

Experiences in Education:
Hermeneutics, Gender and Gifted Education

by

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ABSTRACT

This is a hermeneutic study on experiences being gifted, teaching gifted students and/or raising gifted children. This study focuses on how our horizon, which is a result of our past experiences, has an impact on how we make sense of our world and influences our attitudes and actions. As became clear during the conduct of the research, gender was the dominant characteristic of the horizon and unconscious hermeneutic processes these women used to make sense of their experiences. Gender, it became clear also impacted their self-understanding of who they were, what were their possibilities in life, and the decisions they now make as parents and teachers. For this study the researcher interviewed twelve teachers and parents from two different districts who are involved in gifted programs. Some of them had children involved in gifted classes, some were in gifted programs as a child, some worked in gifted programs as an adult and some were a combination of the three. Data consisted of twelve original interviews. Four of the original twelve were selected and each was interviewed a second time. Data from both interviews was analyzed hermeneutically. Included in the study are each participant's horizon and a topical analysis of the interviews. In addition, a thematic analysis is included which ties each interview to themes and cultural norms.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Wayne and our two daughters, Sydney and Emma. Without their constant love and support I would never have been able to complete this dissertation. Thank you for believing in me when I didn't even believe in myself. Thank you also for all your encouraging words and always being there when I needed you.

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CHAPTER 1

The term “gifted” first appeared in America in 1921. Lewis Terman wrote a book about academically exceptional children. He first used the term “genius” but later coined the term “gifted” to refer to his subjects. It has since become a well used term in educational vocabulary. Today there are many other terms used. For simplicity and clarity I will be using the term “gifted” throughout this paper.

Gifted education has been the subject of numerous educational battles. Some people believe it should be an acceleration program, others believe it should be an enrichment program. The government has funded gifted programs for several reasons and then ceased to fund them for a variety of different reasons. Like with many other school programs, gifted education classes reform moves in waves. Some times it is in the forefront of educational debate and other times, it gets pushed aside for other, more popular issues. I was educated in the public school system for my entire school career and have several different experiences with gifted education.

One of my experiences is not necessarily with gifted education but with intelligence and testing. My father is a business professor who, as a child, hated school. He has many bad memories of his years in elementary school. One unpleasant memory in particular was having to take an IQ test. As a result of his test, he was told he was “uncreative” and the results of that test followed him throughout his school career. When we

were in elementary school our school was performing IQ tests on all of their students. My father refused to have us tested. The principal, in trying to convince my father, told him that we would do well because, after all, the IQ tests were made for “students like us.” I first heard this story when I was in junior high school and remember feeling grateful that my father had not let them test me but also confused by the response of the principal.

I first became familiar with the term gifted when I was in elementary school. Being the youngest of four, I often heard of things before I actually experienced them for myself. Of my three sisters, only one was a part of gifted and talented education or “G&T”. My two oldest sisters are also extremely smart and earned good grades but I believe the G&T program had not yet been created in our district. My sister Lynn who tested into the program, would come home with special projects she was to complete for this class. One of them I remember was an invention. The students were to create some sort of invention to make life easier. They were to draw it out and provide a written explanation of what it did, how it was used etc. I don’t remember anything else about this particular program. This was probably due to the difference in our ages. She is the closest to me in age. She is 2 1/2 years older but 3 grades ahead of me because she skipped kindergarten. I was never really in the same school as any of my sisters. When I was in the primary grades, my sisters were in the upper grades and junior high. By the time I got to junior high my sisters were in high school and by the time I reached high school they had all already

graduated and were attending out of state universities. My mother informed me several years ago that I was tested for the gifted program due to my high state test scores but that I did not score high enough on the gifted test and so I did not get in. I actually do not remember this. My first recollection of any sort of gifted education was in high school.

