INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION AND GIFTED EDUCATION:
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES

by

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(Under the Direction of SALLY J. ZEPEDA)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the perspectives of elementary school teachers assigned to the gifted program in one school system in Georgia. The researcher sought to understand how elementary school teachers of gifted students characterized their past supervisory experiences and if these teachers believed they should be supervised to better support the teaching of gifted students. Convenience sampling was used to select teachers from one school system in Georgia. Data from three semi-structured interviews with each participant were analyzed using the constant comparative method. During cross-case analysis, eight categories emerged demonstrating how the participants characterized their past supervisory experiences as positive (freedom to do the job, moral support, problem solving, material support), or negative (lack of curriculum guidance, lack of voice, lack of appreciation for the gifted program, supervision as evaluation). Findings indicated that teachers in the gifted program received positive supervision in the form of freedom in curriculum development, moral support in the form of encouragement, and assistance in solving problems with parents. Findings also revealed negative supervision in the form of limited curriculum guidance, little coordination of curriculum materials between schools, lack of teacher input into program development, lack of appreciation for the abilities of gifted students and the gifted program, and the use of evaluation observations as supervision.
Findings also revealed teachers of gifted students wanted quality supervision and to be curriculum guidance, collegial program development, supervisors knowledgeable about gifted appreciated for the work they do.

INDEX WORDS: Instructional Supervision, Gifted Education, Teacher Evaluation, Professional Development
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my mother and father Doris and Clarence Williams. Who I am and everything I have been able to accomplish can be traced back to you. You provided a loving stable home in an unstable world. Our home was a place where we felt safe to express ourselves and to develop our own unique personalities. You were always there to celebrate our accomplishments, to comfort us in our disappointments, and to encourage us to succeed in whatever we chose to do. You taught us by example through the life you led. You taught us to work hard, be honest, and always do a good job. You taught me so much, but I think most of all you taught me to enjoy the simple things in life. The paths we chose for our lives were probably not the ones you would have chosen for us, but you accepted our choices and offered your support. Your faith and guidance carried us through many trials. I can’t begin to thank you for all that you have done for me, but I want you to know that I recognize the constant sacrifices you made for me.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Three million students, approximately 5% of the student population, are being served in gifted programs in the United States (Hardy, 2003). All 50 states recognize the need for special programs for gifted students and have some program model in place (Desmond, 1994; Passow, 1993). In Georgia, an estimate of 5% of the population or approximately 10,867 students at the elementary level are reported as gifted and are served in special programs (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003).

The majority of gifted students are identified at the elementary level. The early years are critical for full development of intellectual ability (Wardle, 1999). Experts in gifted education believe that a stimulating early environment for gifted students develops the innate “gifts and talents” of students (Shore, 1997; Wardle, 1999). Silverman (1993) emphasized the unique characteristics of gifted children that make them particularly vulnerable and in need of modifications in the classroom. The first experiences of gifted children set the climate for the remainder of their education. If gifted students are not challenged by well-trained teachers at the elementary level, they become bored and unresponsive through the remainder of their education (Clark, 1997; Shore, 1997; Wardle, 1999). Research indicated that gifted children learn differently, and they require a different instructional approach from teachers. In realizing the importance of programs for gifted children, it is important that teachers of gifted students are given the support needed to be successful in the classroom (Rogers, 1986, 1989).

Given the need for special techniques and approaches to teaching these students, do teachers of gifted students need specialized supervision to meet the needs of these students? This
question led the researcher to the development of the present study. Gifted students need to be connected with “gifted” teachers who can provide the intellectual stimulation, emotional guidance, and enthusiasm needed to develop fully the potential of the gifted child (Haensly, 2001). Stanley (1979) indicated that gifted students need individualized programs to meet their needs.

Experts in the field of gifted education agree that standards should be set for teachers of gifted children, and that states should require certification or endorsement of teachers of gifted students (Cramer, 1991; Heath, 1997; Karnes, Stephens, & Whorton, 2000). Karnes et al. (2000) reviewed the certification and endorsement of gifted teachers and found the number of states requiring special classes to teach in gifted programs had only increased from 27 states in 1996 to 28 states in 2000. Hansen and Feldhusen (1994) found that teachers having three to five graduate classes in gifted education were more proficient in instructional practice than teachers with no special training.

Gifted teachers in Georgia must take special classes and have the gifted education endorsement added to their professional teaching certificate to be qualified to teach classes for gifted students (Georgia Department of Education, 2004; Karnes et al., 2000). Since special training is required to teach gifted classes, do gifted teachers also have special supervisory needs? This study investigated the perceived supervisory needs of teachers in gifted and talented programs at the elementary level.

Statement of the Problem

Elementary teachers in the gifted and talented program teach students from kindergarten through fifth grade, usually in more than one subject area and often at more than one location. In a survey conducted in 1982, Sloop revealed that over half of the teachers in gifted programs are
itinerant and have two or more grade levels grouped together for instruction. Itinerancy adds to deepening the sense of isolation felt by teachers of not “belonging” to any one school (Benson, 2001). Often teachers of the gifted have multiple supervisors, they report to the principal at each school and to a program director at the county level (Benson, 2001; Zepeda & Langenbach, 1999). Having multiple supervisors sometimes leads to conflict in expectations and obligations. Another problem caused by itinerancy is lack of communication between gifted teachers and supervisors. Dangel and Walker (1991) asserted that teachers of gifted students need to “establish and maintain clear lines of communication with supervisors” (p. 90). Little time is available for gifted teachers to meet or to talk with other teachers of the gifted. Moreover, communication with regular classroom teachers is difficult because gifted teachers teach all grade levels and have limited time to meet individually with teachers at each grade level.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of four elementary teachers of gifted and talented students in relation to their views on supervision. This study examined the way elementary teachers in the gifted and talented program in one county of Georgia are presently being supervised, and how this group of teachers believe they should be supervised to not only better serve the students they teach but also to grow as professional educators.

This study sought to shed light on the needs of teachers who taught at the elementary level, grades kindergarten through fifth grade, whose assignment was in the gifted program. A case study approach was used and four teachers participated in this study.

Background of the Study

Marland (1971) was one of the first to draw attention to the need for special programs for gifted students. The Marland Report estimated that 1.5 to 2.5 million of the 41.6 million school
children were gifted, but few were being served in special programs. Gifted programming was found to receive a low priority at the federal, state, and local levels (Gallagher, Weiss, Oglesby, & Thomas, 1983; Marland, 1971; Sternberg, 1995). Ignoring the development of these talents through differentiated programming for gifted students cost both the individual and society (Gallagher & Weiss, 1981; Marland, 1971; Ulm, 1985; Zettel, 1980). According to Passow (1993), the Marland Report emphasized the need for the federal government to make education for the gifted and talented a “national priority, and to encourage the states to include this priority in their own planning” (Passow, 1993, p. 30).

*National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent* (1993) provided a more recent analysis of programs and services for gifted and talented children. The National Excellence report was more significant than the Marland Report because it drew from more complex statistical databases and provided the framework to monitor trends and developments in gifted education (Desmond, 1994). According to the National Excellence report, America’s brightest students were performing so far below their “expected potential” as to cause grave concern for the nation. The crisis was explained in this way: “We, the American people, our schools, and our elected officials are failing to challenge, motivate, inspire, and, if necessary, drive our most talented and gifted youngsters to achieve at the limits of their potential” (p. 225).

Because of the unique characteristics and needs of the population of students served in gifted programs and the special curriculum taught in gifted classes, do teachers in the gifted program need a special type of supervision, and if so, what are the particular needs of gifted teachers in relation to supervision? Supervision has undergone many changes (Glanz & Neville, 1997; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000; Zepeda, 2003). Supervision is often viewed as a means of evaluating teacher performance, exercising control over teaching methods and curriculum, and
determining future employment (Ebmeier & Nicklaus, 1999; Pajak, 1993). Research has indicated that supervision only for evaluation does nothing to improve teacher performance and can even have a negative effect on the morale of teachers (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998). Supervision is an “act of instructional leadership” (Andrews, Basom, & Basom, 1991, p. 97). According to Andrews et al. (1991) teachers are the school’s “greatest resource” (p. 98), and they must be helped to become the best that they can be. Andrews et al. also report:

We must move beyond simplified notions of supervision as the formal pre-conference process, observation, post-conference process. Instead, we must think of the act of supervision as the sum of the personal interactions between and among teachers and the principal that lead to the improvement of instruction. (p. 100)

The main purposes of supervision are to improve classroom instruction and to promote the professional growth of teachers (Blumberg, 1974; Cogan, 1973; Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998). Supervision has been described as the “glue of a successful school” (Glickman et al., 1998, p. 6). Supervision should be used to reinforce effective teaching methods and to encourage teacher development. One function of a supervisor is to serve as an instructional leader. Andrews et al. (1991) found that high achieving schools were strongly correlated with strong instructional leaders. Sullivan and Glanz (2000) stated that supervision that is both developmental and evaluative caused teacher confusion and lack of acceptance. Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) found that informal visits and conferences with teachers were more effective than formal observations.

Much research has been conducted on methods of supervision, the role of the principal in supervision, and teacher perceptions of supervision (Ebmeier & Nicklaus, 1999; Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998). Experts in the field of supervision agree on the need for more research from the perspective of teachers (Sergiovanni, 1985; Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998). The researcher found some studies of teacher perspectives on supervision, but a gap in the literature exists in regard to
the perspectives of teachers in gifted and talented programs. This study will address the needs of teachers in gifted and talented programs in relation to the way they are supervised.

Towers (2001) noted the lack of literature on gifted teaching and teachers. Articles were found on methods and resources for teaching gifted students. Towers (2001) reported the suggestions of the Ministry of Education in British Columbia indicating gifted programs should:

be different in pace, scope, and complexity…provide opportunities for students to interact socially and academically with both age peers and peers of similar abilities address both the cognitive and affective domains; incorporate adaptations…go beyond the walls of the school and into the larger community. (p. 5)

With the differences in program designs and delivery methods for gifted education, are typical methods of supervision enough to support teachers in the gifted and talented program?

Experts in gifted education have compiled lists of characteristics found in teachers of the gifted (Kitano & Landry, 2001; Rogers, 1989). Rogers (1989) stated that two of the most important characteristics of a gifted teacher were the ability to recognize the unique qualities of each gifted child and to encourage growth in their area of giftedness. Gardner (1983) identified one of his intelligences, interpersonal intelligence, as a desirable factor in gifted teachers. Can interpersonal characteristics be developed and maintained in teachers of the gifted through effective supervision or are these natural abilities found in some individuals and not others?

The different models and delivery methods used in gifted education add to the difficulty in supervising gifted teachers. A survey of 135 teachers of gifted students in Idaho found a variety of teaching models and program options were used to teach gifted children (Rash & Miller, 2000). Rash and Miller (2000) also found that as the educational level of the teacher increased, the number of activities offered to the students increased.
Research Questions

The following overall questions were addressed in this study.

1. How are teachers in the elementary school gifted programs supervised?

2. Do teachers in the elementary school gifted program believe they should be supervised to better support the teaching of gifted students?

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism was the theoretical framework that guided this study. Symbolic interactionism is the way individuals interact with the people and things that have meaning for them (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism is appropriate to use in this study because perspectives are a central concept of symbolic interactionism. This study investigated the perspectives of four elementary teachers of gifted students in regard to supervision.

Blumer first used the term, symbolic interactionism, to describe an approach to sociology based on the philosophy of mind and action developed by George Herbert Mead. Mead argued that humans responded to external stimuli as symbols that required cognitive translation before action could be taken (Dingwall, 2001). Over time, a culture develops a “shared symbolic system” (p. 236) which is learned during the course of socialization (Dingwall, 2001).

Blumer (1969) stated symbolic interactionism was based on three premises:

1. An individual acts on things based on the meaning the individual has for those things.

2. The meaning the individual has for things is based on social interaction between the individual and others.
3. When an individual interacts with items, the individual interprets and modifies the meanings of those items.

Studying the perspectives of teachers of gifted students in regard to supervision falls within the framework of social interactionism in that teachers construct meanings about supervision related to their teaching of gifted students.

Blumer (1969) stated that meaning determines action. Mead (1934) believed that all human action was influenced by the individual rather than outside influences. In this study the participants shared their experiences of supervision through the meanings they attached to their interactions with supervisors. By interacting with others, we construct meanings that impact how we view our situations and how we act and react to others. The researcher examined the gifted teacher’s perspectives constructed through the interaction of the teachers with their supervisors.

Significance of the Study

A review of the literature revealed a large amount of research on the supervision and evaluation of teachers (Glanz & Neville, 1997; Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998); however, the researcher found few studies related to the supervision of teachers in gifted and talented programs. A study by Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) examined what teachers want, need, and get from supervision. Teachers reported, among other things, that their best supervision was supervision that both validated and empowered them. Zepeda (2003) stated that teachers valued supervision that recognizes “expertise and their positive contributions” (p. 150) and encourages teachers to “make critical judgments; ask critical questions of their practice; and revise methods based on active inquiry over time” (p. 137).

Benson (2001) studied the perspectives of itinerant teachers related to their itinerant status, and he reported the problems associated with supervision. Benson’s study grouped all
itinerant teachers together rather than separating teachers by subjects or programs taught. Many teachers in gifted and talented programs are also itinerant and share many of the same supervisory concerns; however, gifted teachers may have supervisory concerns that are not related to being itinerant. Beaver (2002) studied the supervision of middle school teachers in fine arts in regard to supervision. Beaver’s study provided some insight into the supervision of fine arts teachers, but nothing directly related to gifted and talented teachers.

A few studies from the perspective of teachers in the gifted and talented program have been conducted. Rash and Miller (2000) in a survey of 62 teachers in Idaho found a relationship between the highest degree obtained by the teacher and the number of activities offered to gifted students. As the education of the teacher increased so did the variety of activities offered to the students. Rash and Miller emphasized the need to establish and to maintain open communication between gifted teachers and their supervisors. However, Rash and Miller’s study did not directly examine supervision from the perspectives of the teachers in their study.

Supportive supervision is one of the main requirements necessary in developing effective programs for gifted students (Dangel & Walker, 1991). Dangel and Walker (1991) surveyed 97 teachers of gifted students to determine supervisory behaviors they found to be irritating. Behaviors related to attitude were found to be more irritating than behaviors associated with the supervisor’s competence. While this study was from the perspective of the gifted teacher and related to behaviors of supervisors, it did little to indicate the specific needs of gifted teachers related to instructional supervision for growth and development.

Teacher perceptions on the quality of support they receive from supervisors can greatly affect their morale and their ability to serve their students (Glickman et al., 1998). Research into the perspectives of teachers in the gifted and talented program in regard to supervision might
provide a deeper understanding into the needs of teachers in gifted and talented programs and insights into more effective supervision for gifted teachers.

Assumptions of the Study

The researcher made the following assumptions.

1. Elementary teachers in the gifted and talented program have perspectives about the supervision they receive and those who supervise them.

2. Elementary teachers in the gifted and talented program openly and truthfully described their perspectives.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms were used in this study.

**Elementary school**: A school spanning grade levels pre-kindergarten through five.

**Regular classroom teachers**: Teachers who teach one grade level in one school.

**Supervision**: The process of working with teachers to improve instruction.

**Supervisors**: Any person assigned to supervise teachers, including principals, assistant principals, central office staff, department chairs, curriculum directors, or other designated persons.

**Gifted teachers**: Teachers teaching in a gifted and talented program in grades K-5.

Limitations of the Study

The research was conducted in only one county in Georgia, limiting the ability to generalize the findings to a larger population. The research was also limited to a purposeful sample of teachers who were teaching in the elementary gifted and talented program, excluding teachers at the middle and high school levels.
Overview of the Research Procedures

A qualitative case study approach was used which included in-depth interviews with four elementary teachers in the gifted and talented program in one county in Georgia. The researcher sought to uncover the perspectives of these teachers and their experiences with instructional supervision. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Participants were shown copies of the transcript and given the opportunity to make additions, corrections, or clarifications to what they shared in the interviews. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used. From the data, emergent themes were identified and then reported first for each case and then as cross case findings and subsequent analysis.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 presents the basic rationale for this study through the background, problem, and purpose of the investigation of elementary teachers teaching in the gifted and talented program and their perspectives about instructional supervision. Chapter 2 presents the theory and literature related to gifted education and the literature related to the purposes and intents of instructional supervision. Chapter 3 describes the methods used in this study. Chapter 4 presents the first case study, Tina Henry. Chapter 5 presents the second case study, Nell Sims. Chapter 6 presents the third case study Mary Drew. Chapter 7 presents the fourth case study, Donna Mann. Chapter 8 presents the findings and the analysis of the data. Chapter 9 provides a discussion of the findings, implications, and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of teachers in the gifted and talented program in relation to their views about supervision. This study examined the way elementary teachers in the gifted and talented program in one district of Georgia are presently being supervised, and if and how this group of teachers believe they should be supervised to not only better serve the students they teach but also to grow as professional educators.

The guiding questions of this study were:

1. How are teachers in the elementary school gifted programs supervised?

2. Do teachers in the elementary gifted program believe they should be supervised to better support the teaching of gifted students?

The gifted and talented program has become a major component in the American education system. Three million students, approximately five percent of the student population, are being served in gifted programs in the United States (Hardy, 2003). The impact of the teachers on this population of students indicates the need to examine the supervisory procedures used to aid the professional development of this group of teachers.

A qualitative approach was taken in this research using a case study method. Interviews were conducted with four elementary teachers of gifted students to investigate the gifted teacher’s perspectives about supervision. This chapter discusses the literature relating to gifted education, teachers of gifted students, and issues of instructional supervision.
Gifted Education

The history of promoting education for students with high ability goes back to the beginning of this country when Thomas Jefferson urged the cultivation of students with talents for the betterment of the state, asserting that without support and encouragement these talents would be lost (Gallagher & Weiss, 1981; Ulm, 1985). Jefferson advocated tests to identify the most intelligent students and proposed that these students be educated at William and Mary College at public expense. Jefferson wanted to educate these youth so the country would have competent leaders (Hildreth, 1966; Silverman, 1993).

Students with exceptional abilities need to be challenged to perform in relation to their abilities. Gallagher and Weiss (1981) warned, “To ignore the education of gifted and talented individuals is to cheat both them and the larger society” (p. 1). Winebrenner (2000) argued, “Gifted students have a right to an education that takes into account their special needs” (p. 53).

In the early part of 20th Century, intelligence testing was used as a measure to sort those students who would benefit from schooling and those who would not. Intelligence testing was then generalized to use in the military to identify “officer quality” soldiers (Coleman, 1999, p. 17). Interest in advancing the education of the brightest students during World War II led to accelerated curriculum to push these students through school so their abilities could help with the war effort (Coleman, 1999; Stephens, 2000). Following World War II, the federal government had an interest in maximizing the potential of these students to aid in the growing arms race (Ulm, 1985; Zettel, 1980).

The Cold War period resulted in an even greater push to improve education, especially in the areas of science, mathematics, and foreign languages (Passow, 1993; Ulm, 1985; Zettel, 1980). Coleman (1999) reported the initiatives to improve education were “based on the nation’s
needs rather than the needs of individual students” (p. 20). The National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA) provided funding to enrich the curriculum in math and science and to provide for staff development for teachers who would deliver the new curriculum (Passow, 1993; Stephens, 2000). However, improvement efforts were directed at the general student population not specifically for gifted children. The 1969 amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), more specifically Public Law 91-230, called for the development of special programs for the gifted and talented students and made these programs eligible for funding under Titles III and IV (Ulm, 1985; Zepeda & Langenbach, 1999; Zettel, 1980).

In 1971, the Marland Report drew attention to the need for special programs for gifted students. Marland reported that out of the 41.6 million school children, it was estimated that between 1.5 and 2.5 million of these students were gifted and talented, but a very small number were being served in special programs. Marland also indicated that differentiated programming for gifted students was a low priority at the federal, state, and local levels with states doing little or nothing to develop programs. The Marland Report emphasized the need for the federal government to make education for the gifted a “national priority, and to encourage the states to include this priority in their own planning” (p. xii).

In 1974, Section 404 of Public Law 9-380, the Special Projects Act, created a department in the United States Office of Education which operated a clearing house for gifted and talented education, provided funding grants to local and state agencies, and provided grants for training, research, and model projects. The Special Projects Act was the first time gifted education received federal funds for education (Ulm, 1985; Zettel, 1980). In 1978, the Gifted and Talented Act, Public Law 95-561, extended funding for gifted programs (Ulm, 1985; Zettel, 1980). Congress asserted the critical need of this legislation for the nation because the nation’s greatest
resource for solving critical problems is its gifted and talented children. The thinking was that unless these special abilities are developed in children during their elementary and secondary school years, their talents would be lost, and gifted children from economically disadvantaged homes would more than likely not be able to afford adequate educational services on their own (Ulm, 1985; Zettel, 1980). This law was repealed in 1981 consolidating gifted education into a block with 29 other programs to receive funding. Not until the passage of the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act in 1988 was federal funding for gifted and talented education reestablished (Passow, 1993).

The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, the only federal legislation devoted exclusively to the needs of gifted and talented students, provides funding for the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, as well as grants that focus on the needs of minority students, students with limited proficiency in English, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and students who are disabled. The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act supports a coordinated program of research, demonstration programs, and personnel training to help schools identify and meet the needs of gifted and talented students (Berger, 1992; Passow, 1993; Sternberg, 1996).

Originally authorized at $20 million in 1988, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act is currently authorized at $7.5 million in 2004 (National Network for Families of Gifted Children, 2004). In 1995, funding for the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act was cut but not totally rescinded (Sternberg, 1995). The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act is currently at risk of more financial cuts. These cuts are representative of the indifference and often-negative feelings toward gifted education (Gallagher, 1994; Sternberg, 1996). Schema (2004) stated that the emphasis of the No Child Left
Behind Act, federal mandates to improve test scores, coupled with declining revenues have forced some school districts to cut or to eliminate gifted programs.

Summary of Gifted Education

The federal government, recognizing the need for leaders to guide the country, sought to develop the talents of American youth to insure the status of the United States as a world leader. As early as the 1700s, Jefferson proposed a free education for promising students who were unable to afford an education on their own. During World War II, curriculum was accelerated, and brighter students were propelled through schools as quickly as possible. Their talents were used to further the war effort, and later in the growing arms race. The tensions of the Cold War in the 1950s and the space race in the 1960s increased the United States need to improve education for the benefit of the nation. The Marland Report (1971) drew attention to the need for special programs for gifted and talented students, and encouraged the nation to make the development of gifted programs a national priority.

Legislation providing funds for gifted education began with the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA). The NDEA provided funds to improve education for the general population, in the areas of mathematics, science, and foreign language. The 1969, Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments called for the development of programs specifically for gifted and talented children, and provided funding for gifted programs. The 1978 Gifted and Talented Children Act increased funding for gifted and talented programs, until it was repealed in 1981. In 1988, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act was passed, reestablishing funding for gifted and talented students. Funding for gifted education has decreased from 20 million in 1988 to 7.5 million in 2004, and is at risk of future cuts (National Network for Families with Gifted Children, 2004).
Need for Gifted Education

The education of gifted students in special programs has been debated since gifted students were first identified. In 1945, *General Education in a Free Society: A Report of the Harvard Committee* proposed that an equal education did not mean providing the same educational program to all students; but rather, an equal education was creating programs to meet the needs of all students in regard to their talents and abilities (Clendening & Davis, 1980). In a report on the gifted programs in the Spencerport Central Schools in New York, Nyquist (1980) declared “Equal opportunity does not mean the same length or type of education for everyone. True equality consists in treating unequal talents equally” (p. 24). Fiedler, Lange, and Winebrenner (2002) restated, “Equality in education does not require that all students have exactly the same experiences, rather, education in a democracy promises that everyone will have an equal opportunity to actualize their potential” (p. 111). Feldhusen (1998) stressed that all students “are entitled to challenging and appropriate instruction if they are to develop their talents fully” (p. 738).

In an attempt to uncover attitudes toward gifted programs in West Texas, Cavin (1980) surveyed a random sample of 232 administrators, teachers, and parents. The consensus of opinions indicated that gifted education, while not the highest funding priority, should receive at least the same support given to underachievers, as money invested in educational programs for the gifted would benefit the society as a whole. In 2003, Title I received $11.7 billion dollars in funds for economically disadvantaged students and special education received $9.7 billion through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), while gifted programs received $11.7 million in federal funds, 7 million of this for research and the rest for local district programs (Hardy, 2003). Parents of gifted students in Tennessee fought to keep gifted education
under the umbrella of special education so gifted programs could receive funding from special education funds. Spokeswoman for the Council for Exceptional Children, Van Kuren (2002) stated, “It is as egregious to fail to give a child with gifts and talents an appropriate education as it is a child with disabilities” (Education USA, 2002, p. 6).

Parke (1989) suggested, “Although they may appear to be achieving, it cannot be assumed that gifted students, when left to their own devices, will achieve at a level commensurate with their abilities (p. 5). Later, Winebrenner (2000) affirmed, “To assume that gifted students are learning because they achieve acceptable standards on state assessments is unrealistic” (p. 52). Teachers must provide differentiated learning opportunities for gifted students to move them beyond the basic competencies. Some states have specified learning expectations at “exemplary levels” (Winebrenner, 2000, p. 53) to document the achievement of gifted students. If educators expect students to achieve at exemplary levels, teachers must provide instruction sufficient for them to achieve at higher levels.

Wardle (1999) asserted that gifted programs are needed because many gifted students do not reach their full potential. Gifted students often “turn off” doing the minimum amount of work to maintain good grades, become behavior problems, and even drop out of school altogether. According to Wardle, gifted students experience these problems because “they have unique learning needs” (p. 20) and these needs are not being met. Gifted students need to know the relevance of what they are expected to learn and often rather pursue their personal interests instead of the assigned topics. Gifted students may challenge authority or appear to be emotionally and socially immature (Clark, 1997; Wardle, 1999).

Gifted programs have long been criticized as being contrary to the American principles of democracy and equality (Delisle, 2001b; Sternberg, 1996). Delisle (2001b) answered the
complaints of gifted education being “undemocratic” or “elitist” by stating that universities, such as Harvard, are not democratic. They admit students selectively based on strong academic performance. It is a myth to believe “everyone will do well and be challenged when they get tossed into the same pot for English, Math, or Science” (Delisle, 2001b, p. 55). Delisle compared gifted education to a racquetball game where players are paired according to skill. Highly skilled athletes would be bored and the less skilled players would be intimidated when competing with each other. The same principles apply in gifted education. Opponents of gifted programs argue that removing gifted students to special classes diminishes the challenge for the remaining students. Delisle proclaimed:

Every student has the right to be challenged, including the gifted ones. If their placement in a heterogeneous class is to enhance everyone’s learning but their own, that is unethical, as gifted students are relegated to the role of intellectual indentured servants, paying interest on bills they never owed. (p. 55)

Gallagher (1994) noted there was ambivalence toward gifted students both in the classroom and in the general population. Sternberg (1996) evaluated “signs” (p. 168) in our society that indicated a negative view toward the gifted. Some of these signs are listed below.

1. The U.S. Congress cutback funds for the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, the only source of funds for research in gifted education.

2. The continuum of student abilities in education run from low to high with special education on the low end and gifted education on the high end. Funding for special education and gifted education are far from equal; literally 99.9 percent of funds for special education go to the low end of the continuum.

3. Legal protection for the rights of minority groups is common in our society. Affirmative action programs protect the rights of certain minority groups and sometimes women. Laws are in place to protect persons with disabilities.
4. Children with learning disabilities must be identified and served according to strict laws. Gifted children, however, have to be identified, but often are not served in any particular way.

5. Gifted programs and teachers in our schools are often the last to be put in place in good times and the first to be dismissed in bad times.

6. Many parents of gifted children have chosen private schools over public schools.
   “Urban schools without special programs for the gifted have seen reductions in their gifted populations” (Gallagher, 1994, p. 169).

7. Not only society, but also the field of psychology is indifferent to gifted education.
   Small studies have been done in gifted education, but the only major study on the gifted was Terman’s study. There is no recognized “psychology of the gifted” (Gallagher, 1994, p. 169) as there is a field of mental retardation.

Sternberg (1996) also offered some reasons for negative views toward gifted education:

1. Gifted students have more intellectual resources than most, why do they need more?

2. Many people view giftedness as “an already developed capacity rather than a capacity that needs nurturance and support to develop” (p. 170).

3. Few parents have gifted children; therefore, gifted education is viewed as other people’s problem.

Attitudes toward gifted children and gifted education must change before behavior toward the gifted can change (Feldhusen, 1994; Sternberg, 1996). Sternberg (1996) indicated:

Our gifted are our most valuable natural resource. We need to start viewing our gifted the way we would any other valuable natural resource to be conserved, developed, and used for the good of all. … Already, we are more dependent on other countries for innovation than we ever have been before, and our dependence is increasing, not decreasing. (p. 171)
Hunter (1990) conducted a study of attitudes toward gifted and talented education in Arkansas. Participants included 188 regular classroom teachers, 71 teachers of gifted students, and 85 school superintendents. Using a form of the Weiner Attitude Scale, data were collected, analyzed, and the following results were reported:

1. Overall attitudes toward gifted education were positive.
2. Significant differences existed between the attitudes of regular classroom teachers, teachers of the gifted, and superintendents.
3. A strong correlation existed between attitudes and the number of hours completed in gifted education.
4. The program model used in the school did not account for a significant difference in attitude.

This study indicated a possible lack of understanding of the characteristics of gifted children and the concepts of gifted education that might be corrected by including classes on gifted education in teacher training programs.

Schroeder (1994) in discussing National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent indicated we are shortchanging the gifted. Gifted students are part of a “quiet crisis” because they sit “bored and unchallenged” (p. 74) in classrooms geared to the average student. Most gifted students know a third to one half of the curriculum before they begin the school year, and few teachers differentiate the curriculum to satisfactorily challenge these students (Schroeder, 1994).

