately, there is little research to describe the scope or magnitude of parental anxiety or guilt in raising high-ability children (cf. review by Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983). Many parents of Deaf and hard of hearing children deal with guilt as a result of their child being diagnosed as having a hearing loss, especially if the cause of the loss is unknown (Luterman, 1984). How do parents reconcile these feeling of guilt with the knowledge that their child has also been said to be gifted?

5. “We wouldn’t want her to be proud and puffed up would we?”

“He figured he was bright enough, why study? ...he lost his incentive to push himself.”

“Saying she’s gifted, helped to reinforce what she already knew about herself and it told her that I knew who she is too. It was a good thing!”
The literature from the general population of hearing students appears to be mixed in terms of the impact of labeling on these students. Shore et al. (1991) have determined that "there is little support for the assertion of harm to the labeled child, resulting from either isolation or hostility" (p. 235). Families accord labeled children high status, teachers are more likely to respond to other characteristics and labeled students themselves report positive feelings". (p. 235). Other studies appear to support this statement.

Hershey and Oliver (1988) surveyed 600 students in grades 4 through 12 who had been identified for special education programs for the gifted, eliciting information regarding their feelings about the label gifted. The study provided evidence that gifted is perceived more positively than negatively by the students, who saw it as a "requirement" for admission to programs that offered challenging learning opportunities.

Hotter's study (1986) of gifted program students found that they had significantly more positive self concepts. The findings led him to conclude that negative impacts of gifted labeling and gifted programming were not demonstrated in his study.

There is often a claim made that being labeled gifted may result in a sense of elitism for those so labeled. Colangelo and Kelly (1983) report that no research supports this assumption and that if anything, giftedness implies greater sensitivity and awareness of the feelings of others.

Guskin et al. (1986) studied the effects of labeling on 47 students who attended the summer arts institute and 248 students attending the College for Gifted and Talented Youth in Grades 6 to 10, asking them to check adjectives which best described them. A small proportion checked these: brilliant 22.6%, average 22.7%, outstanding 28.7%. Approximately half, checked good in the arts (45.8%), special (53.1%). The other adjectives are listed below. The authors conclude from their investigation that the accepted terms were consistently positive traits and the rejected terms were consistently negative:
1. good in school—88.5%
2. imaginative—80.4%
3. creative—79.7%
4. smart—79%
5. talented—74.5%
6. intelligent—71%
7. successful—65.4%
8. gifted—64.3% (p.63)

When asked about the consequences of being labeled, 35% said that they were not treated differently. Of those who said they were, the differential treatments were higher expectations or demands—14%; generally good treatment—11%; encouragement or support—5%; and praise or pride—7% (p.64).

These students were above average to superior in abilities. They viewed themselves as highly competent, but didn’t want to be seen as too different from the others. They wanted people to be aware that their successes were the result of effort and seemed aware of the potential for rejection if they were set apart as an elite.

On the other hand, one reads in the text of Margaret Mead’s work (1954) that society looks with some hostility towards these children because they have been given this label, rather than having earned it. Sanborn’s work (1979) indicated that many children did not like to be called gifted and that gifted and talented “are categorical terms that lack meaning to the individuals so labeled” (In Guskin, 1986, p. 62).

The research related above has all been done with those youths and children who do not have additional handicaps. There is no research available on the impact of labeling as gifted children who are already members of minority groups, the Deaf and hard of hearing, physically handicapped, or learning disabled. As some teachers have noted, it is very possible that for some of these students, the impact could be quite positive, as the other label attached to them has traditionally brought focus to the disability. On the other hand, as the teachers have mentioned, the effect of an additional label on a child whose peer group is small, could be quite negative. The teachers’ stories of students indicate that children react differently to the label.
Gallagher (1991), states quite clearly that “gifted,” “has become a term with blurred and uncertain utility” (p. 354). The “surplus meanings” imbedded in it are those which indicate “unjustified and unearned privilege” and the feeling of “injustice or unfairness” in terms of people not being treated equally. He also mentions the difficulties it might create for some students so designated (p. 355). Because the term “gifted,” “has become increasingly nonfunctional” (p. 360) as the teachers in this study have also said, he offers to the reader five possible options that “present themselves in the field of education of gifted students that would take into account the changed knowledge base in the field” (p. 361). In abbreviated fashion, they are as follows:

1. **Keep the Legal Definition.** We can keep the term “gifted” for its legal and traditional values, but agree to label these students and the actual special programs in which they learn, in a more academically relevant fashion... such as linguistically advanced, or academically able.

2. **Abandon the Term.** We could deliberately change the names of textbooks, organizations, legal terminology, etc. in favor of a more limited, school-oriented term such as rapid learner. This would require a great deal more professional effort than the first option.

3. **Use Performance as Criterion.** We could use actual performance, instead of aptitude, as a basis for organizing students for special instruction in this field... programs would be identified as programs for “advanced mathematics students” or “advanced history students”.

4. **Mainstreaming the Gifted.** A deliberate attempt would be taken to incorporate a much broader and diverse level of ability and performance in the standard classroom than has previously been the case.

5. **Maintain the Status Quo.**

Gallagher maintains that there would be advantages and disadvantages to each of these options.

**Summary**

This chapter has described the teachers’ ideas about issues related to the concept of labeling. Although the concept itself is seen positively, in contrast to some of the other terms in use in Special Education and although there appears to be some use for the term in order to provide funding, the teachers in this study tended to be more negative than positive about its usefulness to them and to their students. The teachers themselves did not tend to use the term; instead they focused on the students’ behaviors and abilities. The underlying philosophy that perhaps can be attributed to its lack of use is that the teachers
know their students as individuals. This is not unusual, given the fact that they are often dealing with very small numbers of students. Andrea, a Deaf teacher, describes most strongly the possible impact of being doubly labeled, Deaf and gifted. "I think that most deaf people wouldn't appreciate a second label being used". It would appear that in terms of what the teachers in this study have said about the need to see children as individuals, as multi-dimensional rather than as cardboard figures, Options 1, 2 and 3 of Gallagher's suggestions above, might be the most widely supported.
Overview

This study was conducted in order to answer the following research questions: What are the perspectives of giftedness among teachers who work with hard of hearing and Deaf students and how do teachers’ come to gain these perspectives? The questions consisted of two main areas of focus:

1. What constitutes knowledge regarding giftedness within this group?
2. What is the process involved in gaining perspectives about giftedness?

The answers to these questions have been previously discussed in the body of the report in the following way. The answer to question one, what constitutes knowledge of giftedness for these teachers, is embodied in the narratives which have been presented and discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. The teachers' knowledge of the meanings of giftedness has emerged from the interview data in two important ways. In the first, the teachers told stories about the students with whom they have worked and provided the reader with a lens through which we might see “giftedness in context,” giftedness expressed in the lives and interactions of the daily encounters between teachers and students in classrooms. In the second, the teachers thought about and reflected upon the general meaning of the term gifted as they were participating in the interview. Their resulting knowledge about giftedness, then, reflects two kinds of orientations: one that is student-centered and practically based and one that is more conceptually centered and similar to theoretical descriptions and definitions of giftedness.

The answers to question two, how teachers might come to develop their perspectives of giftedness in the context of their classrooms and their everyday lives, is best reflected by the presentation of the diagram in Chapter 4. Two critical components of that process having to do with teachers’ ways of knowing are discussed in Chapters 7 and
8. Chapter 7 deals with how teachers use comparison groups in order to identify and provide for educational needs of gifted students; teachers appeared to use this technique as one way of coming to know and understand their students. In contrast, in Chapter 8, a practice which is commonly used in special education, that of labeling, is discussed at length because it did not appear to inform these teachers about their students. An analysis of their concerns in this regard has also been discussed. An important discovery was made for me during the third interview, when I realized that I, as a researcher, was asking the teachers to do something that appeared not to be familiar to them, to label the student as gifted. I realized that what I was asking had more to do with research than with teaching in the classrooms. The teachers appeared to have no need to label these students and were more concerned with meeting their individual needs both in terms of the demands of the effects of having a hearing loss and being gifted.

During the analysis of the interviews, the categories of description emerged quite quickly and easily. I realized early that one of the most important parts of this research had to do with what the teachers did with the most ease and grace: they told interesting and thoughtful stories of the students. The answers to my questions emerged slowly, however. For example the diagram which is presented at length in Chapter 4 and provides the overview and the framework for the resulting description, did not emerge until most of the chapters had been written. The whole process, for me, was one of becoming aware.

Many of the substantive findings for this study have been addressed within the context of the analysis in the previous chapters. This chapter will highlight new perspectives which emerged as they relate to those who took on the most important roles in this research: the students and the teachers. It will also address issues and dilemmas arising from the answers to each question and the implications for both teaching and research that are a result of these findings.

**Question One—What Constitutes Knowledge of Giftedness Within the Teachers?**

It is always in confronting such complexities that one develops real understanding (Duckworth, 1991b, p. 13).
Part of the teachers' knowledge of giftedness comes directly from the students themselves. An answer to this question, then, allows us to spotlight the students, as they have been understood and described by their teachers. The teachers have provided us with several important insights about their Deaf and hard of hearing students and those are listed here, in summary. In addition, several general issues arose in the interviews and are also discussed.

**Insights,**

1. Deaf and hard of hearing students who are considered to be gifted can and do achieve, learn and behave in ways similar to gifted students who are hearing. The range of abilities appears to be just as diverse and can include areas like music, for example, where the ability to hear is often thought to be a prerequisite to this developing talent.

2. These students, like all students, appear to have uneven profiles in terms of their abilities. This unevenness appears most dramatically perhaps on score differences between performance and verbal intelligence tests, reflecting differences between cognitive ability and English language skills.

3. Indicators of giftedness may or may not be the same for hard of hearing and Deaf students as for hearing students. Linguistic ability, as expressed either in English or in ASL, for example, may certainly be an indicator of giftedness, but all gifted hard of hearing or Deaf students may not have well developed linguistic skills.

4. Special areas of ability that might be unique to this population are those in the areas of learning and using a visual language like ASL, the development of speech skills and the ability to speechread.

5. Indicators of giftedness seem to appear at all age levels, from preschool through to adulthood. Teachers appear to have the ability to see the unique abilities of their students.

6. The indicators of giftedness take place in the context of having a hearing loss. As a result, these students deal with different environmental influences than do hearing
students. Their achieving, their behaving and their learning takes place without being able to hear much, if anything, of what is going on around them. Of the students in this study, all except two had profound hearing losses and as a result probably had little residual hearing.

7. The impact of having a hearing loss and being gifted can only be described by the teachers from a second-order perspective. I do not know if the teachers in this study were themselves gifted; some may have been. In any case, except for the two Deaf teachers, none of the other teachers has a hearing loss and, therefore, had not experienced the phenomenon. Teachers have made “best guesses” about the meanings and implications of having a hearing loss and being gifted based on their daily interactions with students and their insights are perceptive and knowledgeable.

8. From the teachers' perspectives, having a hearing loss and being gifted has a definite impact on people's expectations, language development and communication, on student's behaviors in terms of working hard, on their social and emotional development and on career options. Described in the latter part of Chapter 6, these impacts must be given special consideration in coming to understand these students.

9. The stories of the students indicated that they are probably continually dealing with discrepancies because of the imbalance caused by having a hearing loss and being gifted. The teachers described how different students dealt with these on a day to day basis.

Issues.

Several more general issues emerged from the data and are worthy of mention both for educational and research practices. They are as follows:

1. The reciprocity of responsibility as the teachers and the students construct realities in their classrooms. It appears that both students as well as teachers might take responsibility for seeing that their needs and abilities are communicated and understood. One is reminded of Ted’s explanation of “the natural process” taking place so that the
teachers and the students can have clear communication and can both clearly see each other. The building of clear and easy communication becomes perhaps the most critical responsibility of both participants.

2. **The emphasis on individuality and uniqueness that emerged in the students' stories.** In the course of the interviews I listened to over 43 different stories of different students. In fact, I listened to them many times throughout the long months of this project. What is amazing to me is that I continue to be amazed! I cannot "categorize" the stories of these students; each one is different. Each story has a different emphasis; each student lives in a different context. Each story added at least one new dimension to my understandings of what giftedness means to these teachers and in turn, extended my awareness of and respect for the students themselves.