In my high school the academically advanced children were placed in honors and AP classes. All of my sisters were in the honors and AP courses. I just assumed I would be in them. I wasn't really aware of the different tracks until I wanted to register for auto shop during my senior year. I thought that understanding the workings of a car would be a big benefit for me in life and I already had more than enough credits to graduate. However, when I asked my counselor she recommended the more challenging academic class and suggested I take AP Biology, AP Spanish and AP English. I remember taking both AP Biology and Spanish but not AP English because I did not like the teacher. As an adult I am more upset about not being able to register for auto shop than I was at the time. I also wonder how many of the lower track students who wanted to take an honors or AP class were turned away and steered towards other classes in the same way I was. Looking back, I know what I learned in auto shop would have benefitted me more than the knowledge I received in AP Biology. I took the AP tests at the end of the year and only received college credit for my Spanish class. I did not score high enough in Biology. In a way I felt that I could have been better served had I been able to take

the course I wanted to. Since I was not fully aware of the different tracks in my high school I was not bothered by it then. Later on however, I felt a sense of inequality . By only allowing certain students into certain classes there may have been many students who were not able to get the education that they wanted because their GPA wasn't high enough or their test scores were too low, or as in my case, my GPA and test scores were too high for the particular course I wanted to take.

I do not recall being treated any differently because I was in the AP classes. I come from a fairly small town so I knew almost everyone in my high school and had known many of them since elementary school. My closest friends were not in the AP courses with me but I don't remember it every being a big deal at the time. I do remember times that I felt I didn't belong or that my friends didn't "get me" but I equated it with being the youngest child instead of having to do with my intelligence. As the youngest, I was constantly around people older than me. As a result, I was more mature than most of my peers. Looking back now I am not sure what the exact reasons are. However all of my experiences affect the way in which I view gifted education as an adult. My questions about gifted education started when I was an undergraduate studying to become a teacher and seemed to grow as I continued on into my teaching career and then into graduate school.

My childhood experiences are one reason I am interested in investigating gifted education. My interest has two other sources. First

there is my interest as an educational professional. My experiences with gifted programs as an elementary school teacher in southern California stimulated an interest about how gifted education is organized and administered. At the beginning of what was to be my last year of teaching, I was approached by the principal and asked to be the gifted coordinator for the sixth grade. I believe I was asked because I had expressed a desire to get my gifted certificate. This turned out to be a very interesting position for me. Since it was my first year at this particular school, I did not have much of a relationship with the teachers at my grade level. I think this caused some resistance from my colleagues. My role was to ensure that all the gifted students in the sixth grade had educational plans written out. Each teacher was to meet with her students' parents and go over their individual plan. In our district the student was also required to attend so he/she would know and understand what his/her goals or objectives were for the year. As the coordinator, I was to help arrange these meeting and attend them if possible. One teacher, who had been teaching at the school for over 25 years, informed me that she had already met with the parents and that her plans were complete. She did not offer me many details when I asked questions and begrudgingly gave me copies of her students' plans when the principal informed her that it was required by the district for administrative purposes. It was during this time that I saw the lack of communication and coordination that occurred, not just within my school but among schools and within the district. During our coordinator meetings

the program appeared to be thrown together and not consistent from one grade level to the next. At times it seemed to be a way to pacify parents that were concerned with the academic growth and challenges of their gifted/talented child. In our discussions I began to notice that the approaches of the gifted coordinators seemed to vary from grade level to grade level. At our grade level meetings, it was difficult to come to some sort of an agreement as to how the gifted children should be instructed, who should be doing it and what the goal of the program was because there was not an official district adopted gifted education curriculum. Each grade level representative seemed to have different expectations and goals in mind for the gifted program. At some point during the school year, a gifted education expert came and presented her ideas for running a gifted program. Her curriculum consisted of thematic units revolving around big ideas such as leadership, compassion and democracy. I was very interested in her approach but for some reason, we never did come to a decision regarding this or any other curriculum.

In my particular school, the gifted students were part of the regular education classroom. When my grade level did our reading and writing rotations, the gifted students were grouped together in the same classroom for their lesson. This got me wondering what the benefits and/or problems of such a program were and if the problems outweighed the benefits or vice-versa. I also began wondering what different types of gifted curricula were out there and how or if a program could be developed

that would meet the needs of the students, teachers and parents. It was the combination of all of these experiences, that got me interested in researching gifted education.