Peckron (1996) believed all learners have the right to an appropriate education based on “individual differences and unique learning needs” (p. 58). According to Peckron, many gifted students experience a “ceiling effect” (p. 58) making it difficult to measure true achievement.
Since many gifted students master learning objectives one to three years prior to entering that grade, achievement scores may reflect past knowledge rather than current learning. Programs are necessary that take into consideration the advanced knowledge of these students.

In 1993, the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented examined classroom practices used with gifted students in the regular classroom. A survey of third and fourth grade teachers, 3,993 working in public schools, 980 from private schools, and 4 samples from public schools with high concentrations of African-American students, were questioned about the instructional modifications used to meet the needs of gifted students. Major findings of this study indicated that teachers only make minor modifications to curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students. Recommendations of this study were to continue to offer gifted programs where students are taught by specially trained teachers using strategies and techniques to meet the needs of gifted students (Archambault et al., 1993).

Summary of Need for Gifted Education

According to Sternberg (1996), Americans should value gifted students as one of the nation’s treasures. The abilities of gifted students must be cultivated if they are to reach their potential. Advocates for gifted education agree that special programs are needed to meet the needs of gifted students (Sternberg, 1996; Wardle, 1999). Teachers must provide differentiated learning opportunities to challenge gifted students to work to their potential. When not challenged to perform, gifted students often do the minimum amount of work to maintain good grades. Winebrenner (2000) emphasized that good grades do not indicate a student is learning. Many gifted students already know much of the curriculum by the time they enter the classroom. Most classrooms are geared to the average student, with little differentiation for gifted students.
(Archambault et al., 1993). Students with advanced knowledge do not need the same lessons and activities as less knowledgeable students.

Research on attitudes toward gifted students and programs revealed varied impressions. Studies by Cavin (1980) and Hunter (1990) indicated overall positive attitudes, and a belief that gifted students deserve a curriculum that challenges them. Gallagher (1994) and Sternberg (1996) found indifference and negative attitudes toward gifted students and programs. Examples of negative attitudes include: lack of funding for gifted education as compared to special education, flight from public schools to private schools, and a lack of mandated programs for identified gifted students. The belief that gifted education is elitist, and gifted children will “get it on their own” without special assistance are some reasons for the neglect of gifted education (Delisle, 2001b; Fiedler, et al., 2002).

Configuration of Gifted and Talented Programs

Programs for the gifted were not mandatory prior to the Marland Report in 1971 with only two states having a mandated program for gifted and talented and only three states having a “permissive program” (Passow, 1993). A permissive program is one in which the states gave school districts permission to establish a gifted and talented program. Presently all 50 states have recognized the need for programming for gifted and talented students and have some program model in place (Parke, 1989; Passow, 1993). According to Hardy (2003), only about 30 states have statutes on gifted education, and most of the states expect the local school districts to implement the program. In developing an effective program for gifted students, it is necessary to examine the district in which the program will be implemented. Maker and Nielson (1995) reported, “No single model or way of teaching the gifted can provide the comprehensive curriculum needed by the students” (p. xii). An effective program might consider several factors:
1. The philosophies of the teacher, school, and community
2. The characteristics, and interest of the students
3. The teaching styles, strengths, and preferences of the teacher
4. Parent concerns
5. The physical setting of the school. (Maker & Nielson, 1995, p. xii)

Wardle (1999) stated, “Providing for the needs of gifted children does not mean simply increasing the amount and difficulty of academic tasks” (p. 20). According to Wardle, gifted programs should integrate all disciplines, include greater depth and a faster pace, allow students to individualize and extend the content, and provide for creative and artistic development.

Three main approaches for direct service to serve gifted students in the United States include acceleration, enrichment, and grouping for special instruction (Clarkson, 2003; Georgia Department of Education, 2004). Indirect services include collaborative teaching, mentorship and internship programs, and joint enrollment/postsecondary options. Collaborative teaching provides time for the gifted specialist and the content area teacher to collaborate in developing challenging assignments for gifted learners. Mentorship/internship programs allow a gifted student to work with a mentor to explore a specific interest or occupation. Joint enrollment/postsecondary options provide for students to enroll in college classes while attending high school (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). Within states, there are many variations in educational delivery models. The state of Georgia offers several options for gifted programming including:

1. Resource room
2. Advance content classes
3. Cluster grouping
4. Collaborative teaching

5. Mentorship/internship


(Georgia Department of Education, 2004, pp. 4-5)

Each local system translates the state policies into an instructional program designed to fit individual system needs (Hardy, 2003; Parke, 1989). Parke (1989) suggested when choosing program options for gifted students “it is best to think in terms of combinations of programs rather than a single configuration” (p. 49). Program options can be combined or offered alone. For example, a program may combine a pullout program with cluster grouping within the regular classroom, or the gifted teacher may assist the regular classroom teacher in delivering the educational program to the students within the classroom.

Acceleration

Acceleration as defined by Davis and Rimm (1989) is “any strategy that results in advance placement or credit” (p. 105). Educational acceleration has been championed as the most effective way to increase achievement and to decrease boredom in the classroom (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Feldhusen, Proctor, & Black, 2002; Van Tassel-Baska, 1986). Kulik and Kulik (1991) reviewed research on acceleration and found that gifted students who were accelerated into higher grade levels performed as well as the older students already in the grade, suggesting that gifted students benefit from this form of instruction. Rogers and Kimpston (1992) reviewed 11 forms of acceleration: early entrance to school, grade skipping, non-graded classrooms, curriculum compacting, grade telescoping, concurrent enrollment, subject acceleration, advanced placement, mentorship, credit by examination, and early entrance into college.
Early entrance into school or entering at a higher grade level is one option for young gifted children (Parke, 1989; Rogers & Kimpston, 1992). Procedures for early entrance into school or entering at a higher grade could include interviews with family, observation of the child to assess ability and maturity level, and tests to determine readiness, intelligence, and coordination (Davis & Rimm, 1989; Parke, 1989). Some students may enter school as much as two years earlier than the normal beginning age (Rogers & Kimpston, 1992). Early entrance would allow bright students to benefit from cognitive challenges from the beginning of their school careers. Gifted students could form peer groups with students of equal ability, reducing the social and psychological adjustments of moving to an advanced group at a later time (Rogers & Kimpston, 1992). Gould, Thorpe, and Weeks (2001) reported on an accelerated program piloted in the Wichita Public School System in 1998-1999 to identify and teach three and four year old children. The program success led the school system to adopt a modified accelerated program in six schools in the Wichita area. In this program, available to all, students progressed at their own pace through enrichment and accelerated activities (Gould et al., 2001).

Grade skipping allows a student to bypass one or more grade levels. Feldhusen et al., (2002) noted that while school personnel are concerned with the possible social and emotional damage of grade advancement, schools should be concerned with the damage done when students are held back in classes below the student’s ability level. Telescoping of grades reorganizes curriculum to shorten the time a students takes to cover the curriculum. For example, middle school might be shortened from 3 years to 2 years, and high school might be shorted from 4 years to 3 years (Rogers & Kimpston, 1992). Curriculum compacting is the practice of moving capable students quickly through the material they know to allow them to move to new, more interesting topics. The curriculum is tailored to meet the needs of the gifted student by
identifying the knowledge gaps and deficiencies. Able students bypass mastered skills and content and move rapidly through the curriculum (Gallagher, 1998; Rogers & Kimpston, 1992; Willard-Holt, 2003). Reis and Renzulli (1992) stress the importance of matching the learner’s ability to the difficulty of the task. Ideally, the task should be slightly above the learner’s current level. A less familiar acceleration option is the non-graded classroom that does not differentiate grade levels. Students are allowed to move through curriculum materials at a pace compatible to the student’s motivation and ability level (Reis & Renzulli, 1992; Rogers & Kimpston, 1992).

Taking subjects or courses out of sequence, advance placement programs, taking college courses in high school, duel enrollment, and early college entrance are other forms of acceleration most often used at the secondary level (Davis & Rimm, 1989; Rogers & Kimpston, 1992; Sisk, 1988). Students in advanced content classes are grouped homogenously on the basis of achievement and interest in a specific content area. High achieving students and students with specific interest in a content area may be allowed in these classes even if they are not labeled as gifted. Advance content classes are usually taught in grades 6-12. Teachers of these classes must have appropriate content area certification and have gifted certification, or at least 10 hours of staff development in characteristics of gifted students and curriculum differentiation for gifted students (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). Advanced Placement programs are one of the most effective means of meeting the needs of gifted students at the secondary level (Swiatek, 2002; Van Tassel-Baska, 2001). Van Tassel-Baska (2001) reported that selective colleges give preference to applicants who show evidence of advance placement classes or duel enrollment in high school and college. In a longitudinal study through the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY), Swiatek (2002) dispelled the myths that acceleration causes students to lose interest in the subject and to experience gaps in knowledge of content. The SMPY study found
that acceleration did not diminish student interest in mathematics, nor were there gaps in content knowledge. In fact, acceleration helped students to establish areas of interest and to build a stronger knowledge base for future learning. Van Tassel-Baska (2001) reported some of the benefits of advanced placement:

1. Improved motivation, scholarship, and confidence of gifted and talented students over time;

2. Prevention of habits of mental laziness;

3. Earlier access to, and completion of more advanced opportunities. (p. 127)

Mentorship programs, in which a student is paired with a mentor to explore a profession of interest, are sometimes used at the secondary education level (grades 9-12) but should also be considered for elementary programs (Sisk, 1988). Parke (1989) indicated that mentorship programs depend on the availability of mentor volunteers and the screening of these volunteers to assure appropriateness. Davis and Rimm (1989) suggested that mentors begin by working with smaller groups to present information before being paired with an individual student.

Special classes and special schools that place gifted students in a self-contained homogenous group for instruction allow students to study the curriculum more thoroughly using more in-depth learning strategies (Sisk, 1988). Davis and Rimm (1989) suggested special homogenous classes, either full-time or part-time, are beneficial for gifted students. Special schools provide traditional subject matter, enrichment, and accelerated learning to challenge gifted students (Davis & Rimm, 1989). Special schools are most often seen in densely populated areas, and these schools may be public, private, or magnet schools (Davis & Rimm, 1989; Sisk, 1988).
Enrichment

Davis and Rimm (1989) defined enrichment as “strategies that supplement or go beyond standard grade-level work, but do not result in advanced placement or credit” (p. 105). Several models provide for the enrichment of gifted students. Some prominent models include the Purdue Three-Stage Enrichment Model for Gifted Education, (Feldhusen & Kolloff, 1986), the Individualized Programming Planning Model (Treffinger, 1980), and the Enrichment Triad/Revolving Door Model (Renzulli, 1977; Renzulli & Reis, 1985).

Feldhusen and Kolloff (1986) insisted that gifted programs should begin by considering the unique needs of each student. The Purdue Three Stage Enrichment Model (Feldhusen & Kolloff, 1986) begins with activities to teach process skills and basic content knowledge, moves to teaching more complex strategies that can be used for advanced studies and projects, then provides opportunities for students to experience self-directed study through projects using the skills learned in previous activities (Feldhusen & Kolloff, 1986; Renzulli, 1986). Goals of this model include:

1. The development and maintenance of good self-concepts

2. The stimulation of abilities of bright students by providing opportunities for interaction

3. Independent work in challenging areas (Renzulli, 1986, p. 127)

Students have a variety of strengths and talents that need to be recognized and nurtured. The Individualized Programming Planning Model (Treffinger, 1980) was an approach to gifted programming that focused on the “unique characteristics, strengths and talents of individual students” (Treffinger, 1986, p. 430). This model focuses on differentiated instruction rather than on differentiated curriculum in the regular education program with additional services offered in
six programming areas: individualized basic instruction, appropriate enrichment, effective acceleration, independence and self direction, personal/social development, and career orientation with a futuristic perspective (Treffinger, 1986).

Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad Model provided three levels of enrichment, beginning with ideas that extend beyond the scope of the regular curriculum and allow the students to explore these ideas to activities that focus on processing skills, such as problem solving, and communicating, to individualized activities in which students research, write, and present to an audience (Davis & Rimm, 1989; Maker & Nielson, 1995; Renzulli, 1977). Enrichment activities work equally well in the regular classroom or in a resource room where students are pulled for instruction. The Enrichment Triad/Revolving Door Model was an effort to make enrichment programs a part of the total educational experience, to integrate the program into the regular classroom experience, to develop cooperative relations rather than competitive relations between regular classroom teachers and gifted teachers, and to minimize concerns about elitism. This model focused on flexible grouping of students (Renzulli & Reis, 1986). Schlichter and Olenchak (1992) examined the in-service needs necessary to implement a school-wide enrichment program. Success of the program was related to two factors, training of teachers and the quality of leadership in the building. A variety of training sessions were needed before and during the implementation of a school-wide enrichment program, as needs were different for teachers at different levels of implementation. Principals must believe in the importance of the program and be willing to take a leadership role in its implementation for a school-wide enrichment program to work.
Grouping for Special Instruction

More than 750 studies have been conducted on ability grouping (Kulik & Kulik, 1990; Rogers, 2002; Slavin, 1987). Gifted students have been grouped using a variety of methods (Holloway, 2003; Rogers, 2002). School population, demographics, personnel, and culture are important factors considered when choosing a method of grouping. Grouping options for gifted learners included: full-time gifted programs, cluster grouping within the heterogeneous classroom, grouping for acceleration, grouping for enriched learning in specific subjects, cross-grade grouping, enrichment pullout programs, within-class ability grouping, and cooperative grouping for regular instruction. Grouping for acceleration, enriched learning in a specific subject, and cross grade grouping were discussed in the previous section on acceleration. Within class ability grouping, short term grouping of students for differentiated curriculum, provided some benefits if the curriculum was appropriately differentiated (Rogers, 2002).

Grouping gifted students in full-time gifted programs seemed to provide the highest rate of achievement (Davis & Rimm, 1989; Kulik & Kulik, 1990; Rogers, 2002; Sisk, 1988); however, academic gains could not be attributed directly to ability grouping. Differentiated instruction and methods could have been a factor, although differentiated instruction is more easily facilitated in like-ability groups. Gubbins (1998) summarized the findings of a number of studies conducted through the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT). Studies on strategies for teaching gifted students indicated gifted students in pullout programs, separate classrooms, and special schools showed higher achievement than gifted students not involved in programs and those in programs served within regular classrooms. Students in special classes scored at the highest level of achievement, but the student’s perception of their own academic competency and their perception of acceptance by their peers was low.
Cluster grouping within heterogeneous classrooms refers to placing the top 5-8 students in the grade level in a classroom with a teacher trained in gifted education. The remainder of the class would include mixed-ability students. The rationale was that the teacher would be able to spend a significant amount of time differentiating curriculum for the gifted students (Kulik & Kulik, 1990; Rogers, 2002). Cluster grouping, which can be used in grades K-12, places gifted students into a group within a heterogeneous classroom rather than being dispersed throughout the grade level. A teacher, having gifted endorsement, provides advanced instruction to students for one or two segments a day (Georgia Department of Education, 2004).

Enrichment pullout programs group students for creative activities, critical thinking, and extending the curriculum (Clarkson, 2003; Rogers, 2002). Rogers (2002) found that achievement gains in enrichment classes were greatest when activities were linked to curriculum in the regular classroom. The terms, pullout programs and resource rooms, are often used interchangeably (Davis & Rimm, 1989; Sisk, 1988). Students served in this delivery method are usually taken from the regular classroom to a resource room at a specific time each day or each week and taught by a qualified teacher. Students are taught with other identified gifted students using higher order thinking skills, activities that encourage creative expression, and individual research projects (Davis & Rimm, 1989; Sisk, 1988). Gifted students in pullout programs scored high in achievement, and they reported feeling accepted by their peers possibly due to spending the majority of their time in a regular classroom (Gubbins, 1998).

Flexible grouping, grouping students by current interest, current level of need, or current performance level, is the most promising method of meeting students’ needs (Borland et al., 2002). Flexible grouping is most likely to meet the needs of the students, but it is the most
difficult to implement especially if the grouping extends to all subject areas (Borland et al., 2002; Winebrenner & Devlin, 1998).

Feldhusen and Sayler (1990) conducted an evaluation survey of special gifted classes in 35 school districts in Indiana to determine if classes were differentiated and meeting the needs of gifted students. Participants included 103 teachers, 45 school administrators, 20 program directors, and 5 other program personnel. The respondents found special classes beneficial to gifted learners, good for social and emotional development, and more motivating than regular classrooms.

Flood (1984), who surveyed 151 program directors, superintendents, and principals, examined the educational provisions and program models for the gifted and talented in Nebraska Public Schools. At the time of the study, 77% of the elementary schools, 48% of the middle schools, and 40% of the secondary schools had gifted programs in place. The most often used models were enrichment, independent study, extra-curricular activities, and individual counseling. The least often used were alternative schools and advanced placement. Only 50 of the respondents believed that the gifted program in their district would be expanded in the next few years. For the programs to increase, the survey suggested a need for increased financial resources, staff development, and the need for educators to become more proficient in gifted program evaluation practices.

Summary of Configuration of Gifted and Talented Programs

While gifted programs are not mandatory, all states now recognize the need for special programming for gifted students and have some type of program model in place. Effective programs should consider the philosophies of the school and community, characteristics and interest of the students, teaching styles and strengths of the teachers, parent concerns, and the
physical setting of the school (Maker & Nielson, 1995). Gifted programs should integrate all disciplines, individualize and extend content, increase depth and pace of curriculum, and provide outlets for creativity. The most often used forms of gifted programming include acceleration, enrichment, and grouping for special instruction (Clarkson, 2003). Program models vary from school system to school system within the state, and also from state to state. A combination of models and delivery methods may be combined to provide appropriate instruction for the gifted (Parke, 1989).

Acceleration is considered most effective to increase student achievement and motivation (Colangelo et al., 2004). Eleven forms of acceleration include early entrance to school, grade skipping, non-graded classes, curriculum compacting, grade telescoping, concurrent enrollment, subject acceleration, advanced placement classes, mentor programs, credit by examination, and early entrance into college (Rogers & Kimpston, 1992).

Enrichment models include strategies that go beyond grade level curriculum, and cover topics not studied in the regular classroom. Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad Model and The Purdue Three Stage Enrichment Model, two of the more popular models, provide instruction on three levels beginning with exploration of a topic, moving to processing skills related to problem solving and communicating, then finishing with individualized activities or projects.

Grouping for special instruction can be handled through pullout programs, resource rooms, cluster grouping in the regular classroom, special classes, or special schools. Feldhusen and Sayler (1990) surveyed teachers, administrators, and other program personnel to determine respondent’s perceptions of special classes for gifted students. Special classes were thought to be more beneficial to gifted students than the regular classrooms environment. Flood (1984) surveyed school administrators to assess their perceptions of the gifted program. Respondents
suggested the need for financial resources, staff development, and for teachers to be more proficient in program evaluation practices. Gubbins (1998) summarized the findings of studies of teaching strategies for gifted students. Gifted students in pullout programs, separate classroom, and special schools showed higher achievement than gifted students not in these programs.

Teachers of Gifted Students

Research on teachers of gifted students has focused on three areas: psychological traits, teaching competencies, and training programs (Feldhusen & Hansen, 1994). Kaplan (2003) stated, “Effective teachers are perceived as those who know how to make the triadic relationship between content or subject matter, pedagogy or teaching strategies, and the student population” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 165).

Frevert (1993) conducted a survey of 51 elementary principals in Texas to determine the characteristics these principals looked for in hiring teachers of the gifted. The research indicated that elementary principals looked for teachers able to create rich learning environments by promoting critical thinking skills, facilitating discussions, and asking high level questions. Personal characteristics that principals looked for included: excited about teaching, inherently curious, enthusiastic, self-confident, and creative. The desire to teach gifted learners was a major factor. Principals wanted teachers who were lifelong learners and who were willing to devote time for professional growth. Comparisons between characteristics valued by principals and characteristics valued by national experts in gifted education showed a significant difference, indicating the possible need for further research into teacher-selection practices.

Slatin (1995) studied the role of the principal in restructuring enrichment education. A case study of one elementary school in New York revealed the influence of the principal in promoting gifted education strategies for all students. Based on Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad
(1977) and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory (1983), the principal promoted professionalism and collegiality, encouraged participatory democracy and shared decision-making, and honored the strengths and leadership of the teachers.

Zeilinger (1980) investigated the role of the principal in gifted programs. Questionnaires were sent to 248 principals and 85 central office administrators and gifted program directors. A likert scale was used to rate 12 areas including planning and leadership, philosophy, goals and objectives, characteristics of gifted children, identification, financing, programs, staffing, guidance and counseling, community resources, communication, and evaluation. This study indicated a lack of communication and coordination between principals and program directors, which could increase confusion for teachers of gifted students who answer to both groups directly.

Berlekamp (1989) studied factors related to the attitudes of elementary school personnel toward gifted programs and communication between school personnel. Participants included 233 regular classroom teachers, teachers of gifted students, counselors, and principals in selected elementary schools in Missouri. Background information included participant’s total years in education and number of years at the school, the length of existence of the gifted program at the school, the number of gifted classes in the school, the number of gifted students at the school, and school population. Berlekamp found the following relationships:

1. Teachers of gifted students had more positive perceptions about the gifted program and communication than any other group.

2. Regular classroom teachers were less positive about the gifted program and communication between school personnel when there were no teachers of gifted classrooms in the school.
3. Principal’s perceptions toward communications about gifted programs were less positive when there were no teachers of the gifted program or only two or three gifted teachers in the school.

4. When there were fewer than 20 gifted students in the school, both the regular teachers and the principals had less positive perceptions of the gifted program.

The results of the Berlekamp (1989) study suggested that the absence of personnel trained in gifted education within a school lowered the total positive perceptions of gifted education programs possibly due to lack of communication about the gifted program.

Sternberg (1990) discussed how wisdom is related to intelligence and creativity. He identified six characteristics attributed to the wise:

1. an understanding of meaning and the limits to what is known,

2. the search for the understanding of others thinking,

3. judicialness,

4. understanding of ambiguity,

5. interest in understanding what is known and what meaning to attach to it, and

6. an appreciation of context.

Wisdom, according to Sternberg, would be a natural characteristic of an effective teacher of gifted children. Arlin (1999) defined wise teachers to be expert teachers with the additional sense of “relativism and contextualism” having the “humility and courage to live with uncertainty and take the risk of questioning whether they can do better and become active participants with their students in the learning process” (p. 16). Risk-taking was one of the characteristics identified with teachers of gifted students (Mills, 2003). Teachers of gifted students show courage and
willingness to experiment, knowing when and how to challenge students. Wise teachers have a “sense of what is important and what is not” (Arlin, 1999, p. 14).

Starko and Schack (1989) emphasized the need for teachers of gifted students to have confidence in their ability to use unique strategies tailored to meet the needs of exceptional learners. Chan (2001) surveyed 50 teachers in Hong Kong to determine what characteristics and competencies teachers valued in teachers of gifted students. The findings indicated that in the area of characteristics, teachers rated philosophical ideals as more important than professional predispositions, and personal attributes were rated as the least important. When rating competencies, skills such as identifying, teaching, and counseling gifted students were rated more important than “global strategies” (p. 197).

Hildreth (2001) emphasized that teaching gifted students can be a challenging and highly rewarding experience. The intensity of the gifted student to learn puts pressure on the teachers of gifted students to excel in their role as teacher. Howell and Bressler (1988) recognized the fact that gifted youth “tend to be independent learners, very persistent, highly self-motivated and self-directed, and very task-committed” (p. 226). Students with these gifted characteristics require a unique type of teacher trained and supervised to meet the particular needs of gifted students.

Rogers (2002) emphasized that the gifted and talented teacher must be “excited about learning” (p. 10), want to share that excitement with the students, and be able to appreciate how the gifted and talented student thinks and learns. Cox (1983), as cited in Rogers (2002), emphasized the gifted students need to have a teacher “who saw them as unique and directed them toward enhancing that uniqueness” (p. 12). Parke (1989) believed:

The gifted require teachers who value student abilities and encourage excellence and achievement. They need instructional leaders who understand the cost as well as the benefits to being exceptional. Such compassion and understanding are vital to the gifted as they attempt to develop their abilities to the fullest extent (p. 14).
Renzulli (1985) reported “specialization of training required to function as a competent and effective teacher of the gifted has been legally recognized” (p. 145) in one court decision in which a gifted teacher was allowed to retain her job over a teacher with more seniority but without gifted training. Renzulli stated, “within every discipline there are positions which require unique qualifications” (p. 26). Do the unique qualifications of gifted teachers require unique supervision? Most experts agree that teaching gifted and talented students requires “special competencies, training, and commitment” (p. 24).

Hildreth (2001) emphasized the importance of showing “genuine interest” (p. 229) in the academic and social well being of students. Students valued interpersonal skills and the ability to relate to students above cognitive and class management skills as being critical to working with gifted children (Maddux, Samples-Lachmann, & Cummings, 1985). The ability to relate to students was found to be a major attribute for a teacher of gifted students (Freehill, 1974; Hildreth, 2001).

Towers (2001) reviewed current thinking about what makes a gifted teacher and found a lack of literature on gifted teaching. The majority of articles available focused on strategies and resources, but few on teachers of the gifted. Gardner (1983) recognized skilled teachers as “individuals who demonstrate highly developed interpersonal intelligence” (p. 203).

Rash and Miller (2000) surveyed 62 gifted teachers in Idaho to determine the actual practices gifted teachers use to organize experiences for gifted students. Background information was gathered on each teacher as to the number of years teaching, the number of years teaching gifted students, and the highest degree obtained. Teachers were asked to state approximate time spent on tasks, such as preparation, teaching, assessment, meetings, and workshops. A Pearson Product Moment correlation was computed and the following results were reported.
1. There was a significant positive relationship between the highest degree obtained by the teacher and the number of activities offered to gifted students.

2. As the education of the teacher increased so did the variety of areas offered to the students.

3. The teachers with more years experience offered a greater variety of activities to serve students.

The Rash and Miller (2000) study suggested the need for teachers of gifted students to stay up to date on current research and to continue to add to the skills needed to teach gifted students.

In a qualitative study of teachers in one elementary school in Michigan, Schults (2001) examined teacher’s attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about gifted students. The researcher used interviews and observations to gather data prior to implementation of a gifted program in the school to meet state guidelines. The findings indicated the teachers were aware of issues relating to gender, race, and ethnicity when considering identification of gifted students, but they were not sensitive to socioeconomic issues. Teachers believed the school did not adequately support gifted students, gifted programs, or teachers interested in teaching gifted students. This research suggested a lack of teacher training to meet the needs of gifted students as well as the low priority placed on gifted teachers and gifted programs.

Hanninan (1988) found there were significant differences between teachers with specialized training and those without special training in gifted and talented instruction. Trained teachers gave more responsibility to students for learning, assigned more in-depth activities, used more individualize instruction, used more outside resources, provided more specific ideas for student activities, expanded student interest, and linked non-academic and academic topics.
Preservice teacher training programs do not adequately prepare teachers to meet the needs of gifted learners (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Feldhusen & Hansen, 1994). A study by Feldhusen and Hansen (1994) of 82 teachers, 54 trained in gifted education and 28 untrained, suggested that teachers trained in gifted education demonstrated greater teaching skills and developed more positive class climates than those who received no training in gifted education. Teaching skills were assessed by trained observers using the Teacher Observation Form (TOF). The TOF consist of 12 items that focus on critical thinking skills. According to Feldhusen and Hansen, some of the important characteristics of effective teachers of the gifted students include “flexibility, enthusiasm, self-confidence, high intelligence, appreciation of giftedness, broadly cultured background, ability to foster higher level thinking and problem solving, and capacity to meet personal and social needs of gifted students” (p. 115). While pedagogical and content knowledge, curriculum, and teaching skills are important factors in being an effective teacher, personality characteristics are also important. “Many consider the psychological makeup of a teacher to be the most powerful force in effective teaching” (Feldhusen & Hansen, 1994, p. 115). It is reasonable to assume that teachers who feel threatened by highly intellectual students will not be as effective teaching these students, and teachers who are inflexible, will be less effective (Feldhusen & Hansen, 1994).

Karnes and Whorton (1991) surveyed 50 state directors, members of the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted, to determine the certification/endorsement requirements for teaching gifted education programs. In 1990 when this study was conducted, fewer than half of the states required specific training to teach gifted students. More specifically, 21 states reported requirements for certification, 3 states reported that certification to teach gifted students was
optional, 1 state avoided the question, and the remaining 25 states had no specific certification or requirements to teach gifted students.

Studies have been conducted on various populations within the gifted student population. Begoray and Slovinsky (1997) observed gifted students in a low-income school to determine problems in identifying and teaching this subsection of the gifted population. Identification of gifted students is problematic because teachers often “fail to see potential in a student who is very different in dress, attitude, or speech pattern from those usually connected with the educated class” (p. 46). Within the existing school setting, it is up to the current teachers of gifted students to share their knowledge of disadvantaged gifted students, their successes and failures to promote identification, and instructional strategies to meet the needs of disadvantaged gifted students. Begoray and Slovinsky concluded that teacher education programs should include training to meet the needs of all gifted students especially those populations with special needs. Feldhusen and Hansen (1994) found that teachers trained in gifted education demonstrated greater teaching skills and developed more positive classroom climates than teachers who had no training in gifted education.

Under-representation of culturally diverse students in gifted education programs has been a concern for some time (Ford & Harmon, 2001). Factors in the under-representation of culturally diverse and minority students include: low referral rates, tests that fail to identify the strengths of diverse students, and the over-reliance on intelligence and achievement scores. Ford and Harmon suggested teacher education programs and staff development to prepare teachers to recognize culturally diverse gifted students.