3. **The importance of context in understanding and learning from these students.** These stories have reinforced for me my awareness that teachers must allow themselves to see students in the contexts of not only the classrooms, but also of their lives outside the schools and their lives within and surrounded by their families. This appears to be especially important when we are so aware of the need for the promotion of educational interventions that build on students' strengths and help the child develop to the best of his or her abilities. As Moores (1987) suggests, academic problems may be related more to what the children "do not do, not to what they cannot do" (p. 226).

4. **The role that educational placements might play in helping or hindering the developments of their abilities.** These teachers have noted that the educational placements for these students may in fact be providing the necessary challenges to meet the needs of their active and inquiring minds. On the other hand, one of the teachers has suggested that because of the special demands of these challenges, in terms of just keeping up, the students' gifted abilities may be at risk. Moores (1987) suggests that "we really must examine the different environments of deaf children as they go through integrated as well as self-contained classroom programs. We may find completely different demands--
intellectual, social and cognitive—being put on children in various placements.” (p. 331). It seems that this recommendation is especially appropriate for those children who are gifted.

5. The realization that these students are dealing with dual and often conflicting impacts of both having a hearing loss and being gifted. Many of the students mentioned by the teachers appeared to be handling this impact well; many children appeared to be experiencing difficulties. One is reminded of Whitmore’s and Maker’s (1985) recommendation for counseling that would assist these students in dealing with their unique situations.

6. The recognition that the students’ abilities to face many complex challenges is truly impressive and deserving of a great deal of respect. Above all, students deserve credit for what each can do and how each responds to their life situations.

**Teachers’ knowing related to the handicapped-gifted literature**

The beginning chapter of this thesis outlined issues in the existing literature which brought into question teachers’ abilities to recognize giftedness among students who have a disability, which suggested obstacles to identification and for programming and which supported the notion that giftedness was difficult to identify because of the ambiguities associated with the term. The need for in-service training of teachers and for the establishment of well developed identification programs has been strongly supported in this literature. As a result of the findings which emerged from these teachers interviews, it is important to note areas which might receive different emphasis for teachers who deal with Deaf and hard of hearing students. These are listed below.

1. **Labeling.** It may not be important for teachers to label these students. This study has shown that the teachers are indeed capable of recognizing gifted students who are Deaf and hard of hearing. The teachers can “uncover” their gifted abilities and in turn, the students can display certain indicators to the teachers. These indicators, however, appear
to be relatively unimportant to the teachers in the daily process of interacting with their students, except where they inform the teachers about the needs of the student. In other words, teachers have not found it necessary to label these students as gifted. It appears to these teachers that this is a perfectly reasonable situation given the small class sizes and the already well established emphasis on planning IEPs to meet individual needs.

2. **Identification/programming.** It may be more worthwhile to assist teachers to move towards more effective ways of recognizing and meeting the special needs of all their students, than for developing strategies to identify giftedness among them. More important to the students may be the teachers' requests for developing better ways to understand and evaluate all students in order to meet individual needs. It must be remembered that the educational situations in which children are placed are relatively small in number and teachers of Deaf and hard of hearing students usually have frequent contact with one another; they share stories of their students' abilities. The time and effort spent in the development of identification programs may not be worthwhile. If our aim is to eventually help the child to develop to the best of his potential, then listening to teachers and responding to the requests that arise from their strong knowledge base might in fact be the best solution.

There appears to be at least one area where teachers might be assisted in better, faster and easier assessment of children's abilities. The use of IQ scores is often frowned upon in our schools, because it is well recognized that IQ tests are limited in scope in terms of what they measure. They do not take into account the newer conceptions of intelligence which incorporate the importance of information processing and the recognition of 'street smarts' (Sternberg, 1985), or features such as planning and organization as described in the model of Naglieri & Das (1988). They are, however, useful in allowing teachers to have just one more piece of information about a child. Of the 43 students talked about in this study, only 11 IQ scores were known to the teachers; for the most part, teachers indicated that they never used them and that they trusted their
own judgments far more than scores on an IQ measure. This is reminiscent of Sternberg et al's (1981) findings when they studied lay persons' conceptions of intelligence. The laypersons trusted their own views of intelligence and these conceptions were in fact very similar to those of the experts.

There may in fact be a very strong case made for obtaining results from IQ scores for this population of students. In the Yewchuk and Bibby (1989c) study, psychologists nominated two students who had IQ scores in the 99th percentile; these students had not been nominated by the teachers. The behaviors of these students, now seniors in high school, were extremely disruptive and troublesome and the students were dealing with a multitude of social and emotional problems at that time of their lives. As mentioned earlier in this study, one wonders what might have happened to these students if their high intellectual abilities had been recognized sooner?

It must be remembered that although verbal IQ scores do in fact predict school achievement very well, few Deaf and hard of hearing students can ever be given these tests because of the inherent bias due to English language delays. The recommendation to teachers to become aware of either verbal or performance scores on IQ tests for students with hearing loss is not meant to imply that these scores be used for prediction. The teachers in this study have described their students in ways which indicate that many variables interact in many different ways; these strongly affect the outcomes for their students. Many of the students in this study have also been perceived as gifted by their teachers, and they have not had high IQ scores. Obtaining an IQ score for either the verbal or performance levels of the students is a relatively easy thing to do and could be the piece of information that alerts the teacher to the student's special capabilities. Because of this, it should not be omitted from the teacher's repertoire of information.

It may be worthwhile to encourage teachers to change their minds about the use of IQ scores, given the understanding that despite obvious difficulties, knowledge of high performance as indicated by these tests might prove to be extremely helpful in planning.
We can and need to be suspicious of low test scores (Moores, 1987), but knowledge of high test scores can prove to be very useful. This knowledge, in addition to the teacher's own close observations of the students based on on-going classroom interactions, and in addition to other kinds of evaluation, could provide a comprehensive base from which to plan appropriately for the student.

3. Instructional strategies. It has been said that teachers of disabled students and those of gifted students hardly ever communicate and this absence of communication was obvious in this study. Perhaps what the two groups have most in common is that both are working toward, as one teacher said, “extending (the student's) knowledge and abilities as far as they can go.” Teachers are constantly being asked to raise their expectations of what students can do and to build on strengths. Any sharing of knowledge of these strategies in this regard would be beneficial.

4. Comparison groups. The literature suggested that when handicapped students are being identified as gifted, one should “compare (them) with like-handicapped peers, not with the general population of gifted learners or nonhandicapped peers” (Yewchuk & Lupart, in press). Teachers in this study paid no attention to this directive because the students themselves had set the standard. Many of them were performing at par with their hearing peers. It is important to recognize that for hard of hearing and Deaf students comparison groups will differ depending on the placements of the students and the purpose for identification and comparison.

**Question Two—How do Teachers Gain Perspectives of Giftedness?**

**Insights.**

Gaining perspectives, which is discussed fully in Chapter 4 illustrates the process that a teacher might go through as he or she enters the classroom and encounters students who might be gifted. The process is continuous, dynamic and non-linear and passage through it appears to depend upon the openness of the teachers to new ways of seeing and learning about students and upon ways in which interactions take place in the classrooms.
The process emerged not from the story or the interview of only one participant, but from the interviews with the 12 participants. Each teacher highlighted one or several parts of the process in their own interview and together, the full picture emerged. This is fitting in terms of the fact that this research was about perspectives and since each participant could offer one view, their view, of the reality that they experienced, the other participants were able to extend our understandings by offering different views of that same reality. It is interesting to note that, like the teachers, the researchers who described 17 different conceptions of giftedness (Sternberg & Davidson, 1986) each offered the reader one part of the larger understanding of the meanings of giftedness.

The process begins when teachers enter the classroom. Chapter 4 of this writing has described the influences on perspectives which, for Liz and for Ted, arose from three different areas: their own experiences as students in classrooms; their interactions with other friends or adults; and their interactions with students they have taught. As a researcher it is difficult for me to label the new understandings that emerged from their stories as “findings” or as “results.” As I put together their stories, read and listened to their experiences and uncovered their philosophies of teaching which lay embedded in their interviews, I became aware of several new dimensions.

The first was the importance of what we, as teachers, bring into the classrooms, in terms of our own points of view. Like sugar dissolved in tea, however, these preconceptions are usually not at the surface of our understandings and, as we become caught up in the daily practice of teaching, taking time to uncover them is not necessarily a priority. Not only are our ideas perhaps not fully brought to our awareness, but teachers’ ideas are also not respected. Duckworth (1972, 1991a, 1991b) writes masterfully about “the having of wonderful ideas” (1972, p. 217), ideas that are entirely our own and that are honestly respected and acknowledged by the listener. The teachers in this study brought with them ideas and thoughts which emerged in the interviews and slowly each teacher contributed a worthwhile piece to the puzzle of giftedness.
The second awareness that was significant for me as a researcher and as a fellow teacher, was that all of the teachers in this study appeared to be thoughtful and open to ideas and discussions which happened around issues concerning giftedness. The interview process itself acted as an opportunity for change and as an opportunity for the teachers to think about some things that they had not had time to think about before.

The third issue that impacted on me, as a researcher and as a teacher, was that these teachers were ones who noticed. Duckworth (1991a), also a teacher, suggests that the first question in any educational encounter might be to ask the students what they notice about the phenomenon under investigation. Duckworth maintains that every single person will notice something and “the more everybody notices, the more everybody notices. Each one says, ‘oh yeah, yeah, I never noticed that’ and both collectively and individually the group builds an understanding…” (1991a, p. 31). Unfortunately, I was the only other person who was privileged to hear each teacher’s ideas, but I did keep saying, “oh yeah, I never noticed that!” As a direct result of these new awarenesses, my own perspectives have changed, my knowledge of teaching and learning has been extended and as a result I now look at the world in different ways.

Another awareness had to do with the fact that, as shown by the diagram in Chapter 4, not only do perspectives change across time and contexts, the meaning of the term gifted, embodied in teachers’ perspectives, remains fluid and open. The meanings given to it, too, appear to be influenced and changed by teachers’ interactions and situations. This may in part be the reason that teachers, when asked to define the term, had great difficulty. That request, perhaps, was too closed and too confining and did not fit with the reality that the teachers faced.

**Teachers' ways of knowing—The theory practice relationship.**

Information presented in Chapters 7 and 8 illustrates the idea that teachers appear to have different ways of coming to understand and make sense of their everyday worlds in the classroom and of themselves as teachers. These teachers, in the process of constantly
noticing, thinking about and interacting with their students, develop ways of understanding that are radically different from the way they develop ways of understanding in many teacher education programs. These teachers, for example, turned to their own experiences of the world, to their own learnings based on and tied into their own ways of making connections through their interactions with students. These teachers used the very practical and student centered process of comparison for understanding their students; they did not go to the literature, nor did they attempt to use definitions or other so-called expert sources to inform their own knowledge. Once again Duckworth (1991b) explains personal learnings as a teacher in the classroom, “The very complexities of the subject matters enables me to connect with them, made them accessible and the integrity of my own ideas enabled me to retrieve those connections when they could help me understand a new situation” (p. 7).

Since teachers' focus appears to be on what they know, since their learning also appears to be guided by “situations where they develop their own understanding—it’s not going to happen from your telling them” (Duckworth, 1991a, p. 30), then it might be worthwhile for teacher education programs to heed the words of a high school student’s point of view about learning: “I don’t know why we read about trees in science class. It seems stupid not to come outside and really study ‘em, don’tcha think?” (Duckworth, 1991b, p. 24).

To understand the importance of teachers' personal practical knowledge and to observe it's presence in the conversations with the teachers throughout this study was, for me, an unexpected finding. I had used Connelly and Clandinin’s (1989) work to frame my thinking about reasons for investigating teachers’ knowledge of giftedness, but I did not expect to see the teachers demonstrating the use of their practical knowledge with such clarity. Duckworth (1991a,1991b) makes the point that all learners, children and adults, rely on practical experiences, on immersion with the subject of learning. Teacher
educators at all levels will benefit from a closer investigation of the process of learning which happens in classrooms.