My second inspiration for wanting to research gifted education comes from a personal family experience. My oldest daughter entered kindergarten academically advanced in many areas. She began reading at the age of 4 and was very interested in books and writing. When she began first grade it seemed as if the curriculum was not offering her anything new or challenging. I spoke with her teacher and she recommended that my daughter be tested for the gifted program. Testing does not usually start until the second grade but I thought I would agree to the testing so I could be fully aware of our options. Our daughter was pulled out of her classroom several times and given different multiple choice tests. The results of her tests were then shared with me and my husband during a meeting with the gifted teacher. It was during this meeting that I again begin to question the concept of gifted education and wondered what exactly this district and more particularly, our school, hoped to achieve through the gifted program they chose to implement. Most of my questions stemmed from the test. There was a sense of randomness and lack of cohesion. In addition to this, all the question were multiple choice. I found myself wondering: What is the goal of the test? What type of information could they/did they gather from the results? Was this test the one and only way a child could get identified as gifted in

this particular district? What about other districts? The test focused only on verbal, reading and math skills. It is important to note that my daughter was never observed in her regular classroom and that no one in the gifted program sat down to have a conversation with her. She missed being identified by two questions and as the teacher went over her answers I become more and more troubled with the test. There were questions she answered correctly that were way above her grade level. One of the questions she missed, neither my husband nor I believed her answer to be incorrect. The longer I reviewed the test, the more frustrated I became. The gifted instructor began to describe what were either her views, or the views of the district re. the different types of learners who existed. She described the two different types as local and global. When I asked her my daughter's type, she said she had no idea. She also began describing what the gifted program offered. During this conversation she made it clear that the students did what was required in a shorter amount of time and were consequently given additional work. For example, in reading they would complete the basal reader in weeks instead of months and then they would use the rest of the time reading literature etc. My daughter enjoys reading and is constantly reading books at home and school. I guess I was hoping for a completely different approach to the curriculum, one that afforded the students with more choices and more independence. When my husband and I explained what the gifted class consisted of my daughter replied: "I don't need a class to get me to read and I don't just

want more work.” I began questioning the validity of the program because the one person that had been given the job of testing and determining who is and is not going to be labeled “gifted”, had no concept of who my daughter was, what she liked, how she learned best, what her favorite subjects were etc. All she knew was that she missed two more questions than she should have. During our conversation, she also informed us that due to budget constraints, she was also the Title One teacher for the school. This meant that only part of her time was spent with the gifted children. The rest of her time was spent giving remedial help to students who were struggling in their regular classroom. I started to feel frustrated for her as well. I began to wonder how many other parents felt frustrated with the program and how many teachers had ideas and opinions about gifted education that went against the program that was implemented by the district. I began to wonder who designed the programs and why one model is chosen over another. I began to wonder about what power and responsibility the gifted teachers and/or coordinators had in the creating and implementing of the program chosen and what their thoughts and feelings were about gifted education. What were the opinions and attitudes of other parents who had experiences with gifted education?

In a strange turn of events, as I began work on my dissertation, my oldest daughter, who is now in the fifth grade, came to me and my husband and informed us that she was bored. She claimed that the work in the classroom wasn't really teaching her anything and she wondered if

she could go into the gifted class. It didn't help that two of her best friends were already in the gifted class for reading. I called the school the next day to inquire about testing. Since she had missed the testing window, I was informed that she couldn't be retested until the next window, which was several months away. I decided to call the district to see what could be done. I spoke with the gifted coordinator who reiterated what the school told me about testing. I mentioned she had been tested a few years earlier but had missed getting in by a few points. After reviewing my daughter's file, the district coordinator informed me that because of our school's Title I status, she would be allowed in and that she qualified for both reading and math. My daughter loved the classes immediately. As a parent, I was very grateful there was that option for us. I don't know what we would have done if she wasn't able to attend the gifted class for reading and math. I have always believed that as long as my children are happy and enjoying school that is all that matters. When my daughter came to me and told me she no longer enjoyed school, I was devastated. I am not sure what I would have done had gifted classes not been available. The work she does pushes her intellectually and seems to be a combination of acceleration and enrichment. It has been a much better experience than I expected.

As a result of this experience, my views on gifted education have shifted. I have always believed all students should be exposed and have access to the best possible education. The time she was spending in the

regular classroom, was not providing that for my daughter. Different students learn at different rates and students and parents should have options when it comes to education. Before I thought gifted classes were unfair, but perhaps it was that I viewed them as unequal. I believe they are an important option for parents in meeting the needs of their children when the regular classroom isn't.