Davalos and Griffin (1999) studied the impact of teachers’ individual practices on gifted students of varying abilities in rural classrooms. The researchers spent more than 150 hours
observing teachers being trained to differentiate instruction in the content, rate of delivery, preference, and environment. The researchers also used teacher and student interviews and product analysis. Few teachers individualized instruction to the “maximum extent” (p. 313), but student interviews indicated satisfaction when individualized instruction was used. Conclusions from this study were:

1. Regular classroom teachers must understand the importance of individualized education and be willing to use these strategies in the classroom.
2. Classroom teachers must be willing to give students more control over their learning.
3. Classroom teachers must understand the social, emotional and academic needs of gifted students and support these needs.
4. Classroom teachers must receive training to learn to individualize to meet students needs.

Davalos and Griffin (1999) believed that the needs of gifted students could be met in the regular classroom only if these conditions were met.

Summary of Teachers of Gifted Students

Research on teachers of gifted students has traditionally focused on psychological traits, teaching competencies, and training programs. Teachers of gifted students were expected to be lifelong learners, excited about learning, and able to pass this excitement on to their students (Frevert, 1993; Rogers, 2002). In studies of what principals look for when hiring teachers of the gifted, the ability to create a rich learning environment was imperative (Frevert, 1993; Rogers, 2002). Principals also looked for dedicated teachers who could facilitate discussions, promote critical thinking skills, and ask high level questions (Feldhusen & Hansen, 1994; Frevert, 1993). Since gifted students tend to be self-motivated, task orientated, and independent learners,
teachers should be knowledgeable in teaching strategies and methods that work best with gifted students (Starko & Schack, 1989; Sternberg, 1990).

Personal characteristics common to teachers of gifted students include: enthusiastic, self-confident, curious, creative, and willing to take risk in trying new things. Teachers of gifted students should be interested in gifted students, strong advocates for gifted education, and possess good interpersonal skills. The ability to relate to gifted students was an important attribute (Freehill, 1974; Hildreth, 2001; Mills, 2003).

Studies indicated that teacher training was an important issue (Berlekamp, 1989; Renzulli, 1985). Teachers with higher educational degrees and more experience displayed more variety in activities and better teaching strategies (Hanninan, 1988; Rash & Miller, 2000). Not all states require specialized training to teach gifted students. Studies indicated a failure of general teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to teach gifted students (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Feldhusen & Hansen, 1994; Schults, 2001). Significant differences were found between teachers who received specialized training to teach gifted students and teachers who did not have special training (Feldhusen & Hansen, 1994; Hanninan, 1988; Rash & Miller, 2000). Trained teachers gave more responsibility for learning to the students, used more in-depth activities, individualized instruction, and linked academic activities to the real world (Hanninan, 1988; Rash & Miller, 2000). Teachers specifically trained in gifted education had a more positive view of gifted programs and gifted students than untrained teachers (Berlekamp, 1989).

Instructional Supervision

Marks, Stoops, and King-Stoops (1971) reviewed the history of supervision and its intents. Traditionally, school supervision was authoritarian, consisting mainly of inspection of teachers. Modern supervision is based on “research and analysis of the total teaching-learning
environment and its many functions by many individuals” (p. 13). Early supervision, from colonial times through the Civil War, consisted of inspection of the school and classroom to control and to maintain existing standards. The 19th Century saw some supervision for improvement. The early 1900s saw a movement to improve instruction through classroom observations focusing on teacher weaknesses. By the middle of the 1900s, supervision was becoming more democratic in function and was expanded to include curriculum development and in-service programs directed toward improvement of instruction. Supervision has moved toward a cooperative effort, teachers and supervisors working together to improve classroom instruction (Marks et al., 1971).

Reitzug (1997) examined the role of principal as instructional leader by examining the concepts of supervision taught in administrator preparation programs and in supervision textbooks. Using 10 supervision textbooks, Reitzug focused on the principal’s supervision of teachers to discover the projected images of the principal, the image of the role of the teacher, the image of teaching, and the image of supervision. Analysis of most textbooks revealed images of the principal as “expert and superior” (p. 326) and the teacher as “deficient and voiceless” (p. 326). Three textbooks portrayed supervision as “collaborative and empowering” (p. 326) and others encouraged collaboration. Although the principal’s role is to help teachers, textbooks place the principal in a role of superiority over the teacher. Reitzug asserted:

The image of the principal as expert and superior ill serves both teachers and principals. Placing principals in the role of expert and superior marginalizes the knowledge teachers have developed from their practice and reduces them from professionals to pawns in achieving instructional school goals. (p. 337)

Textbooks portrayed supervision as looking for mistakes, implying a deficit, which needed to be corrected. The lack of teacher voice and the image of the teacher as inferior indicated “the principal is the agent of improved instruction, not the teacher” (Reitzug, 1997, p. 333). The study
revealed the view of supervision as a discrete event instead of an ongoing process. The implications of Reitzug’s study were to encourage principals to work collaboratively with teachers, to create safe, supportive environments, and to “focus on asking questions that facilitate the examination of practice” (Reitzug, p. 342).

Zepea and Ponticell (1998) examined the perspectives of 114 elementary and secondary teachers in regard to what teachers need, want, and get from supervision. This qualitative study asked teachers to describe their best and worst supervisory experience and the supervisory behaviors that encourage or inhibit teacher growth. Two main categories were established supervision at its best and supervision at its worst. Sub-categories of supervision at its best were supervision as validation, supervision as empowerment, supervision as visible presence, supervision as coaching, and supervision as a vehicle for professionalism. Sub-categories of supervision at its worst were supervision as a dog and pony show, supervision as a weapon, supervision as meaningless/invisible routine, supervision as a fix-it list, and supervision as an unwelcome intervention. Validation of teacher’s ability increased the teacher’s confidence and sense of security. Empowerment increased teacher self-awareness and self-direction. Teachers who had supervisors as coaches expressed positive experiences, which led to successful teaching. Supervision at its best seemed to occur in informal classroom visits, while supervision at its worst seemed to occur in formal evaluations (Zepea & Ponticell, 1998). An absence of discussion between the supervisor and the teacher was noted, even though a post observation conference is required. Glickman and Jones (1986) noted that instructional dialogue, which leads to planning and acting on those plans, occurs when a supervisor provides time, focus, and a place to meet.
The clinical supervision model, the oldest and most widely used model to supervise teachers (Cogan, 1973; Goldhammer, 1969; Pajak, 1993), has undergone many alterations and refinements over the years (Acheson & Gall, 1992; Blumberg, 1974; Eisner, 1979). Goldhammer (1969) and Cogan (1973) pioneered clinical supervision to improve teacher performance through observation in the classroom and support for the teacher. Cogan believed teachers were capable of analyzing their own teaching and making improvements and innovations with help from a supervisor. Clinical supervision consists of five sequential steps:

1. Preconference – Teacher and supervisor meet to determine the purpose of the observation, the focus of the observation, the method of observation to be used, and the time for observation and post conference.

2. Observation of the teacher in the classroom – Using the predetermined method, the supervisor observes and describes what is seen in the classroom.

3. Analyzing and interpreting the observation – The supervisor analyzes the observations and prepares for the post conference.

4. Postconference – The teacher reflects on the observation and discusses with the supervisor a plan for improvement.

5. Critique of the process – The supervisor reviews the process and maintains a plan to review for the next observation. (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998)

Schools commonly use a “one-size-fits-all” method of supervision for all teachers regardless of whether they are beginning teachers, mid-career, or veteran teachers (Zepeda, 2003). Glatthorn (1984) believed that a differentiated approach to supervision was needed to meet the individual needs of the teacher. Zepeda (2003) stated “Differentiated supervision operates on the premise that teaching is a profession; teachers should have a degree of control
over their professional development and the power to make choices about the support they need” (p. 23). Glatthorn (1984), proposed “teachers should have some choice about the kind of supervision they receive” (p. 1). Glatthorn gave the following three reasons for differentiated supervision:

1. Standard supervisory practices are often ineffective and inadequate.
2. It is not feasible or necessary to provide clinical supervision to all teachers.
3. Teachers have different growth needs and learning styles. (p. 3)

Clinical supervision has been modified to meet the individual needs and experience levels of teachers (Glickman et al., 1998). Developmental Supervision grew from the need to address the needs of teachers at different points in their career, from beginning teachers to veteran teachers. Ideally, developmental supervision would help teachers “grow and become independent” (Mark, et al., 1971, p. 15).

Ness (1980) recommended a separation between the supervisory role and the role of administrator. Ness expressed the belief that the administrator, who is in charge of evaluations, is too threatening to the teacher to be in a position to assist in diagnosing strategies, improving classroom methods, or improving instruction. The presumption is made that the teacher is too concerned with the impression she will make during the observation to expose any weaknesses or needs for improvement in teaching performance. Self-growth in personnel should be stimulated to insure that “adequate” teachers are gaining new skills, taking a fresh look at strategies, and constantly seeking to improve methodology. Supervision should be an ongoing process, formative rather than summative, and depend on the interaction of people (Zepeda, 2003). In clinical supervision, the teacher is helped to identify and to concentrate on a limited
number of skills, and the supervisor is responsible for helping the teacher make the necessary changes. Zepeda (2002) clarified the difference between evaluation and supervision as:

Teacher evaluation and supervision are two different sides of the same coin. The intents and processes of evaluation and supervision differ, however. In practice, teacher evaluation is concerned with a single summative statement with the assignment of a ranking (for example, satisfactory, excellent, and unsatisfactory) and a recommendation to either renew or to terminate employment. The intents of supervision are formative and more concerned with the ongoing professional growth of teachers. (p. 83)

As an instructional resource, supervisors provide, not only a diagnosis of teaching, but also feedback that enables professional growth (Andrews, Basom, & Basom, 1991).

Whose job is it to supervise teachers? It is ultimately the job of the principal to fulfill the objectives of a supervisory program (Marks et al., 1971). Being responsible for instructional supervision makes the actions, attitudes, and role of the principal critical to improvements in the classroom. Andrews et al. (1991) encouraged us to look beyond the research on supervision to studies of effective principals to increase achievement in schools. Andrews et al. (1991) asserted, “We must think of the act of supervision as the sum of the personal interactions between and among teachers and the principal that lead to the improvement of instruction” (p. 100).

McCurdy (1983) declared “school–site leadership is an essential ingredient for successful schools” (p. 5), the principal is the “critical agent who can get things done” (p. 7), and “how schools are run corresponds with how well they [principals] perform” (p. 8). In a study of leadership, Gross and Herriott (1965) found a clear link between the leadership of principals and the professional performance of teachers and student learning. The researchers found “when principals work closely with teachers on instruction, teachers are more satisfied with their jobs and their attitudes are more positive” (p. 10). According to McCurdy, elementary principals spend a limited amount of their time in the classroom. Effective principals maintain an active role in classroom instruction. Frequent visits and conversations with teachers keep principals
informed as to know what is being taught in the classroom and how it is presented. “Principals must be knowledgeable about instruction to advise, evaluate, and direct teachers.” (McCurdy, 1983, p. 15). The principal is the guiding force in the school. According to McCurdy, “Everything points to instructional leadership as the main ingredient in good schools.” (McCurdy, 1983, p. 19).

McKerrow (1996) described a project to learn the differences between what teachers need and what principals do in regard to supervision. An open-ended interview was developed and administered to 118 teachers and 95 administrators. Data were compiled into four categories, instructional process, classroom management, interpersonal relations, and professional responsibility. Under these categories were 19 specific concerns and 26 possible solutions. Teachers were not as concerned as administrators about instructional process. Principal and teacher comments on the need for classroom management and professional responsibility were congruent. Teachers were primarily concerned about support and the need “to be listened to and made to feel successful” (McKerrow, 1996, p. 332). This study suggested the need for principals to develop trust and a strong supportive relationship with teachers prior to formal supervision.

Minton (1984) encouraged principals to assess the needs of certain groups and departments to meet better the needs of those particular groups. The principal’s lack of knowledge in the content area was a concern of teachers in respect to evaluations (Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Berstein, 1985).

Spaulding (1997), in a qualitative study of 81 experienced teachers, examined the perspectives of teachers on the politics of principals. More precisely, Spaulding examined the ineffective behaviors of principals and the consequences of these behaviors on the teacher’s
thinking and behavior. The study revealed seven categories of ineffective principal influence on teachers:

1. Lack of participatory decision making
2. Lack of support
3. Showing favoritism
4. Unclear and unreasonable expectations
5. Flexing muscles
6. Micromanaging
7. Contradictory body language
8. Lack of communication skills
9. Lack of positive reinforcement
10. Lack of availability

Clearly, the principal is the center of politics in the school, and dealing with the principal is foremost in the minds of the teachers. Waller (1932) recognized the political structure of the school is based on authority that is always being challenged, so to some extent, this makes the principal and the teacher “natural enemies” (p. 56) or as what in the field of supervision, Blumberg (1974) described as a private cold war.

Supervision and Gifted and Talented

In 2002, 98,251 students were enrolled in gifted and talented programs in Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). Gifted programs are a major component of the educational system in almost all school systems in the United States. Gifted teachers impact the education of approximately five percent of the total student population. This population of students requires a differentiated curriculum to achieve their potential (Delise, 2001b; Peckron,
1996; Schroeder, 1994; Wardle, 1999; Winebrenner, 2000). Wardel (1999) reported gifted students have “unique learning needs” (p. 20) and Delise (2001b) indicted that gifted students need a curriculum that is both “meaningful and challenging” (p. 55). Past research has indicated that teachers of gifted students have unique traits that make them suitable to teach gifted students (Chan, 2001; Rogers, 2002; Starko & Schack, 1989). Do gifted teachers need to be supervised in a different way given their unique characteristics and the specialized curriculum that they teach?

Teachers of gifted students have concerns about their interactions with supervisors especially about the attitudes of their supervisors (Dangel & Walker, 1991). Kramer (1987) stated the importance of supportive supervision for effective programs for gifted students.

Few studies have been conducted from the perspectives of teachers in gifted education in relation to supervision. Dangel and Walker (1991) surveyed 97 teachers of gifted students in Georgia to determine their concerns related to supervision. The respondents, a mixture of elementary, middle school, secondary, and multilevel teachers indicated, “behaviors related to supervisor attitudes were more irritating than behaviors associated with supervisors’ competence” (p. 89). Respondents were asked to choose 5 supervisory behaviors from a list of 30 behaviors distilled from previous research of educational supervisors. Behaviors most often chosen indicated that the supervisor rarely complimented the teacher on a job well done, did not really understand the job of a gifted teacher, and made teachers feel inferior or “talked down” to them.

Maker (1993) calls attention to the need for better communication between teachers and administrators. Administrators and classroom teachers are often not familiar with the goals of gifted programs, and do not know what occurs in other classrooms, other schools, or in special
programs. Program models and authors, who write about gifted programs, address the issue of collegiality, which seems to be a key aspect of a successful program.

Teachers are willing to try new approaches when they know follow-up is available and nonjudgmental advice will be forthcoming. Collegiality must be fostered to facilitate the setting of common goals and the balancing of management concerns from schools, classrooms, and the central office. (Maker, 1993, p. 31)

It is necessary to have honest communication to solve problems in any program, but it is especially important in “setting of goals, identification of giftedness, monitoring and evaluation of progress, and communication between and among those who are providing services or developing programs” (Maker, 1993, p. 31). Gifted education is a relatively new field and little research has been conducted relative to the supervision of the teachers in this field.

Research into the supervision of teachers of gifted and talented students is basically nonexistent. Dangel and Walker (1991) conducted a survey of the perspectives of teachers in gifted education about supervision. With the exception of this one article, little information is available about this area. A gap exists in the area of supervision in relation to teachers in the gifted and talented program, and this is why the present study has the potential to contribute information about the perspectives and supervisory needs of teachers of gifted and talented students.

Chapter Summary

Gifted education programs are a major component of the educational system in America, serving over three million students, and the history of gifted education goes back to the beginning of this country. Improving education became a focus after World War II with the increased tensions of the cold war and the space race. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 provided funds to enrich the curriculum in math and science for all students. Special programs for gifted and talented students received some funds through Titles III and IV of the

The need for special programs for gifted and talented students has been debated since gifted students were first identified, (Delisle, 2001a; Sternberg, 1996) and advocates for gifted programming refer to the special needs of gifted students (Coleman, 1998; Wardle, 1999). Gifted students often enter a grade knowing much of the planned curriculum, and a differentiated curriculum is needed to challenge these students (Peckron, 1996; Winebrenner, 2000).

Gifted and talented programs are not mandatory; however, most states have some form of gifted program (Parke, 1989; Passow, 1993). Gifted programs vary from state to state and from district to district within the states. Acceleration, enrichment, and grouping for instruction are the most common models. Acceleration includes early entrance to school or entering at a higher grade, grade skipping, non-graded classrooms, curriculum compacting, grade telescoping, concurrent enrollment, subject acceleration, advanced placement, mentorship, credit by examination, and early entrance into college.

Enrichment models implement strategies that go beyond standard grade-level work and include topics not taught in the regular classroom. The most common forms of enrichment models focus on activities that begin teaching skill and content knowledge, and then move into teaching more complex strategies, and finally using the learned content knowledge and strategies to create a project or experience a self-directed study.
Grouping for instruction can take several forms. Student can be grouped within the regular classroom, pulled out to a resource room, or grouped in special classes or special schools. Acceleration methods, especially full-time seem to have the greatest impact on student achievement (Colangelo et al., 2004; Feldhusen et al., 2002; Van Tassel-Baska, 1986). Pullout programs seem to enhance student achievement as well as allow students to spend most of the day in a heterogeneous classroom (Borland et al., 2002; Gubbins, 1998). Flexible grouping is the newest trend in gifted education, allowing students to be grouped for special interest and by achievement levels and because students do not remain in the same groups, they are able to interact with a variety of other students (Borland et al., 2002; Rogers, 2002).

Research on teachers of gifted students focus on psychological traits, teaching competencies, and training programs. Some traits that principals look for in hiring a teacher of gifted students are being excited about learning and being able to get students excited, being a lifelong learner, being enthusiastic, and having good interpersonal skills (Frevert, 1993; Rogers, 2002). Teachers with specialized training in gifted education provided more activities and a greater variety of activities than untrained teachers (Hanninan, 1988; Rash & Miller, 2000).

Research into teacher attitudes and perceptions about gifted programs found that many teachers believed that gifted programs did not receive adequate support (Berlekamp, 1989; Schults, 2001). Teachers who had some training in gifted education had a more positive perception of gifted programs than those who had no training (Hanninan, 1988; Rash & Miller, 2000). Research also recognized that teacher preparation programs do not adequately prepare teachers to teach gifted students (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Feldhusen & Hansen, 1994).

Instructional supervision began as the inspection of teachers for the purpose of control (Marks et al., 1971). Later supervision focused on correcting mistakes and improving instruction.
Clinical supervision is the most widely used form of supervision, consisting of a pre-conference, observation, analysis and interpretation of the observation, post-conference, and critique of the previous four steps (Cogan, 1973; Glickman et al., 1998; Goldhammer, 1969). Supervision has moved into a more collaborative process to help teachers self monitor and improve their teaching skills (Glickman, 1981; Glickman et al., 1998; Zepeda, 2003). Much research exists on supervision, but little on the supervision of special groups of teachers, and even less research has been done related to supervision of teachers of gifted students (Dangel & Walker, 1991; Kramer, 1987). Only one study, Dangel and Walker (1991), was found that related specifically to supervision in gifted programs.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of four elementary school teachers who teach gifted and talented students to gain insight about their supervisory experiences. This study examined the way elementary teachers in the gifted and talented program in one school district of Georgia are presently being supervised, and how this group of teachers believe they should be supervised to not only better serve the students they teach but also to grow as professional educators.

A qualitative case study design using the constant comparative method of analysis was employed in this study. Participants were interviewed to gather the perspectives of elementary teachers of gifted students in regard to the type of supervision needed to meet the needs of this specific population. Symbolic Interactionism, the theoretical framework guiding this study, allowed the researcher to examine the meanings of supervision constructed by teachers of gifted students and gave voice to gifted teachers in conveying their perspectives about instructional supervision.

This chapter includes (1) the research questions, (2) rationale for qualitative study (3) the design of the study, (4) the data sources, (5) sample interview questions, (6) a discussion of symbolic interactionism, (7) data collections procedures, (8) data analysis methods, (9) trustworthiness (validity, reliability, generalizability and neutrality), and (10) the limitations of the study.
Research Questions

The guiding questions of this study were:

1. How are teachers in the elementary school gifted programs supervised?

2. Do teachers in the elementary gifted program believe they should be supervised to better support the teaching of gifted students?

Rationale for Qualitative Study

Eisner (1998) explained, “The point of using qualitative means to render and interpret the educational world is that it enables researchers to say what cannot be said through numbers—or at least cannot be said as well” (p. 187). An assumption of qualitative research is that each setting is “unique, dynamic, and complex” (Hatch, 2002, p. 9). Teachers in the gifted and talented program operate in a unique environment due to the type of program and the characteristics of gifted students. The benefit of using qualitative research in this study was that it allowed the researcher to gain a personal view into the teacher’s world. Qualitative research is used in an effort to understand the meaning individuals apply to their situations and interactions in a particular context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Patton, 1985). Teachers develop their own meaning of supervision through their experiences and interactions with their supervisors. This study allowed the teachers “voice” in expressing their perspectives about supervision.

Qualitative research contains detailed descriptions and narratives that allow the reader into the world of the participants. Merriam (1998) indicated that qualitative research focuses on meaning and understanding through rich descriptions. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher described the experiences of elementary school teachers in the gifted program. The words of the participants provided a mental picture to aide in understanding the perspectives of teachers in the gifted and talented program relative to supervision.
Merriam (1988) believed “The qualitative case study is a particularly suitable methodology for dealing with critical problems of practice and extending the knowledge base of various aspects of education” (p. xiii), and she also indicated that “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (Merriam, 1988, p. 3). This study contributed to the database on instructional supervision by providing insight into the perspectives of teachers in the gifted and talented program. Kvale (1996) suggested the legitimacy of using qualitative methods of research rested on “their contributions to effecting changes in persons and their conditions” (p. 70). Merriam (1988) stated that a qualitative case study “offered insights into educational practice and proved helpful in forming policy” (p. xi). While this research is limited in scope, it provided insights into the perspectives of this group of teachers.

Research Design

The researcher sought to examine the perspectives of four elementary school teachers in the gifted and talented program using qualitative case study methods. Merriam (1988) presented the qualitative case study as a “research design in its own right, one that can be distinguished from other approaches to a research problem” (p. 5). A case study investigates a “contextualized contemporary (as opposed to historical) phenomenon within specified boundaries” (Hatch, 2002, p. 30). Originally, the researcher intended to interview five elementary school teachers in the gifted and talented program in one school district in Georgia, however, one participant dropped out of the study for personal reasons. Participants were interviewed three times over a six-month period in the schools where they taught. Eisner (1998) advocated the use of interviews insisting, “We need to listen to what people have to say about their activities, their feelings, their lives” (p.
Interviews allowed participants voice in expressing their experiences and perspectives. Crotty (1998) believed, “Only through dialogue can one become aware of the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent” (pp. 75-76). Using open-ended and probing questions, the researcher sought to uncover the experiences and beliefs participants had about supervision. Hatch (2002) explained:

Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds. These meaning structures are often hidden from direct observation and taken for granted by participants, and qualitative interview techniques offer tools for bringing these meanings to the surface (p. 91).

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions written in advance. Open-ended questions encourage discussion and solicit opinions, feelings, and perspectives from the interviewee (Collier, Holmes, & Brown, 1995). Lancy (2001) proposed conducting interviews in an informal manner using broad guiding questions that removed “any constraints on the interviewee’s responses. The informal atmosphere allows the interviewee to relate her own conceptualization of the phenomenon in a natural manner” (p. 13). By using broad, open-ended questions, the researcher had the opportunity to elicit more information and greater detail from the participants. Kvale (1996) believed “it remains the task of the interviewer to motivate and facilitate the subjects’ accounts and to obtain interviews rich in knowledge. A good interviewer is an expert in the topic of the interview as well as in human interaction” (p. 147).

The researcher used the same broad questions to begin each interview, but relied on the use of individualized, probing questions to better relate to each individual participant.

Data Sources

This study examined the perspectives of four elementary school teachers in the gifted and talented program in one school district in Georgia. Participants were chosen who could provide
insight into the supervision of teachers in the elementary school gifted program. Interviews with participants provided in-depth information into the supervisory experiences of this population of teachers.

**Sampling**

Convenience sampling methods were used to select the participants. The researcher is employed in the school district chosen as the setting for this study. Having a working relation with the administrators in the county facilitated easy entry into the district school system.

The Shiloh County School System consists of 2 high schools, 3 middle schools, and 11 elementary schools. The school district is located in Georgia in one of the fastest growing areas of the state, and is one of the fastest growing school systems in the country. Participants were employed in the gifted program, and they were assigned to five separate elementary schools. It is noted that one of the participants is an itinerant teacher and she works in two schools.

When investigating a specific problem, situation, or event, it is necessary to focus on individuals who have first-hand knowledge of the research topic (Goldenberg, 1992). The researcher chose participants having at least two years experience teaching gifted students and who were currently teaching in the gifted and talented program. These teachers were best qualified to provide rich, detailed information on the supervision they received as teachers of gifted and talented students.

Participants were selected using the following criteria:

1. Participants were teachers at the elementary school level, and they taught in the gifted and talented program.
2. Participants taught in the same district school system.
3. Participants had taught at least two years in the gifted and talented program.
The participants in this study were chosen from Shiloh County School System, a mid-size school district in Georgia. The district employs 10 elementary teachers of gifted students in the 11 elementary schools in the district. From the 10 teachers in the gifted elementary program, 1 teacher was eliminated due to the researcher’s close personal ties to the administrator in the teacher’s school, 1 new teacher to the program was eliminated, due to lack of experience within the system, 2 part-time teachers were eliminated, and the teacher teaching in the researcher’s home school was eliminated. This reduced the number to five participants. One of the five participants withdrew from the study after one interview. Data relating to this participant was removed from the study. Data from the remaining four participants comprise this study. Although the number of participants was relatively small, Patton (1990) asserted that “it is more desirable to have a few carefully done case studies with results one can trust than to aim for large, probabilistic samples with results that are dubious because of the multitude of technical, logistic, and management problems” (p. 100). Silverman (2000) affirmed “for qualitative work, one case study is sufficient” (p. 46).

Participant Profiles

Participants in this study included four elementary school teachers of gifted students; each participant taught in separate schools in the Shiloh County School System. The participants, all white females, have taken classes in gifted education, and they have received state gifted endorsement certifying them to teach gifted students. The educational experience of the participants range from 3 to 30 years teaching gifted students. Table 3.1 gives an overview of the participants including their level of experience, number of years teaching in the gifted program, and the highest degree attained by each of the participants. All names of the participants and their schools are pseudonyms to protect their identities.
Table 3.1

*Profiles of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Years in Gifted Program</th>
<th>Highest Degree Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina Henry</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Batchelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nell Sims</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Batchelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Drew</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Mann</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Batchelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tina Henry has been in the field of education since 1961. She has a Bachelor’s Degree in Science and Education and the gifted education endorsement. Prior to teaching in Georgia, Tina taught in Florida and North Carolina. She taught several grade levels from third to eighth before accepting an assignment in the gifted program in Shiloh County. In 1974, Tina began teaching in the gifted program as an itinerant teacher serving seven schools. She currently teaches kindergarten through fifth grade at Inman Elementary School.

Nell Sims has been in the field of education for 26 years, first teaching in Rawlings County in West Georgia before moving to Shiloh County in 1984. She began teaching in the gifted program in 1990. She began as an itinerant teacher and she has taught in 6 of the 11 schools in Shiloh County. She has a Batchelor of Science Degree in Education and the gifted endorsement.

Mary Drew has been teaching elementary school for 13 years with 3 of those years spent teaching in the gifted program in Shiloh County. She has a Batchelor’s Degree in Early Childhood Education, a Master’s Degree in Middle Grade Education, and the gifted endorsement.

Donna Mann has been a classroom teacher for 17 years, and she spent 2 of those years teaching in Illinois before moving to Georgia. Prior to teaching in Shiloh County, Donna taught in the gifted program in a nearby county for 4 years. She has taught in the gifted program at
Lawrence Elementary School and Arlo Elementary School for the past 2 years. Donna has a Batchelor’s Degree in Education.

The Context of Shiloh County School System

Shiloh County School System consists of 18 schools: 2 high schools (grades 9-12), 4 middle schools (grades 6-8), 11 elementary schools (grades PreK-5) and 1 alternative school (grades 7-12). Over the past 8 years, 8 new schools have been built and 57 additional classrooms have been added to existing schools. Shiloh County is the 13th fastest growing county in the nation with a 6.5 % growth rate between July 2003 and July 2004. It is the 3rd fastest growing county in Georgia with growth of 31.5 % from April 2000 to July 2004. The student population increased 2000 students in the past 2 years. Plans are under way to build an additional high school to accommodate 1500 students, a middle school capable of housing 1100 students, and 2 new elementary schools able to house 900 students each. More than 15,700 students were enrolled in the 2004-2005 school year. With the influx of new students, the student population has become more racially diverse.

Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shiloh County Ethnicity 2004-2005</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of Shiloh County Schools meet the standards of the Georgia Department of Education and are fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Shiloh County elementary schools offer child-centered curriculum in all subject areas for grades Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Elementary schools provide educational programs for regular
education students, gifted students, special education students, and ESOL students. Additional student support is provided through Title I and Early Intervention Programs (EIP).

In 2000, the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (GCRCT) was first administered to students, and the mean scores for students in Shiloh County exceeded the minimum performance level in all areas for grades 4, 6, and 8. In the past 4 years, the number of students not meeting the state requirements has decreased from 37% in 2000 to 19% in 2003. In 2003, the state began evaluating schools through the measurement of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) on the GCRCT. In 2004, 76% of the schools in Shiloh County met AYP. The data reflect an increase of 16% from the 61% of the schools meeting AYP in 2003. Data for 2004 showed 24% of the schools did not meet AYP because of failure to meet academic performance. As a whole, Shiloh County School System failed to meet AYP during the 2003 and the 2004 school years.