The implications for me as a teacher, in light of these new understandings, will probably mean that I will be unable to enter a teaching/learning situation again without realizing how I might be influencing both the situation and my students because of my own perspectives. I also see more clearly that the situation in which we learn and in which we act as teachers is complex and full of change. The importance of having ideas, respecting these ideas and sharing our ideas is critical to our work as teachers. Perhaps most importantly, I have a greater respect for the differing perspectives of my students and a deeper recognition of the fact that every individual begins by looking at the world from his or her own point of view.

Implications for Educational Practice

In the end, as Duckworth says (1991a), it’s just “finding out about. You just look at the phenomenon and if you ask yourself what you can find out about it, you notice all kinds of things which keep leading to deeper understandings” (p. 32). The teachers in this study have helped me find out about giftedness. Nobody else knows what the teachers know; they have so much knowledge about “...kids’ lives in the classrooms and that knowledge on the whole is untapped and known only to the person who holds it. Teachers own the knowledge they hold about their own classrooms” (p. 34). The teachers, therefore, deserve to have their ideas about classroom programming and practices shared with others in their own words. The following highlights their ideas, as they expressed them in the interviews.

...the thing I see that would be most useful would be to take a group from all across Canada and make summer camps for them, because they will be leaders, not only for the deaf of course, but to get them together so they will know they are not alone and there are others that understand...that would be great. When Kate went, it was probably the only time she was exposed to a real peer group.

...remember, we have a tough time meeting his needs for a peer group; even if the adults are here and can challenge him he really needs to be challenged by
other children as well; I don’t think adults can do everything for a child, I really don’t.

...It’s really hard to find appropriate places for her because she certainly does not want to be singled out, but on the other hand she has certain needs that must be met...we just have to find the best things by trial and error and be careful!

...and I would be very wary of test results for these students; I guess if it’s a challenge she might do her best, but if it’s too easy then it’s like, why bother and if it’s too hard, then well, it might not be worth doing because I’m not going to do well.

...should the school take responsibility for developing talent in areas that are not traditionally the school subjects, like artistic ability? Well we can and should do something, but to what extent?

...well you know parents have to take some responsibility too to help the child develop his other talents as well; and for the most part they do a great job, but we can’t do everything

...if I had money, I’d probably try and develop better tests for identifying what the individual needs are for these students, for all students in fact; we just need to get more information on a lot of these kids; meeting individual needs is the key...for teachers of the deaf with so few students in our classes, we have the best chance for meeting their needs individually so I certainly hope we are doing that.

...as a teachers you’ve got a separate responsibility for each child. It’s like, do you love your own three children the same? well, no, but you love them the way each one needs to be loved and I think that with teaching you can’t treat them all the same because they’re not the same...

...communication is critical you know; we have to be able to fluently and easily communicate with each other, kids and teachers, then if we have that communication, it will help us to really get to understand the students; we can then really listen to learn more about them and what is going on in their heads...

...I also have to be careful because when I’m teaching I like to move along as I have planned and get things done, but then I see Rob sitting and being quiet, or reading. I have to remember he’s probably thinking about something and isn’t that what we’re here for to help the students learn to think? So I have to find a balance in order to give him time to do that and also to have him participate; it’s not easy...

...you could develop a special program for all the kids that are gifted in the same way of course; there would be a mixture of different ages but that’s ok, not for everyday but for once a week or something, an enrichment program; but it would have to be with hearing kids too I guess and then you run into language challenges, but it’s an idea...

...well, you still do have to have priorities in your planning; for example I have more students who have learning disabilities in my classroom and then I
have one student who is doing fine and he gifted so I have to decide where I should spend my energies? Guess who might get left out a little bit? Well, what would you do?

...It's hard trying to balance providing the impetus for the artistic learning, where he's gifted and also providing the language input and the stimulation for helping him to deal with his other needs, but where is he going to get it if we don't try? It's hard! But ideally, we really have to build on his strengths and work from there...

...I know some people say you have to push them; I don't like that language, I just try and extend them like for example, I expect more from her, or I ask her to do something a little bit differently from the others because I know she can; so my expectations are different, that's all and it fits into the classroom, because they are different for all the kids. I'd rather extend them here in the classroom than send them out for something...

...well, we have the Academic challenge program here and that is a great thing for our kids; we can meet the need to challenge the students right here at the school for the Deaf and that's great...

...teachers need to do different things because there's a real chance that the kid will get bored here, that he'll get turned off education and that is a really worry for me, that's a danger; so we need to be very aware of these kids...

...I just want to keep stretching these students, all my students, as far as they are able to go and be careful because you don't want to go too far and then have them not like what's happening and stifle them...

...if you're really looking at serving individual needs, which we should be, the you might need some additional support in the classroom, so the teacher can address these people's needs without sacrificing the needs of the other kids; You'd want a situation that would accommodate to individual needs, but you'd want that for every single kid...

...maybe you have to challenge these gifted students in different ways, more creative ways and maybe there are some teachers who are better at that than others. You have to be comfortable when you're teaching; maybe I couldn't be really good with gifted kids, then maybe I could. I don't know...

...I really hate it when I go into a classroom in the regular school and see all that rote memorizing going on; he's just not being challenged by that kind of teaching I know, but it's so hard to do anything about it; the teaching isn't open-ended enough for him...

...we need to change out teaching so that all the students in the systems are being challenged, are being given responsibilities for their learnings and so that they needs are being met; but I think it means we have to change teachers ways about thinking in classrooms too; they have to see them as being interactive, with students and teachers working together and the teachers is really a learned too...

...we have to be careful because when we think of a gifted student, we sometimes forget that if they also have a disability then that creates needs too; so we have to meet both those needs...
...I think that we certainly have to raise our expectations for these students; they are so capable and they just need the appropriate communication and programs and the kind of teaching too. But we have to give them the regular curriculum and discuss concepts about things and teachers sometimes have to overlook their difficulties with language stuff because that's always going to be there...

...all the research seems to point to heterogeneous groupings rather than homogeneous groupings so if I had money I wouldn't want to pull out the gifted students; we all need to interact with each other and learn from each other and the teachers' job as facilitator is to keep them all interested; if the situation is rich enough then every kid should have the opportunity to develop her or his potential...

...I think that the decision on enrichment should be left with the students, not with the teachers; the students know whether or not they want to be in an accelerated program; I guess both have to plan and discuss together, but the student must make the decision...

...theoretically, learning should be so individual and teaching should be so individual that the students should be having their needs met in the classroom; it's easier said than done I know but that’s what we have to strive for...

...if we do set up a program then we should also remember that some kids develop interests and talents quite suddenly so flexibility is the key; If it’s on an individual basis anyway, then you’re going to have some kids coming and going in and out of it and that’s the way I think it works best; because you just never know when some kids are going to just take off...

...if only I had the answer for knowing how to motivate each child to do his or her very best; they have a responsibility too, but that’s what I’d like most as a teacher...

...we also have to be really honest with the parents of these kids and be sure and help them develop realistic expectations in terms of the kids abilities...

...well you know, I never want to look at the files of the students before they come in the fall because of expectations and all that; but that one time, I really should have consulted the file because I would not have wasted so much time trying to figure out about this students; I don’t really believe in the IQ scores, but if I’d seen his then I probably would have reacted in a more positive way faster; I guess I can really judge essential from non-essential information and then I always trust my own judgments too...

The teachers in this study have shared "what they own". Based on their words and based on the issues which have arisen from the findings I would like to make the following recommendations.

1. More research must focus on the experiences and ideas of those who are experiencing the phenomenon under investigation, in this case teachers of students with
hearing losses who are also gifted and perhaps most importantly, the students themselves. We have a great deal to learn from their first hand experiences within educational programs.

2. Teachers' ways of knowing and understanding have recently been given more respect in research and education and this trend must continue. Teachers have clearly indicated in this study that each one is able to contribute to an overall understanding of the concept of giftedness. Their ideas must be listened to, respected and shared.

3. Teachers too must be seen and respected as learners, for the cycle of teaching and learning does not deal with children as the main players. Teachers teach as they learn, and learn as they teach.

4. In order to have better outcomes for Deaf and hard of hearing students, time and money should be invested in ways to assist teachers in both more clearly recognizing the individual needs of all students and in planning programs that will assist them in meeting those needs. If this can be accomplished, it may not be worthwhile or even necessary for teachers to develop either identification guidelines or special programs especially to meet the needs of those who are gifted. Their needs may be able to be met in the classrooms, as identified by teachers who work with them.

5. Hard of hearing and Deaf students have set the standards for what they can do and those standards are impressive. The usefulness of comparing them to any other group might be questioned, unless it is tied to the need for obtaining funding.

6. There appears to be no need to label these students as being gifted. Teachers prefer to talk about individualized needs.

7. Much of the literature on gifted education calls for a need to come up with a clear definition of the meaning of the term gifted. It may well be that the term can never be specified clearly since it is socially constructed and it may well be that the time has come for those in the field to surrender to its ambiguity.
Implications for Future Research

This descriptive study was a first attempt to understand what is meant by giftedness among Deaf and hard of hearing students by exploring the perspectives of teachers themselves. Further exploratory research is needed to extend the understandings offered by the teachers in this study and much more research is needed into the first hand experiences of gifted students themselves. The analysis of the present study would suggest the following research questions:

Dealing with the process,
1. Is the process of perspective-making as outlined in this study applicable to other teachers of Deaf and hard of hearing students?...to other teachers?
2. Is there, in fact, a teacher's way of knowing, as different from other ways of knowing? If so, in what ways might these differ?
3. How does the process of comparison work in classrooms?
4. How do teachers' perspectives impact on what happens in classrooms?

Dealing with the students.
1. What is the first hand experience of students who have hearing losses and who are gifted?
2. What are the important factors that allow Deaf and hard of hearing students, or encourage students, to develop to the best of their abilities?
3. What are the special cognitive abilities of those students who have hearing losses and who are gifted?
4. What can be learned from these students experiences that can be of help in understanding all students with hearing losses?

Dealing with the concept of giftedness.
1. What are the perspectives of giftedness among Deaf and hard of hearing students who are gifted?
2. What are the perspectives of giftedness among parents who have children who have hearing losses and are gifted? What are the experiences of these parents?

3. Are there differences in the perspectives which are held by teachers, parents and the students themselves?

4. What are other understandings of giftedness that did not appear in the conversations with these teachers?

5. What are the perspectives of the issue of labeling which might extend the beginnings of our knowledge presented in Table 2? Could the Delphi technique be used effectively to provide further clarification and understanding?

6. To what extent are these understandings shared by other teachers of Deaf and hard of hearing students who have worked with and known gifted students or to other teachers who have not worked with or known students with hearing losses who are also gifted?

In conclusion, the aim of this research was to describe the perspectives of teachers and their ideas about giftedness as they come to understand it by working with a unique group of individuals, those students who have hearing losses. It is not surprising that an original approach to investigating giftedness, as seen through the eyes of teachers, should provide new and fascinating data. The teachers, however, provided additional understandings in extremely thoughtful, insightful and exciting ways.

As a result of this investigation, teachers were able to have their voices heard; they were encouraged to tell their stories and those of their students. Teachers are often not given opportunities to share their understandings of their students; through these interviews their resulting perspectives can be shared with other teachers. It is hoped that upon reading the descriptions of giftedness in the findings of this research, teachers will not only gain some clearer understanding of the meanings of giftedness, but that they will also gain some small understanding of how they come to know what they know.
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Appendix A

An Interview Guide—Teachers of Gifted Hard of Hearing and Deaf Students

These questions were formed before the interviews began. They allowed me to clarify, in my own mind, the issues that I perceived to be important if I were going to obtain answers to my original research questions. In reality, the only question that was asked “formally” during the interview, was the opening statement with its question about the teachers’ background. In each interview, the first question served to open the conversation, and the teacher from that point onward led the way. At the end of the interview, I paused for a minute to look over these questions to see if there had been a topic that we had not covered in some way.

Opening Statement

I am really interested in finding out more about gifted students who have hearing losses, and about your own ideas about what the term “gifted” or “giftedness” means to you. I guess we all learn about giftedness from somewhere, and as teachers some of us learn about giftedness from our students. I’m a teacher, but I’m not sure that I’ve ever worked with students who have been gifted, so I’m really interested in your thoughts. I have lots of questions here, but I am happy to be as formal or as informal as we want as we go along. Perhaps you could begin by telling me a bit about yourself and your experiences as a teacher of hard of hearing and Deaf students, then maybe we could talk about some of the students you worked with.