As my own experiences have taught me, a person's attitude toward gifted education does not happen by chance or materialize over night or even over several days. The perception a person has about gifted education is a result of many different experiences that span several years. Since most people have been involved in some form of education or schooling for most if not all of their childhood and adolescent years, it is not surprising that they would have developed certain feelings, attitudes and opinions about what they feel is effective and what they feel is not. Even if a person does not have personal experience from being in a gifted program, the existence of such a program does bear upon that person's perception of schooling and education. This study will be an examination of how the teachers, parents and/or administrators talk about their childhood and their school experiences. By hermeneutically examining their stories I hope to provide an understanding of how one's past is used to make sense of the present and how the past and present are used to help understand or predict what can or might happen next. A more in

depth discussion on the methods being used in this study will be discussed in section three.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Meaning making is central to a hermeneutic study. Hermeneutics focuses on how people go about making sense of their life. In this literature review, I will begin by looking at how various scholars have made sense of the term “gifted” Next, I will look at the history of gifted education and how academics, educators and/or government policy makers have made sense out of various important historical events, such as the launching of Sputnik or the civil rights movement and how the meanings derived from these events were catalysts that lead to the creation, change and/or implementation of certain gifted curricula. I will then describe some of the most popular types of gifted curriculum models that have been implemented in schools. Lastly I will look at the Bourdieuan ideas of habitus and field and what they add to hermeneutics in explaining the how and why behind meaning making.

Giftedness: A Definition

Giftedness is, in general terms, abilities and/or talents that a child possesses that appear to be at a level that is higher or more advanced than his/her peers. What are these abilities and talents and how are they categorized and conceptualized by our society and our public school system? The distinct types of intelligences or domains of excellence have changed over time. In 1957, DeHaan and Havighurst developed a list of six traits. They are:

1) *Intellectual ability*- those abilities related to success in school subjects such as reading and math.

2) *Creative thinking*- the ability to recognize problems and be flexible in thinking.

3) *Scientific ability*- encompasses mathematical reasoning and curiosity about the natural world.

4) *Social leadership*-includes the ability to help a group reach its goals or the ability to improve human interaction and relationships.

5) *Mechanical skills*- those abilities that are related to fine arts, science and engineering.

6) *Talents in the fine arts*- those talents required of dancers, artists, writers, musicians and actors. (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 25)

In 1983, Howard Gardner created his list of “multiple intelligences”.

Gardner’s original list includes six different types of intelligences. The original categories were: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical and personal. (Gardner, 1993) Linguistic intelligence refers to people who are skilled with words and are usually people who enjoy reading and are effective story tellers. Linguistically intelligent individuals tend to learn best while taking notes, listening to lectures or participating in discussions. Logical-mathematical intelligence refers to people who are skilled with numbers, are able to recognize abstract patterns and are capable of performing complex calculations. Spatial intelligence has to do with the ability to re-create aspects of a visual

experience and utilize spatial judgement. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is about muscle movement and memory. Individuals who exhibit this type of intelligence generally learn better by doing something and are sometimes skilled at building or making things. People who are musically intelligent have a sensitivity to rhythms, tones and sounds. They may use songs or rhythms to memorize information. Personal intelligence can be broken down into two different categories. Knowledge of self (intrapersonal) and knowledge of others (interpersonal). According to Gardner, intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to access and understand one's own emotions and to use this information to guide one's behavior. (Gardner, 1993, p. 239) Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to notice and be sensitive to the attitudes and feelings of others. (Gardner, 1993, p. 239) Gardner developed this list because he felt that schools focused too much on the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences. Gardner's theory of multiple types of intelligences has resulted in many teachers varying their teaching style in order to reach all children. (thomasarmstrong.com) Understanding that there is a wide range of ways a student can be intelligent, could have been a boon for gifted education. It might have opened the door for more students to be considered gifted. Despite Gardner's attempt to call attention to other types of intelligences, certain types of intelligences and knowledge are still more highly regarded than others.

According to Abraham Tannenbaum in the *International Handbook of Giftedness and Talent* (1993), there is a hierarchy that exists among the various intellectual talents and abilities. The highest in value are scarcity talents followed by surplus talents, quota talents and then anomalous talents. Scarcity talents are so called because they are in short supply. They include people who are “inventive enough to make life easier, safer, healthier and more intelligible” (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 25). People such as Jonas Salk or Abraham Lincoln were considered people who possessed scarcity talents. Surplus talents are those that “exceed the capacity of individuals to sample and derive benefit from all of them” (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 25). Artists such as Michelangelo or Picasso and musicians like Beethoven and Bach would be examples of people with surplus talents. They satisfy society’s wants as opposed to its needs. Quota talents are those abilities and skills needed to provide goods and services for the market. Professors, teachers, doctors, engineers and lawyers are a few professions that fall into this category. Quota talents are sought in response to market demand. Therefore the value of a specific quota talent is tied to society’s need for it. Anomalous talents are those abilities that are for pure entertainment or enjoyment such as musical prodigies or speed readers. Many of the exact traits that fall into each category have changed throughout the years. According to Tannenbaum (1993): “Schools have historically been most responsive to the public’s needs for quota talents. These types of advanced skills are appreciated