Instructional Supervision and Evaluation in the Shiloh County School System

Instructional supervision in Georgia is linked to teacher evaluation procedures as set forth in the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program (GTEP). The Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program was developed to comply with the Quality Basic Education (QBE) Act. The QBE Act states that personnel employed in Local Units of Administration (LUA) must be evaluated annually by trained evaluators. All administrators in the Shiloh County School System received training from the central office in the use of the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program (GTEP). Administrators in every school are expected to use the same instruments and procedures to supervise and evaluate teachers. All the schools represented in this study used the GTEP to supervise and to evaluate teachers in all school programs.
The Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program (GTEP) manual includes procedures for conducting observations, copies of evaluation instruments, requirements for training evaluators, and responsibility for evaluations. Teacher job descriptions and professional development plans are also included in the manual.

The philosophy and purpose of the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program are stated as:

Teacher evaluation is an integral component in the process of improving teaching and learning. An effective evaluation program results when teachers are treated as professionals and evaluators are successful in using evaluations to reinforce effective practices and to improve teaching.

The purposes of the annual performance evaluation are:

1. to identify and reinforce effective teaching practices;
2. to identify areas where development can improve instructional effectiveness; and
3. to identify teachers who do not meet the minimum standards so that appropriate action can be taken. (Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program, 1993, p. 1).

The GTEP consist of a two-part program. Classroom observations using the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI) and school-wide observations of teacher duties and responsibilities using the Georgia Teacher Duties and Responsibilities Instrument (GTDRI) are used to evaluate teaching personnel on an annual basis. Responsibility for all teacher evaluations falls to the principal of the school. The principal must conduct and sign the annual review for each teacher.

Teachers evaluated with the GTEP must receive a copy of the evaluation manual and be trained in its use. Teachers must also receive an Annual Evaluation Summary Report derived from information obtained from the GTOI and the GTDRI.

There are two forms of the GTOI. The standard evaluation, used to evaluate teachers with fewer than three years teaching experience, consists of three unannounced classroom observations of at least 20 minutes each. Teachers new to the school system must have the first
observation prior to November 15. Observations should be conducted at different time periods during the school day, at the beginning, the middle and the end of lessons. Additionally, observations should be distributed over several months. Observations completed using these guidelines give a more accurate picture of the teacher’s strengths and weaknesses.

Formative evaluation, used to evaluate teachers with more than three years of teaching experience, consists of one unannounced classroom observation. The formative observation is used “for diagnostic purposes only: therefore, it must not be used when determining the overall annual evaluation rating” (Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program, p. 8). Both the standard and the formative observations are recorded on the GTOI, and this form must be returned to the teacher within five days of the observation.

Pre-observation conferences, while not required unless requested by the teacher or the evaluator, provide an opportunity to clarify evaluation procedures, share information about students, classes, or any other information that might impact the teacher’s evaluation. Pre-observation conferences also provide a time to review the teacher’s Professional Development Plan.

During the classroom observation, the supervisor records information relating to the teacher’s skill in three broad areas. Area I relates to the instruction of students. This area includes the amount and organization of the lesson, content development of the lesson through appropriate activities, and building for transfer of learning. Area II consists of assessment of student learning. It includes assessing and encouraging student progress through promoting engagement, monitoring progress, responding to student performance, and supporting students. Area III consists of managing the learning environment. This includes wise use of time, appropriate physical setting, and managing student behavior (see Table 3.3).
Table 3.3

*Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area I Instruction</th>
<th>Area II Assessment</th>
<th>Area III Classroom Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization of lesson</td>
<td>Promoting engagement</td>
<td>Wise use of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of</td>
<td>Monitoring Progress</td>
<td>Physical setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building for transfer of</td>
<td>Responding to student performance</td>
<td>Student Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post-observation conferences are not required unless a request is made by the teacher or the evaluator. Formal or informal conferences are encouraged to allow the opportunity to discuss instruction.

**Sample Interview Questions**

1. Describe your employment history. Did you work in another occupation before becoming a teacher? How long have you been in education? What subject area(s) and grade level(s) have you taught? How many years have you taught in this district? How many years in the gifted and talented program?

2. What degree(s) or added endorsement(s) have you earned?

3. What were your reasons for entering the field of education?

4. Define instructional supervision. What does it mean to you?

5. Do you believe the same type of supervision works for all teachers?

6. Is there a connection between supervision and improved teaching?

7. Is there a connection between supervision and student achievement?

8. What is supervision like for a teacher in the gifted program?

9. Describe a time when you experienced positive supervision.

10. Describe a time when you experienced negative supervision.
Symbolic Interactionism

The term symbolic interactionism was coined by Blumer (1969) to describe an approach to the study of “human group life and human conduct” (p. 1). Symbolic interactionism rest on these three basis premises:

1. People act toward things based on the meaning they have for these things. A person act and relates to supervision based on the meaning the person has for supervision.

2. The meanings that people have for things are derived from the social interaction they have with other people. Teachers construct the concept of supervision based on their interactions with supervisors and their supervisory experiences.

3. The meanings are manipulated and changed by an interpretive process as the individual interacts with other individuals to construct and refine meanings. The meaning of supervision for the teacher is modified with each additional supervisory experience.

Blumer (1969) stated that an object consist of the meaning that a person has for the object. The meanings that are attached to objects are constructed and research has shown that we learn by constructing meaning. The meaning of supervision is constructed through the interaction of the supervisor and the person being supervised. Therefore, supervision may have different meanings for different people. In this study, teachers of gifted students developed meanings and concepts of supervision based on their interactions with supervisors and other teachers. This study explored the perceptions of this group of teachers in regard to instructional supervision.

Crotty (1998) quoted Mead as saying, “every person is a social construction. We come to be persons in and out of interaction with our society” (p. 62). People construct meaning on the basis of their interactions with others and behaviors are based on the constructed
meanings. Crotty also stated that we achieve our “perceptions, attitudes and values of the
community” through the use of “language, symbols, communication and interrelationships” (p. 8). The interactions of shared meanings are social constructions created through the interactions
of teachers and principals. Interaction between teacher and supervisor form the basis for
meaningful supervision. A central notion of symbolic interactionism is “putting oneself in the
place of the other” (Crotty, 1998, p. 75). The researcher hoped to be able to learn about
supervision related to gifted teachers through hearing their perspectives.

Data Collection Methods

A request for permission (see Appendix A) to conduct research was sent to the
coordinator of the elementary gifted program at the central office. The gifted program
coordinator informed and received permission from the principals in the five schools in which
the participants taught. Written permission was received from the county coordinator and the
principals in each of the five schools in which research would be conducted (see Appendix A).
The researcher assured the county coordinator, the principals, and the participants that
pseudonyms would be given to the school district, the schools, and the participants, and that all
statements would remain confidential.

Participants were contacted to explain the research, request their participation, and to
schedule an initial interview. Two copies of the informed consent were signed, one was given to
the participant and the other was secured in a filing cabinet in the researcher’s home. The
consent form (see Appendix B) described the purpose of the research, the procedures to be used,
risks and benefits to the participants, confidentiality, and the uses of the data. The consent form
also stated that participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any
time.
Interviews, lasting approximately one hour each, were conducted over a six-month period, during the fall and winter of 2004-2005. The researcher conducted three interviews with each of the four elementary school gifted teachers participating in this study. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Audio-recording interviews allowed the researcher to “concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview” (Kvale, 1996, p. 160). The first interview collected general information and focused on supervisory experiences through open-ended questions. Collier et al. (1995) indicated, “Open questions solicit discussion and ask for opinions or feelings from the interviewee” (p. 16). Probing questions were used to elicit individualized information from the participants. Glesne (1999) described probes as “request for more: more explanation, clarification, description, and evaluation” (p. 87). Participants were asked the same basic questions in the initial interview with probing questions used to clarify responses or elicit more information. Follow-up questions for the next interview were developed individually from the information obtained in the first interview.

The transcripts were sent to the participants to give them the opportunity to review the transcripts, make clarifications, and corrections. Follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify or to answer any questions generated from the previous interviews.

While data for this study was primarily collected through face-to-face interviews with the participants, additional information was obtained from fieldnotes taken during the interviews and the supervision manual used in Shiloh County (Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program). Moreover, profiles of the Shiloh County School System and the individual schools obtained from internet sites were used to understand better the context of the schools and the system in which these teachers worked and to broaden the picture of supervision in this particular setting.
Data Analysis Methods

The constant comparative method of analysis was used to examine the data collected. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed an inductive method of discovering concepts through constant comparison of data. The researcher compared and categorized data as it was collected. Categories were developed from the themes emerging in the interviews. Glaser and Strauss warned against using borrowed categories from other sources, “emergent categories usually prove to be the most relevant and the best fitted to the data” (p. 37). Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection, as the researcher looked for recurring phrases, and concerns in the transcripts. Glesne (1999) stated, “Data analysis done simultaneous with data collection enables you to focus and shape the study as it proceeds” (p. 130).

Common thoughts and phrases emerging from the interviews were grouped into themes. Themes were grouped into two main categories positive supervision and negative supervision. Sub-categories of positive supervision included freedom to do the job, moral support, problem solving, and material support. Sub-categories of negative supervision included lack of curriculum guidance, lack of voice, lack of appreciation, and supervision as evaluation. Table 3.4 summarizes these categories.

Table 3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories and Sub-categories of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom to do the Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kvale (1996) discussed categorization as the process of reducing long statements into simple categories and indicated that when analyzing data, “the creation of appropriate categories may be just as significant as the number of observations made for the different categories” (p. 206).
The researcher assigned codes to the sub-categories and used the codes to identify common themes and phrases in the interview transcripts. Table 3.5 presents the codes used in this study, the sub-categories, and an example of the participant’s phrases. These themes, sub-categories, and categories were analyzed during the dissertation writing process.

Table 3.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Participant’s Phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Freedom to do the Job</td>
<td>“You were trusted to create the program, run the program, and handle any objections to the program.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoS</td>
<td>Moral Support</td>
<td>“She is always thanking me for the good job I do with my students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>“She backs me up when there is a problem with parents either about testing or curriculum.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MaS</td>
<td>Material Support</td>
<td>“She occasionally buys books and other items that we need for a unit.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCG</td>
<td>Lack of Curriculum Guidance</td>
<td>“There is just no guidance, not from any level of the administration.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV</td>
<td>Lack of Voice</td>
<td>“I would like to see teachers of gifted students playing a larger role in the development of the gifted program.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Lack of Appreciation</td>
<td>“Nobody seems to care.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/E</td>
<td>Supervision as Evaluation</td>
<td>“I get evaluated once a year that is the one time I am supervised.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The term coding serves as a description of data organization. Atkinson and Coffey (1996) describe it as:

Coding usually is a mixture of data reduction and data complication. Coding generally is used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories and is used to expand and tease out the data, to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation. (p. 30)

Categories developed from the data were used to analyze each case study individually, then compared across the other case studies. For example, Tina and Nell expressed the need for more
teacher input into determining the program model and curriculum used in the gifted program, while Donna declared a need for increased curriculum guidance from her supervisors.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) used concepts such as “trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and confirmability” (p. 231) to discuss the true value of qualitative research. To insure trustworthiness of the data, the researcher provided transcripts to the participants allowing them to check their words, make clarifications, and add additional perspectives. Subjects were active participants in the research, providing information they deem important, and reviewing the interview transcripts.

Validity

Silverman (2000) described validity as truth and suggested taking the data back to the participant for verification. Merriam (1998) describes this process as “member checks.” Merriam (1988) stated that validity referred to the researcher showing that the information was adequately reported and the interpretations were credible. Some strategies used in this study to insure validity were member checks and reporting researcher’s biases (see Appendix D).

Reliability

Reliability is often associated with the ability to replicate the findings of the study if another researcher were to conduct a similar study. Merriam (1988) believed it is impossible to achieve reliability in the traditional sense because qualitative research seeks to “describe and explain the world as those in the world interpret it” (p. 170).

The participants were interviewed three times over a six-month period to track the temporal nature of the data. Also the researcher audio recorded and took fieldnotes of the interviews. Audio recording was a more stable method of recording information because the
researcher was able to replay the participant’s words, noting inflections in the voice, and listening for certain ques that relate to what was recorded in the fieldnotes. Moreover, the fieldnotes served as reminders to que the researcher as to what to listen more carefully to in the audio recordings.

**Generalizability**

According to Kvale (1996) “A common critique of interview studies is that the findings are not generalizable because there are too few subjects. A paradoxical answer, from the history of psychology, is that if the aim of a study is to obtain general information, then focus on a few intensive case studies” (p. 102). This study investigated the perspectives of teachers in the gifted and talented program in regard to supervision by conducting a case study of four teachers of gifted students. The generalizability of this study to other situations may be limited depending on the similarity of location, individuals, and situations. This study will add to the knowledge base of instructional supervision by expanding an understanding of the teachers of gifted students in regard to supervision. The researcher does not intend to assert broad generalization of the findings beyond the participants of this study.

**Neutrality**

In addition to member checks and reviewing the researcher’s biases, the researcher enlisted her major professor in auditing all data collected with the findings and in the final analysis of the data.

**Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of the study include:

1. Research was limited to one school district in the state of Georgia.
2. Research was limited to the perspectives of four elementary school teachers of gifted students.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of teachers who teach in the elementary school gifted and talented program to gain insight about their supervisory experiences. A qualitative case study design using the constant comparative method of analysis was employed. Symbolic Interactionism was the theoretical framework guiding this study. Qualitative research methods were employed in an effort to better understand the perspectives of this particular group of teachers.

Participants were four teachers in one school district in Georgia. The teachers were interviewed three times over a six-month period. Interviews lasting approximately one hour were audio recorded and transcribed. Data was compared and categorized as it was collected.

To insure trustworthiness, the teachers were active participants checking transcripts, making clarifications and additions. The researcher also reported personal biases to allow readers insight into the researcher’s point of view. To insure reliability the researcher conducted the interviews over a period of six months, audio taped the interviews so the researcher could replay the participants’ words for clarity, and took fieldnotes as reminders to que the researcher as to what sections to listen to more carefully. This study is limited to one school district and to the perspectives of four elementary school teachers in the gifted and talented program.
CHAPTER 4
TINA HENRY

Tina Henry, a teacher in the elementary gifted and talented program, provides instruction at Inman Elementary School in Shiloh County School System, a mid-sized school system located in central Georgia. Tina has been in the field of education since 1961. She has a Bachelor’s Degree in Science and Education and the gifted education endorsement. Prior to coming to teach in the Georgia in 1974, Tina taught in Florida and North Carolina. She had taught several grade levels (third though eighth) before teaching in the gifted program. In the Shiloh County School System, the gifted program is not housed in one location. The teachers of gifted students are located in separate schools and the teachers receive supervision from the principals of each school in which they teach and the county coordinator for gifted education.

Inman Elementary School is located in a western suburb of Shiloh County. Student enrollment at Inman Elementary School for the 2004-2005 school year was 774 students, and 98 of those students were served in the gifted program. The racial diversity of the school varies from the demographics of the county with a larger percentage of the school population being African American (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi Racial</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Classroom instruction at Inman Elementary School is provided by 45 teachers (19 holding advanced degrees) with an average of 12 years educational experience. All grade levels at Inman Elementary School, as approved by the district, follow Learning Focus methods of instruction. Learning Focus initiatives include prioritized curriculum, the use of proven instructional strategies, and performance based assessments. The school provides extra-curricular activities through various clubs and programs. Clubs listed on the school web page included Junior BETA club, 4-H Club, Art Club, Honors Chorus, and Girls on the Go. Academic programs included Reading Mentor/Volunteer Program, Accelerated Reader, Outdoor Educational Center, DARE, and Character Education. The only reference to the gifted program at Inman Elementary School was listing the name of the teacher of the gifted program in the faculty directory.

When asked her reasons for wanting to teach in the gifted program, Tina explained, “I have a gifted son, and it was scary what he could do at such a young age. I wanted to know more about giftedness.” Offering another reason for choosing to teach gifted education, Tina shared, “I was bored with repetition in the regular classroom and I wanted students who were able to learn it the first time. I enjoy working with the faster students.”

Since 1974, Tina Henry has taught gifted education in Shiloh County. Initially, she was an itinerant teacher traveling to all of the seven elementary schools in the county. She remembered when the gifted program first began:

Initially, we started with 5th graders. I traveled to all 7 schools and I tested in all the schools. Then we dropped down to include 3rd through 5th grades. At that time, there was only 1 elementary school teacher and 1 middle school teacher. Later the program expanded to include all grades.

The number of teachers with the gifted endorsement in Shiloh County has increased from 2 to 10 resource teachers with approximately 33 teaching in the regular classroom.
According to Tina, in 30 years, the gifted program has grown in size and scope from a loosely organized enrichment program to a structured program using a combination of instructional delivery methods. The gifted program at the high school level consist of honors classes in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. At the middle school level, gifted classes are taught in language arts, science, and social studies. The elementary school gifted program is a combination model. Kindergarten through 3rd grade uses a pull out model for enrichment. An enrichment model involves pulling the students for one day a week and providing higher level thinking activities on a topic not usually taught in the regular classroom. The 4th and 5th grades use a combination of enrichment and cluster grouping. Students are pulled from the regular classroom for two segments a week for enrichment activities. These students also receive instruction in the regular classroom through the cluster model. In a cluster model, a teacher with the gifted endorsement will instruct gifted students in a small group in the regular classroom. In Shiloh County, 4th and 5th grade gifted students are clustered for a two-hour block for Language Arts instruction.

Tina described the elementary gifted program model this way:

In the beginning the program at the elementary level was strictly an enrichment program where we taught the same topic but adjusted the curriculum to fit the grade levels. The county has since changed the elementary program model. It is now a combination of enrichment in the early grades (K-3), and a combination of enrichment and cluster model in 4-5 grades.

Reflecting on changes in the gifted program, Tina shared, “When I started teaching gifted, the emphasis was on the gifted child.” She elaborated, “At that time teachers were taught the characteristics of gifted students, given an overall format of what a gifted class should look like, and told to follow the interest of the students, teach them, and motivate them.” According to Tina, recently the county changed the emphasis of the program to “gifted students should be able
to do these basic skills and you’re responsible for giving them these basic skills.” Explaining the rationale for the change, Tina reported, “It’s supposed to provide the basic skills so students can go on their own and use those skills in the pursuit of their own interest.” Tina believes, “The students need to have the basic skills, but they also need to be motivated to follow an interest or pursue a specific subject. I think we have lost something in focusing so much on basic skills.”

Expressing concern about the future of the gifted program, Tina explained, “The powers that be do not understand and appreciate the abilities and needs of this segment of the student population.” Tina shared, “I would like to see teachers of gifted students playing a larger role in the development of the gifted program. I know I would like more input into the program model and what is taught.” She added, “We know the students better than any of the administrators. We know their needs and their strengths.”

Tina indicated a need “to examine the gifted program in Shiloh County.” Suggesting a study of the types of programs, methods of teaching, and the curriculum taught in other district in Georgia, Tina remarked:

I think it would be beneficial to see how other districts implement their gifted programs. We could see how they schedule their classes, their curriculum emphasis, their testing methods, and what they do on a daily basis. We could better evaluate our own program and make improvements. I think this kind of study is necessary to see if we measure up and if we have the kind of program that we should have.

Instructional Supervision

Defining instructional supervision, Tina reflected, “Instructional supervision means supervision through the way the instruction is given. Supervisors are looking for certain things that you should do that are standard. They expect to see certain strategies and procedures used in the classroom.” Tina further defined supervision as “the same as evaluation.” Tina remarked:

By observing and checking in the classroom supervisors insure that teachers are following the correct procedures and teaching the objectives for the class or grade level
they teach. The methods and strategies used in the gifted classroom are different than those used in the regular classroom.

Tina indicated that an untrained supervisor might misunderstand the methods and activities used in the gifted classroom. She remembered one observation when the principal questioned her “control of the classroom.” Tina explained:

Gifted students are for the most part far more verbal than the average student. They get excited about what they are doing. It requires a different kind of discipline. Some times supervisors do not understand and view the class as being out of order or unruly. Students can be moving around and somewhat loud and still be on task!

The same evaluation instrument, the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI), is used to evaluate all teachers in the Shiloh County system. Tina believes this is “not a good instrument to evaluate teachers in the gifted program.” She explained, “Anytime you drop into a class for gifted students you are not going to see all the repetition and a lot of the items on the regular education evaluation instrument.” Tina indicated that another instrument might be more useful for supervising teachers of gifted students. She suggested “a checklist of observed skills” or “a teacher self-evaluation checklist.”

Although Tina does not believe the GTEP is a good instrument to evaluate teachers in the gifted program, she acknowledged, “Supervision is what’s required of them (the principals), and that’s all that tells me what’s required from gifted teachers other than curriculum requirements from the county.” Tina continued, “The expectations of the GTEP along with the guidelines from the county office form the framework for the curriculum in the gifted program.”

According to Tina, “Supervision should be more than just evaluation. There should be more input from a supervisor about what is being taught as well as how it is being taught.” She explained:
It seems to me that supervision is more of a day to day, saying what’s required from the curriculum. If you want the students to learn these objectives, you need to do these things, follow these steps, and then observe to see that it is being done.

When asked about the connection between supervision and improved teaching, Tina did not see a connection between supervision and improved teaching for herself. “Maybe for some teachers,” she reflected, “but I don’t think their (principals) supervision makes me a better teacher.” Describing her teaching style, Tina explained, “I push my students beyond the basic skills they should know at a particular grade level. I believe that gifted students should be challenged to excel in the area of their interest and strength.” She added, “I expect more of my students than the basic curriculum requires. They (supervisors) don’t require as much of me as I require of myself.” Reflecting on the supervisor’s expectations of the gifted students, Tina reported, “They do not expect the students to accomplish as much as I expect from them, nor do they expect a lot from me. I demand more from myself than they demand of me for my students.”

Supervision in the Gifted Program

Describing supervision in the gifted program, Tina reflected, “I don’t think we are supervised.” Tina reported that the curriculum director at the county office “coordinates what topics are to be taught in the gifted program, but she does not supervise the teaching of these topics.” According to Tina, “The principal does the job of supervision to some extent in each school by evaluating the performance of the teacher of gifted students as all teachers are evaluated.”

Tina noted some problems with “this kind of supervision for the gifted program.” Tina stated, “Our curriculum doesn’t lend itself to that kind of supervision. Topics are taught that are
not included in the regular classroom curriculum, and information and skills are not taught in a specific order. ” Tina explained:

We don’t say in the gifted program that students need to learn certain things at a grade level or learn them in a certain order. It’s up to the individual teacher to decide how much of a topic is taught and when it is taught. Sometimes it is difficult for an observer to see the benefit of what is going on in the gifted classroom.

Tina reported, “Guidelines for the curriculum in the gifted program are general, not specific. Individual teachers are given a topic or subject and are allowed to teach it in their own way.” Tina believes it is best to have “loose guidelines” for gifted education allowing the teacher the “flexibility to adapt the curriculum to fit her individual students.” According to Tina:

The basic skills should be taught in the regular classroom, gifted education ought to teach to the student’s strengths. Gifted students are all different. They have a variety of strengths and abilities. Gifted education ought to teach to their strengths and not all gifted students have the same strengths. More than likely their life will depend on their strengths. That’s the area they will go in, and that is where they should have their support in the gifted program.

Expressing concern about evaluation in the gifted program, Tina explained, “Evaluation for teachers in the gifted program should be done by someone who knows what a gifted program should be like, and there should be an instrument for evaluating it.” Expanding on the issue of having a different instrument to evaluate teachers in the gifted program, Tina suggested an instrument that would “observe the things that should be taught in the gifted program, such as higher level thinking skills” not teaching basic skills because the things taught in the gifted program are “over and above the basics.” Suggesting another type of evaluation instrument, Tina added:

I think a good idea would be a checklist of things that you see being taught in a unit lesson, things that you see students doing in the classroom, or the things that should be seen in a gifted classroom.
Tina recalled creating a checklist like this but not using it “because it was too difficult to keep up with and created too much paperwork.” Tina also talked about a self-evaluation checklist, but she stressed, “again it was not used due to not enough time to do it.”

Table 4.2 categorizes Tina’s supervisory experiences under two broad categories, positive supervision and negative supervision. Seven sub-categories were identified as positive supervision and eight sub-categories were identified as negative supervision.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tina Henry’s Supervisory Experiences</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Lack of Curriculum Direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive comments</td>
<td>Lack of Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>Lack of Interaction with Other Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent communications</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Education-School Communications</td>
<td>Lack of Staff Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Lack of Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Freedom</td>
<td>Poor classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Lack of Time to Test, Plan, &amp; Teach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tina reported receiving positive supervision through positive comments, appreciation for a job well done, support with parent communications, support with student discipline, curriculum freedom, and problem solving. While the positive experiences reported by Tina related to interactions with supervisors, most negative supervisory experiences related to lack of interaction with supervisors as opposed to negative interactions.

When asked about positive supervisory experiences, Tina referred back to her statement that she had “no real supervision.” Tina shared, “If you mean my evaluations, they have all gone well, but to me those are not very applicable to gifted. I have taught gifted since 1974, and I have been totally unsupervised.” Tina continued to discuss how the lack of supervision could affect teaching in the gifted program:
So much of the time it was just our ideas of what we should do. If you weren’t really conscientious about your job, you could have gotten by not doing a good job. Most of the time they ( principals) had no idea what I was doing or what I was supposed to be doing.

Discussing positive support, Tina recalled, “I get a lot of moral support from my supervisors. I receive positive comments from the principal and the gifted coordinator.” Tina reported general comments such as: “She (the principal) is always thanking me for the good job that I do with my students.” “She gives me positive comments that she gets from parents.” “She (the county coordinator) is always pleasant and gives good comments about the performance of our students.” Tina reported the county coordinator always “supported my ideas” and “listened to my problems.” She described one occasion:

The county coordinator really liked the vocabulary program I developed. I chose root words and prefixes then searched the dictionary and found words that use the same roots and prefixes. These I grouped together for the students to study. She was so impressed with the vocabulary program; she suggested I get it copyrighted.

Tina was quick to acknowledge the support that she receives from the county coordinator and the school principal. She receives support from the county with parent communications about the gifted program. The county provides a letter for parents explaining the Gifted and Talented Program in Shiloh County as well as providing a letter to parents when changes are made in the program. Both the county coordinator and the principal are helpful in dealing with parent questions and complaints. Tina indicated that her supervisors “back me up when I have a problem with parents about testing or curriculum.” While satisfied with the amount of support with parent communications, Tina expressed the need for “continued support” in this area.

Tina positively reflected on the principal’s assistance in “managing communications.” For the weekly newsletter that she sends to parents to keep them informed about “curriculum, upcoming events, and projects,” her principal “gives suggestions of topics and information to put
in the newsletters to parents. She proofreads communications to parents and suggests added information or ways to clarify statements.”

Tina receives support from the county with communications between the individual elementary schools and the county office. The county coordinator, according to Tina, “Makes sure that the county and the elementary schools are on the same page in what we are to be teaching.” Additionally, she added, “The county coordinator informs the principals about scheduled meeting of the teachers of gifted students, planned events for students in the gifted program, and provides a copy of the curriculum guidelines to the principals.”

Discussing additional support from the county, Tina indicated, she received “support for county events and competitions for gifted students such as organizing events, providing communications to parents, principals, and county administrators about events and issues, providing transportation, awards, and being present at events.”

Tina reported that the principal and the county coordinator were supportive in issues related to discipline. Tina described typical activities and behavior in a gifted classroom:

The types of activities we use require students to be up and moving and use their verbal skills, and students these days are not used to that kind of freedom. One of the challenges is to keep them on task with their volume at an acceptable level and not get too excited about what they are doing. It requires a different kind of discipline. Sometimes supervisors do not understand and view the class as being out of order or unruly. They can be moving around and somewhat loud and still be on task. Gifted students are far more verbal than the average student. They believe in their own ability and opinions and disagree with others and so they have to work it out in cooperative groups. This contributes to the noise and the appearance of disorder.

Tina reported, “The principal backs me up when I have a discipline problem I can’t handle. She supports me when I have conferences with parents of students who are not performing or when I put them on probation.” Describing support from the county coordinator, Tina shared, “She is supportive when there is a problem with parents either about testing or curriculum.”
One of the most important elements of positive supervision to Tina was “the freedom to do the job without excessive interference.” Tina expressed confidence in her ability “to recognize the needs of her students and to challenge them beyond their basic skills.” She described the freedom she receives from her principal with the following comments:

My school lets me make most of my own decisions about what I am going to teach and how I’m going to teach it. They let me make my own schedule, as long as it fits into the school schedule. They just leave me free to do my job, and I think that is the way it should be.

Tina felt she deserved this freedom explaining, “They (administrators) haven’t taught gifted students as long as I have or taken classes in gifted education. They pretty much trust my idea of what I should be doing.”

Problem solving was the final positive element that Tina reported. She indicated, “The county coordinator furnishes support through problem solving.” The county coordinator “tries to work out problems of scheduling and overcrowded classes.” Tina stated, “She tries to work out solutions to our problems and goes to bat for us when we need help. She also listens to difficult questions about eligibility and gives advice or makes eligibility decisions.”

When asked about negative supervision, Tina could not recall any specific negative experiences, but she went on to describe negative feelings including lack of curriculum direction, lack of funding, lack of interaction with other teachers in the gifted program, isolation, lack of staff development, lack of consistency, the worst classrooms, and lack of time to test, develop lesson plans, and teach the students. She indicated that if anything could be implied as negative, it might be “neglect.” Tina emphasized, “As I said before, I have not been supervised. My school administration doesn’t give me any kind of direction.” While Tina thrives in this type environment, she admits that other teachers might feel isolated or abandoned.
Although Tina reported that her supervisors “give some support through monetary means,” Tina indicated “little money is appropriated for the gifted program.” Admitting the gifted coordinator purchased some materials for the gifted program, Tina explained, “She occasionally buys books and other items that we need for a unit, such as dictionaries, maps, and atlases.” She added, the county also “foots the bill” for large scale copying cost. According to Tina, “The county office makes copies of large packets that we use in the gifted program, such as logic problems and vocabulary lists.” However, Tina revealed having to spend her own money for materials and projects for her class:

I end up spending my own money, too much of my own money. I think the local administration or the county administration could give us some kind of fund to pull from rather than use our own money. I would estimate that I spend over $500 a year.