Interview Guide

1. Background
   a. What is your experience in teaching had of hearing/Deaf students?
   b. What is your experience with gifted students?
   c. Have you ever had any special courses in gifted education?

2. Focus on identification
   a. Tell me about how you came to realize that the student was gifted.
   b. Are you aware of any formal procedures for finding gifted hard of hearing/Deaf students in the school system?
   c. Let’s say you were given the responsibility for finding these students in the school system. How would you go about doing that?

3. Focus on the student
   a. Can you think of a student with whom you worked and tell me as much as you can about the student?
   b. What were the specific strengths of the student? Weaknesses? Did the student have any problems?
   c. What problems existed because the student was gifted? Because the student was hearing impaired?
d. Have you known more than one student who was gifted? Can you tell me about the others?

4. Focus on the concept
   a. There might have been a point in your life or in your career where you hadn’t really thought about the idea of giftedness. Tell me about how you think the concept came to have some meaning for you.
   b. If you had to explain the meaning of the gifted concept, what would you say about it?

5. Focus on the label
   a. What about this “gifted” label? What are your thoughts and feelings about the label? What do you think about labeling these students?
   b. A category implies that there are some common things about the people in that category. What might those be for students who are gifted?

6. Focus on society
   a. If a student is gifted, what do you think his or her place is in the educational system? Where do gifted students fit?
   b. Does the gifted student have any special responsibilities within the school system? To society?
   c. If you could look into the future for this student, what would you see happening for this student? What would this student be doing as an adult?
   d. Let’s say you walk into a room full of people at a party. You don’t know anyone. The you are told that some of these people have IQ’s around 150. How would that impact on you?

7. Focus on teaching
   a. If, in August, you were told that you had a gifted student in your class, how would that impact on you in getting ready for that class in September?
   b. Would this knowledge change your responsibilities as a teacher?

8. Focus on education
   a. You know how many different settings are available to hearing impaired students. What about the educational setting for the student who is gifted?
   b. Describe the ideal setting for a gifted student with hearing loss... for a student who is not gifted.

9. Closing questions
   a. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the students, or anything that we’ve talked about?
   b. Are there any questions or thoughts in your own mind that I have left out or that we have not covered?
   c. Would you be willing for me to give you a call again in a couple of weeks to see if you have further thoughts about what we have talked about? In any case I will be sending you a copy of the transcript for you to read, and we will get together again for a review of that, and for any second thoughts or further clarification. Thank you very much.
Appendix B
HyperQual Label Sort for Teachers' Comments on Giftedness

Andrea

1. A: Okay. I need to emphasize, in my 15 years of teaching, I've only labeled one student as gifted, only one. No one else so obviously I'm going to be speaking about that person all the time and I'll give you her name. Alexis. It's not her real name but it's a female student. I think it will make it easier for you that I will speak about the one student. She's not here anymore. She's graduated.

2. A: (Shoulder shrug) Do you mean a list of criteria for identification? Hmm.
Q: For instance if I were to give you a certain amount of money to set up a group for establishing for only deaf gifted children, how would you select children for that group?
A: I tend to associate giftedness with learning process. We don't tend to label people as gifted after they've left school, so I would identify students in terms of their learning abilities but if they can learn, if they're fast moving, if they could learn after once being taught. That sort of thing. I would relate it to how fast and how easy they learn.

3. A: No. I never really thought about that, you know. Gifted seems to, giftedness seems to disappear on graduation. We don't term people gifted after they graduate. No, I can't think of anyone. So if someone graduates, becomes an adult and after you've had some interaction with that person as an adult. No I don't think of it as gifted. I don't, you know, I don't, there's no label is needed for them.
Q: What do you think of labeling.
A: Well it's garbage.

4. A: You know, even if you'd give one person a label people may disagree. It may not be the accurate label. If I say definitely this person is gifted, someone else may very well say, no. So why come up with labels? Why not leave the children alone?
Q: I'm curious again about the label. Are there some benefits of labeling or is it always a negative.
A: Oh, no. It’s nice to know. Well perhaps like mentally retarded or deaf. Those are beneficial labels cause then we can find out who is and who isn’t and we can do more checking where we need to and we could categorize the individuals into smaller and smaller groups. You know, but I don’t support conformity. Individualization is what we need so normally there’s not a use for labeling because a person is already an individual.

5. Q. I'm curious about where the label giftedness has come from and why we use it or seem to use it within the school system.
A: That’s an interesting question. Perhaps because there’s more and more dropouts and those dropouts are quite often gifted. Quite often those dropouts may be gifted or not challenged enough and then perhaps it’s just a reaction so it will single out the students who perhaps are gifted and make sure that they will finish school and go through the system. Perhaps the system is simply not meeting their needs or is not identifying them as it should. Maybe that’s one reason. One that I can think of right now. So gifted as a label is fine in a general sense.
6. A: So gifted as a label is fine in a general sense. You know, the general public but do we need it for deaf children? We've already got so many categories, hearing loss, this and that and I think that most deaf people wouldn't appreciate a further label being used. We don't want to be singled out. I think for the learning process, yes. It's important to be challenged and to identify some students as gifted, yes. But Alexis here at the school, I think we've met her needs. I think we gave her enough supplementary work.

7. Q: you said that sometimes that labeling such as deafness or mentally handicapped has some merit.
   A: Ummhmm that's right. So for educational reasons it's sometimes worthwhile to have. There would be educational reasons. For instance, mentally disabled or deaf or so on. So for educational reasons there would sometimes be a benefit in having that labeling.

8. A: I would perhaps agree with their choice of labels or I might not. The IPP's speak about the plan for the individual but they don't mention any labels.

9. A: Okay. They would say she's wonderful or that she's doing very well, but the term gifted would not specifically be mentioned, at least it hasn't been in our discussions. Let me emphasize again where the need for labeling comes in. Let me re-emphasize where the need for labeling comes in. Deaf students are already different from the beginning so really we're looking for confirmation that they have difficulty with a second label. There's just a smaller community, smaller culture. We would have perhaps one student. If there's one that's making very good marks, that child might not be accepted and that child knows it. The others would not appreciate them. That sort of thing. So there has to be similar type of treatment for all of them

10. Q: So if you were going to label them as ...they're already accepted as hearing impaired and so if there were another label that would probably would not be accepted?
    A: That's perhaps an older mentality from the residential schools for the deaf. Like myself. Someone who grew up in a residential setting. There was the notion that everyone had to be pretty much the same. All the boys and the girls had to do everything the same way in the same time. That was dorm life. We had to eat, think, go to sleep at the same time and so on. And so that ...it's great to be individuals, but there is that preference for similarity in the group that goes away back.

11. A: If they are identified as gifted what will come out of it? If we identify deaf children as gifted then what. What will come out of this process? There's no relationship to the working world so what's the point of labeling deaf children as gifted? I don't really see it. If they're excellent or outstanding in math or whatever and then they go out into the working world, you know, there will be no connection back to their abilities in math. I don't know.

12. Q: So, related to the educational system here, do you feel that the label doesn't really benefit the children themselves?
    A: In a school with 500 children perhaps, but not with only 90 or 120. So if we have one student then, you know, what is there to be done? That student would have to stay in the classroom anyway. But possibly if there were a large number, 500, 600 students, it would be nice to have that kind of identification system. If
there were 600, yes. If you’re in a school with a larger number of students, yes, so it wasn’t just the one then you could do things in groups for them and they would identify with each other.

13. A: One thing that I believe. Like you, as a teacher, if you’re working with a small number of students, the teacher really knows each student individually and knows how they do, knows what their abilities are, knows who they are as people and can look at their strengths and weaknesses and so on. So I think that it might be a lot different if it was a very large number. I understand, yes it would be definitely a different situation. But if you were given 5 or 6 students and one was labeled, I can see that as a problem. In public school it’s an honor to be singled out but not so here.

Elizabeth

1. Q: Like would it be important for him, for you, to find out whether he’s gifted or not?
   A: (long pause) No..., I don’t think so. What I’d like to see though, him have all the opportunity he can, if he’s going to go into some kind of field.

2. Q: ...that child stands out.
   A: (long pause) Ummm. There was a class when I first came here, but I didn’t have them, so, I don’t really know them well enough to label them, but I know they were a very good class. You’d have to ask... No, I couldn’t say, because I didn’t have them but, they were a class that I think that might have been gifted..

3. Q: ...use that label with these kids? Or even to think about it?
   A: (long pause) Is it important? I don’t know if it’s important, but I see nothing wrong with it. At least then, if they’re gifted, especially at this school I think, because if you label a child gifted at this school he’s going to have all the advantages he can get. I mean, he’s not going to go into a class where....he’s going to be pushed, because you know, or you think he’s gifted, whereas if it wasn’t there, you may not push him as hard
   Q: So the expectations are going to be higher?
   A: I think so. I think so. Especially at this school. You definitely want him to go on to Gallaudet, or to some kind of university if he can, but I guess I don’t see it as really important, the label itself.

4. A: Well, I guess I don’t particularly like labels too much, anyway.
   Q: Why? It’s one of the issues...
   A: Well, because in gifted, I mean, if you’ve got the label gifted, I mean that’s so positive that that’s great, but if you get the label of anything else, mentally retarded, something else, it’s not doing anything to help the child is it?
   Q: Ummmm?
   A: I know sometimes you can’t help I mean you have to classify. This school has to be classified, labeled, deaf. Some labels aren’t so bad, but, “gifted” I can see helping the student, but some of the other ones I can’t, so.

5. Q: When you’re in the staff room, or whatever, do you talk about giftedness very much among the students themselves?
   A: No.
   Q: Do you talk?
   A: No. Okay, I guess you...what you probably would say is, I haven’t heard the word gifted too much used here, but what you would say is a really good class,
or it’s a really good student. You don’t really say gifted. Really good, very good student. You’ll really enjoy having that student. He wants to learn. He just soaks up everything you hand him, or whatever. But the word gifted itself…. I can’t say I’ve heard that too much.

6. Q: If you knew that you were going to have a gifted child in your classroom in September, or when you’re preparing for classes, or whenever you find out, if you knew ahead of time, anyway, would you do anything different at all?
A: Gifted in what way?
Q: Is that important?
A: Yes, it would.
Q: How?
A: Because, okay. With Craig, because he’s gifted in art I would probably do more art with this group than I have done with…as I say, because it’s not my favorite subject,

7. A: I don’t know if I’ve ever used the label gifted, but you often say, oh, they’re incredible in math, or incredible in whatever their field was. Gifted is a actually a label I think that they use more, not the people working with the kids so much as the, maybe the people on high, the psychologists, or whatever, but I don’t think the…. I don’t think I’ve ever used it that much as a teacher, or with my peers as teachers. I don’t think. We always say a good student, or she’s a very good student, or…But… I don’t remember using “gifted” that much.
Q: So why is it used “on high”? I mean why is it used by people who are not in the field. I mean not at the grass roots level?
A: Because usually they use all the terminology that teacher’s usually don’t use. There’s a lot of terminology up there that they come up with all the time, but usually the ones, the people doing the administration and all that, or in universities or whatever. That’s where most of the terminology, I think comes from. But the normal people…the lay people don’t use it.
Q: So why do we use it
A: I don’t know. Sometimes I think...not so much...I’m not saying you...just to make themselves look more important. Do you ever read the government paper sometimes that comes out and they say that any government...Usually when the papers come out from the government, especially “On high”, the normal person trying to read it, it makes no sense at all. Like, just give it to someone to write, and someone will read it and say, oh, oh, okay. I’m not saying that gifted is that kind of terminology though, but I just, I don’t know, I just don’t think that most people working with the kids just don’t use that kind of..