for the specialized services and goods they supply and for their market value” (p. 26). It is indeed these quota talents that have driven most of the waves of gifted reform in this country. To get a better understanding of why this is so, I will discuss some events that are important to the history of American schools and the affect these events had on gifted education.

History of Gifted Education

It is important to cover the history of giftedness in America because it provides a necessary context in which to place the various trends that have occurred within American schools and, more specifically, gifted education. In my research of schooling and education in America, I discovered numerous sources. I have read books by scholars such as Herbert Kliebard, David Tyack, Larry Cuban and Joel Spring. In searching for sources on the history of gifted education however, it has been difficult to find information. The best source I have found is located in the *International Handbook of Giftedness and Talent*. The author, Abraham Tannenbaum, does a nice job in laying out the history of giftedness in chronological order. This layout combines nicely with Joel Spring’s style and organization as well as my own. It is for these reasons that Tannenbaum and Spring are cited most regularly. Reading all of the scholars gave me an understanding of the overarching history of schools and education in America but I draw from Spring and Tannenbaum to help explain the details.

The study of the history is necessary to have an understanding of the contribution gifted education has made to both special and regular education curriculums and it helps locate my own prejudices and bias as well as those of my interview participants. It will also aid in making meaning out of my participants' experiences to look at the trends in gifted education and what events and/or people were responsible for changes in gifted education and the affect these changes had on how gifted curricula was or was not implemented in schools and classrooms.

Three major education reports in the United States set the stage for differentiation based on ability. One was the 1912 report by the Committee on Industrial Education. The report argued that there were two types of capital in the world. One was comprised of material possessions and the other was "the character, brains and muscle of the people" (Spring, 2005, p. 256). It was this type of capital the Committee believed was underdeveloped. The report divided children into "abstract-minded and imaginative, concrete-, or hand-minded and the great intermediate class, comprising all degrees of efficiency" (Spring, 2005, p. 257). The goal of the Committee was to ensure that schools met the needs of the all students. The committee believed the best way to achieve this would be the creation of vocational high schools. This is an important development in gifted education because it was the beginning of discussions about how and why schools could or should differentiate instruction based on ability.

The second important report occurred in 1917 with the passing of the Smith-Hughes Act. This act “reinforced a dual system of education—a differentiated curriculum—by clearly separating vocational training from academic training” (Spring, 2005, p. 258). The Smith-Hughes Act was passed as a result of the 1914 report of the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education. The goal of the commission was to gain support for vocational education as a way to “meet the individual needs of students” (Spring, 2005, p. 257). The Smith-Hughes Act was also important because it “symbolized the increasing tendency in the twentieth century to define a national interest in education that would be used to justify federal intervention” (Spring, 2005, p. 257). The passing of the Smith-Hughes act was an attempt to reduce the waste of American human resources. “Vocational education was advocated as an important answer to the economic problems facing the United States” (Spring, 2005, p. 257). In short, the Smith-Hughes act allowed federal money to be used to support a dual system of education: schools that focus on academic training and those that offer vocational training. It was one of the first times federal money had been used to support education but it would not be the last. The passage of the Smith-Hughes Act had a lasting affect on education policy. When the Soviets launched Sputnik, the federal government would, once again, intervene for the sake of national interests. The affect Sputnik had on American education policy will be discussed in greater detail later. Like the discussion of differentiated

curriculum, government involvement helped gifted education by opening doors for government funding and support which gifted programs have historically relied upon.