Tina expressed appreciation for “items bought for the gifted program, such as dictionaries and atlases,” but she continued, “I need the county to cover the expense for teacher materials, such as vender books on various topics and large items for student projects.” In the past, according to Tina, “There is no set curriculum or books for the teachers in the gifted program to use.” Consequently, “Teachers pulled information and activities from various sources.” With additional support, Tina projected that “the program would be more consistent if the county provided the same books and resources to the teacher of gifted students in each school.”

Tina noted a lack of time to complete the assignments associated with her job. She reported, “I need time to test students, time to plan lessons and activities, and time to gather resources and plan curriculum.” According to Tina, the teachers in the gifted program are given time to test students at the beginning of the year, at the semester break, and at the end of the year.
Another negative aspect of being a teacher of gifted students was “working alone in the school leads to the feeling of isolation.” Tina expressed feelings of being on her own with the following comment:

Most teachers are on grade level teams. Teams meet on a regular basis to exchange ideas, coordinate lesson plans, and assess the progress of students. Teachers in special programs are expected to gather information on their own from other teachers in the school.

Tina also remarked that “working in isolation” makes it difficult to know “if I am teaching the things I need to teach.” Offering a suggestion to decrease the feeling of isolation, Tina interjected, “If we were given one day a month to meet together and plan lessons and activities, we could share ideas and better coordinate our activities.”

Extending her thoughts about isolation, Tina reported, “Teachers of gifted students feel isolated when there is only one of us teaching in the school.” Emphasizing the importance of interaction with peers, Tina reported, “Teachers of gifted students need to have time to meet and work together to plan curriculum,” and she added, “A supervisor should see that teachers at the same grade level have time to work together to plan units, share ideas and materials, and get ready for county events.” She suggested, “It would be good if during in-service days if the gifted teachers could meet with a pre-announced agenda for problems, a teaching experience with new material or new methods, and time to write up units, lessons, etc.”

Tina described her schedule as being “too busy to stay on top of new information in testing and program development for gifted education.” She believes part of being a “good supervisor” is to help teachers in this area. She remarked, “A supervisor should keep abreast of new ideas, programs available for testing, and curriculum for gifted education and share this information with teachers of the gifted.”
According to Tina, “There are not many opportunities to attend workshops or even to work together to plan units.” Tina strongly feels the need for teachers of gifted students to stay on top of new developments and research in gifted education. “A supervisor should suggest ways to get new ideas or learn how to do new things, and provide time to learn new strategies.” Tina suggested the county provide workshops and staff development classes for gifted education.

A major concern for Tina was the “low priority given to gifted students and the gifted program.” Citing one example, Tina explained, “For years I had no access to the Internet except my home computer and the computer lab after school. Due to overcrowding the gifted class could not get time in the computer lab.” Another example of “low priority” reported by Tina was “room assignments.” She explained, “Because the gifted class is low on the totem pole, we are always put into a trailer, at least most of the time. Sometimes we are moved into the building, but when they need to add another class we are moved back to the trailer.” Tina believes the administrators expect these students to do well “with whatever curriculum they are given.” She elaborated:

I think the gifted program is at the bottom of the priorities as far as needs in the school. Gifted in general is that way not just this school. I think gifted has the lowest priority. The lowest kids have the highest priority because of testing scores. Gifted is sort of looked at as an added thing to the program not necessary.

Table 4.3 presents Tina’s supervisory needs as classified into three categories: support currently receiving, support that needs to increase, and additional support needs.

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tina Henry’s Supervisory Needs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support currently receiving</td>
<td>Support needs to increase</td>
<td>Additional Support Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Communication</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Staff Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>New Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Peer Interaction</td>
<td>Program Priority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Tina reported earlier in this chapter, the county curriculum director decides what topics will be taught in the gifted program, helps to coordinates details about the curriculum, and disseminates the information to gifted teachers, administrators, and parents. Tina appreciates this support and would like to see it continued in the future.

Tina would like to see an increase in “time to testing students for the gifted program, time to plan lessons and activities, and time to gather resources.” Tina elaborated, “It would be helpful if I could have a day each week set aside to test students and to plan my lessons for the week.” Tina described her schedule as “being full” and “teaching all day with no planning period.” Tina explained:

When we teach students all day, every day we have no time to find new, challenging information and activities, except after school and weekends. Teaching the gifted can become more than a full time job. It can take over your life if you let it.

Tina reported few staff development opportunities related to gifted education. She believes supervisors should look for workshops and classes that would benefit teachers of gifted students. Moreover, Tina believed that “a supervisor should supply information about workshops, Internet sites, etc. that would improve teaching skills and teach new methods to teachers of gifted students.”

Tina expressed concern for the low priority placed on gifted education. She would like for classroom teachers and administrators to believe in the importance of gifted education. Tina previously reported some examples of “low priority” as lack of internet access, poor room assignments, and the belief that gifted students do not need special help because they can “get it on their own.”

Tina summarized her feelings about supervision in the gifted program and her personal preferences with the following statements:
Personally, I would not like to be supervised. I think the gifted classes ought to be pretty well free to do as they think they need unless someone is brand new and needs help. A teacher new to the program should be assigned a mentor who is teaching in the gifted program.

Case Summary

Tina, a veteran teacher with 30 years experience teaching gifted and talented students, expressed confidence in her knowledge of gifted students, gifted curriculum, and methods of teaching gifted students. She questioned:

I have taught gifted students longer than most of my supervisors have been in education. Most (principals) do not know what I am doing in my classroom or what I am supposed to be doing. So how can they supervise me?”

Tina reported items that she interpreted as being positive and negative support. She preferred to use the term support instead of supervision because she believed she experienced “little” supervision. She associated supervision with evaluation, and Tina reported success in all of her evaluations. This is the way Tina summarized her supervisory experiences while teaching gifted students:

We are not supervised. We are evaluated in the manner that all teachers are evaluated with a 20-minute observation. While all my observations have been good and my annual evaluation has been good, I don’t call that supervision. It is a formality that principals follow as part of their job. It has no real meaning. It may help some teachers to know what is expected of them and keep them on track, but for an experienced teacher it is just another hoop to jump through.

The next case in this study details the perspectives of Nell Sims, a teacher in the Gifted and Talented Program at Newman Elementary School in Shiloh County School System.
CHAPTER 5
NELL SIMS

Nell Sims is a teacher in the elementary gifted and talented program at Newman Elementary School in Shiloh County. The school is located in the small, rural community of Newman, Georgia, in the eastern section of the county. Originally an agricultural area, new homes and small subdivisions have replaced much of the farmland. Newman Elementary School was built on the site of a one-room schoolhouse, Apple Hill Academy, originally built in 1885. The current building was built in 1957 with additions completed in 1972, 1988, 1998, and 2003. Newman Elementary School, one of the oldest elementary schools in the county, originally housed grades Pre-K through 8\textsuperscript{th} grade. In 1974, grades 6-8 were moved to a new location leaving grades Pre-K through 5\textsuperscript{th} grade at the present site.

Newman Elementary School experiences a high degree of community involvement through PTO, community volunteers, and Partners in Education. Community members volunteer as tutors, clinic workers, clerical aides, and chaperones. Seven local businesses and civic organizations serve as Partners in Education. Many of Newman Elementary School activities encourage community involvement such as the Annual Book Parade, Veteran’s Day celebration, and local field trips. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts meet in the school facilities, and in the summer, local churches assist with the reading program. The atmosphere of the community is reflected in the school motto, “We Are Family.”

Student enrollment for Newman Elementary for the 2004-2005 school year was 510 students with 32 students served in the gifted program. The racial diversity of the school varies
from the demographics of the county with the majority of the student population being Caucasian.

Table 5.1

*Ethnicity at Newman Elementary School in 2004-2005*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>84.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


School programs listed on the school website include Reading Buddies, America Reads Program, and the Newman Nature Walk featuring the Bowden Plantation Outdoor Classroom. School sponsored clubs include 4-H, DARE, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts. The Gifted Program was mentioned one time in the faculty listing under programs and personnel assigned from the county office along with the art teacher, music teacher, and the speech therapist.

Nell Sims has been in the field of education for 26 years, first teaching in Rawlings County in West Georgia before moving to Shiloh County in 1984. She has a Batchelor of Science Degree in Education and the gifted endorsement. When asked why she wanted to teach, Nell remembered, “I had a high school teacher once tell me that I would do really well working with children, and I thought well, I’ll do that.” She added, “There were no noble callings, just a suggestion from a journalism teacher.”
Before teaching gifted students, Nell taught kindergarten at Candler Elementary School, and first grade at Arlo Elementary School in Shiloh County. Nell has taught gifted students since 1990, when she began as an itinerant teacher. She recalled, “As one of only two elementary teachers in the gifted program, my first assignment was teaching students at four different schools: Mann Elementary School, Inman Elementary School, Ryan Elementary School, and Vincent Elementary School.”

According to Nell, “When I started teaching in the gifted program in Shiloh County, there was one high school, two middle schools, and seven elementary schools.” Nell and Tina Henry provided instruction to all elementary students in the gifted program. Nell recalled, “Originally we traveled to the individual schools, but later the county bused the students to a central location at Candler Elementary School for instruction.” In 1997, Shiloh County added additional teachers in the elementary gifted program. According to Nell, “This is when teachers in the gifted program returned to the practice of teaching students in their individual schools.” As a teacher in the gifted program, Nell has taught in 6 of the 11 elementary schools in Shiloh County.

Discussing her reasons for wanting to teach gifted students, Nell explained, “I was really tired of teaching the same thing over and over. I wanted to try something different.” She continued, “I really enjoy working with these students. You can do so much with them.”

Instructional Supervision

When asked what instructional supervision meant to her, Nell replied, “Someone who will give me the materials that I need, the expectations of the job, and who is there for support if I have difficulties following the instruction or the curriculum.” Confident in her ability to teach, Nell defined supervision with the following comments:
I know how to teach. I know how to follow directions. I know how to do a good job. I know how to teach children, but I need someone in a supervisory role to listen if I have a problem and see what they can do to solve it.

Expressing openness to new ideas and methods of instruction, Nell shared, “I look to my supervisors to provide opportunities to grow as a teacher. To me, these opportunities are the link between supervision and improved teaching.” Nell made the following comments:

I think a supervisor should always be ready and have accessible to them opportunities that might help my instruction, that might enhance my instruction, that might offer me opportunities to increase knowledge in areas such as technology. Someone to let me know when something new comes along that might enhance my instruction. I would like someone in a supervisory position to be knowledgeable about those things and offer them to me.

Nell reported, “I do not receive many of these opportunities from my supervisors.”

Commenting on the connection between supervision and student achievement, Nell expressed the belief that supervisors “don’t always utilize their assets and the wherewithal to make things happen.” She indicated, “Supervisors should be open to the suggestions of teachers, especially suggestions related to the teachers’ area of expertise.” Nell described a good supervisor as “someone who is willing to listen to teachers’ suggestions and be able to see value in their ideas.” Nell remarked, “A good supervisor is someone willing to hear a suggestion and weight it out before they have a knee-jerk reaction.” Nell added, “There might be potential in an idea that might possibly lead to some advancement in knowledge, not just vertical advancement but lateral enrichment.”

Supervision in the Gifted Program

According to Nell, supervision for teachers in the gifted program has changed since 1990. She reflected:

For years there was pretty much no supervision. You were just trusted to create the program, run the program, and handle any objections to the program. The pros and cons to that are there was a lot of freedom but a lot of fear. Fear that I wasn’t doing it right not
having a model to look at, a model to go by, or directions as far as curriculum guidelines. I did appreciated it (lack of supervision) to a degree because it gave me a lot of freedom to teach and to enjoy teaching.

Supervision in the gifted program is currently more controlled by the county coordinator, who determines the program model and the topics to be taught. Table 5.2 categorizes Nell’s supervisory experiences into two broad categories positive supervision and negative supervision. The majority of negative supervisory experiences were related to lack of interaction with her supervisors, while the positive supervisory experiences were related to actions from the supervisor.

Table 5.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nell Sims’ Supervisory Experiences Teaching Gifted Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freedom in Curriculum Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Interactions</td>
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As expressed by the negative experiences listed in Table 5.2, Nell clearly indicated her preference for more teacher input and control in the gifted program.

Nell reported the type of supervision she receives now as “mandated to do certain things a certain way. It’s taken a good bit of the joy of teaching out.” Nell described the current gifted program with these comments:

We have to follow the same curriculum that the grade level teachers use. We extend on the topics they have taught. It’s not that I can’t come up with things to do that are within the curriculum guidelines; it’s just not as interesting for the students. The mandates are just pretty confining.
Discussing the principal’s supervision of teachers in the gifted program, Nell reported, “I am a lot less supervised than the classroom teacher. I think they (principals) care, but they are so busy with the regular classroom teachers and the daily grind, they don’t have time to supervise us.” Nell further reported:

Location has a lot to do with our supervision. Since I am out back in a trailer, they don’t get out there unless something is wrong. They are up and down the halls, and in and out of the regular classrooms on a daily basis, but it takes something special to get them out to the trailers.

According to Nell, “Supervision is the same as evaluation.” She reported:

I am supervised through evaluation. My principal comes in when I am evaluated, or if she needs something. Supervision for me really corresponds with my evaluations. I get evaluated once a year that is the one time I am supervised.

Nell reported good evaluations from her principal, and she shared, “I have never had a bad evaluation, not in my classroom observation or in my end of year evaluation.” Nell continued:

I’m not sure how much that says about my teaching. In a 20-minute period the principal might not see the different objectives that we are teaching. I’m not sure it is a fair way to look at the gifted program teacher. If we are really into putting together a project, they might not see a thing they need to see. Maybe we need a different kind of evaluation for gifted teachers.

When asked about supervision from the county coordinator, Nell replied, “She sometimes handles complaints from parents, and that is probably part of her evaluation of us.” She added, “The fewer complaints, the better job we are doing. We are expected to keep the students, parents, and principals happy. She really doesn’t do much supervision or evaluating.” She explained:

They (the county) choose the model for the county, but as far as offering any help or information, nothing. It’s more of a reactive kind of thing. They are just there in case something comes up. I think they are there to address issues if I have a problem.
Reflecting on the positive supervision received while teaching in the gifted program, Nell replied, “My positive affirmation has come more from parents and students. It never really comes from an administrator.” However, Nell recalled:

I did have one administrator who absolutely appreciated everything I did. I didn’t have him long enough for him to trust all the things that I did no matter how whacky it was, but he had almost gotten to the point that he understood, if I had an idea, that I had really thought it through and could relate it back to the QCC objectives or to grade level objectives.

Describing negative supervision, Nell reported, “I can’t think of any specific negative supervision. I would call the lack of input into how and what I teach as negative, but I’m not sure that would qualify as supervision.” According to Nell, “the supervisors lack an understanding of the gifted program.” She elaborated:

It is not an elitist club. Gifted students need a period of time to spend with their intellectual peers, and if they are not given time to spend with their intellectual peers, they very quickly work themselves into being just an average student, a student who performs on an average level.

Questioning the supervisors’ support of the gifted program, Nell reported, “I think they are supportive, but they don’t really understand the gifted program.” Nell continued:

For the most part, it wasn’t that they didn’t support me. I just don’t think they really understood what the program was supposed to be like, and they just hoped I did it right and didn’t create any problems for them.

According to Nell, “There is a need for greater understanding of gifted students and the gifted program”. She explained, “I want them (principals) to know what is going on in the gifted program and be aware of our needs.” Nell continued, “I would like for the principals to feel the program is important. The gifted program is not a high priority in the school system.” Explaining why she felt the gifted program was not a high priority, Nell cited “lack of funds, lack of teachers in the gifted program, and the worst classrooms” as examples of low priority issues.
Discussing monetary support Nell said, “I spend ten times more of my money on projects and supplies than I did in the regular classroom.” According to Nell, “I had more money to spend when I taught in the regular classroom, and the things I could get from the county supply warehouse better met my needs as a regular classroom teacher.” Nell reported:

Last year I was allotted 300 dollars, which I spent on warehouse supplies, but this year I was only allotted 200 dollars. I also learned that if I purchase things from Wal-Mart and kept the ticket, I could get reimbursed. I can buy more things that I really need that way. It is just a little more work for me, and I have to tie up my own money for a little while.

Addressing the need for more teachers in the gifted program, Nell reported, “The limited number of teachers in the gifted program often necessitates combining different grade levels.” According to Nell, “Multi-grade classes are difficult to work with.” She explained, “When I have to put 1st through 3rd grade students together, it really is a challenge to accommodate all their needs.” She elaborated:

I want to keep it challenging enough for the 3rd graders, but not intimidate the 1st graders. When they are together, I don’t expect the same out of the 1st graders as I do the 3rd graders, but they expect the same out of themselves.

According to Nell, the lack of time is related to the need for more gifted teachers. She reported, “It’s hard to juggle both the teaching and the testing.” She continued:

Trying to keep up with testing students for eligibility for the program, and teaching the students who are already in the program is difficult. I test any time I can squeeze it in. Sometimes I skip lunch to test students. It would really be nice to have some time set aside for testing.

While discussing her supervisory experiences, Nell described the support she needed from her supervisors. Table 5.3 lists Nell Sims supervisory needs under two broad categories, extrinsic needs and intrinsic needs.
Table 5.3

Nell Sims’s Supervisory Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extrinsic Support</th>
<th>Intrinsic Support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Freedom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Time</td>
<td>Appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Communication</td>
<td>Input into the gifted program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Classrooms</td>
<td>Opportunities to improve teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Development</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
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</table>

Having previously stated that she felt the gifted program was not a “high priority,” many of Nell’s supervisory needs related to her desire for understanding, appreciation, and respect for the gifted program.

When asked what she, a teacher of gifted students, needs from a supervisor, Nell explained, “I need understanding and freedom to do the things I know to be good for my students”. Nell continued, “An example of something good for gifted students is field trips.”

According to Nell, “About half of the principals in our county are in favor of big field trips and are even willing to go with us, and the other half of the principals do not want the responsibility.”

Nell gave this example:

We had a big field trip planned, and the county cancelled it. We were studying colonial America and wanted to go to Williamsburg, VA. I think they (the county) didn’t want the responsibility. There are some risks involved in talking students off campus, but I believe the risks are small and the benefits large, especially for these students.

According to Nell there is a need for “better communication between the county coordinator and teachers”. Nell reported, “We try to pull ourselves together to plan what we want to do with the curriculum, but sometimes we need her guidance and support. It would be nice to feel that we had that guidance.” Nell reported the following example:

In 1999, we worked hard to gather information and plan a field trip to Orlando, FL for the big Millennium celebration put on by Disney World and Epcot Center. When we presented the information to the county coordinator, it was shot down immediately. She said that the public would see it as a fun trip, even though it would have been very
educational. She would not even entertain the idea because of the location of the trip and the public’s perception.

Nell expressed the need for funding, material support, better classrooms and more planning time. Reflecting on the lack of materials and the lack of funding for the gifted program, Nell noted, “In the gifted program, when we do projects, we have to go out and buy our materials ourselves, so it would be nice if we had some funds or money from the county to work with.”

Discussing the need for better classrooms, Nell noted, “I would like to have adequate space in which to teach.” She explained, “I am currently in a trailer, and I have 17 to 20 students in there. It gets a little crowded, especially when we are working on projects.” Nell described her room with this comment, “You feel a little bit like sardines in a can.” According to Nell, “The teachers of gifted students get the last classrooms.” She remarked:

They fulfill the needs of everyone else, and gifted teachers get what’s left over. I guess one of the main things that bother me about teaching in the gifted program is that we are the last to get what we need.

According to Nell, the teachers of gifted students have “limited” time to plan together. Nell reported, “The county coordinator and the principals do not want the gifted teachers to meet without an administrator present. As it is now, we meet when she (the county coordinator) sees a need.” Nell recalled:

We used to make time to plan together after school on our own time. It would be nice to have an afternoon or day to plan together, but we don’t have it. Our eligibility meetings are also after school on our own time instead of school time.

Describing her schedule, Nell reported, “My classes start at 8:30 a.m. and end at 2 p.m., but I have other responsibilities. I have bus duty in the morning and afternoon, so I do most of my planning after 2:30 in the afternoon.” She admitted, “I stay very late most of the time, a lot later than I did when I taught in the regular classroom. There is a lot of planning that goes into teaching gifted students.” Nell explained:
I spend more time preparing for my gifted class than I did for a regular education class. When you teach one grade level for a long time you know the curriculum. In the gifted program, you are learning with the kids or right before them. Also, I have to plan a different lesson for each grade level that I teach. If you do a good job, it takes a lot of time.

Interpreting the lack of supervision of teachers in the gifted program, Nell reflected, “I think probably they see that gifted is not an area where kids are tested at the end of the year, so there is no real focus on trying to improve their test scores.” She continued:

I believe that test scores drive our educational programs, and that is sad. It is not the way it should be. There is so much focus on scoring well on the standardized tests, and principals have so much pressure to deal with testing that gifted students are just forgotten.

According to Nell, principals should be “more visible” to the gifted teachers. She noted, “I would like it if I saw them and the kids saw them at least one a week.” She continued:

If they could just pop in and ask a few questions of the kids, it would be really nice. I would really like for them to communicate with the kids about what we are learning instead of just coming in and looking around the classroom.

Nell reported, “I really like my principal, but I wish she knew more about the gifted program. I would like to see her show a little more interest in what we are doing.” She continued:

I would like to see her more often, and know that she knows what is going on in my classroom, and that she believes it (gifted education) is a worthwhile program. I think principals would be more prone to speak up for the gifted program, if they knew more about what was going on in the classroom.

Case Summary

This study sought to discover if teachers of gifted and talented students need and want supervision and, if so, how much and what type of supervision they need. Nell Sims, a veteran teacher with 15 years experience teaching gifted students, described few supervisory experiences. Nell stated, “Supervision for me really corresponds with my evaluations. I get evaluated once a year; that is the one time I am supervised.”
Nell missed the freedom she once enjoyed teaching in the gifted program. She explained, “The gifted program is so structured and mandated now, I have little input into the program design, and little freedom to extend the curriculum in different directions.”

Nell expressed the need for extrinsic support in the form of more funding, appropriate materials, increased planning time, and better communication with her supervisors. These extrinsic needs were overshadowed by her intrinsic needs. Nell summarized her feeling with the following words:

I want my supervisors to respect me for my knowledge and ability. I would like a little more freedom to use in the curriculum, a little more trust that I understand gifted children, an appreciation for the abilities that I have to teach gifted children and to recognize the difference between a gifted child and an above average student.

Nell shared her beliefs about supervision in the gifted program with the following statements:

I don’t believe most of our principals really understand the gifted program or gifted students. If they did truly understand, they would not be so rigid in their curriculum demands. They would give the teachers more freedom in the classroom. I wish they would trust us to do a good job.

The next case study explores the perspectives of Mary Drew, a teacher in the gifted program at Ryan Elementary School in Shiloh County School System.
CHAPTER 6

MARY DREW

Mary Drew teaches gifted students at Ryan Elementary School. Ryan Elementary School was originally built in 1971 with renovations completed in 1988 and 1999. Located next to one of the local high schools in a semi-rural area of the county, Ryan Elementary School serves students in Pre-K through fifth grade. The school uses Learning Focus methods of instruction, as approved by the district, to optimize the use of current research and teaching methods to improve student achievement. Ryan Elementary School met AYP for the years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. The school received a Reading First Grant for $500,000 for the academic years 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007. Science and social studies curriculums are interwoven with reading and math skills in an effort to provide an instructional environment that will better prepare the individual child to succeed in today's world.

A total of 80 certified teachers and non-certified personnel are employed at Ryan Elementary School. Programs and special services include art, music, physical education, and community volunteers. School clubs and activities include BETA Club, DARE, 4-H Club, Journalism Club, Chess Club, Astronomy Club, and Drama Club. The gifted program was not listed or described anywhere on the school web page; however, the teacher of gifted students was listed among the faculty as “gifted teacher.”

Student enrollment at Ryan Elementary School for the 2004-2005 school year was 705 students with 47 students served in the gifted and talented program. The racial diversity of Ryan
Elementary School differs from the county with a larger percentage of the students being African American.

Table 6.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi Racial</td>
<td>5%</td>
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Mary Drew has been teaching elementary school for 13 years with 3 of those years spent teaching in the gifted program in Shiloh County. She has a Batchelor’s Degree in Early Childhood Education, a Master’s Degree in Middle Grade Education, and the gifted endorsement. When asked why she chose teaching as a career, Mary reported, “I love teaching. I’ve always loved it. Even when I was a little girl, I knew I would be a teacher.” Explaining why she chose to go into gifted education, Mary reflected, “There are so many different things in different subjects that I like, and I can do more of those things in the gifted program. I don’t like book work, and in the gifted program, we do more activities and stuff.”

Instructional Supervision

Defining instructional supervision, Mary reflected, “It’s a way to make me accountable for teaching the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) or whatever is supposed to be taught.” She explained:

Instructional supervision is having someone in charge. Someone to be ultimately responsible for what is being taught, and especially how it is being taught. It should be a constant part of our teaching. It’s having someone to come by and check up on us, to see if we have any problems, and to ask if we need anything.

Mary expressed concern about the emphasis on all teachers teaching the same way. She reported, “They (school system) are so big now on this Learning Focus method of teaching. I think we
should be allowed to teach the best way we can teach.” Mary continued, “I think the kids learn best, when you (teacher) are the most comfortable teaching them. There are a lot of different ways to teach. Many of them are really good methods.” Summing up her comments on instructional supervision, Mary emphasized, “It’s having someone show a genuine interest in what we are doing.”

Considering the connection between supervision and improved teaching, Mary remarked, “There probably is a connection. I can see that some teachers need supervision to improve their teaching, but many teachers are so self-motivated, it really doesn’t matter. They are going to do a good job even without any supervision.” Sharing her thoughts on how supervision could best be used, Mary remarked:

I would like to see better supervision of new teachers. I think that is where they (supervisors) start off wrong. They don’t want to come down hard on the things a new teacher is doing wrong, so they let them slide by for a few years doing it the wrong way. After doing it wrong for a while, it becomes a habit. I know we could stop some of the stuff going on in our schools, if we would stop some of the bad teaching at the very beginning.

Considering possible reasons for ineffective supervision, Mary reflected, “It takes time to do a good job supervising someone, and sometimes you have to butt heads. Administrators have to be strong.” She continued, “Administrators have to be able to hurt people and keep going on with their life. They have to make decisions, say what needs to be said, then move on.”

Discussing the qualifications of a good supervisor, Mary stated, “They have to be able to tell you what they need, what you need to improve, if you need to improve, but still love you. It has to be very professional, the way they talk to you.” She recalled:

I remember one time butting heads with the assistant principal. She and the principal really complimented each other. We knew that whatever the assistant principal said, the principal would back up. If she thought something needed to be done, he totally went along with it. Our fifth grade team came up against her on an issue, and the principal called us into the office. He said, ‘The assistant principal thinks its best to do this, so this
is what we are doing.’ We were all so mad. The next day it was like nothing happened. The assistant principal told me she knew we were upset, but she really thought it was what was best for the kids. You couldn’t be mad at her, and she never held it against us.

When asked about the connection between supervision and student achievement,

Mary replied, “Student achievement is affected by supervision. It goes back to making sure the objectives are being taught. If the objectives are being taught, the scores on the achievement test are going to show it.” She continued:

I’m not sure requiring teachers to take all this training about how to teach a certain way is helpful for student achievement, but checking to see that the teacher is teaching the correct information, and teaching it in a way that students are learning, that’s what is important.

Reflecting on methods of supervision, Mary shared, “Supervisors need to know how to talk to teachers. I hate to say it, to manipulate them, not in a bad way, but to get the best from them.” She explained, “If you try to push teachers into teaching a certain way, they are going to fight you about it. If you wear me out about teaching something, I’m not going to do it. It’s natural to rebel against it.” Discussing the way supervisors handle the job of supervising teachers, Mary commented, “The principals and supervisors have so much on them, they don’t have time to visit the classrooms.” She reflected:

I think schools are too big now, they (principals) have too many responsibilities. I think a lot of the time they don’t even know what is going on in the classroom. Teachers are better at judging other teachers, they know what is going on in the classroom.

Further discussing peer supervision, Mary stated, “We tried three or four years ago teachers going into other rooms to observe, and it pretty much flopped. Teachers don’t enjoy other teachers coming into their classrooms.” She explained:

I’m a better teacher, when I’m in my classroom with the door closed. I wouldn’t care if there was some way they could look in and see me, as long as I didn’t know it. For some reason, just knowing it puts pressure on me. I’m not hiding anything. They can come anytime they want to, but I’m a better teacher when I don’t think anyone but my kids are paying attention to me.
Supervision in the Gifted Program

When asked to describe supervision in the gifted program, Mary shared, “I don’t feel like, at this point, administrators know what is going on in the gifted program, what we are required to do. I really don’t think they have a clue.” She continued:

They can evaluate me as a teacher teaching the QCC’s (Quality Core Curriculum), but to evaluate me as a gifted teacher, I don’t think they are qualified to do that, unless they have taught gifted students or have the gifted endorsement. A lot of principals are former high school teachers, and they are coming in to evaluate elementary teachers teaching a gifted program. Really! What do they know about elementary gifted children?

Mary disclosed, “I think a lot of teachers in the gifted program can actually do anything they want to do. I could do a lot of things, and they wouldn’t know the difference.”

Speculating on how physical location affects supervision, Mary remarked, “I’m in a trailer way, way far away, so no one comes out here.” She added, “They do ask how I’m doing, and if I need anything when they see me in the hall, but as far as physically coming out to see what I’m doing, it hasn’t happened yet.” Remembering when she taught in the regular classroom, Mary recalled,

When I taught second grade in another school, my room was right across the hall from the office, and to be honest, it wasn’t much different. The principal would stick his head in, and say good morning, but other than that, nothing but my regular observations. So maybe it’s not the location, but the class you teach.