Heather

1. Q: Is it important? How do we use the term? Like how do you use…Do you ever talk about gifted kids when you’re talking to parents?
A: No. Well actually no, that’s not true. Gifted is not a word I use with parents hardly ever.
Q: Why?
A: Cause I’m scared of it. Because if you say the word gifted to parents, boy, then right away it either gives them unrealistic expectations, or rather, there’s a danger of giving them wrong information….Oh, gifted kid, you know. I mean I’ve talked with John’s mom about giftedness. She’s a teacher. We’ve talked about it rather objectively. So I’m real careful about using that label with parents.
2. A: So I’m real careful about using that label with parents.
Q: Because why, again?
A: Because I’m not...how do I know? I don’t know. I mean I can say, look, he’s functioning way up here. look at all the things he’s doing. He’s really very bright. I’ll say to a parent, he’s very bright and you need to push him because he can do it. But I’m careful with gifted because I don’t want to set that kid up for failure I guess.
Q: How do you mean?
A: I don’t want a parent sort of saying, oh well, great, he’s gifted. I’ll put him in a regular class with regular normal hearing kids and, you know, he can make it because he’s gifted.
Q: So the assumption. You’re afraid of the expectation that’s involved with the label. Is that right?
A: Yeah, yeah.

3. A: she was very bright, cause that’s safe, that’s safe, that’s safe.
Q: You said that three times, “that’s safe.” And so implying that if you put gifted, there is a real distinction, but I wondered how that...
A: I think there is in people’s minds.
Q: And how does that operationalize. Like you said it does because a parent might then put a kid in a program that’s not the right program.
A: And that’s not going to give him the kind of support he does need to learn as well as he can.
A: But you said “very bright.” So there’s an incredible power in the term “giftedness” isn’t there?
A: I think so, I think so.
Q: But not as much power in the term “very bright”, or “extraordinary”.
A: Extraordinary’s strong too.
Q: But you’ve used extraordinary....It seems to me in this thing you use extraordinary with more ease.
A: I use extraordinary when I’m talking about.....Yeah it’s true. I do use extraordinary with more ease. Because extraordinary is not a label, it’s a descriptor. Gifted to me is a label. Extraordinary has a broader range. Gifted to me means absolutely, this kid is up there. That’s maybe my frame of reference....I think all labels, I mean, you tell a parent your kid’s gifted, you tell a parent your kid’s mentally retarded. You tell a parent your kid’s learning disabled. You tell a teacher that....

4. Q: It’s the expectations isn’t it.
A: To me it hems it in. It makes it concrete. It makes it, you know...very bright means, oh well, I can expect more of this kid, but there’s a broad range there. To me, gifted, the range, cuts off here, and goes here, and it doesn’t extend down here.

5. A: To me, gifted, the range, cuts off here, and goes here, and it doesn’t extend down here.
Q: So if you were diagramming it, would you draw gifted as a box and would you draw very bright as some kind of circle with all kinds of offshoots and openings, and stuff?
A: Yes. That’s helpful to me. That’s a good description. That’s exactly what it is. That’s the fear of it. It’s that box. It’s putting that kid in that box. And then I think that gives....The label takes the attention off what the kid is doing and what he actually needs and puts it on to this category. We expect him to do this because he is in this category. Not, we expect him to do this because he did this
yesterday. I expect him to read at age level because he's gifted as opposed to I expect him to read at age level because this year he's showing me that he's learning, you know, print, the print is making a lot of sense to him and that he can remember words in print. Then you're programming to the kid instead of to the label.

6. A: ...but gifted to me, I think that kid jumps out at me because he's, or she is very different from most of the kids in my experience.
Q: But you certainly use the term with great caution.
A: I'm not afraid of it for myself, to use it with myself, but I'm real afraid to put it verbally on for a parent or anybody else.
Q: As with any other label because of the expectations implied with it.
A: Yeah, I think the label has more predetermining value. It has more power to predestine that kid than a description of this kid's really got smarts. Press him. But then you're pressing him based on what you see him doing as opposed to well, he should be up here, so I'm just going to start programming up here just cause it's where I want to be.

7. A: But then you're pressing him based on what you see him doing as opposed to well, he should be up here, so I'm just going to start programming up here just cause it's where I want to be.
Q: Yeah. It's a very interesting aspect you're bringing out. I don't think we really
A: I didn't have it defined before. It just sort of fell in there for me.
Q: Yeah, it comes, it comes.

8. Q: If somebody, if we woke up tomorrow morning and somebody made an announcement that giftedness no longer existed in our society.....
A: In what sense, the label of the phenomenon? If somebody said tomorrow, "We're going to abolish the label of giftedness," or somebody said, "there aren't any gifted people."
Q: Which?
A: Well, let's take it for the label. The linguistic...All of a sudden in our language that word doesn't even exist, would we be at a loss....?

9. Q: Well, let's take the label. The linguistic... All of a sudden in our language that word doesn't even exist, would we be at a loss....?
A: I don't think so. We'd find another way to categorize those people.
Q: Why? Why is categorization so important though?
A: It has to do with the efficiency of service delivery. It has to do with...especially because I think education has a whole bunch of people who are really trying to do the right thing. They're going to find kids who are so far above the norm that they cannot be served effectively. They may not reach their maximum learning potential in that environment. I don't care what they call it. They could call it cute. They could call it bright. They could call it whatever. But when you get down to the functionalist perspective, there are going to be kids whose learning needs are so different and in the case of real bright, so far above what their peers are, that they're going to require special solutions and teachers are just notorious for wanting to find special solutions for those kids. It's one of the wonderful things about teaching. So, I don't think it would matter. If we didn't have a label tomorrow, I still think that it would be something that would need to be dealt with and would be. The people would struggle with.

10. Q: So, we'd need the label then. I mean, we need something. Maybe not....
A: We need to acknowledge that there are kids whose learning styles are different.
11. Q: Okay. So the phenomenon is not going to....I’m just trying to get at, at the work that G-I-F-T-E-D does, you know, as a language thing. You know, what work does it perform, and it just sounds to me, like, the work that it performs is a categorization so that....
A: What does that mean though? I mean to me, what work does that perform.
Gifted means that this kid’s learning needs are substantially different enough from the needs of the people he’s being educated with that he needs something different, and because the label is gifted, that means that his needs are above . But that doesn’t tell you, you know, so what do you put in, a program for the gifted kid? No, I mean, you could do that. That’s why I’m afraid of that label.
Oh, well, here’s this program for gifted kids over here and we’ll just...this is the stream you’re going to be in. I’d as soon we didn’t have the label. I’d as soon we didn’t have any of those labels. I’d as soon....I would rather we had a descriptor of how that kid is functioning. This kid is now reading at a grade 4 and 5 level. He’s in grade 3. We’ve got to do something about this because this kid is not going to be challenged in this situation.

12. Q: So why do we keep on going back to the label.
A: I don’t know.
Q: And why aren’t these descriptors sufficient?
A: Isn’t part of this a North American scientific Western categorization compulsive, labeling, categorizing, scientific method thing, you know? I mean, that’s what it is. This is...I don’t know tons about this by any means...I don’t think I know anything about it but, I’ve heard somewhere that this compulsive labeling is a western scientific method kind of thing, and somehow we think that if we label it we understand it. And because of that, we relinquish the responsibility of really understanding it.

13. A: If we label it we understand it. And because of that, we relinquish the responsibility of really understanding it. And we have seen that happen with every label we’ve used. It’s like, Oh, I’ve got this label, and something about that....that’s why I’m scared of labels. This helps me identify this. Something about that label allows us to relinquish the responsibility of looking at that kid exclusively and saying, “This is what he’s doing. This is what he needs. He’s doing this in reading, this is where I go next. He’s doing this socially. This is where I go next, you know.” Something about that label makes us think, “oh, okay, I got it. I can put it in a box. When you put that in a box, you put the kid in the box with it, and you lose something. You’re going to lose something. I don’t care, regardless.

14. A: When you put that in a box, you put the kid in the box with it, and you lose something. You’re going to lose something. I don’t care, regardless.
Q: Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant...
A: I don’t know if it’s brilliant, but it’s true I think. This is why I wanted to do this with you Mary Ann.
Q: Oh, it’s great, it’s great. I’m so excited!
A: Because I really wanted to find out my own thinking about this ______.

15. Q: You know, there’s also, if you look at the labeling that you’re just talking about, you know, it helps us relinquish the responsibility for looking at he’s reading here, he’s doing it. It also saves us time.
A: Oh, well this is what I was going to say. We’re looking at mass service delivery here. Right? We’re looking at mass service delivery here, so sure, timesaving is
what that's all about. "Oh, yeah, we got a program for gifted. No problem! I don't have to train this teacher. All I have to do is give her this book and she'll get it." (laughs). It's like the total communication phenomenon. Why train the teacher? We'll just give him this book and, you know, we can categorize these students in such and such a way and ..... 

16. Q: so that the situation, the reality of the school system defines the need for the teacher...
A: It's systems driven, not kid driven. And then the teacher there has to work within the system so then she, she has to find a way to rationalize that to herself. Well it's the same with gifted somehow. Our society, you know, there's an imbalance. Our society's very systems driven.
Q: Yeah, there's an imbalance.
A: There's a whole body of literature that looks at ....that's evolving, and it's evolving largely out of business literature, which I've been exposed to through a couple of things. But the books, like In search of excellence and The win-win negotiator and various things like that have tremendous implications for what we're doing because they look at what drives this service. Is this service driven by the needs of the client, or is this service systems driven? Is this service driven by the needs of the service delivery agency? And in very many cases, now what people are looking at....They're looking now at hospitals. We went through an exercise like this in our program. What, you know, just looking at, what drives the system? Are we looking at, is our primary thing serving our clients, known as "patients" at XXX because we have to keep them passive you know, it's a hospital. I have a mini crusade going on about that. Or is it client driven? Or is it systems driven, you know, who are we serving here us or them? They come at our convenience. We determine how we're going to....we don't give them much say in the model of delivery. That is changing now. That's undergoing some radical changes in our program, which I'm very, very happy about, and the number of options we're giving the families is opening up much wider. In recognition of that fact, and that's happening in education, it's happening in business, so people are beginning to realize that this Western passion for systems driven stuff which makes us generate labels where we can put things so we can pull out the right program off the shelf that's already been done to do it, leads to a lack of individualization. that concept supports a hurried time, sequencing of events. All that stuff. I think a lot of it is dictated by Western culture, that need for that label.

17. A: All that stuff. I think a lot of it is dictated by Western culture, that need for that label. I think Eastern cultures would be quite different. It would be interesting to look at that. I think we are an extreme over here. Those labels served a function and do, can, but now again, I think we are at this extreme where they're not serving their function, they are defining their function, and that's different.
Q: Oh, that's another good one.
A: You know? They're not serving the function they were supposed to serve. The label now defines the service as opposed to the service defining, you know. So, that's true, that really helps me understand why I'm so leery of labels. Somewhere down the line one of my psych profs., bless their hearts, said you've got to be leery of labels and talked about the limiting factors of labels, and the predetermining factors of labels, but really...
Q: It puts it in a larger context now, doesn't it?
A: So does the label gifted do good work? No. I could live without it quite happily. If I had a choice to have it or not have it, I'd say get rid of it.
18. A: If I had a choice to have it or not have it, I'd say get rid of it.
Q: On the other hand, you're very first reaction to my question was, it would be all right, cause we'd just find another one right away. But that's in light of the society's system needs.
A: But remember what I said after that. I said I don't know what we'd call it, another label, but, the phenomenon would not cease to exist and the need to address it would be there, and we would be looking at that need to address it. That's how it evolved in the first place, and then we thought, oh, there's this thing happening, and we can put it under an umbrella called giftedness, and so then we started limiting it, which you kind of need...I mean you have to find a balance there always, so you have to limit some things, you have got to limit it somewhere because you have got to figure out how you're going to serve that population, but if you get too wed to that label, then you're going to be excluding and you're going to be cutting off possibilities is what you're going to do. You're going to start limiting possibilities and making mistakes. We're going to make mistakes anyway, but you know, you don't want the label to contribute to that if possible.
Q: No, that's right, I know. If you can get rid of it.

19. Q: Is there an ideal setting for a gifted, hearing impaired child?
A: No. There's no such thing as an ideal setting....
Q: Or situation, I mean let's broaden it a little bit.
A: If you want to say an ideal setting, you have to accept the label of gifted you see. You have to accept that in this little box, all the kids that fit in this little box have an ideal. So, no. That's something that I don't want to touch with a 10 foot...Of course it's not an ideal. I mean if you had to identify a few things that would be real good in that situation, you would identify a situation where there was lots of individualization, of programs, because those kid's needs are going to be different. I don't care if they're gifted or not. But something that allowed you to individually meet their needs so you'd want, you know, smaller group situations. You'd want a classroom where there's additional support so the teacher can address those people's needs without sacrificing the needs of the other kids. You'd want that stuff, you know. You'd want a situation that would accommodate to individual needs, but you want that for every single kid. So is it different? No. Is it more important to meet that gifted student's needs than it is to meet little Johnny's needs over here who's struggling?