The third and final report was in 1918 with the release of the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* issued by the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education. This report, unlike those mentioned earlier, argued for the creation of the comprehensive high school. A comprehensive high school is one in which all students, regardless of their intelligence or curriculum choice, would be taught together. The commission was worried that specialized schools would be chosen by students for nonacademic reasons such as friendships and sports teams. Bringing all of the students together under one roof would, according to the commission, "eliminate those factors from consideration; everyone would attend the same school regardless of his or her choice of course of study" (Spring, 2005, p. 251). Students who were on an academic track and those who were on a vocational track would attend school together. The commission also argued that a comprehensive high school would satisfy the "two components of democracy" (Spring, 2005, p. 251). According to the commission the two components were: specialization and unification. Educating students in these components became one of the goals of the comprehensive high school. The committee's belief was that education "was supposed to fit the individual into a social position that would enable him or her to make a maximum

contribution to society” (Spring, 2005, p. 251). For the second component, unification, the report defined it as the part of democracy that brings people together to help create social cohesion. In order to compensate for the separation of students due to their different courses of study, the committee called for the social mingling of the students during activities such as sports, social clubs and student government. The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education recommendations were used to create comprehensive high schools across the United States.

The comprehensive high school allowed students from different academic tracks to be educated together in order to promote democracy and facilitate socialization between teenagers and their peers. The task of teaching children to focus on becoming the best individual he/she could become (specialization) and teaching them to be part of a cohesive society (unification) is one of the main arguments surrounding gifted education. The terms used have changed over the years but the concepts remain the same. Today people speak about the schools’ responsibility to promote excellence in every student while remaining egalitarian in its access to resources. It is this argument that surfaces during discussions about gifted education. With the creation of the comprehensive high school, gifted children could be taught in separate classes and still be with their peers thus fulfilling both aims of democracy.

According to Abraham Tannenbaum (1993), “the greatest swings between devotion to excellence and to egalitarianism have occurred

between the late nineteen-fifties and the early nineteen-seventies” (p. 32). During the twenties, thirties and forties, the main focus of many psychologists, philosophers, educators and administrators was on the challenges of providing adequate schooling for the large number of both American and immigrant children that began moving into growing urban areas. Most of the educational writings during this period in history are about what subjects should be taught, how they should be taught and the logistics of doing so. A few of the important people at this time were: John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick and Edward Thorndike.

John Dewey is referred to as a pragmatist. This term, in its simplest form, means that “humans should adopt those ideas, values, and institutions that best work in a particular social situation” (Spring, 2005, p. 273). According to Dewey, a child learns best when having an actual experience as opposed to just reading about it. Dewey believed “the school must avoid the teaching of abstract ideas; rather, it must provide actual condition out of which ideas grow; and the child must be given an opportunity within the school to test moral and social judgments” (Spring, 2005, p. 274). According to Joel Spring, many of Dewey’s ideas got misinterpreted by educators. Many pedagogical decisions that were attributed to Dewey, are actually not in line with his philosophy. According to Joel Spring, school activities such as group activity, learning by doing and doing projects are not exactly the type of educational activities Dewey had in mind. In his book, *Experience and Education*, Dewey writes:

“Hence the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (Dewey, 1938, p. 28). Experiences in and of themselves are not necessarily, according to Dewey, a positive education experience. “...the trouble is not the absence of experiences, but their defective and wrong character- wrong and defective from the standpoint of connection with further experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 27). For Dewey an experience should present new problems and connect to past and future experiences. Kliebard (2004) writes: “[Dewey] was anything but enthusiastic about the project as a mode of curriculum organization. For one thing, he felt that projects frequently involved too short a time span and were often casually arrived at” (p.149). Dewey said the projects were “too trivial to be educative” (p.149). Despite this, many learning activities were instituted into classrooms across the United States and labeled as “Deweyian”.

Another important figure in education was William Heard Kilpatrick. Kilpatrick created what he called the “project method” in 1918. Kilpatrick’s project method was focused on socially purposeful acts. (Spring, 2005, p. 276) Kilpatrick considered moral development of a child one of the most important results of his method. For him, the most meaningful classroom activities were projects that grew out of social situations. Like many other educators of his time, Kilpatrick tended to focus his efforts on morals and social conformity. According to Kilpatrick, “moral character is developed

when the individual is conditioned always to respond to the desires of the group” (Spring, 2005, p. 277). The projects method, in addition to child-centered and socialized learning, received a great deal of support within the education community. Most of the teacher training done during the first several decades of the century included these approaches.