Reflecting on which classes need supervision, Mary stated, “The fact that I teach gifted students makes a difference in the amount of time they give me.” She added, “My first year here, my trailer was beside the EBD (Emotional Behavior Disorder) class, and they were always out there. Of course, they needed to be out there all the time. I don’t normally have any behavior problems.”
In Table 6.2 Mary’s supervisory experiences are listed as sub-categories under the main categories of positive and negative supervision. Mary experienced both positive and negative supervision while teaching in the gifted program.

Table 6.2

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<th>Mary Drew’s Supervisory Experiences Teaching Gifted Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Experiences</td>
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<td>Parent Interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
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<td>Positive Comments</td>
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Mary experienced positive supervision in the form of assistance with parent interactions, solving managerial problems in the program, displaying interest in the program, and by making positive comments about the program. Most negative experiences were not the result of negative actions, but the result of the lack of knowledge, lack of appreciation, lack of classroom visits and feelings of isolation.

Describing some positive supervisory experiences, Mary reported, “I’ve had certain problems arise like a parent conflict, and they have been very supportive. They’ve always defended me. They come to me first and ask what happened.” Previously Mary reported the lack of classroom visits, however, she recalled, “I remember when I first started teaching, I had a principal, Mr. Reagan, who knew what was going on in the classrooms because he would visit us every day.” She stated:

He didn’t sit in his office all day like some principals I have had. He was constantly moving through the building talking to the teachers, and talking to the students. He showed an interest in what we were doing. He was the only principal that I have had who took the time to ask what I was doing with my kids. He acted like he really cared. He made me feel like what I was doing was important. I haven’t gotten that kind of support since then.
Discussing evaluations as part of positive supervision, Mary stated, “My administrators have always been able to find positive things to say about my evaluations, so when you read it, you feel good about yourself as a teacher. I’ve always gotten good evaluations.” She added, “Also at the end of the year, they tell you what a good job you’ve done, and thank you for doing the little extra jobs, like I do the morning news show.” Looking back on the number of evaluations she receives, Mary reported, “They just don’t get out here very often. I know they are always so busy with other problems, I am the least of their worries.” When asked about other positive supervisory experiences, Mary reported, “That’s all that I can remember. I really don’t get much supervision, other than that one year I had Mr. Reagan for a principal.” She added, “They never come in or make suggestions like ‘let’s do it this way or let’s change the way you do that.’ I wish they would come around more often.” Reflecting on additional support, Mary reported:

I’ve gone to the administrators before with problems, and they’ve helped me figure things out, such as scheduling or dealing with discipline, but actually just to supervise what I am doing, no they don’t. I don’t think the supervisors know how to supervise the gifted program, because they are always looking at the big picture instead of the little sections.

When asked to describe a time she experienced negative supervision, Mary reported, “I don’t think there is any supervision, when it comes from administrators in the school, for the gifted program.” She continued, “There is a lot of ‘You can’t do this, and you can’t do that,’ but it is not really supervision. It’s just telling me what I can and can’t do.” Expanding on what activities were not allowed, Mary explained, “We (gifted teachers) think field trips are important, but most of the principals do not like for us to go out of the building.”

As she evaluated the lack of appreciation for what gifted teachers do, Mary reported, “I am disappointed that they (gifted students) don’t get recognized.” She continued:
There is no one, but me, to say they (students) did a good job. I guess that’s just me wanting a little approval or to be bragged on occasionally, and we don’t get that. I tried once to display their projects in the library, but was told there wasn’t enough room. I work really hard. I spend my time doing all this stuff with my kids, and they work hard. It’s really frustrating.

Discussing the way some teachers view the gifted program, Mary noted, “Many teachers see it as play time. They come and do puzzles and play games. We use games to practice math and vocabulary, but that’s not all we do. We work hard on research, projects, and other things.”

When asked if administrators displayed the same opinion of gifted education as the teachers, Mary remarked, “I don’t know. I don’t get the sense that what we are doing is really important to them. Now our assistant principal’s son was in the gifted program when he was in school, and she is supportive.” She added, “I have had a few teachers who had children in the program, and they do seem to be a little bit more aware of it (gifted program) and more supportive.” Recalling the support of teachers who have gifted students in their classrooms, Mary reported, “I think some teachers think the students can’t be having fun and doing hard work at the same time.”

Reflecting on the jealousy of teachers, Mary noted, “Sometimes I think teachers are jealous of what I do. They think I have an easy job.” She explained:

We get to do the things that every teacher wants to do with her class, but can’t because of the mixed ability classes, because of time, because of behavior. They (gifted students) are learning and doing hard work, but they are doing it in a fun way. Also, they see me in the halls picking up students, taking students back to their class, picking up students to test, gathering materials, and running copies of materials. They think I’m not doing anything, that I have all this free time. They don’t see the hours I put in after school, on weekends, and during the summer. It takes a lot of time to gather the materials we need to teach.

Discussing the feelings of isolation felt by teachers of gifted students, Mary shared, “I think I’m not seen as really part of the school, but as an extra, a kind of add-on.” She explained:

If there is not enough time or not enough room, then we (gifted students) are kinda pushed to the side. We’re left out of the computer schedule, we’re even left off the lunch schedule. We have to go and try to fit in somewhere ourselves. We are not seen as a part of everything.
Describing the support she is currently receiving, Mary stated, “I always receive any materials I need. My principal always finds money for the things I need to enhance the program.” She added:

When I first came to this school, the previous teacher had retired and they had moved the gifted class to a different trailer. Someone at the school decided to take everything from my trailer. They took bookshelves, file cabinet, desk, and chairs. The principal was quick to go around the school and collect what I needed.

Continuing her thoughts on academic support, Mary reported, “She backs me up when I have problems with parents, and she supports me when I make academic decisions about a child, such as putting them on probation because of bad grades.”

As Mary discussed her supervisory experiences, she also disclosed many of the things she needed from her supervisor. These supervisory needs are listed in Table 6.3.

### Table 6.3

*Mary Drew’s Supervisory Needs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
<th>Parent Interactions</th>
<th>Material Support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Academic Decisions</td>
<td>Supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
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</table>

As she considered the kind of support needed as a teacher of gifted students, Mary’s supervisory needs were divided into three areas: parent interactions, emotional support, and material support.

Sharing her need for supervisory support in working with parents, Mary disclosed:

I need them to back me up on academic decisions such as putting students on academic probation. Also, when students fail to qualify for the gifted program, sometimes parents want to blame the person testing them. Principals and the county coordinator need to back up the teachers. They need to trust that we are following the state guidelines and procedures.
When Mary discussed the emotional support teachers of gifted students needed, she commented:

Principals need to include us in what is going on in the school, keep us informed on the events in the school, put us on school committees, and make room for the gifted program. Don’t make us feel like we are left out in the cold, that we are not important. If administrators don’t respect what we do, then the teachers won’t respect what we do either.

According to Mary, the final area of support needed from supervisors, involves materials. Mary stated, “Of course, we always need money and materials for the program.” She added, “They could help by giving us a more structured curriculum that included materials, text, and supplies. The county purchases curriculum sets for science and social studies. I think they could find similar units of study for gifted students.”

Sharing some ideas on what supervisors could do to provide opportunities to improve teaching skills, Mary reflected, “There are not many staff development classes for gifted educators. Maybe she (county coordinator) could help locate some nearby. It would be nice if she could arrange for us to go to the gifted conference each year.”

When asked if she wanted more input from the supervisors, Mary responded, “No, I believe most administrators do not fully understand the gifted program or the gifted child. I would rather have input from experienced gifted instructors.”

Describing an ideal supervisory experience, Mary shared, “To me supervision is being sure I am on the job and my students are learning. I want them to be interested in what I’m teaching, appreciate the work I do, and value my students.” She added:

It would be nice to have someone who truly understands the gifted program and what it should be like, but I don’t want to be pinned down to just a set curriculum. I don’t need them to be overly involved, just support what I am doing, and show appreciation for what I do.
Case Summary

Mary reported both positive and negative experiences with supervision. She summarized her positive experiences in the following words:

My positive experiences are related to my principal supporting me in dealing with parents and helping solve any problems I have in my classroom, such as discipline or scheduling. She also is good about supplying most of what I need for my students in the way of materials. She makes positive comments about what I am doing when she sees me in the halls and when she comes to observe in my classroom.

Mary expressed the majority of her negative experiences with supervision as lack of emotional support. She reported:

My negative experiences were not really anything that they (supervisors) did wrong, it was just not feeling appreciated by them. I realize they are busy and have a whole school to run, but I think they should be more knowledgeable about the gifted program. They don’t make any effort to know what we are doing, and they don’t try to include the gifted class in what’s going on in the school.

The support that Mary reported that she needed from supervision closely correlated with her past experiences with supervision. She wanted her supervisors to be knowledgeable about the gifted program, be interested in what students in the gifted program are doing, respect the gifted teacher for the work she does with gifted students, and include the gifted class in school activities.

The next case study includes the perspectives of Donna Mann, an itinerant teacher in the Gifted and Talented Program in Lawrence Elementary School and Arlo Elementary School.
CHAPTER 7
DONNA MANN

Donna Mann teaches at two schools, Lawrence Elementary School and Arlo Elementary School. Lawrence Elementary School was originally built and supported by a small, local college to provide an education for the children of the college professors. Originally named Lawrence Institute, the school was established prior to the War Between the States. Lawrence Institute is credited with leading the county in its early efforts to improve the educational experience of its students. In 1904, the first “Corn Club” was started at Lawrence Institute. The Corn Club instigated the formation of the first 4-H Club in the south, which later merged into the National 4-H Club Program. The current building was built in 1955, and the name changed to Lawrence Elementary School. As student populations grew, additions and renovations were made in 1988 and 1999.

Lawrence Elementary School, located in a small college community in Shiloh County, serves students in Pre-K through fifth grade. Student enrollment for the 2004-2005 school year was 597 students with 74 served in the gifted program. The student population of Lawrence Elementary is less diverse than the county as a whole, with a higher percentage of Caucasian students and a low percentage of minority students.

Table 7.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
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</table>
Table 7.1 continued

*Ethnicity at Lawrence Elementary School in 2004-2005*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi Racial</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Classroom instruction is provided by 69 certified teachers and non-certified personnel. Learning Focus methods of instruction, as approved by the district, are used to provide quality instruction. Lawrence Elementary School is a Title I school and the recipient of a Reading First Grant. Lawrence Elementary School is accredited through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Lawrence Elementary School met annual yearly progress (AYP) for the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years as measured by the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (GCRCT). Students at Lawrence Elementary School participate in extracurricular clubs such as the Guitar Club, Art Squad, 4-H Club, and Junior BETA Club. The gifted program was not mentioned on the Lawrence Elementary School website.

Arlo Elementary School, located in the southern section of Shiloh County, was originally built in 1954 with additions and renovations completed in 1972, 1976, 1979, 1988, 1993, and 1997. Arlo Elementary School, serving students in Pre-K through fifth grade, is located near several large tracts of state and federally owned property. Although the student population comes mostly from a rural setting, it does include children from three mobile home parks and apartment complexes within the community. The student population for 2004-2005 was 520 students with 36 students served in the gifted program. The school received a grant from Georgia Outdoor Classroom Program in 2000 to build an outdoor classroom. Partners in education and members of the community participated in the outdoor classroom construction. Fifth grade students participate in the Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program (DARE), 4-H, and Junior BETA club. Racial diversity is less evident in Arlo Elementary School as compared to other schools in
the county. The percentage of Caucasian students is more than double the percentage of African American students, and there are no Asian Americans students attending Arlo Elementary School.

Table 7.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi Racial</td>
<td>3%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Classroom instruction at Arlo Elementary School is provided by 62 certified teachers and non-certified personnel. Arlo Elementary School, accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), strives to meet the educational needs of the student population through various academic programs. The special education program at Arlo Elementary School serves Mildly Intellectually Disabled (MID) students in a self-contained classroom or a resource room. Special education students in the community, who cannot be served in these settings, are bused to another school in the county. Arlo Elementary School qualified as a Title I school in 1999 and began receiving funds to provide for instruction in smaller group settings. The gifted program, listed under special programs on the school website, provides instruction for academically advanced students. There are two itinerant teachers in the gifted program at Arlo Elementary School. Donna Mann teaches fourth and fifth grades one day a week, and Rita Brown teaches first, second, and third grades one day a week.

Donna Mann has a Batchelor’s Degree in Education and the gifted education endorsement. She worked in varied occupations before finding her calling in education. Sharing her reasons for going into education, Donna recalled:
I think it was that I was not able to use my creativity and enthusiasm in my other jobs. I was working at Indiana State University. There, I could take classes for something like three dollars an hour, so I thought I’ll take one; I took Educational Psychology and I was hooked! There are so many fun ways to teach. I just love it!

Donna has been a classroom teacher for 17 years, and she spent 2 of those years teaching in Illinois before moving to Georgia. Prior to teaching in Shiloh County, Donna taught in the gifted program in a nearby county for four years. She has taught in the gifted program at Lawrence Elementary School and Arlo Elementary School for the past two years. Explaining her decision to teach gifted children, Donna reflected, “I really needed to break away. I was at a point where I was burning out on being a regular classroom teacher.”

Donna is an itinerant teacher, and she works at Lawrence Elementary School for four days a week, and Arlo Elementary School for one day a week. Describing the difficulty in being an itinerant teacher, Donna reported, “I feel like one of my schools is short-changed because I am only there on Friday, and I don’t always do as much for the students.” She explained:

At that school I don’t have materials. I don’t always go prepared, not intentionally, but a lot of times I’ll be teaching and realize I forgot the magnifying glass or whatever. Not that I’m irresponsible, but it happens. You try to pack up on Thursday to get ready to go on Friday, and you get there, and you’ve forgotten things - things that you have at your other school all the time that you just take for granted. I wish that all the schools could have the same materials.

According to Donna, students at the smaller schools — the schools with less money to spend on the program, are not getting the benefits of having materials in the school as the students at the larger schools — the schools with more money to spend. Discussing her feelings about the gifted program at the smaller school where she teaches and how the lack of materials affect the students, Donna reported, “I don’t see my gifted students getting anything. I’m really disappointed. As a professional, I’m just totally frustrated.”
Reflecting on the gifted program, Donna remarked, “There are so many problems. Too many students in the classes, not enough time to teach, and the difference in materials at the schools.” Reporting on the number of students, Donna stated, “I have a total of 93 students in both schools. That is a lot of kids to keep up with. It’s just a problem trying to get papers copied.” Delineating on the number of students in each class, Donna noted:

In my 5th grade, I have more than 20 students, and in 4th grade, I have right at 20 students. I believe we were taught that you could have 15, with 17 being just under the wire. Every class is overloaded. We are in a trailer, which makes it even more difficult. You put 20 fifth graders into a trailer, and physically it’s too crowded. If you want to get up to do anything, there is no room to move. So just physically we are overloaded.

Discussing the amount of time available to teach, Donna reported, “I only have my fourth and fifth graders for a two hour block one day a week. Those students are the ones who are old enough to do problem solving, projects, and experiments. They need that, and we just don’t have the time.” She added:

There’s not enough time to teach the curriculum that we are expected to teach. I really don’t feel like I’m accomplishing anything at all. We are told what and how we are expected to teach, but not given enough time to do the job right.

Prior to coming to Shiloh County, Donna taught in a gifted program in a neighboring county. In that program, students were transported to a central location for a day of gifted instruction. Donna explained the program in these words:

Each teacher would teach a class. Students would choose the three classes they wanted to take each semester. We had so many classes for these children to choose. They were curriculum based. You’d have your language arts, math, and science classes taught in classes such as Project Wild, storytelling, or photography. They (students) were excited and so were you. It was just always fun and interesting and very active. Classes always included projects. They always included accountability for the students and accountability for the teachers.

Describing the model used in Shiloh County, Donna stated, “For the early grades, we follow the curriculum used in the regular classroom and extend on it. In fourth and fifth grades, we study
geography one semester and science vocabulary the next.” She emphasized, “I am told very
generically what to do and then kinda turned loose to do it!”

Expressing concern for the gifted students, Donna stated, “They (gifted students) burn out
too. Right now they are fed up with it (gifted program).” Expressing concerns for student interest
in the program, Donna shared, “They (students) would quit in a minute, if I did it (the program)
the way I have been instructed to do it.” She explained:

That almost sounds contradictory to what I have been saying about not having any
supervision, but I’m handed a packet and told to teach these kids. When asked how do
you want me to teach it, they say, ‘Oh just have fun with it.’ I’ve got a packet of
questions and answers for them to learn. How much fun is that going to be?

Interjecting her personal opinion about the gifted program, Donna shared, “They (school system)
are not doing what the gifted program is intended to do, in my opinion. I’ve seen these kids
blossom and grow and create. I believe it is intended to be enrichment.” Describing her vision of
a gifted program, Donna explained:

To offer these children an opportunity to do things they would never do in the regular
classroom, to step outside and to stretch, and to imagine, and to create, and do teamwork,
and come up with these great concepts, and go “ah”, and somebody to say ‘how did you
figure that out?’ These kids need to be challenged. They need to be creative. They need to
be exposed to other kids that are gifted. They’re the kids that we really need to teach how
to use their intelligence. They need to know how to process, to find information, and to
create.

Reflecting on how supervision was related to the problems in the program, Donna shared,

“We are left too much on our own to solve our own problems.” She explained:

It’s like we are hired and given a school assignment, then turned loose to do whatever we
need to do to teach the gifted students. The county should see that each school has the
same amount of money to spend for the gifted program, access to the same materials, and
enough time to really teach these students. Supervisors should know our problems and
work to correct them. We need someone to show an interest in what we are doing, to
come to our classrooms, and to care enough to try to solve some of our problems.
Instructional Supervision

When asked to define instructional supervision, Donna replied, “Someone to give us guidance, to sit down and say this is what we need to cover, these are our goals.” Donna elaborated:

I like to know what is expected of me, because I need that guidance. We need some boundaries. We need to know what is the ultimate goal here, and what it is we are trying to provide for these children. What curriculum we are trying to cover and within the curriculum specific topics. I think if we leave it too broad, we don’t know where we are going with it.”

Discussing the connection between supervision and improved teaching, Donna noted, “A good supervisor will support you, guide you, and offer you suggestions. I like the critique. Without that supervision, I may be stuck in a rut and not realize it.” She added:

Someone has to be accountable and see that students are getting a good education. Without effective teaching, students don’t learn. I believe a good supervisor can make the difference between a good teacher and a great teacher. We can all improve on what we do in the classroom. A fresh view on how you are doing things is really helpful.

When asked if supervision can be connected to student achievement, Donna replied:

Sure, again I think it is that accountability. If I’ve got a supervisor that’s gonna check to see if I am accomplishing the goals with my students, I’m gonna make them (the students) more accountable, and they’re gonna feel more comfortable too. Yes, my supervisor can make a difference in what I get from my students.

In continued discussion of student achievement, Donna remarked, “When you know you’ve got that support, and that backing, it makes you want to do more. You want to do a better job, and that, in turn, would affect student achievement.”

According to Donna, the quality of supervision can also affect the attrition rate of teachers. She remarked, “They (supervisors) can make a difference in whether or not a teacher stays in education, especially in new teachers. New teachers need supervision more than an experienced teacher, but I believe we all need good supervision to succeed.
Supervision in the Gifted Program

Reflecting on supervision in the gifted program, Donna reported, “I’ve worked in two very different gifted programs. One of the main differences lies with supervision and accountability.” Donna explained:

In my current program, I am pretty much told very generically what to do and then turned loose to do what I want. Nobody checks on me. Nobody looks to see if I am accomplishing these goals. There is no accountability. I learned pretty quickly that if I keep my mouth shut and don’t cause any problems, then nobody is going to check on me. I really am not accountable, and that is not good for anybody.

As Donna compared supervision of teachers in the gifted program to teachers in the regular education program, She shared, “We don’t get as much as a regular classroom teacher.” Donna added, “With our numbers being smaller and our curriculum being different, I think they (principals) look more at the supervision for our program as coming from the county level than from the school level.”

Discussing evaluations as part of supervision in the gifted program, Donna reported, “I’m not being evaluated or supervised. I had one evaluation last year, and I should have had three. I had no evaluation this year, and I should have had three.” She added, “I could do whatever I want, as long as I keep the students and parents happy.” Sharing her feelings on this, Donna stated, “I don’t believe what I am doing is respected. It’s as if what I teach is not important enough to even check to see if I am doing my job.” Reflecting more on her feelings, Donna shared:

Nobody knows what I am doing because nobody asks. I make it entertaining and fun for the kids, but nobody really knows what I’m supposed to be doing. As an educator, I’m very frustrated with it, and as a teacher, I feel like I’ve lost all value to what I’m doing.

Donna reported both positive and negative experiences while teaching gifted students. She recalled that most of the positive experiences occurred while teaching gifted students in
another school system, and many of the negative experiences occurred while teaching in Shiloh County. She attributes much of the negative experiences to the excessive workload of administrators.

Table 7.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donna Mann’s Supervisory Experiences Teaching Gifted Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Supervisory Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
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</table>

Donna reported positive supervision in the form of classroom visits in which the supervisor showed an interest in the program by making suggestions and offering encouragement. She recalled negative supervision in the form of lack of direction and guidance in the curriculum, few classroom visits, and a lack of materials and support for the gifted program.

Assessing her supervision, Donna stated, “There is just no guidance, not from any level of the administration. I work at two schools, and they (principals) just assume I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing, because they don’t know.” She added, “Nobody comes to my room. I’ve been in a trailer for eight years. I don’t mind that, but they have no idea what is going on out in that trailer. Nobody seems to care.”

Describing positive experiences with supervision, Donna reported, “I had a supervisor who was principal in another school system. She was so involved and so interested in what we were doing.” Elaborating on this supervision, Donna reflected:

She took the time to visit our classrooms to see what the students were learning. She would come in and observe the activities we were doing and sometimes offer suggestions on ways to improve the activity. Sometimes she would suggest other activities that would enhance what we were learning. Knowing someone is interested and cares about what you are teaching encourages you to do your best and be proud of your job.
Acknowledging additional positive experiences with supervision, Donna recalled, “We had a supervisor at the county office who was right there all the time. We could call anytime and ask for help, guidance, and suggestions.” She continued:

She is still one of the greatest supervisors I’ve ever known, because she was gifted herself and understood what the kids go through. She was never critical. She could be strong, and firm when she needed to be, but also supportive. She always encouraged us to do our best.

When asked to recall negative supervisory experiences, Donna reported, “I’ve not had much supervision at all here in this school system. I have had conflicts with testing children of colleagues.” Describing some conflicts she experienced, Donna explained, “As long as their children got into the program, I got a lot of support. If they didn’t qualify, they had a different view of the program’s importance. I did not receive as much support from them.”

As she explained supervision at the county level, Donna reported, “We get the program model and mandates from the county, not supervision.” She added, “She (county coordinator) doesn’t have time to come out to each school to observe and supervise us. She does visit the schools from time to time, but unless we have a major problem, we are on our own.” Donna explained:

We’ve had two supervisors at the county level in the past few years. One worked full time and the other is working part time. They are different in the way they lead and what they want in the gifted program. Our previous coordinator wore many different hats. She was in charge of curriculum, staff development, special education, all the programs. She was so busy she had very little time to help us. Our current supervisor works part time, I think three days a week, so she is not always available to answer questions and help us.

As Donna discussed her supervisory experiences, she also reported the things she needed from her supervisors. Table 7.4 presents the things Donna Mann needs from supervision divided into three categories: what she needs related to the program, what she wants in the way of the
supervisor’s presence, and support related to affective issues such as respect for the gifted program, interest in what the gifted students are doing, and being included in school activities.

Table 7.4

*Donna Mann’s Supervisory Needs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Presence</th>
<th>Affective</th>
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<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
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<td>Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>Attend Events</td>
<td>Interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
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</table>

When asked what she needed in the way of support from her supervisors, Donna reported, “We need more supervision. We need more structure in the program, more guidance in how and what we teach. We need consistency throughout the county, and we need to be accountable.” She continued, “We can not be accountable if we are not supervised, and we cannot be supervised if no one knows what we are supposed to be doing.”

Further discussing accountability, Donna remarked, “I think that it is ironic that in the age of accountability, our gifted program is not being held accountable.” She explained:

I suppose it is because these students test high enough on the CRCT (Criterion Referenced Competency Test) that they aren’t going to hurt the school. With schools struggling to make AYP (Annual Yearly Progress), the focus is on the students who test poorly. It’s a shame, because even though they test well doesn’t mean they (gifted students) are learning. We need to provide better educational experiences for these students!”

Concerning supervisor involvement in the gifted program, Donna stated, “I want to know that they know what I am doing and they approve. I want them to encourage teachers to cooperate, and work with the gifted teachers to provide the best education possible for these students.” Discussing supervisory interest in the gifted program, Donna remarked, “I want the school administrators to show interest in what we are doing, visit our classrooms, come to our
competitions. I want to feel like my job is important enough for them recognize that I am here.”

She reported:

We really do some neat stuff. I know the principals would be impressed by these students and their abilities, if they would just come and see what they can do. I think then the program would be appreciated more. We (gifted teachers) might gain a little respect for what we do. Principals lead the way in demonstrating what is important in a school. If they don’t show appreciation for the gifted program, no one else will.

Discussing issues of isolation, Donna reported, “We (gifted teachers) need to be included in what is going on in the school, at least informed.” She explained, “The gifted program is almost viewed as totally separate from the school. I am rarely included in school activities or assignments, especially since I am not assigned to one school.”

When asked to describe an ideal supervisory experience, Donna summarized, “It would be having a supervisor show interest in what I am doing.” She added:

I want her to come into my classroom. I love to show off what my kids are doing. I want to feel appreciated and respected for what I do. I work hard, and I think what I teach is important.

Case Summary

Donna reflected on her supervisory experiences in the gifted program of two school systems in Georgia, remembering both positive and negative experiences. Her positive experiences centered around supervisors who expressed interest in what was going on in the classroom. Donna summarized her positive experiences in these words:

The supervisors were actively involved. They came into the classroom. They seriously looked at what I was teaching, and made suggestions to improve the way I was doing it or suggested related things I could do with my students. They showed appreciation for what I do. They complimented me and made me feel like I was an important part of the school.

Her negative experiences were from supervisors who showed little interest in her teaching. Donna summarized these experiences with these words:
They rarely visit the classroom, only if I have a problem or they need something from me. They do not include me when they plan activities at school, such as assigning time in the computer lab. They forget to inform me of what is going on in the school, such as schedule changes or special programs. We get the worst classrooms. Principals budget very little money to the gifted program.

This study sought to learn if teachers of gifted students wanted to be supervised and what they needed from supervision. While sharing her supervisory experiences, Donna expressed a desire for more supervision at the county and the school level that would include visits to the classroom, more guidance in programming the curriculum, suggestions for improvement, and appreciation of the efforts of the teacher in teaching gifted students.

Chapters 4 through 7 presents the individual case studies of the four participants. The next chapter presents a cross case analysis of the data to provide a broader picture of supervision in the gifted program in Shiloh County School System.
CHAPTER 8
CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of four elementary school teachers of gifted and talented students in relation to their views on supervision. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How are teachers in the elementary school gifted program supervised?
2. Do teachers in the elementary school gifted program believe they should be supervised to better support the teaching of gifted students?

The purpose of the cross case analysis was to further investigate themes gathered from individual participants by comparing and contrasting the data. To discover participants’ perspectives on supervision of teachers in the elementary school gifted program, the researcher originally interviewed five teachers currently assigned to the gifted program. One participant chose to withdraw from the study, so only four teachers participated in this research. All information obtained from the fifth participant was removed from the study.

After conducting interviews with the participants, the researcher used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to analyze the data. Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection as the researcher looked for recurring phrases and common concerns. Thoughts and phrases were gathered from the interviews to be analyzed. Categories were developed from data emerging in the interviews, and patterns were notated to compare common themes shared by the participants. From these themes, data analysis was extended by developing propositions based on the past experiences of the participants. The propositions grounded from the data should not be generalized to a larger population. Before presenting the
themes, a review of symbolic interactionism and the constant comparative method are presented to build the framework on which the findings of this study were constructed.

Symbolic Interactionism Related to Supervisory Experiences

Symbolic interactionism, coined by Blumer (1969), is described as the way individuals interact with people and things that have meaning for them. Symbolic interactionism rests on the three basic premises that individuals act on things based on the meaning the individual has for them, the meaning the individual has for things is based on the social interaction the individual has with other people, and meanings are manipulated and changed as individuals interact with other individuals.

Symbolic interactionism was the appropriate framework for this qualitative research study because this study examined the perspectives of teachers in the elementary gifted program and perspectives are the central concept of symbolic interactionism. Qualitative research set in the framework of symbolic interactionism focuses on the meanings participants derive from their experiences. In this study the researcher posed questions to encourage the participants to reflect on their past supervisory experiences while teaching in the elementary gifted program. Crotty (1998) stated that we achieve our perspectives and values through communication and interactions with others. Through the interactions and communications during the interview process, the researcher and the participants worked together to reveal meanings the participants constructed from their past supervisory experiences.

The researcher examined the supervisory experiences of teachers of gifted students through data gathered from personal interviews. Open-ended questions were used to encourage relaxed conversations and the free flow of information. Probing questions were used to elicit
individualized descriptions, explanations, and clarifications. The researcher and the participants worked together to discover meaning from the participants’ past experiences with supervision.