Heidi

1. Q: Do you, like where does that term come from, gifted? Is that even an important term for you as a teacher, or when you're talking among other teachers or in this school, or does that come from someplace else?
A: Well, I guess labels aren't important, although if you're trying to teach a child a concept and you don't know whether it's within that child's capability, then knowing what he can and can't do is important and is in a way, a label, if you've tried over and over to teach, oh, Johnny how to read kindergarten and he's....words, and he's in grade 10. I mean he's ten years of age and he still can't do it, it might be nice to know why..

2. A: ...He's 10, he can't...he has no reading vocabulary, no written vocabulary. I can't help but put a label on him and then you've got Rob at the other end who you get him away from the book, well, I don't care if it's gifted, but what label you put on him, it certainly an ideal child to teach reading to. So I don't know, the question about whether it's important.
3. **Q:** So is this concept of gifted an important one or is it not?
**A:** Well, to me it would be useful in terms of if I could get something for that child that would be challenging to him and helpful to him to bring out what, the potential I see in him. But it’s of no value to you if you can’t give a program or...

**Q:** So what you just said was...

**A:** Well, if you haven’t got something to offer to a child that you’ve labeled, whether it be at the bottom end or the high end, there’s not much point labeling. There’s not much point maybe labeling the child at the bottom that he’s got a perceptual, or whatever kind of problem, if you can’t somehow give him some therapy to help correct...

**Q:** Do something...

**A:** So the same for the gifted. Why label them gifted if we aren’t going to challenge them in some way, or offer them something different. Cause to be just called gifted to me, a child that thinks he’s gifted might be the worst hellion on two feet.

**Q:** True, true.

**A:** But like I see this little kid, he must know he’s smart. There’s no way that he’s been in this school 3 years and people saying “look at that Rob. Look at him read.” Like you, you must, he must know that he’s got the ability to read and write.

4. **A:** Look at that Rob. Look at him read.” Like you, you must, he must know that he’s got the ability to read and write.

**Q:** So he knows. He knows where he’s at.

**A:** But he doesn’t...you never hear tease another child for being dumb or being slow. I never see him really go and help them either, but he....I’ve never seen him tease them in terms of, like he can be a mischievious [sic] little ______, but so often the child that maybe is struggling more, I don’t know if this is the old pecking order, but they peck the next person? I don’t see that coming from Rob and like...for the brightness he’s got, you....it’s quite amazing.

**Hilary**

1. **Q:** At the beginning you said I know we really can’t use this word, but where is that where is it coming from.

**A:** I guess out of the era that you can’t label. I’ve had that drilled into me. You cannot label because you give false expectations, or you or you pigeon hole. You say the child has a learning disability therefore he’s gonna have one. I’ve come from that era of education. And yet in reality everyday life, let’s face it. there are some gifted kids.

2. **A:** I know you’re not supposed to label.

3. **A:** I think it’s interesting when you said would you tell, like would you use the term with a parent. And I think it’s part of - you know here that our relationship with parents is very thick. If anything too much so I think. So yeah here you probably would. Now if I were a teacher with 20 kids in the class and saw the parents once or twice a year, I probably would have to be very careful before I came out with this “gifted.”

4. **A:** Let me just mention Sue; very very proud hearing impaired youngster. Doesn’t even wear a hearing aid. She has the world’s worst speech. She is extremely bright. She was one of those because she was reading at a grade 6 level when
she was about 10 years old they decided to call her genius. It’s been a very difficult label for her to live up to.

5. A: ...decided to call her genius. It’s been a very difficult label for her to live up to.  
Q: Who calls her genius?  
A: Everybody. You know a genius. ______ too bad she doesn’t have the speech. That was the big thing about her. Too bad she doesn’t have the speech because she’s just so brilliant. Well I’ve come to the conclusion that this particular youngster is having a really rough time living up to this image.

6. A: And she’s having social problems. She works moderately hard to keep up moderate grades. She would love to be in Seventeen magazine and be that type of young lady. And she’s homely and overweight. I spend a lot of time with her but because of this too - because of this image of genius she will not allow me to tutor. Do you see what I mean? All the tutor, all the tutors I meet in the School Board, they’re always tutoring, reteaching language and all that kind of stuff - with most of mine I wouldn’t touch, - Why fool around with their language when it’s better than mine. And then I run into a kid like Sue yeah it needs to be cleaned up but because of her attitude and her sensitivity towards her being a genius, you can’t touch it. Really can’t. You’d have to know her.

7. Q: Is she saying you cant’ touch it because I should know how to do that myself or it’s certainly good enough because I am a genius.  
A: She figures it as being a lot better.

8. A: Here’s this kid. You have to be careful too. I’m not taking away from the fact that the child reads at a university level now. ... But then you see what you also run into and most people call her gifted. If you asked around of course you’d go through two weeks of people worrying about the term gifted but once they relaxed this is gifted and this isn’t -whatever, she would be categorized.

9. A: Teachers, regular teachers will, if you ask to come right out with it, do you think this English is from a - they won’t use the word gifted of course. You know. Only a jerk like me would use the word openly. It’s true. people won’t use it.  
Q: What’s the feeling there?  
A: Oh they would say bright. They don’t go much further than very bright.  
Q: What’s the fear associated with the word gifted, label?  
A: I don’t know. That’s their problem. If you showed it to them they’d say, oh she’s fairly average. Anyway, that’s fine, it’s fine. Then if maybe I said it’s Sue, she’s that profoundly deaf kid that can’t talk. Oh, I’ll look at this in a different light. So if you have enough experience with what truly is gifted hearing impaired people then ...

10. Q: Would you ever use the term like this when you’re talking about the kids. Do you feel comfortable about using it?  
A: Yes.  
Q: What labeling kids themselves like that in the school system or in just in meetings with other teachers or whatever?  
A: Well I’d have to be pretty sure except ...I’m bad and people take home what I say with a grain of salt. I would say. I’ve told B that he’s brilliant. I’ve told him he’s gifted. I told his parents he’s gifted. See. I don’t have a problem with that. They can sort of take it. I tell them it’s my opinion. In my opinion. And I know that I have done testing if they want testing. Doesn’t really mean too much. If they want testing I can show you testing. I can show the father he’s brilliant.
Ken

1. Q: Like when you talked about these kids with other teachers, or in the staff room, or whatever, do you talk about this being gifted?
   A: No.
   Q: What was...?
   A: Might mention the fact that they’re very smart, or that they’re able to do this very well, or...but the word gifted, no. I don’t think it would ever be mentioned.
   Q: I wonder why that is? Any ideas?
   A: I don’t know.
   Q: It’s not the first time it’s come up. I mean, this happens all the time, you know.
   A: It’s a good question because I suppose when you really think about it, if you have them at the other end, you don’t mind putting that label on them.
   Q: We do that fast enough don’t we?

2. A: The word isn’t used but I think the connotation is there. People... it’s sort of...
   Q: That’s a good point...
   A: ...people know the ability of the kid. They accept it, don’t need the label

3. Q: But what about the label of gifted for you? What, does that have any meaning, or association...?
   A: Positive and negative connotations you mean, or?
   Q: Whatever. I mean, you said you don’t use it very much or haven’t used it.
   A: The thing about giftedness is that you have no control over it. It just happens. So from that point of view, I don’t see it as being either positive or negative. I think it’s great. I mean, if you have a kid that is gifted. It is a gift. It’s like playing the piano. It is a gift. But I don’t look at it as being positive or negative any more than you would look at a, well, yeah, you could look at a mentally retarded person, or that far into the scale or whatever, and you say, oh gee, isn’t that a shame and all that kind of stuff. It’s not negative, it’s just that something that you have no control over. It happened.

4. Q: If you label a child gifted, does that put any expectations on that are maybe not there if you weren’t labeled?
   A: I could think of a couple of kids that think they’re gifted. Not only hearing impaired but hearing kids as well, and socially it ruins them. They end up trying to express themselves, or telling their peers that they’re smarter than they are. It just doesn’t work socially, or otherwise. Yeah, you may run into a problem like that if you start saying, okay, you’re gifted.

5. A: Expectations of this child that were above or beyond what she was capable of. In fact she was treating her as if she was hearing and ignoring, and we want that of course, in some instances, but this was to the detriment of...ignoring the, you know, the fact that the child...
   A: ...Well, it’s like I was saying. You’re talking 10 to 20 points on her average. You have to accept that. That’s the way it is. Again, one of those things that’s a given, and work with it. Yeah. I don’t know. I don’t like labeling kids anyway. I don’t like labeling anybody. And when you label then, and something comes with it. A stereotype comes with it. Which brings me back again to this idea of why anybody would really want to go out and find these gifted kids. What is the purpose of this? The question that you were asking. I’d have to know what is it...Why do you want to know?
Laura

1. Q: labeling and why identify, why identify. Because, like, you said well, why would we want...are we trying to create?
   A: Oh, yes. Creating an elite, but that’s...well that’s often question isn’t it, when you start talking about programs for the gifted?
   Q: It can be, it can be. Absolutely, yeah.
   A: I’m not sure that I don’t feel that way to a certain extent myself. It’s like there’s so many kids there who need help, why would anyone spend time with those kids who are going to make it just fine anyway, you know.

2. A: I guess I’m too much of a practical person to even think about the identification unless I knew why we were going to. If it were going to improve the quality of instruction that they got.

3. Q: What about labeling the kids? did you ever use the term gifted with Kate for example? or was it ever used, is it ever used in the staff rooms when you’re in the staff rooms for coffee? Is that label ever used?
   A: I don’t hang around staff rooms for coffee the way my schedule goes this year. I don’t. So I don’t know.
   Q: But in your experience would you be talking about kids using that label.
   A: No, it’s not, no, no.
   Q: What about labeling the kids, using that label for kids. You know, when we talked about yesterday we were identifying, we were creating an elite group. But what about the label issue?
   A: I don’t know. The labels for all the other kinds of groups have come to be such an issue that it’s laughable. I was told the other day that special needs was not the right one to use anymore. I’ve forgotten what it was. Challenging needs perhaps?

4. A: Yes. I guess there’s probably a resistance amongst most people to even identify or label gifted or to do anything about them. I don’t know.
   Q: Maybe there is. I’m not quite sure why except...
   A: It’s because it’s a democracy and we’re all supposed to be equal and it’s okay for people to be not quite equal to us that way. But it certainly isn’t all right for them to be more equal. I don’t know.

5. Q: I think there is. I think there is part of that. I think it is. It’s very interesting. And I’m not quite sure where it comes. What about expectations? Do you think there are expectations if you label a child?
   A: I think there may be a feeling that you’re going to over-inflate the child’s ego perhaps by letting him think that you think that he’s smart? I don’t know....We wouldn’t want him to be proud and puffed up would we? I mean it’s wonderful to have a good self-image, but that’s what you get from playing basketball. It’s not what you get by being super brilliant in school. I think maybe there’s still the old-fashioned kind of notion that being gifted means being an egg-head, and out of balance? Brain, kind of person?

Liz

1. A: Being labeled as being gifted? I don’t think it’s helpful in any way. The only thing that I can ....the only impact that I can see, or result that I can see that it would have would be negative in that negatives from other kids, that they may be intimidated by someone who’s labeled as gifted. Negative in relation to
teachers having either unrealistic expectations of the kids or being disappointed then in the kid. The kid’s not allowed to be human to just be himself. I can’t think of any positive label that we can ______, the label would make it ______. Just like I can’t think of any positive label that comes out of being retarded or athletic.

2. **A:** You know, people know, we know each other, and we know what, how we feel about each other and where we see that person’s strengths. But what I see as one student’s strength, another teacher may not see that. The student may not show that teacher that strength. He may show another teacher a different strength and so it’s very important that we stay multi-dimensional, and I think labeling makes us cardboard figures. It makes us unidimensional and we stop, once we put a label on something, we stop thinking about it, and reacting to it.