Unlike Dewey and Kilpatrick, Edward Thorndike, a student of William James, focused on stimulus-response or behavioral learning. His major work, *Educational Psychology*, was published in 1913 and became one of the most influential books on educational theory. Thorndike’s ideas were scientifically based and he felt teaching should be turned into a scientific profession. He believed the most important function of education was to control the habits and social development of the students. He also believed the power of the teacher was in her/his ability to control stimuli. According to him “educators would be concerned with controlling the learning of students and with scientific measurement of results” (Spring, 2005, p. 279). At the center of his vision was testing and other methods of measurement. Thorndike believed that intelligence was determined solely by nature and not environment. As a result, he believed that intelligence could be determined by giving a child a test. His belief in the quantification of intelligence led him to develop several different intelligence tests. The overcrowded classrooms of the time were conducive to his pedagogical methods. When faced with the monumental task of educating large numbers of students, Thorndike’s more rigid scientific approach seemed

much more practical than the less structured, student centered approaches created by Dewey and Kilpatrick. For American schools, the first fifty years of the twentieth century were filled with a great deal of change and uncertainty. The energy of educators was spent on figuring out how to provide equality of opportunity and to ensure the promotion of a democratic and moral society. Since the public school was still a fairly new concept, much of the focus of theorists, educators and administrators was on what logistical and curricular decisions should be made to best meet the needs of the growing school-aged population. While not intentionally neglected, the gifted population was not specifically focused on. Eventually, however, America was forced to consider the importance of gifted education programs.

The launching of Sputnik in 1957, in addition to numerous written critiques of the public school system, caused the federal government to take a more active role in the education of the gifted. In 1953, historian James Bestor wrote a scathing review of public education and accused schools of being non-inspirational or motivating. Bestor's main complaint was that public schools needed to get away from their emphasis on socialization and start developing curriculum based on various subject-matters. His paper was titled "Anti-Intellectualism in the Schools: A Challenge to Scholars". Another critic of the public education system, Vice Admiral Hyman Rickover, warned that "in order to compete on an equal footing, America had to overcome its traditional guilt about singling out the

gifted for special opportunities at school” (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 33). He commented specifically on the failure of American schools to encourage talented students to pursue degrees in math and science. Another person critical of public schools and in favor of federal programs aimed at improving the American educational system was James B. Conant. Conant, president of Harvard (1933-1953), also critiqued public schools and favored federal programs to improve the American education system. Conant (1959) wrote a report titled *The American High School Today* which offered his twenty-one step plan for changing secondary education. In it he paid special attention to the “academically gifted (defined as the upper fifteen percent on IQ tests) and the highly gifted (defined as the upper three percent on IQ tests)” (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 34). Conant suggested that greater emphasis should be placed on the superior students. Further, he recommended that a federal subsidy be available for the superior students to attend college and pursue degrees that would benefit national interests. (Spring, 2005, p. 381) Although not the first time children with exceptional ability were acknowledged, it was the first time it was suggested that government money be set aside to support gifted programs.

One key piece of legislation that provided funding and support for the gifted was the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958. The passage of the NDEA resulted in several things. First of all, it created a new role for American schools by proposing that schooling would help

protect the country from military and ideological attacks from foreign powers. Another important part of the act was that it provided money to help strengthen the schools. Gifted education was one of the four areas to receive funding. "NDEA became a means by which the federal government could control local education policy simply by offering money for the establishment of specified educational programs" (Spring, 2005, p. 388). Other subject areas to receive funding at this time were science, math and foreign languages.

There were numerous investigations, reports, programs and policies written and/or implemented in education during the post-Sputnik era. According to Tannenbaum, one such federal government program was the Great Talent Hunt. The GTH was a search conducted by the federal, state and local governments to identify and educate gifted students across the nation. This was a time "when ever possible effort was exerted at federal, state, and local levels to identify gifted children and to educate them to the limits of their potential" (Tannenbaum, 1993, p.35). Gifted students were viewed as human resources; resources that America could not afford to squander. At this particular moment in history, gifted students were viewed in how they could be of service to their country, specifically by pursuing degrees in math and science. Post-Sputnik schooling in America was a "period of total talent mobilization, requiring the most able-minded to fulfill their potentials and to submit their developmental abilities for service to the nation" (pg. 35). They were

expected to obtain jobs and pursue careers that would promote the American agenda both nationally and abroad.