Following the interviews, the researcher used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to analyze the data. The constant comparative method is an inductive method of discovering concepts through the constant comparison of data. Glesne (1999) stated, “Data analysis done simultaneous with data collection enables you to focus and shape the study as it proceeds” (p. 130). The researcher compared the data as it was collected giving each of the emerging ideas a code to represent it. The coded ideas were then grouped into sub-categories which in turn were categorized into two broad concepts: positive supervision and negative supervision. Atkinson and Coffey (1996) describe coding as a “mixture of data reduction and data complication” (p. 30). The data revealed eight common themes, four were classified as positive supervision and four as negative supervision. Kvale (1996) discussed categorization as the process of reducing long statements into simple categories and indicated that when analyzing data “the creation of appropriate categories may be just as significant as the number of observations made for the categories” (p. 206). Glesne (1999) reported that a researcher reaches saturation when data become redundant. In this study, the researcher reached saturation during the interview process when the interviews failed to reveal any new information related to the participant’s supervisory experiences.

The analysis of data was a multi-layered process that included:

1. Examining data
2. Coding data into categories
3. Examining categories for commonalities
4. Developing themes from the categories
5. Establishing propositions that reflected meaning from the data, it’s themes, and the categories.

The remainder of the chapter explicates these categories, themes, and propositions.

Past Supervisory Experiences

There was some variance in the supervisory experiences of the participants, but the interviews yielded many commonalities. These commonalities were used to build propositions related to the research questions. The researcher used open coding in each case study to develop themes. The researcher then organized the data from the four case studies into eight categories characterizing the participant’s past experiences with supervision.

Because participants characterized their past experiences as positive or negative, the categories were divided producing four positive categories and four negative categories. Table 8.1 depicts the positive categories and sub-categories including: freedom to do the job, moral support, problem-solving, and material support.

Table 8.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Data Categories and Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freedom to do the Job</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivity comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Visits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under the topic of positive supervision experiences, the freedom to do the job category included past experiences related to freedom to develop curriculum, to engage in activities, and to teach gifted students in the way most comfortable for the teacher. The moral support category referred to receiving positive comments on evaluations and interactions in school, showing appreciation for the teacher and the gifted program, showing interest in the program and
students, visiting the classroom, and encouraging the students and teachers. The problem-solving category included handling eligibility questions, scheduling, managing over-crowded classrooms, making suggestions, supporting discipline, and interacting with parents. The material support category pertained to copying materials, providing money for supplies, and supporting activities.

Table 8.2 illustrates the negative categories which include: lack of curriculum guidance, lack of voice, lack appreciation of the gifted program, and supervision as evaluation.

Table 8.2  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Data Categories and Subcategories</th>
<th>Lack of Curriculum Guidance</th>
<th>Lack of Voice</th>
<th>Lack of Appreciation</th>
<th>Supervision as Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandates</td>
<td>Lack of Interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few Classroom Visits</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Input</td>
<td>Lack of Respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Staff Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under the topic of negative supervisory experiences, the lack of curriculum guidance category included isolation, few classroom visits, lack of knowledge about gifted program, lack of accountability, lack of materials, lack of activities, and lack of staff development beneficial for teachers of gifted students. The lack of voice category referred to curriculum mandates and the lack of teacher input into the gifted program. The lack appreciation for the gifted program category pertained to lack of understanding the needs of gifted students and lack of interest in the gifted program. The supervision as evaluation category referred to teachers past experiences of only being evaluated not supervised with the intention of improving the quality of instruction for gifted students.
Some categories were discussed by all of the participants and others were only discussed by a few of the participants. Table 8.3 presents the positive and negative categories revealing which experiences the participants discussed.

Table 8.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Tina</th>
<th>Nell</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Donna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom to do the job</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of curriculum guidance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of voice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack appreciation of gifted program</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision as evaluation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the eight categories, two categories were discussed by all four participants, three categories were discussed by three participants, and three categories were discussed by two participants. The researcher based the themes and then the propositions related to supervision of teachers in the elementary gifted program on information gathered in these categories, with particular focus on categories discussed by all participants. Case study research is dependent on the context themes about the supervisory needs of its setting. Data analysis had to be conducted with the context and characteristics of the participants in mind.

Comparison of Contexts

Before discussing and comparing individual themes, it is important to review information about the four participants. Of the 4 participants 2 teachers were veteran teachers with over 25
years experience teaching in the gifted program. The remaining 2 participants had been in
education for less than 17 years and had less than 6 years experience in the gifted program. Of
the four participants, three had been itinerant teachers at one time, and one teacher, Donna Mann,
remained an itinerant teacher serving two elementary schools.

The participants reported no formal policy for supervising teachers in the district, but
they indicated that they were evaluated using the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program (GTEP).
Participants reported that teachers in the gifted program are accountable to the principal at the
school level and to the county gifted coordinator at the central office. The principal at the school
is responsible for the gifted teachers’ evaluations, and the county coordinator decides the
program model and curriculum guidelines. Tina Henry reported, “The expectations of the GTEP,
along with the guidelines from the county office form the framework for the curriculum in the
gifted program.” Tina expressed the belief that the GTEP was “not a good instrument to evaluate
teachers in the gifted program.” She suggested a better way to evaluate teachers in the gifted
program might be “a teacher self-evaluation,” or a “checklist of observed skills” demonstrated in
the classroom. Tina believed that “someone knowledgeable about gifted programs” should
conduct evaluations of teachers in the gifted program.

Nell Sims compared her principal’s supervision of teachers in the gifted program with
supervision of regular classroom teachers. She reflected, “I am a lot less supervised than the
regular classroom teacher.” Nell attributed the lack of supervision to the principal’s busy
schedule and the fact that she is located in a trailer away from the other classrooms. Nell
indicated she received little supervision from the county office. She reported, “I think they are
there to address issues, if I have a problem.”
Mary Drew reported a lack of contact with the administrators in her school. She recalled, “They just don’t get out here very often.” Like Nell, she cited the many responsibilities of the principal and being located in a trailer as reasons for lack of supervision.

Although she expressed concern for the program model used in Shiloh County, Donna Mann recalled more positive supervisory experiences while teaching gifted students in another county. In discussing her supervisory experiences prior to coming to Shiloh County, Donna reported supervisors at the school and county level were “very involved in what she was teaching.” She reported that they “took the time to visit our classrooms to see what the students were learning.” Donna’s experiences while teaching in Shiloh County were similar to those of the other participants. She stated, “We don’t get as much (supervision) as a regular classroom teacher.” She believed that principals thought supervision for the gifted program would come more from the county level; however, she indicated, “We get the program model and mandates from the county, not supervision.”

Positive Supervisory Experiences

Freedom to do the Job

The first category under positive supervision is freedom to do the job. Freedom to do the job refers to allowing teachers in the gifted program the freedom to make curriculum decisions to best serve the students they teach. Table 8.4 summarizes the positive experiences reported by the participants related to freedom to do the job.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Reflections on Past Experiences Related to Freedom to do the Job</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>“My school lets me make most of my own decisions about what I am going to teach and how I am going to teach it”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.4
Table 8.4 continued

*Participant’s Reflections on Past Experiences Related to Freedom to do the Job*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tina        | “It is best to have loose guidelines for gifted education  
“I like the flexibility to adapt the curriculum to fit the needs of my students”  
“They just leave me free to do my job”  
“They pretty much trust my idea of what I should be doing”  
“The county coordinator always supported my ideas”  
“I enjoyed the freedom to do the job without excessive interference” |
| Nell        | “It gave me a lot of freedom to teach and to enjoy teaching  
“I need freedom to do the things I know to be good for my students” |

The two teachers having the most experience working with gifted students, Tina Henry and Nell Sims, indicated that in the past, this was the main reason they enjoyed working in the gifted program in Shiloh County.

A few years ago the program model for Shiloh County changed from an enrichment program to a mixed program model. The current program model includes cluster grouping of fourth and fifth grade gifted students in the regular classroom for language arts instruction and pulling students out of the regular classroom to a resource room for enrichment. This model of instruction limited the freedom that individual teachers enjoyed to choose topics and activities for gifted students. Tina reported that in the current program “the county coordinator determines the topics to be taught but does not directly supervise the way topics are taught.”

Describing the previous enrichment model, Tina recalled, “Teachers were taught the characteristics of gifted students, given an overall format of what a gifted class should look like, and told to follow the interest of the students, teach them, and motivate them.” Tina believed it
was best to have “loose guidelines” for gifted education because it allowed teachers the freedom to “adapt the curriculum to fit the needs of individual students.” Tina reported having little supervision under both gifted program models, but that is the way she wanted it. According to Tina, the principal at her school allowed her freedom to make most of her own decisions about “what she would teach and how she would teach it.” She believed her knowledge and experience in the gifted program earned her this privilege. Tina reported the administrators at her school “just leave me free to do my job.” She enjoyed the freedom that came from not being supervised and latitude to develop the curriculum according to the “individual needs of her students.”

Nell, like Tina, enjoyed more freedom to develop curriculum and activities under the previous gifted program model. Both teachers expressed their preference for the enrichment model. Discussing differences between the current gifted program model and the former model, Nell indicated that teaching the same topics as the regular classroom teacher resulted in a “lack of student interest in the activities.” She also reported the guidelines were “pretty confining.”

Nell agreed with Tina that it is important to have the freedom to develop curriculum to fit the needs of the students; however, she indicated that with “a lot of freedom” came “a lot of fear.” Nell feared that without more structured guidelines to follow, she might not be doing all the right things for her students. Given a choice between more or less supervision, Nell chose less supervision because it gave her more “freedom to teach and to enjoy teaching.”

Moral Support

The second category of positive supervisory experiences derived from the data was related to moral support. Two of the four participants reported receiving some form of moral support from principals, the county coordinator, or both. This category included classroom visits,
positive comments, encouragement, demonstrating interest, and appreciation. Table 8.5 summarizes the positive experiences reported by the participants related to moral support.

Table 8.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>“She was so impressed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“She is always thanking me for the good job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“She gives me positive comments she gets from parents.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“He would visit us every day.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“He showed an interest in what we were doing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“He made me feel like what I was doing was important.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They tell you what a good job you’ve done.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tina reported receiving positive comments from both the principal and the gifted coordinator who thanked her for her hard work and the good job that she does with her students. The gifted coordinator was so impressed with a vocabulary program that Tina developed, that she suggested that Tina “get it copyrighted.” Tina reported that her principal passed along compliments received from parents regarding the gifted program.

Mary recalled, when she first began teaching, having a principal who “visited classrooms almost daily” and “showed an interest” in what she was doing with her class. According to Mary, “he knew what was going on in the classrooms.” She remembered, “He acted like he really cared about the students and the teachers.” Mary also reported positive comments on her evaluations that made her feel good about herself as a teacher. Mary enjoyed receiving appreciation for the little extra jobs like the morning news show that she does at school.

Donna reported previous positive supervision in another school system in Georgia as “taking the time to visit our classrooms, offering suggestions on ways to improve, and showing
interest by caring about what you are teaching.” She did not report any of these experiences while teaching in Shiloh County. Instead Donna noted, “nobody seems to care.”

Problem Solving

The third category related to positive supervision was problem solving. Included in this category were assistance with student discipline, parent interactions, scheduling, overcrowding, and making suggestions. The participants addressed the first research question as they discussed the positive aspects of their supervisory experiences. From the analysis of the data extracted from the four case studies, the researcher developed the first proposition.

Proposition 1: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about positive supervision, episodes involving problem solving were evident.

Three of the four participants reported receiving help with various problems while working in Shiloh County. The data from the participants supported the proposition that teachers in the elementary gifted program received assistance from their supervisors in the area of problem solving. The problem solving experiences that Donna reported were experiences from another school district. Since this study is focused on Shiloh County School System, experiences from another school system were not relevant to this study. Table 8.6 summarizes the positive experiences reported by the participants in regard to problem solving.

Table 8.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>“backs me up when I have a discipline problem”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“tries to work out problems of scheduling and overcrowded classes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“is supportive when there is a problem with parents”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nell</td>
<td>“She sometimes handles complaints from parents”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8.6 continued

**Participant’s Reflections on Past Experiences Related to Problem Solving**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nell</td>
<td>“They are there to address issues if I have a problem”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“They always defend me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They’ve helped me figure things out, such as scheduling, or dealing with discipline”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“She supports me when I make academic decisions” She backs me up when I have a problem with parents”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each participant addressed the first research question by discussing past experiences with supervisors involving problem solving. The descriptions of episodes involving problem solving differed from teacher to teacher. Categories related to problem solving included issues about discipline, scheduling, overcrowded classrooms, parent interactions, and curriculum.

Tina, Nell, and Mary reported assistance in dealing with parents in regard to student achievement, student eligibility, or discipline. Both Mary and Tina reported assistance in problems with overcrowded classes and scheduling. In parent issues related to testing students, Tina remarked, “Sometimes when we test a student and they don’t qualify for the program, the parents get upset with us.” She recalled the county coordinator backing her up by assuring the parents that “correct procedures were followed” and the “best interest of the student” was being served.

Tina reported that her principal always “backed her up” when problems arose with parents. Concerning problem solving at the county level, Tina recalled the county coordinator as “being supportive in dealing with parents about testing or curriculum.” The county coordinator also helped solve problems of “scheduling and overcrowded classes.”

Nell referred parent complaints about the program model to the county office where “she (gifted coordinator) told parents that this is the way the program is going to be.” According to
Nell, “This takes some of the pressure off us.” Nell believed the county coordinator’s main job was “to address issues or problems” when they occurred.

Describing support from principals relating to conflicts with parents, Mary noted that her supervisors always defended her. Mary reflected, “If I give a student a bad grade or put them on probation, my principal always backs me up.” When pressured by parents to test students repeatedly for the program, Mary reported, “I tell the parents to call the county office, and they take care of it for me.” In addition to support with parental conflicts, Mary also reported receiving help with “scheduling and discipline.” Like Mary, Tina reported receiving help from the principal with disciplining students.

Donna recalled a former supervisor who took the time to visit her classroom and to make suggestions to help improve or expand on what she was teaching; however, this supervision was not received in Shiloh County, the researcher could not include the data in this study.

Material Support

Although the fourth category, material support, was not directly related to supervision, it emerged as a form of support received from supervisors. Table 8.7 summarizes the positive experiences reported by the participants in regard to material support.

Table 8.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>“The gifted coordinator purchased some materials for the gifted program”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“She occasionally buys books and other items”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The county foots the bill for large scale copying cost”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“I always receive any materials I need.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My principal always finds money for the things I need to enhance the program.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two of the four participants discussed *material support* in the interviews. Tina reported receiving some “monetary support” when the county coordinator purchased books, dictionaries, and atlases for the gifted program. Copying cost for vocabulary packets, worksheets, and parent communications were also covered by the county. However, Tina reported spending much of “her own money for materials.” According to Tina, “the school system as a whole appropriates little money for the gifted program.” Tina speculated that the gifted program would be “more effective and consistent” if the county provided the same resources to the each school.

Mary’s report of material support was more positive than Tina’s responses, as she recalled receiving “any materials” that she needed from her principal to “enhance the program.” She remembered coming to her current school to find nothing in her trailer, but Mary reported her principal quickly provided all the things she needed.

Negative Supervisory Experiences

Lack of Curriculum Guidance

Each participant addressed the first research question by discussing their experiences regarding lack of curriculum guidance. This category includes having little knowledge of the gifted program, limiting activities in the gifted program, experiencing few classroom visits, lacking curriculum materials, feeling isolated, lacking staff development, and lacking accountability. The researcher analyzed the data across the individual case studies relating to the category of lack of curriculum guidance to develop the second proposition.

Proposition 2: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving lack of curriculum guidance were evident.

Table 8.8 summarizes the negative experiences reported by the participants in regard to lack of curriculum guidance.
Table 8.8

*Participant’s Reflections on Past Experiences Related to Curriculum Guidance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tina        | “Teachers of gifted students feel isolated.”  
              “Teachers in special programs are expected to gather information on their own.”  
              “I have been totally unsupervised.”  
              “My school administration doesn’t give me any kind of direction.”  
              “There are not many opportunities to attend workshops” |
| Nell        | “I had more money to spend when I was in the regular classroom”  
              “She really doesn’t do much supervising or evaluating” |
| Mary        | “I really don’t think they have a clue”  
              “They just don’t get out here very often”  
              “I really don’t get much supervision”  
              “They never come in or make suggestions”  
              “I don’t think there is any supervision”  
              “You can’t do this, and you can’t do that” |
| Donna       | “At that school I don’t have any materials”  
              “We are left too much on our own to solve our own problems”  
              “turned loose to do whatever we need to do to tech the gifted students”  
              “Some one has to be accountable”  
              “I’m not being evaluated or supervised”  
              “I could do whatever I want”  
              “Nobody knows what I am doing because nobody asks” |

Although the descriptions differed from teacher to teacher, episodes involving lack of curriculum guidance were reported by all four participants. The following descriptions and comments support this proposition that negative supervision received by elementary teachers in the gifted program related to lack of curriculum guidance.

Tina could not recall any specifically negative supervisory experiences, but she surmised that lack of supervision or “neglect” would qualify as a negative experience. Tina reported her school administrators did not give her “any kind of direction regarding curriculum.” Tina
indicated that as an experienced teacher, she needed little curriculum guidance; however, she believed new teachers to the gifted program needed more assistance with curriculum and should be assigned a mentor or a peer supervisor.

Tina also recognized the “lack of staff development” indicating there were “few opportunities to attend workshops” for teachers in the gifted program. She wished that administrators would “seek out” and “inform” teachers of opportunities to improve their teaching ability and to enhance instructional methods.

Nell’s lack of supervision paralleled Tina’s as she reported her experiences with supervision as being a “reactive kind of thing.” According to Nell, administrators were there if they needed to solve problems, but they did little supervising. Nell recalled an incident when teachers of gifted students planned a large overnight trip only to have it rejected when presented to the county coordinator. Nell recalled that a lot of time was wasted because of lack of guidance in the planning of curriculum and events. She commented that limiting activities really “hurt the program.” Nell reflected her belief that most supervisors “want to be supportive,” but they “lack the knowledge” they need to understand gifted children and their needs. Speculating on the lack of supervision in the gifted program, Nell suggested it was because “there is no real focus on trying to improve their test scores” since “most of the gifted kids do well on standardized tests.”

Mary reported similar instances of lack of supervision. She expressed her beliefs that administrators did not know what was “going on in the program,” or what the gifted teachers were “required to do.” She stated that her supervisors could evaluate her according to how she taught the QCC’s, but not how she taught gifted classes.

With the exception of one year being supervised by Mr. Reagan, Mary recalled few interactions with her supervisors. She reported, “They just don’t get out here very often.”
Explaining the many obligations of principals and their lack of time, Mary noted, “I am the least of their worries.” While wanting her supervisor “to show more interest in what she was doing in the gifted classes,” Mary did not want their input on “curriculum issues.” She preferred having curriculum assistance from “experienced gifted teachers.”

Donna discussed several issues that were categorized as lack of curricular guidance. She noted a problem with lack of materials, or inconsistency in distributing materials from school to school. Being an itinerant teacher working in two schools, Donna reported “carrying supplies from one school to the other,” and she sometimes was unprepared because she forgot to bring an item she needed for class.

Donna emphasized the need for guidance in teaching the curriculum. She reported the curriculum as being “too broad” and teachers as not knowing “where we are going with it.” Describing the guidance she received in Shiloh County, Donna reflected, “I am told very generically what to do and then kinda turned loose to do it.” She also described her assignment as, “I’m handed a packet, and told to teach these kids.” When Donna asked how to teach the information,” she was told “just have fun with it.”

Accountability was a major concern for Donna, and she emphasized several times that “someone has to be accountable.” Donna shared, “I learned pretty quickly that if I keep my mouth shut and don’t cause any problems, then nobody is going to check on me.” She has been “in a trailer for eight years” and reported, “Nobody comes to my room.” Donna remarked that she was “rarely included in school activities or assignments,” and she explained that being an itinerant teacher, only at a school part time, accentuated the problem of not being accountable. Donna noted, “It’s as if what I teach is not important enough to even check to see what I am doing.”
Donna wanted to know the “ultimate goals” for the gifted program, the “curriculum expectations” of the county, and “what was expected from her regarding teaching.” Reporting feelings that what she was doing was not respected, Donna stated, “I’ve lost all value to what I am doing.”

Lack of Voice

The data revealed a second category of negative experiences the researcher referred to as lack of voice. Three of the four participants reported a desire to have more input into the gifted program. Each participant addressed the first research question by discussing their experiences regarding lack of voice. Specific items discussed by the participants were lack of input into the gifted program and mandates. The researcher analyzed the data across the individual case studies relating to the category of lack of voice to develop the third proposition.

Proposition 3: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving a lack of voice were evident.

Table 8.9 summarizes the negative experiences reported by the participants in regard to lack of voice.

Table 8.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tina        | “I would like more input into the program model and how it is taught”  
|             | “I would like to see teachers of gifted students playing a larger roll in the development of the gifted program”  
|             | “We know the students better than any of the administrators” |
| Nell        | “Supervisors should be open to the suggestions of teachers”  
|             | “A good supervisor is someone willing to hear a suggestion and weight it” |
Table 8.9 continued

*Participant’s Reflections on Past Experiences Related to Lack of Voice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nell</td>
<td>“We are mandated to do certain things a certain way” “The mandates are just pretty confining”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“It’s just telling me what I can and can’t do”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the descriptions differed from teacher to teacher, episodes involving lack of voice were reported by three of the four participants. The following descriptions and comments support the proposition that negative supervision received by elementary teachers in the gifted program was related to lack of voice.

Having more experience with the curriculum and freedom with the enrichment model, Tina and Nell were more verbal on the issue of lack of voice. Tina emphasized the fact that the teachers work with these students every day and know their students better than administrators. She believed this “knowledge of the students needs and abilities” should allow teachers some input into curriculum decisions for these students. Reflecting on the gifted model, Tina stated, “I would like more input into the program model and what is taught.”

Nell also reported that she had little input into decisions regarding the curriculum. Responding to a query about negative supervision, Nell stated, “I would call the lack of input into how and what I teach as negative.” Under the current model for gifted education, Nell noted that teachers were “mandated to do certain things a certain way.” She described the current gifted program model as having to “follow the same curriculum that the grade level teachers use” consequently, Nell considered this model as “not as interesting for the students.”

Mary recalled most of her experiences with the school administrators as a series of “you can’t do this, and you can’t do that.” Reporting that gifted classes could no longer take field trips,
Mary noted the principals did not want the students “out of the building” when the students could be doing work in the classroom. Mary believed that this limiting of activities “decreased the student’s enjoyment of the program.” She speculated the “focus on accountability” and “making annual yearly progress” prompted principals to concentrate on students being in the classroom working on academics. While Donna mentioned receiving mandates from the county office, she put no emphasis on lack of voice in her interviews.

Lack of Appreciation for the Gifted Program

All four participants reported supervisory experiences that were categorized as showing a lack of appreciation for the gifted program. Each participant addressed the first research question by discussing their experiences regarding lack of appreciation for the gifted program. Specific items discussed by the participants were lack of interest in the gifted program, lack of respect, and lack of understanding of gifted children and the gifted program. The researcher analyzed the data across the individual case studies relating to the category of lack of curriculum guidance to develop the fourth proposition.

Proposition 4: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving a lack of appreciation for the gifted program were evident.

Table 8.10 summarizes the negative experiences reported by the participants in regard to the lack of appreciation for the gifted program.

Table 8.10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>“The powers that be do not understand and appreciate the abilities and needs of this segment of the student population”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8.10 continued

Participant’s Reflections on Past Experiences Related to Lack of Appreciation for the Gifted Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nell</td>
<td>“The supervisors lack an understanding of the gifted program”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I would like for them to feel the program is important”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They are supportive, but don’t really understand the gifted program”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>“I don’t get the sense that what we are doing is really important to them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I believe most administrators do not fully understand the gifted program or the gifted child”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>“I need someone to show an interest in what we are doing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t believe what I’m doing is respected”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Nobody seems to care”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I want them to feel my job is important”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the descriptions differed from teacher to teacher, episodes involving lack of appreciation for the gifted program were reported by all four participants. The following descriptions and comments support the proposition that negative supervision received by elementary teachers in the gifted program was related to lack of appreciation for the gifted program.

Concerned about the future of gifted education, Tina stated that the people “in charge did not fully appreciate the abilities of gifted students, if they did, the gifted program would hold a higher priority in the educational system.” Nell reported most of her “positive affirmation” as coming from parents and students. Initially reporting never receiving any positive affirmation from administrators, Nell corrected herself saying, “I did have one administrator who appreciated everything I did.” Nell recalled that this principal “understood if I had an idea, that I had really thought it through,” and he “trusted me to do what was good for the students.” Nell believed
most “supervisors lack an understanding of the gifted program.” She reflected her belief that most supervisors want to be supportive, but they lack the knowledge they need to understand gifted children and their needs. Nell further felt “the gifted program was not a priority in the school system”, and she wanted the “principals to feel the program is important.”

Mary reported receiving little appreciation for gifted students in the form of recognition of their accomplishments. As she recalled wanting to display student work in the media center, Mary was told “there wasn’t enough room because of classroom projects.” According to Mary, “There is no one, but me, to say they did a good job.”

Reflecting on the lack of interest in the gifted program, Donna noted, “It’s as if what I teach is not important enough to even check to see what I am doing.” Donna wanted someone “to show an interest in her, in her students, and in the gifted program enough to try to solve some of the problems.”

Supervision as Evaluation

The final category of negative supervision was related to supervision as evaluation. Three of the four participants reported supervisory experiences that were evaluative in nature. Each participant addressed the first research question by discussing their experiences. The researcher analyzed the data across the individual case studies relating to the category of supervision as evaluation to develop the fifth proposition.

Proposition 5: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving supervision as evaluation were evident.

Table 8.11 summarizes the negative experiences reported by the participants in regard to supervision as evaluation.
### Table 8.11

**Participant’s Reflections on Past Experiences Related to Supervision as Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tina         | “Supervision should be more than just evaluation”  
|              | “The principal does the job of supervision to some extent in each school by evaluating the performance of the teacher” |
| Nell         | “Supervision is the same as evaluation”  
|              | “Supervision for me really corresponds with my evaluations”  
|              | “I get evaluated once a year that is the one time I am supervised” |
| Donna        | “I’m not being evaluated or supervised” |

Although the descriptions differed from teacher to teacher, episodes involving supervision as evaluation were reported by three of the four participants. The following descriptions and comments support the proposition that negative supervision received by elementary teachers in the gifted program was related to supervision as evaluation.

According to Tina, supervision should be “more of a day to day activity” working with the teachers to determine “what is being taught as well as how it is being taught.” Nell reported only seeing her principal when he came in “to evaluate her teaching” and when he “needed something from her.” According to Nell, “Supervision is the same as evaluation.” She reported good evaluations, but she doubted that a 20 minute snapshot of her teaching was “a fair way to look at the gifted program teacher.” She reported that “much of the gifted class time is spent on projects,” and a supervisor might see only a small part of the overall project and not see the different objectives being taught.

Not only did Donna report a “lack of supervision,” but she also reported a lack of the required evaluations. She recalled needing three evaluations last year and receiving one; this year she received none of the three required evaluations. Donna stated, “There is just no guidance, not
from any level of the administration.” She shared, “I want to feel like my job is important enough for them to recognize that I am here.”

Tina defined supervision as “the same as evaluation,” and she described being evaluated “the same as all teachers with the GTEP.” According to Nell, “Supervision is the same as evaluation.” Not only did Donna report a lack of supervision, but also she reported a lack of the required evaluations. Mary commented on her supervisor evaluating her as a teacher in the gifted program, but she had little more to say about supervision as evaluation.

Supervisory Needs of Teachers of Gifted Students

The themes discussed in the participant interviews also addressed the second research question. Do teachers in the elementary school gifted program believe they should be supervised to better support the teaching of gifted students? The researcher analyzed the data across the individual case studies to develop the sixth proposition.

Proposition 6: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about past supervisory experiences, teacher reflections about supervision confirmed the need for improved supervisory methods for teachers in the gifted program.

The participants reported past positive and negative supervisory experiences that had an impact on their teaching careers. In addition to reporting past supervisory experiences, participants reflected on their unique supervisory needs as teachers of gifted students. The following descriptions and comments support the third proposition that teachers in the gifted program need and desire more effective supervision.

Tina made the comment, “I have taught gifted since 1974, and I have been totally unsupervised.” When asked to describe her supervisory needs as a teacher of gifted students, Tina replied, “I would not like to be supervised, and I think the gifted classes ought to be pretty
well free to do as they think they need.” She did acknowledge that teachers new to the program needed assistance, but she felt supervision would be more effective from peer supervisors or mentors. Tina indicated she would like to see teachers of gifted students “playing a larger role in the development of the gifted program,” and she stated, “I would like more input into the program model and what is taught.” Tina described her supervisory experiences as “the same as evaluation,” and she desired that “supervision should be more than just evaluation.”

Describing lack of supervision, Nell reported, “For years there was pretty much no supervision,” and “there was a lot of freedom but a lot of fear” that she was not “doing it right.” She remarked that she enjoyed “a lot of freedom to teach and enjoyed teaching.” Nell reported the type of supervision she currently receives as “mandated to do certain things a certain way.” Nell commented, “Supervisors should be open to the suggestions of teachers” and “Supervision is the same as evaluation.” Nell described the supervision she received as “more of a reactive kind of thing,” and felt that supervisors “are just there in case something comes up.”

Donna described her supervision with the following comments, “Nobody comes to my room. I’ve been in a trailer for eight years. I don’t mind that, but they have no idea what is going on out in that trailer. Nobody seems to care.” Discussing supervision as evaluation, Donna reflected, “I’m not being evaluated or supervised.” In describing what she needed from supervision, Donna noted, “I want the school administrators to show an interest in what we are doing, visit our classrooms, and come to our competitions. I want to feel like my job is important enough for them to recognize that I am here.” She added, “I want to know that they know what I am doing and they approve.” Donna reflected, “We need to be included in what is going on in the school, at least informed. I am rarely included in school activities or assignments.” Additionally Donna reported, “I don’t believe what I am doing is respected.”
Mary also reported feelings of isolation reporting, “I’m not seen as really a part of the school, but as an extra, a kind of add-on.” The gifted classes not only were “pushed to the side” when there was limited time or space for an event or activity, but also Mary recalled the gifted class was “even left off the lunch schedule.” She reported lack of supervision stating, “They just don’t come out here very often,” and “I don’t get the sense that what we are doing is really important to them.” Mary reported needing administrators “to back me up on academic decisions” and “trust that we are following the state guidelines and procedures.” She indicated a need for more money and materials for the gifted program. Most importantly, Mary asked that principals “include us in what is going on in the school, keep us informed on the events in the school, and make room for the gifted program.”