3. **A:** It makes us unidimensional and we stop, once we put a label on something, we stop thinking about it, and reacting to it.
   **Q:** Do you think that most teachers feel the way you do about that?
   **A:** I have no idea. I don’t know why they wouldn’t. I don’t know whether they’ve thought about it. It’s not necessarily a discussion they’ve had on the issues.

4. **Q:** What does it do? I mean, what is it used for then? Is there a use for it? Is it an important term?
   **A:** To be labeled gifted?
   **Q:** The gifted label, yeah. I mean, another way of putting that might be if you woke up tomorrow morning and all of a sudden that word g-i-f-t-e-d no longer existed, would it be any great loss?
   **A:** I can’t see that it would be. If we had an educational system that enriched all kids, provided a variety of learning, ways of learning that met, you know, that would meet the different needs of different kids including accelerated classes, and put the decision on learning back with the students, right, then, you know, right now, it seems to me that people feel they need the term gifted because they’re the ones that identify students and they’re the ones that pull the students from regular classes and they’re the ones that set up gifted programs, and they’re the ones that make the decisions about students’ learning. They being the teachers, the adults, the parents, anybody but the kid.

5. **A:** ...and they’re the ones that make the decisions about students’ learning. They being the teachers, the adults, the parents, anybody but the kid. It’s not kids who set up classes for gifted. So I think that it’s only there to help adults identify kids to pull from regular classes and put into enriched classes. I mean why...I’m sort of thinking out loud here. If kids could make decisions about their own learning, right? I can’t see that they would label themselves or each other in that way. As a matter of fact it could be quite... it could be considered oppressive or discriminatory. I’m kidding now, but you know, really, to be labeled, you know, why would it be any different than being labeled Jewish, or being labeled female, right? I mean labeling, you know, is really quite a restriction. It’s a pigeon hole.

6. **A:** I can’t see that they would label themselves or each other in that way. As a matter of fact it could be quite... it could be considered oppressive or discriminatory. I’m kidding now, but you know, really, to be labeled, you know, why would it be any different than being labeled Jewish, or being labeled female, right? I mean labeling, you know, is really quite a restriction. It’s a pigeon hole.
7. A: ...labeling, you know, is really quite a restriction. It’s a pigeon hole.
Q: very much so.
A: And that’s not the kind of thing that we should be doing in education I don’t think.
Q: So you said... you made an important distinction. I think you said if we had, you know, and we don’t, and so then you said so under the conditions in which we’re living it seems that this label provides a program, or allows an entry point or exit point, or gets funding, allows for funding. Is that the work that that term does really?
A: It seems to be. Am I being too naive?
Q: Oh, no, no, no! I’m just exploring this. I don’t...(phone rings)

8. A: ...so what we’re doing is actually, is we’re going through, we’re delineating more clearly but we’re putting labels on the delineations so at the point where we have no more delineations to make, maybe we can take all those labels away, and then we’ll be aware of all the different kinds of needs that need to be met and all the different teaching strategies that need to meet those needs.

9. A: ...right, and along...okay...two things came to mind when you were talking. Along those lines, what we did in the 1950’s is we labeled kids with special needs and we pulled them out and put them into special classes and now we realize, oh, gee, they don’t learn very well just from each other. Let’s mainstream them back into regular classes and what we’re trying to do now is do the same thing with gifted. Oh, let’s label them, pull them out, put them in special classes. 20 years from now they’ll say, oh, they’re not learning very much from each other. Let’s mainstream them back. So, yeah, so we’re going sort of backwards, but also when you look at trying to label, or when you look at labeling kids what we’ve been doing is we’ve been labeling the most obvious kids whose needs have not been met. Whereas in the regular classroom, you know, it’s more subtle, but a lot of their needs are not being met as well. So, it’s a lot easier to label really obvious needs whereas we need to be, you know, aware of a lot more subtle needs and a lot more pervasive boredom. I don’t sort of paint a black picture about education but when you label, you’re only looking at obvious stuff and there’s a lot of subtle stuff that’s not being addressed.

Naomi

1. Q: What was it called? The ...
   A: SIP, a SIP kid. There’s a label...
   Q: ...You didn’t want to look.
   A: No, I didn’t want to know why.
   Q: So what about the label. Like, gifted labels a kid, right?
   A: It does. But not the same way. It’s positive. Gifted is a positive label, you know. Whereas when you get a child come in who is SIP or whatever they’re called, you know, the name changes every year, right. But anyway, when they’re special ed. for some reason obviously they’re having some real problems with learning and I would rather find out what the problems are myself. Whereas when a child comes in gifted, it’s not derogatory. You know, you don’t have to worry about what it is and what kind of problem is she going to give and how will I have to change my curriculum for this child, and I have to accommodate her differences. It’s not the same thing, you know. It really isn’t. And when a teacher sits down and says, well this child has special needs and this one is
really bright or blah, blah, blah. Well the ones that are really bright, you don’t worry about them too much until you see that they really need to be challenged and then you do that kind of thing. So it’s a different kind of worry. It’s not a worry.

2. From story of Josh in Helen’s sort file on students (MH20,21)

Richard

1. Q: What about...you sort of alluded to this...what about the idea of labeling these kids. You were questioning a few minutes ago, you know, the gifted label and the sort of, chance for opportunity and all the kids should have an opportunity to develop their talents. What about labeling those kids? Where does that label, what’s that label sound like to?

2. A: ...I think if you take the teachers here for example, you talk about individuals, you don’t talk about the particular program. I mean, we have the...it’s not in existence anymore because it’s been absorbed into the academic, but we had the master program which was for multiply handicapped and then we still have the ________ department which is deaf-blind plus. Other handicaps as well.

Teachers tend to talk about the kids. They don’t talk about the class that they’re in, or whatever. I think it’s more _____ individually directed. You know, this kid can do this, he can’t do that. This one’s a real pain the neck because, are you having this problem with that one, why are you having this problem? But labels, I don’t....administratively, they’re useful. It’s easier to go to the financial director and try and stump up some money for a particular identifiable group of people than to say, well, I’d like to institute this program for “these kids”, you know. Well, I mean.....When it comes down to it it’s all to do with money, because it’s tight, and, I mean, if you’ve got the time you cant do it, and if you haven’t got the time you can’t do it, and the only way you can get more time is to put more money into the system. So, as far as labels and drumming up money, yeah, they’re useful. It’s like Special Olympics. People that go into the Special Olympics have a particular public persona and you can attack people’s wallets by using that. And it’s the same for the gifted program and it’s a great...I mean, you can come up with some really good reasons why you should get extra funding, even outside of education, from the corporate body, especially for a gifted program. I mean they’re not going to put money into the less able, but they’ll put money into gifted who are going to be tomorrow’s leaders, right, you know. And the way things are going, it’s quite frightening really, from my perspective, but I think corporate dollars are going to have to be put into education somewhere down the line, because public dollars are just going to run out and we’re going towards sort of more American, American system.

3. Q: ...next year, and one of them was gifted, would that change your expectations, or the way you were thinking about dealing with that class, or, as a teacher, what would your reaction be?

A: Oh, I think your expectations change with labeling, obviously. The research shows that. I mean, you tell a teacher these 3 kids are gifted and say “Oh, they’re gifted, are they?” Then you don’t tell the next one and then you see what their scores are, you know, between the two teachers and the way they mark. I think your perception is...Perhaps we ought to say they’re all gifted. So everybody’s gifted.
4. A: you tell a teacher these 3 kids are gifted and say “Oh, they’re gifted, are they?”
Then you don’t tell the next one and then you see what their scores are, you
know, between the two teachers and the way they mark. I think your perception
is... Perhaps we ought to say they’re all gifted. So everybody’s gifted.
Q: Because why? Implied there is that your expectations change.
A: Your expectations...
Q: Would be higher?
A: Yeah, would be higher, yeah, yeah. I think the teachers... especially with the
hearing impaired, their expectations are too low. They tend to be too low.

5. A: I think the teachers...especially with the hearing impaired, their expectations are
too low. They tend to be too low. Oh, he can’t do this, he can’t do that, poor
little deaf kid, you know....when in fact they can do a damn sight more than
they do a lot of these kids, you know. The problem is that it’s not just our
perception as educators of the deaf, but it tends to be a professional perception
through the teaching population and what really really annoys me is where you
have a student in an integrated setting and he comes back here when he’s 14, 15,
and he’s totally illiterate, functionally illiterate.

6. A: perception through the teaching population and what really really annoys me is
where you have a student in an integrated setting and he comes back here when
he’s 14, 15, and he’s totally illiterate, functionally illiterate.
Q: Illiterate.
A: Illiterate, yeah. He has no...very poor social skills. His communication skills,
very poor and then you read the report. This kid’s been swung through the
public school system because he’s a poor quote, unquote, poor little deaf kid,
and that just chokes me up. I get really annoyed with that one. But it’s not
only...the shame is that it’s not only the teachers in the public school situation
that still do that. I mean it’s getting better because I think...one of the things
that we are doing here is getting out into these schools and getting information
over to the teachers so that’s improving. But...yeah, expectations are really low.
The labeling, well, labels, labels, I don’t...you can call the kid what you like. If
you develop...if an IEP has been developed and is following the student
through, it doesn’t matter what you called him, you can see what he can do and
what he can’t do, or what he’s achieved or what he needs to achieve.

7. A: ...labels, I don’t...you can call the kid what you like. If you develop...if an IEP
has been developed and is following the student through, it doesn’t matter what
you called him, you can see what he can do and what he can’t do, or what he’s
achieved or what he needs to achieve. So perhaps that wouldn’t make that much
difference. Perhaps you might say, you might shorten up the timetable on him
and say, okay, I want you to be able to do this , this and this by that date instead
of the other date further down the road. That may be where your expectations
change there. But I don’t think that would be too difficult a problem for teachers
to deal with the labeling. Yeah, I could see a gifted program as a gifted program
in a particular school for administrative purposes, you know, for it to be noted at
the board level, but at the grunts level, at my level, I don’t think it would make
any difference whatsoever.

8. Q: Do you think society has expectations or do deaf people have expectations for
these kids? Is that a problem? Might that be a problem for the kid as well? That
they’re said to be gifted in some way?
A: I think...well, I mean you could label...you could turn around and see
somebody and put them into a quote, unquote gifted program and they could be
labeled and identified as gifted. That does not necessarily mean that you've got
to pressurize them to death, okay. I think it's...any gifted program I think has
got to be cooperative program between the teacher and the student, so any
pressure that's coming should, in fact, be coming from the student and not from
the teacher. But I don't, I mean obviously, if they're getting to a situation where
the... in fact flogging themselves to death over it, then the teacher should
intervene and say, look, okay, relax a bit, you don't have to do this, or readjust
the program in some way. No, I don't necessarily think...I think it could be a
problem if...but it depends on the individual. It really will depend on the
individual. They can cope with a problem of, if it is a problem, of people having
these expectations but people have expectations of you anyway, you know.
That's part of the learning process.

Ted

1. A: I don't want to label anyone as gifted. That's not something I like to do but I
could say, for the sake of this, that he does have the characteristics of someone
with giftedness. If you recall, at the very beginning of this interview I said that I
do have some trouble identifying individuals, pointing out people in particular. I
prefer to look at people as...on the individual basis and just see what they are
able to manage. I mean, everybody goes through various stages of adaptation,
and I think some people just go through it easier than others. Some find it easier
to go through these stages, easier than others might. But I don't really want to
label any individual as being gifted. If I label them, perhaps that will set a _____
of false expectations on the person.

2. A: Well I guess one thing that we must understand, that it doesn't matter how
gifted a person is, each person has to go through various stages of development
in their life which means that they will have to experience various kinds of
activities, learning situations. If you expect them to be able to handle more
information or different concepts at a certain level, that they're not ready for,
that could be difficult. If you expect too much, I think in doing that you can
cause, maybe I'm wrong, but I think you can cause some confusion and perhaps
that would be due to lack of experience with that kind of learning situation.

3. A: But I think you can cause some confusion and perhaps that would be due to lack
of experience with that kind of learning situation. For example, let's say if I was
to be with this gifted person. However, let's say they haven't learned physics,
the concept of physics in grade 11 level. Perhaps they're in grade 7. If I were to
give this student a lesson, expecting that they would be able to figure it out, I
don't think that would be a good thing at all. You have to remember that
giftedness does not necessarily mean that they can do it. They still have to go
through the stages of learning. And perhaps the difference between someone
who is gifted and who isn't, the gifted person may go through the situation or
the lesson quicker.

4 Q: No. Have you got any criteria in your head. Like you said, you know, well,
Michael you'd call gifted, and Charles you'd call gifted. You seem to be able to,
you know. So it seems to me like, you've got some criteria in your head, you
know, that allows you to call some kids gifted and some kids you're not sure of,
and that's what I'm interested in.

A: That's a hard question to answer. Well, I guess as I've said before. I hate to
label because I'm not sure. Maybe I should have labeled Janet and Cody both as
gifted. I don't know. Maybe I shouldn't have labeled Michael and Charles as being gifted. Maybe I shouldn't have done that!

5. A: To label, may have some benefits certainly. If you identify, you may become more inclined to provide more challenges than the average student. Let me tell you, if we don't label, it is interactions between the students and the teachers. If both have good communication skills than the natural process, it would be natural for the student, or the teacher to provide the student more challenging work without even realizing that the student may be gifted or not. I would rather see the natural process take place. I think the most important thing that happens is for the teacher and the student to have clear communication both, that can see each other. Both are able to assess each other and be very open to each other. I think that's the best way for a teacher to find something more, or give challenges to the student and I do want to avoid labeling and segregation. Kids, if you do that you can cause, maybe problems. I mean, with this segregation, it would make them, maybe they'd have a false self-concept. I'm not sure.

6. A: Kids, if you do that you can cause, maybe problems. I mean, with this segregation, it would make them, maybe they'd have a false self-concept. I'm not sure. I remember one day at Gallaudet with my roommate, his name was Lockhart. And he told me, he said, oh, I've got an IQ of 144. So he considered himself to be gifted. He said that. And I thought, well, that's fine, okay. He never completed University. He dropped out. He never studied and he works with computers or something somewhere. Maybe he lost his incentive to push himself. You know, he figured, maybe he figured he was bright enough, why study? And so I've seen that happen with a few students at University.

My other roommate was very bright, and never studied, played hockey incessantly. He boozed it up all the time and, you know, eventually dropped out. A very bright person. A leader. And so I've seen this happen as well. And so it makes me wonder if the label in fact doesn't give, maybe not give, but it removes the incentive for somebody to push themselves. They may be over confident and there's something I'd rather avoid and I'd like to leave it to the natural process.

Tina

1. Q: Above 130?
   A: On the Performance.
   Q: On the Performance Scale. Does he know that, or do any members of his family? Has he ever been called gifted?
   A: Yeah, his parents know that. His parents know that. I think that there's a hesitancy to use labels. If we look at his Performance Scale and call him gifted, we can look at his verbal skill and call him dull/normal or borderline.

2. A: I would be hesitant to put too many labels on Mark since we're using him as an example right now, because he's very difficult to teach. And given any label, people write kids off. Oh, well, you know, he's LD. Or oh well, you know, he's got, you know, dull normal language skills. Or oh well, he's hearing impaired. Or, why should I put in all this extra effort and modification. He's supposed to be gifted, he can do it. He's just not trying. You know, so, too often, all the stereotypes that come with the label make it difficult for people to see the real child, and make it too easy for them to jump to conclusions. So I'd rather that they just work with Mark. I don't want them to work with a gifted child, or a
language delayed child, or even for that point a deaf child. I just want them to work with Mark.

3. A: I just want them to work with Mark.
Q: Would that apply to Judy and to Barb and to Terry?
A: Absolutely. I think that’s one potential risk of taking a hearing-impaired child and labeling him gifted is that it will remove from them access to language remediation. Now do you know what I’m saying?
Q: Meaning that
A: Meaning that, if this child is gifted, why do they get resource room time?
Q: Right...
A: Resource room time is for kids who have trouble. If this child’s gifted, they’re just not trying enough. If this child is gifted, and they’re only getting B’s, that’s their problem.

4. A: If this child is gifted, and they’re only getting B’s, that’s their problem.
Q: So the recognition that there are still some areas where those kids can be helped will be smothered, smoked, clouded.
A: Exactly. Simply, you know, no one would question that a gifted person with cerebral palsy might still need their wheelchair. But a gifted person with a hearing aid isn’t. It isn’t as obvious that they still need their assists, their technical assists, their educational assists, whatever assists. It doesn’t become that obvious.
Q: That’s right...
A: So, to give them this set of assumptions because the child is quote/unquote gifted, may deprive them of something else, just because of stereotypes that go with labels.

5. Q: So how come why, how come why, gifted exists, the term?
A: I think we all acknowledge that there are children who perform above the norm. Who are extraordinary in some areas, and we recognize that, but it’s very difficult for a lot of professionals to recognize that you could be gifted at one thing and almost retarded in another area. I mean, this to them is a huge discrepancy to try to fathom. They’re going to throw one or the other out. Good old cognitive dissonance here. That, you know, it just doesn’t make sense to have the gifted child who can only read at grade 3. Therefore what am I going to believe? That he’s gifted and should be able to do it, or that he really can only read at grade 3? Now which makes more sense? I’ll believe that he’s gifted and lazy. Because then I don’t I don’t have to remediate. If I believe that he’s really reading at grade 3 I have to take on responsibility to remediate. So it’s easier to believe one or the other than to try to reconcile the two.

6. A: So I would rather have them focus on remediating his reading problem than to say, or by the way, he’s gifted. You’re off the hook. No. They still have responsibilities but it’s very hard for some of them, for a regular classroom teacher, which is where these children for the most part are, in a regular classroom. For them to accept that they not only have a special needs child, but he’s multiply classified. This is just too unusual for the regular classroom teacher at this point in our systems.

7. Q: You just said, or to talk about, you know, things like very bright, in other words not using gifted. What… one seems safe and the other seems a little bit...
A: Yeah
Q: …dangerous somehow. Is that....?
A: Well if you have a very bright child in your class, you don’t have to tell anybody there’s no separate funding category for the bright child. This child could still be part of a regular classroom. And they might be the A student in the classroom, but they’re still part of the regular classroom. Therefore the regular teacher will still say, “Aha. I can teach this child. I can be relaxed around this child. This child does not throw me. You put a label on that child that falls outside what is perceived as the traditional regular classroom and you’ve got a teacher in panic I mean isn’t enough that he’s deaf? And I have to wear this equipment and now you want me to do enrichment or something too? You know. Tell somebody they have a gifted child, they feel obligated to do enrichment. Which is fine because we’re asking them to do language enrichment anyway. But....

Q: So is the expectation _______ difficulties in the perceptions then?
A: It’s the perceptions within the regular school system that make me very hesitant to use labels.

Q: Would you ever use labeling with Barb when you’re talking to her? Would you call her gifted? Her parents must know she’s gifted.
A: I think I would. For one thing, Barb’s very mature. This is not going to upset her self-concept. It’s not going to give her new and unrealistic expectations or lead her into any paths down, you know, the direction of snobbery. This will not happen with Barb. And if I say to Barb, “Barb,...

8. A: “Barb, look. You and I both know you’re gifted” It would be in terms of reinforcing her self-concept and saying, yes, I know you can do it. I know who you are.
Q: And she knows who she is too.
A: That’s right. That’s right.

9. Q: As long as they fall very bright, then that child is within this range and then gifted. Some teachers, are they, do you think, what are teachers’ reactions to having a gifted child in their class? Like what, forget hearing impairments...
A: It’s not positive. Many teachers see a gifted child as someone who creates extra work for them because they have to keep doing, finding more new ways to challenge them. They cannot simply just teach the mainstream curriculum. So this child creates extra work. This child upsets lessons. You know, instead of being able to draw the class through step by step they shout out the answer from the beginning. They do create a factor in the classroom that the teacher can’t predict, therefore can’t manage or control within that plan. And so, a lot of teachers do not enjoy having gifted children. An anecdote which does not relate to a gifted hearing impaired child, but just a gifted child, where she was quite thrilled with the teacher she has this year. She says, “you don’t really mind that I’m gifted do you? Lot’s of teachers don’t like to have me. I know they don’t like to have me. They said they liked to have me but they really don’t like to have me in their classroom. I had a teacher who really didn’t want me last year because I just made extra work for them. You know, they felt like they had to do something different for me, and you don’t mind having me, do you” You know, that acceptance, the child feels accepted or not accepted because of the way they learn.
Appendix C

Illustrative HyperQual Cards

Project Name: Gifted-Hearing Impaired-Teachers' Perspectives

General Project Notes: [HyperQual copyright (c) 1989 Raymond V. Padilla]

This project involves 12 teacher interviews, and stories of 43 children. The data are in narrative form, and have been transferred into hyperqual from MSword. This is the first information card in the stack.

HyperQual Data Stack: "Helen"

Card No. 1 Card ID 3006

HyperQual Site Data Stack: "9"

Site: 9
Researcher: MAB
Date:

Site Face Card. Put general notes about the site here.

Interview with Naomi...it took place in my office and I found it a little bit awkward, perhaps less relaxing than being on her turf. she had some very neat ideas and she is just the greatest teacher in my opinion..knows and cares about the students and is especially good in helping students take responsibility for their own learning; want to explore and ask for clarification re. her ideas about how she sees things differently as a result of the different setting she is in now.

Card No. 2 Card ID 8988
The interview starts with this card, and the first 25 pages are here; then a new card holds the last 25 pages of the interview. I have kept track in my note book, that Naomi's is the 9th interview (site)

HyperQual Site Data Stack: "site"

Researcher:

Notes:
The interview starts with this card, and the first 25 pages are here; then a new card holds the last 25 pages of the interview. I have kept track in my note book, that Naomi's is the 9th interview (site)

○ Data Dump

Card No. 3 Card ID 9879

HyperQual Site T&S Stack: "s.abilities"

Site: 9

Researcher:

Source Card: 6680

Source: stack "ts."

Tags:  Sort Tag: abilities

dg abilities comparison group
meaning

Exemplar:
don't have one set definition. So one child...I had a really...I had a divergent thinker in my class, really...

And I considered him gifted in that area. He could come out with all different kinds of ideas on the subject. More than I could come up with and I'm thinking, yeah, this kid is gifted in that area. I mean he could come up all kinds of ideas and even though he didn't do math that well, he didn't do his writing that well, he was a divergent thinker, and I think gifted in that area, you know. So, and you could almost look at...
Appendix D

Consent Form

Title: Perspectives of Giftedness: Teachers of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students
Investigator: Mary Ann Bibby, (403) 492-3697
Research Supervisor: Perry Leslie, (604) 228-4942

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. You are being asked to participate in two, possibly three interview sessions. I have some questions that I wish to ask, but we do not need to follow a set path through those questions. I am most interested in receiving your own views on issues related to your experiences with students whom you think might be gifted. The interview will last approximately one and a half hours and I will record the sessions for transcription at a later date.

Your part in this project will be (a) to participate in the interviews; (b) to read the transcription of your interview and react to it for clarification, or to make changes; (c) to assist the researcher in gaining an understanding of the meanings you wish to convey through description or explanation. The total time necessary for the above will be between 6 and 8 hours over a period of 3 to 4 weeks.

The results of this research will be used in completion of Doctoral Degree requirements from the University of British Columbia. In addition, it is anticipated that journal articles will be published.

All information contained in the interview will be confidential. There will be no way for others to identify either the interviewee, or people talked about by the participant. All names of people will be changed, and school settings will be placed in different cities. Age and sex may be changed to assist in maintaining confidentiality.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Just before we start the interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this project you have several very definite rights.

First, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time. You are free to withdraw (without prejudice) from this interview at any time.

Your signature on the bottom of this page indicates that you have read this form and that you willingly give consent to this interview. Please feel free to contact me at anytime should you have questions.

Signature ___________________________ Date__________________________

____________________________________________________________________________
I have received a copy of the consent form including all attachments (where applicable)

Signature ___________________________ Date__________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

Please send me a copy of the results of the project _____yes _____no

Address _______________________________________________________________________

Phone _______________________________________________________________________