The participant’s responses indicate they believed the gifted program held a low priority within the school system. Tina reported examples of the “low priority” placed on the gifted program. She reported that “because the gifted class is low on the totem pole, we are always put into a trailer. Sometimes we are moved into the building, but when they need to add another class we are moved back to the trailer.” Nell remarked, “I would like for the principals to feel the program is important. The gifted program is not a high priority in the school system.” Citing examples of low priority, Nell reported “lack of funds, lack of teachers in the gifted program, and the worst classrooms.” Mary wanted the principals to be more “visible.” She stated, “I would like to see her show a little more interest in what we are doing.” Mary requested that principals not “make us feel like we are left out in the cold,” or that “we are not important.” Donna wanted, “more supervision, more structure in the program, and more guidance in how and what we teach.”
Additional support needs reported that did not fall under supervision were funding, materials, and time to plan curriculum with other gifted teachers. Tina reported receiving some material support in the form of supplies such as dictionaries, maps, and atlases. She acknowledged the material received, but she noted there was “little money appropriated for the program,” and that she spends “too much” of her own money. She noted, “The program would be more consistent, if the county provided the same books and resources to each school.” Nell also reported a “lack of funds,” reporting that she “had more money to spend when I taught in the regular classroom.”

Chapter 9 presents the findings of the study related to the existing literature on instructional supervision and gifted education. The next chapter discusses the implications of the study, recommendations, and the need for future research in the area of supervision for teachers of gifted and talented students.
CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This study was designed to examine the perspectives of teachers working in the elementary gifted program related to instructional supervision. This study sought to examine the way teachers of gifted students at the elementary level are supervised and how these teachers believe they should be supervised to better meet the needs of the students they teach. This study was significant because a review of the literature revealed only one study related to teachers of gifted students and supervision. This chapter includes a summary of the study, a discussion of the research findings, implications, and directions for future research.

Summary of the Study

A qualitative case study approach was used to examine the perspectives of teachers in the elementary gifted program in one school system in Georgia. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How are teachers in the elementary school gifted program supervised?

2. Do teachers in the elementary school gifted program believe they should be supervised to better support the teaching of gifted students?

Interviews with teachers in the elementary school gifted program provided insights into supervision of teachers in the gifted program.

The theoretical framework guiding this study was symbolic interactionism which focuses on the way individuals interact with others and the meanings the individuals draw from these interactions (Blumer, 1969). Because perspectives are the central concept of symbolic
interactionism, this was appropriate to gain insights about the meanings the participants assigned to their past supervisory experiences.

The study was conducted with four teachers assigned to the elementary school gifted program in one county in Georgia. Each of the four participants were interviewed three times over a six month period from November of 2004 to April of 2005. Transcripts of the interviews were the primary data source for this study, but additional information was obtained from fieldnotes, Internet web sites, and the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program manual. The data gathered in this study was analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Common themes were identified and grouped into eight categories. Each case study was analyzed individually then the case studies were analyzed together in a cross case analysis. From this analysis, the themes were further reduced and data were delimited into proposition.

Discussion of Propositions and the Related Literature

The eight categories that were produced in this study were used to develop the six propositions discussed in Chapter 8. This section discusses the categories and propositions in relation to the literature discussed in Chapter 2. From the findings, the researcher proposed the following propositions:

1. When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about positive supervision, episodes involving problem solving were evident.
2. When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving lack of curriculum guidance were evident.
3. When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving lack of voice were evident.
4. When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving lack of appreciation for the gifted program were evident.

5. When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving supervision as evaluation were evident.

6. When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about past supervisory experiences, reflections supported the need for improved supervisory methods for teachers in the gifted program.

Proposition 1: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about positive supervision, episodes involving problem solving were evident.

Participants in this study indicated they received positive supervision in the form of problem solving. Problem solving emerged in several different forms including assistance with student discipline, parent interactions, scheduling, overcrowded classrooms, and making suggestions in curriculum.

Discussing student discipline problems, Tina reported that her principal “backs me up when I have a discipline problem.” Mary also indicated assistance in “dealing with discipline.” Nell reflected the main supervision she received was in the form of problem solving. She stated, “They are there to address issues if I have a problem.” While assistance in solving problems is identified as positive, this statement implies that teachers are not given the authority to make decisions which would solve their own problems.

Recalling supervisory assistance with parent interactions, Mary and Nell recall referring parent complaints to the county gifted coordinator. Nell reported, “This takes some of the pressure off us.” Mary stated, “I tell the parents to call the count office and they take care of it
for me.” Nell indicated the county coordinator assured parents that “correct procedures were being followed” in testing students and that the “best interest of the student” was being served. Mary reported her principal “backs me up when I have a problem with parents.”

Scheduling and overcrowded classrooms were two issues in which supervisors offered assistance. Nell reported the county coordinator “tries to work out problems of scheduling and overcrowded classrooms.” Mary also indicated help with scheduling stating, “They’ve helped me figure things out, such as scheduling.”

Though she did not work with this principal very long, Nell reported having one principal who trusted her to do what was best for the gifted students. Mary also reported having one principal who visited her classroom, made suggestions, and show an interest in what was going on in the gifted program.

Proposition 2. When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving lack of curriculum guidance were evident.

All four participants reported episodes related to a lack of curriculum guidance in the form of supervisors having little knowledge of the gifted program and gifted students, limiting activities in the gifted program, and having few classroom visits. The participants also reported a lack of curriculum materials, feeling isolated, a lack of staff development, and relatively little accountability.

All participants reported little or no supervision of teachers in the gifted program. Describing supervision in the gifted program, Tina responded, “I don’t think we are supervised,” and “I have taught gifted since 1974 and I have been totally unsupervised.” She reported getting no direction from her school administrators. Nell has been teaching in the gifted program since 1990, and she reported that in the early years there was “pretty much no supervision.” Nell also
reported “a lot of freedom, but a lot of fear” that she might not be “doing it right.” Nell viewed the current supervision as being “mandated to do certain things a certain way.” Mary’s statements paralleled those of Tina and Nell recalling, “I really don’t get much supervision.”

Some confusion exist as to who is responsible for supervising teachers in the gifted program. The findings of this study support those of Zeilinger (1980), who investigated the role of the principal in gifted education and found a lack of communication and coordination between principals and program directors. This increased confusion for teachers of gifted students who often answer to both groups. The teachers in this study reported confusion related to having dual supervisors. Nell expressed the need for better communications between the county gifted coordinator and the teachers of gifted students. She reported that often the expectations of the principal and those of the gifted coordinator do not match, leaving the teacher undecided as to which instructions to follow. According to Tina, the gifted coordinator determines the topic taught, but she does not “supervise the teaching of these topics.” Donna reported, “We get the program model and mandates from the county, not supervision.”

Research indicates that gifted students require a differentiated curriculum to be successful (Delise, 2001b; Peckron, 1996; Wardle, 1999; Winebrenner, 2000). All four participants reported little supervision from their principals and the gifted coordinator at the county office, causing the teachers to question whether they are truly meeting the needs of these students. Nell reported enjoying a lot of freedom to plan curriculum and teach students, but she also reported a lot of fear that she might not be doing it correctly. Donna reported being “told very generically what to do and then turned loose to do what I want.” Tina recalled “much of the time it was just our ideas of what we should do.”
While Gross and Herriott (1965) reported a clear link between the leadership of principals and the performance of teachers of gifted students, the findings of this study can not confirm or deny this. While the performance of the teachers in the gifted program was not evaluated in this study, the findings revealed that the less experienced teachers in this study desired more supervision, while the experienced teachers preferred the independence they enjoyed by not being supervised. While McCurdy (1983) indicated that instructional leadership is the “main ingredient in good schools” (p. 19), the participants in this study reported the principal evaluates the performance of the teacher but did little else in the way of supervision.

The findings of this study support those of Spaulding (1997), who examined the ineffective behaviors of principals and the consequences of these behaviors on teachers. Spaulding’s study found that teachers were most concerned with interactions with their principals, more specifically with lack of support, lack of communication skills, and lack of availability. Participants in this study expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of support, lack of communication, and lack of availability they received from their supervisors.

All participants in this study reported that their administrators had little knowledge of the gifted program and the characteristics and needs of gifted students. This supported information from Maker (1993) indicating that administrators and regular classroom teachers often are not familiar with the goals and guidelines of gifted education. Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, and Berstein (1985) indicated the principal’s lack of knowledge in content area was a concern of teachers. All participants in this study reported their concern that principals did not understand the gifted program, did not know what was being taught in the gifted classroom, nor did they express a desire to learn what was going on in the gifted classroom. Minton (1984)
encouraged principals to study special groups and departments to learn how to better meet the needs of these groups.

When talking about the principal’s knowledge of the gifted program, Tina stated that most of the time the principal “had no idea what I was doing or what I was supposed to be doing.” Tina explained that strategies used in the gifted classroom are different from strategies used in the regular classroom. Recalling an observation when the principal questioned her control of the classroom, she noted that “some times supervisors do not understand” the less structured gifted classroom or the characteristics of gifted children. Tina reported, “Students can be moving around and loud and still be on task.”

Donna described the extent of her curriculum direction as being given a packet of information and told to “teach the students and to have fun with it.” Nell wished the principals knew “what is going on in the gifted program” and “what the program was supposed to be like.” She believed that most supervisors wanted to be supportive but “lack the knowledge” needed to understand gifted students and their special needs. Mary’s remarks about the principal’s knowledge of the gifted program matched those of Nell. Mary expressed her belief that administrators did not “know what is going on in the gifted program,” and “I don’t think they have a clue.” Mary summed up her opinion of supervision in the gifted program with these words, “I don’t think the supervisors know how to supervise the gifted program because they are always looking at the big picture, instead of the little sections.”

Limiting activities in the gifted program was a theme discussed by some of the teachers. Mary reported a lot of “you can’t do this, and you can’t do that.” She noted field trips were activities the teachers of gifted students felt strongly about, but remarked “most of the principals don’t want us to leave the building.”
In the past, field trips were an important part of the gifted program. According to Nell, field trips were important to the gifted curriculum as they reinforced the topic being taught in the classroom and were a motivational tool used to increase student interest. Nell reported about half of the principals opposed field trips. She recalled working hard to plan an overnight field trip to Orlando for the “millennium celebration.” This would have been the culminating activity for a year long unit on the millennium. According to Nell, when the field trip was presented to the county for approval, the proposal was “shot down immediately.”

In a seminal study of instructional supervision, Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) examined the perspectives of teachers in regard to what teachers want, need, and get from supervision. This study asked teachers to describe their best and worst supervisory experiences. Two main categories were established; supervision at its best and supervision at its worst. Sub-categories of supervision at its best were supervision as validation, supervision as empowerment, supervision as visible presence, supervision as coaching, and supervision as a vehicle for professional development. Sub-categories of supervision at its worst were supervision as a dog and pony show, supervision as a weapon, supervision as meaningless/invisible routine, supervision as a fix-it list, and supervision as an unwelcome intervention. Supervision as a visible presence was found to be a sub category of supervision at its best. The study also revealed supervision at its best occurred in informal classroom visits. The lack of classroom visits reported by the teachers of gifted students was viewed as a negative similar to the findings of Zepeda and Ponticell.

According to McCurdy (1983), effective principals maintain an active role in classroom instruction. This study found no evidence that principals were active in classroom instruction. To the contrary, the participants reported no input from the principals relating to classroom instruction. The findings of this study did support those of Spaulding (1997), who studied
ineffective behaviors of principals and revealed seven categories including lack of support, lack of communication skills, and lack of availability. All participants reported the desire for more interaction with supervisors.

Funding for gifted programs has been a concern since the Marland Report (1971) drew attention to the need for special programs for gifted students. The Marland Report described differentiated instruction for gifted students as a low priority at the federal, state, and local level. The Special Projects Act in 1974 was the first time gifted education received funds from the federal government (Ulm, 1985; Zettel, 1980). The Gifted and Talented Act of 1978 extended funding for gifted programs; however, it was repealed in 1981 (Ulm, 1985; Zettel, 1980). Not until 1988 when the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Education act was passed, did federal funds again become available for gifted education (Passow, 1993). Since that time, funding through the Jacob K. Javits Act decreased during the 1990s (Sternberg, 1995). Schema (2004) found that federal mandates under the No Child Left Behind Act and declining revenues have forced some schools to cut or to eliminate gifted programs. The participants in this study indicated there is still a lack of funding for gifted programs. While participants reported some monetary support in the form of purchasing basic items for the gifted program, they reported spending much more of their own money on classroom supplies than they did as a regular classroom teacher. The findings of this study do not support those of Cavin (1980), who reported that the consensus of opinions indicated gifted education should receive at least the same support given to underachievers. The participants in this study expressed the lack of priority given to gifted education, indicating that with the focus on accountability made the support for underachievers a higher priority. Contrary to the reports from the other participants, one teacher reported receiving
adequate monetary support. Mary recalled, “I always receive any materials I need,” and “My principal always finds money for the things I need to enhance the program.”

The gifted program model used in Shiloh County is set up to have one teacher of gifted students assigned to each elementary school with some itinerant teachers serving two schools. Feelings of isolation as expressed by the participants in this study were similar to those expressed by other itinerant teachers in the research by Benson (2001) and Beaver (2002). Being the only teacher of gifted students in a school, participants described feelings of isolation about being uninformed about what was going on in the school. Reflecting on feelings of isolation, Mary shared, “I think I’m not seen as really part of the school, but as an extra, a kind of add-on.” She added, “If there is not enough time or not enough room, then we (gifted class) are pushed to the side.” Donna also believed the teachers in the gifted program were “left too much on our own.”

A study by Rash and Miller (2000) found the need for teachers of gifted students to stay up to date on current research and to continue to add to the skills needed to teach gifted students, and in a study by Fervert (1993), it was reported that one of the characteristics that principals looked for was teachers who were lifelong learners and who were willing to devote time for professional development. The participants in this study expressed the desire to stay current on new strategies and to improve their teaching skills, but they reported there were few staff development opportunities for teachers of gifted students. The teachers of gifted students in this school system were denied opportunities within the school system.

While not all states require specialized training to teach gifted students, significant differences were found between teachers who received specialized training and teachers who did not have specialized training (Feldhusen & Hansen, 1994; Hanninan, 1998; Rash & Miller,
2000). According to Tina, there are not many opportunities to “stay abreast of new ideas, programs available for testing, and curriculum for gifted education.” She would like for supervisors to “supply information about workshops, Internet sites, etc. that would improve teaching skills and teach new methods.” Nell reported needing her supervisor “to provide opportunities to grow as a teacher.” She also described these opportunities as “the link between supervision and improved teaching.” Nell added, “I do not receive many of these opportunities from my supervisors.”

Although Donna was the only participant to discuss “accountability,” the topic seemed a natural extension of the topics previously expressed by all participants. Donna discussed the difference between the gifted program in which she taught in another school system and the gifted program in Shiloh County. Coming from a system in which supervisors closely monitored classroom instruction to a system in which the supervision is almost nonexistent, Donna felt as if “nobody cares.” Expressing concern for the lack of accountability, Donna reported, “Nobody checks on me. Nobody looks to see if I am accomplishing the (curriculum) goals. There is no accountability.”

Proposition 3: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving lack of voice were evident.

The lack of voice reported in this study supports the findings of Reitzug (1997) who examined the role of principal as instructional leader and found the lack of teacher voice and the image of teacher as inferior indicated the principal was “the agent of improved instruction, not the teacher” (p. 333). Although Marks et al. (1971) reported that supervision has moved toward a cooperative effort with teachers and supervisors working together to improve classroom
instruction, this was not found to be true in the gifted program of Shiloh County School System where the teachers reported having little input into the gifted program.

Maker (1993) addresses the issue of collegiality stating, “Collegiality must be fostered to facilitate the setting of common goals and the balancing of management concerns” (p. 31). Tina indicated that since the teachers knew the students and their needs better than anyone else, she would like to see teachers of gifted students playing a larger role in developing the gifted program. She stated, “I would like more input into the program model and what is taught.” Nell indicated, “supervisors should be open to the suggestions of teachers,” and she described a good supervisor as “someone who is willing to listen to teachers suggestions and be able to see value in their ideas.”

Reitzug (1997) examined concepts of supervision taught in administrator preparation programs and in supervision textbooks. Analysis of most textbooks revealed the image of the teacher as “deficient and voiceless” (p. 326). The findings of this study support the notion of the teacher as “voiceless.”

Proposition 4: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving lack of appreciation for the gifted program were evident.

The category of Lack of Appreciation included elements of lack of interest, lack of respect, and lack of understanding. Dangel and Walker (1991) examined the perspectives of gifted teachers in Georgia regarding supervision of teachers in gifted education. Teachers in this study reported that their supervisors rarely complimented the teacher on a job well done, did not really understand the job of the teacher in the gifted program, and made teachers feel inferior.

Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) included supervision as validation as a subcategory of supervision at its best. Supervision as validation as described by Zepeda and Ponticell parallels
the teachers need for appreciation in this study. All of the participants indicated their feeling of not being appreciated for what they do. Some participants used the word “appreciation,” while others depicted a lack of appreciation by reporting their principal’s lack of interest, lack of respect, and lack of understanding for the gifted program.

A study by McKerrow (1996) indicated that principals need to develop trust and a strong supportive relationship with teachers before initiating formal supervision. In this study, teachers expressed the need “to be listened to and made to feel successful” (McKerrow, 1996, p. 332). The participants of this study indicated their desire for appreciation from their supervisors.

Donna recognized the importance of the principal’s attitude in the school when she stated, “Principals lead the way in demonstrating what is important in a school. If they don’t show appreciation for the gifted program no one else will.”

As previously reported in this chapter, lack of knowledge about the gifted program and lack of classroom visits also indicate a lack of interest in the gifted program. While discussing the need for supervisors to know the problems in the gifted program, Donna reflected, “We need someone to show an interest in what we are doing, to come to our classrooms, and to care enough to try to solve some of our problems.” Indicating the lack of interest displayed by her supervisor in learning about the gifted program, Donna reflected, “Nobody knows what I am doing because nobody asks.” Nell added that she “would like for the principals to feel the program is important.” Mary wanted her supervisor to “show a genuine interest” in what they are doing.

Donna interpreted the lack of classroom visits and the general lack of supervision as a lack of respect for the program. She discussed some of the “neat stuff” the gifted students do and believed “the principals would be impressed by these students and their abilities” if they would
“take time to come and see what the gifted students were doing.” She added that the teachers of gifted students might “gain a little respect” for the job principals did. Discussing the failure of her supervisors to perform the necessary evaluations, Donna remarked, “I don’t believe what I am doing in respected.”

Lack of understanding the characteristics and needs of gifted children coincides with lack of knowledge. Tina indicated the people in charge of the gifted program “do not understand and appreciate the abilities and needs of this segment of the student population. Commenting on supervisors lack of understanding, Nell noted, “I don’t think they really understand what the program was supposed to be like, they just hoped I did it right, and didn’t create any problems for them.”

Proposition 5: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about negative supervision, episodes involving supervision as evaluation were evident.

Supervision as evaluation was another category discussed by the participants in this study. Tina also defined her supervision as “the same as evaluation.” She described this type of supervision as having “no real meaning” and “just another hoop to jump through.” She also reported the principal evaluates the performance of the teacher but did little else in the way of supervision. Tina stated, “supervision should be more than just evaluation,” and there should be “more input from the supervisor” about “what is being taught and how it is being taught.”

Tina also expressed a dislike for the use of the GTEP in evaluating teacher in the gifted program. Tina stated that “evaluation for the gifted program should be done by someone who knows what a gifted program should be like.” According to Tina, the GTEP is “not a good instrument to evaluate teachers in the gifted program” because in a gifted classroom “you are not
going to see all the repetition and a lot of the items on the regular education evaluation instrument.”

Nell recalled her supervision as “the same as evaluation” and “I get evaluated once a year, that is the one time I am supervised.” Describing supervision received from the county coordinator, Nell reflected, “She sometimes handles complaints” but added, “she really doesn’t do much supervising or evaluating.” Discussing supervision and evaluation, Mary remarked, “to evaluate me as a gifted teacher, I don’t think they are qualified to do that.”

Proposition 6: When teachers in the elementary gifted program reflected about past supervisory experiences, reflections supported the need for improved supervisory methods for teachers in the gifted program.

Nell indicated the program would benefit from “more guidance from the county coordinator.” Nell felt principals should be “more visible” to the gifted teachers stating, “I would like for them to communicate with the kids about what we are learning” and “show a little more interest in what we are doing.”

According to Nell, “the teachers of gifted students get the last classrooms.” She described the trailer she used for a classroom as “a little crowded” and “like sardines in a can.” She wanted “adequate space in which to teach.” In addition to the physical things she could use Nell reflected, “I need understanding and freedom to do the things I know to be good for my students.”

Tina and Nell both expressed the feeling that the gifted program was a low priority in the school system. Tina believed it was because administrators expect the gifted student to do well “with whatever curriculum they are given.” Nell gave examples of low priority issues as “lack of funds, lack of teachers, and the worst classrooms.” She also remarked that principals “fulfill the
needs of everyone else, and gifted teachers get what’s left over” and “we are the last to get what we need.”

Discussing her supervisory needs, Mary disclosed the need for support when parents protest academic decisions. She needed material support in the form of supplies and a more structured curriculum. Mary also needed emotional support by showing interest in the gifted program, include the gifted teachers in school activities, and keep the gifted teacher informed about what is going on in the school. Mary summed it up saying, “Just support what I am doing, and show appreciation for what I do.”

Concerned about the lack of guidance and lack of accountability, Donna remarked, “I like to know what is expected of me because I need that guidance.” Expressing the belief that accountability belonged to supervisors and teachers, Donna stated, “Someone has to be accountable to see that students are getting a good education.” Donna indicated that supervision meant a lot to her and to the gifted students noting, “My supervisor can make a difference in what I get from my students.”

Donna wanted more involvement from supervisors in the gifted program. She wanted her supervisors to “show interest in what we are doing, visit our classrooms, come to our competitions.” Donna wanted respect for herself, the talents of her students, and appreciation for the job she does. She emphasized, “I want to feel like my job is important.”

Implications

The findings of this study have implications for further research, relationships between principals and teachers of gifted students, and relationships between program directors and teachers of gifted students.
Implications for Further Research

Only one study related to teachers of gifted students and supervision was found prior to this study. Because this study was limited to four elementary school teachers of gifted students in one school system in Georgia, the topic of supervision in gifted programs is basically unexamined. The study could be expanded to include a larger number of participants, to compare supervision among school systems, or to include other levels of education such as middle school and high school teachers.

Another facet that could be included would be the perspectives of the supervisors of teachers of gifted students. How do they feel about supervising special programs? Do supervisors see a need for special supervision? Would there be a difference in the descriptions of teachers and supervisors related to supervision?

Implications for Supervisors of Teachers in the Gifted Program

The findings of this study hold implications to inform supervisors about what teachers in special programs deem important. Although the participants in this study described some positive interactions with their supervisors, many of their experiences with supervision were described as negative. The findings of this study indicate that the participants view problem solving as the major form of positive supervision. All teachers in this study reported few classroom visits, and equate supervision with evaluation. Three of the participants reported that their evaluation observation was the only supervision they received. This further illustrated what past research has shown that evaluation is not supervision and in interpreted as a negative by teachers. The participants addressed the supervisors’ lack of knowledge about the gifted program, their feelings of isolation, and a lack of respect and appreciation for the gifted program.
Knowing the needs and wants of this group of teachers might lead to improved communications and more effective supervision of teachers in the gifted program.

Implications for Teacher Education Programs

Teacher preparation programs include classes in a variety of subjects. Gifted education is only mentioned slightly in the special education class. The participants in this study expressed concern for the general lack of knowledge about gifted education displayed by supervisors and regular classroom teachers lack of knowledge. The finding of this study should prompt teacher preparation programs to include some class or classes on gifted education.

Concluding Thoughts

This study was designed to examine the perspectives of teachers working in the elementary gifted program related to instructional supervision. This study sought to examine the way teachers of gifted students at the elementary level are supervised and how these teachers believe they need to be supervised to better meet the needs of the students they teach. A case study design was used to present the stories of four elementary school teachers assigned to the gifted program in one school system in Georgia. Since only one study was found related to supervision and teachers in the elementary gifted program, this study is timely with possible implications for future research.

Experts in gifted education believe that identifying and developing the talents of gifted children during their early years is critical to their intellectual development (Wardle, 1999; Shore, 1997). Participants in this study indicated a need for effective supervision in order to meet the needs of gifted students.

Instructional supervision has moved from being primarily an authoritarian action focused on the inspection and control of teachers (Marks, Stoops, & King-Stoops, 1971) to differentiated
supervision operating on the belief that teachers should have some control in the type of supervision they receive (Glatthorn, 1984; Zepeda, 2003).

There has been much research in the field of supervision but almost nothing related to supervision of teachers in the gifted program. This study indicated that teachers in the gifted program need and want effective supervision. The findings of this study indicate a serious lack of supervision in the gifted education program of this school system. Whether this is true of other gifted programs is not known, but supervision in gifted education is an area needing more research.
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APPENDIX A

ENTRY LETTER

Attention:  
XXXXXX  
Curriculum Director  
Shiloh County Schools  
XXXXXX, Ga.

Dear XXXXX

My name is Patricia Bentley. I teach in the gifted program at XXXX Elementary School, and I am a graduate student at the University of Georgia. I am working on my doctorate degree in Educational Leadership under the direction of Dr. Sally J. Zepeda, and I would like to conduct the research for my dissertation in the Shiloh County School District.

The purpose for this study is to examine the perspectives of elementary teachers teaching in the gifted and talented teacher’s in regard to instructional supervision. My research would consist of interviewing teachers in the elementary gifted program to learn their perspectives on instructional supervision. Three interviews would be conducted with each of the gifted teachers over a six-month period from September 2004 to February 2005. The interviews, lasting approximately one hour each, would be audiotaped. Interview questions would relate to demographic information, and educational and supervisory experiences. Participation by the teachers would be voluntary and all information collected would be confidential. Pseudonyms would be given to the teachers, the schools, and the district to insure confidentiality.

All audiotapes and written data would be kept in a secure location in the researcher’s home. Coded information would only be shared with the researcher’s major professor, Dr. Sally J. Zepeda, for the purpose of study and data analysis. The audiotapes and interview notes would be kept indefinitely for the purpose of future research, but the identities of the participants would be destroyed.

I will be happy to answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached at:

XXXXXXX  
XXXXXXX  
XXXXXXX
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in a research study titled “TEACHERS OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS PERSPECTIVES OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION” conducted by Patricia Williams Bentley from the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Georgia (phone number 706-542-4146), under the direction of Dr. Sally J. Zepeda, in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia (phone number 706-542-0408). I understand that participation in this study is voluntary. I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose for this study is to examine the perspectives of gifted and talented teacher’s in regard to instructional supervision. I consent to be interviewed three times over a six-month period. The interviews, lasting approximately one hour each, will be audiotaped. Interview questions will relate to demographic information about me, and my educational and supervisory experiences. I understand that transcripts will be available so that I can check for accuracy and clarification.

I understand that I will receive no compensation for participating in this study. There are no risks to participating in this study. All information about me, and provided by me will be confidential. I will be assigned a pseudonym to protect my identity. All audiotapes and written data will be kept in a secure location in the researcher’s home. Coded information will only be shared with the researcher’s major professor, Dr. Sally J. Zepeda, for the purpose of study and data analysis. The audiotapes and interview notes will be kept indefinitely for the purpose of future research, but the identities of the participants will be destroyed at the end of the study.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached at XXXXXXX.

I understand the above information, and all my questions have been answered. My signature indicates that I agree to participate in this study, and that I have received a copy of this form.

Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one and return the other to the researcher.

Signature of Researcher
Telephone: XXXXXXX
Email: XXXXXXX

Date

Participant’s Name

Signature of Participant
Date

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, PhD, Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone 706-542-3199; E-Mail address IRB@uga.edu

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APPENDIX C

THE RESEARCHER’S PERSPECTIVE

I have taught in the gifted and talented program for the past seven years, and I have enjoyed the interaction with this unique group of students, as well as working with the gifted and talented teachers. It is wonderful to work with students who are as bright, creative, and highly motivated as most gifted students, but there are problems unique to working in the gifted program. There is a sense of isolation when you are the only teacher of gifted students in the school. Regular classroom teachers work as part of a grade level team. In teaching all grade levels, it is difficult for me to meet with each team. There are several teachers in the gifted elementary program, but only one in a school and if the number of gifted students in a school is small, the teacher will work in more than one school in the district. The elementary gifted teachers have little time set aside to plan curriculum together.

I have taught in five of the eleven elementary schools in this district. It is amazing how different the experiences are from school to school. In one school in which I taught, the principal questioned everything I did and watched my every movement. In another school I felt like a ghost, invisible to all but a few teachers and students. Supervision/evaluation in each school, while based on the same instrument, was totally different. Each principal adapts its use to fit his or her idea of supervision. I have been fortunate to observe and learn from the various supervisors.

As I worked through my graduate classes to obtain my leadership endorsement, I began to question supervision and evaluation. In most schools they are interchangeable, and this is confusing especially to novice teachers. Are they being observed as supervision to help them improve their teaching, or purely as an evaluation of their teaching ability? This question led me
to question the effectiveness of supervision as it is used in schools. All teachers are observed and evaluated using the same instrument. Does it fit all teachers, veteran and novice? Does it fit teachers in special programs, such as art, music, and gifted? I hope that this research project will shed some light on the perspectives of teachers in the gifted and talented program.