The 1960's began on a high note with the election of John F. Kennedy. In one of his famous speeches, President Kennedy said: "Ask not what your country can do for you-ask what you can do for your country." According to Tannenbaum, this was interpreted by some educators as a call to those who had more to give, i.e. gifted individuals. They were expected to serve their country with their intellect. "Those with higher abilities had more to contribute and were therefore under pressure not to bury their talents or even to indulge in creative productivity that was impractical" (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 36). And serve their country they did. According to Tannenbaum, those that had tested high in IQ tests tended to major in the sciences or technology- fields that could help in the defense of our country. The embarrassment of Sputnik was still fresh in the minds of most Americans. Many young people felt a desire to help America rise above other countries in scientific and technological advances.

Despite all of this, gifted education began to suffer. There were several reasons for the decline. One was that programs geared towards the gifted, like enrichment, were not seen as core curriculum but rather "a curricular ornament" (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 36). So why, if the federal government was so focused on cultivating the talents of the highly intelligent, did educating them seem to be easily discarded if costs got too high? It has to do with the ongoing struggle between equality and a desire

for excellence. “There will always be egalitarian-minded people who consider it necessary to withhold special opportunities that might aid the ablest to get far ahead of the pack” (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 36). Gifted education continues to fall in and out of favor throughout the history of American schools. Some of the reasons gifted education seemed to fall to the wayside were the civil rights movement, Vietnam and lack of trust in the sciences.

The Civil Rights Movement was a movement towards equality and integration. Many gifted programs were seen as being unequal and segregated. Civil rights legislation of the 1960’s was concerned with eliminating “discriminatory actions against minority groups” (Spring 2005, p. 375). Most children were given an IQ test to gain entrance into a gifted program. The majority of the students in these programs were white. In 1962, Riessman published a book on the culturally deprived student. In it he claims that “ the curriculum was loaded with verbal content and therefore placed underprivileged children at a disadvantage” (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 41). Tannenbaum writes:

Objections were not necessarily against special ability grouping *per se* for the gifted, or even the enriched educational experience reserved for them because of their ability. What created the furor was the practice of denying enough children from disadvantaged sub populations their rightful access to these classes.

(Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 37)

America's focus had shifted. During this time in history, the country was "more concerned about bolstering freedom and equality within its borders than in playing the lead on the world stage" (Tannenbaum, 1993, p.37). As a result, gifted programs were pushed aside so the federal government could focus its time and money on issues of social justice and equality.

The decline of gifted education was one casualty of the Vietnam War. Although extremely brilliant, the Whiz Kids of the Kennedy era were criticized for being insensitive and disassociated from the needs of the people. (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 38) Many gifted youth across the country saw them as being partially responsible for the war. Being highly intelligent did not mean having a better understanding of or compassion for humanity. Many of the gifted youth began to participate in riots and protests. Some of their first targets were the schools they attended. These institutions represented the establishment that was to blame for the war and the dehumanization of the students. Instead of pursuing degrees in the sciences, technology or academia, many gifted students desired something more. "Many were attracted to the sensitivity-training movements...the human being was increasingly seen not as a thought machine but rather as a complex biological, psychological, and social organism that can fulfill itself through all the dimensions of being" (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 38). The gifted students were more concerned with the ideas of individualism and rejected the idea of being viewed as human resources.

This growing idea of individualism caused many gifted students to shun careers in math and science. Those careers, that had been in vogue just a decade earlier, were now viewed with suspicion and doubt. Many gifted individuals began to question how well these types of professions attended to the conscience as well as the intellect. Due to the huge influx of math and science graduates as a result of Sputnik, science and math positions were not as available or lucrative as they had once been. With the ongoing civil rights conflict at home and the Vietnam war happening overseas, students began to question the need for technological advances and instead became more concerned with creating solutions to social and racial unrest. These ongoing conflicts and the sciences apparent lack of concern for humanity, caused many gifted students to choose other professions. “Many would-be scientists and engineers began to realize that these professions attracted neither the prestige nor the occupational rewards that would have been guaranteed only a few years earlier” (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 39).

The 1970's presented a kind of revival for gifted education. The document “Provisions Related to Gifted and Talented Children” was added to the Elementary and Secondary Educational Amendments of 1969 by a Congressional mandate. The original document had to do with special education. The Congressional mandate was an effort to include gifted children under the ‘special education’ label in order for this population to receive federal funds and support. The Commissioner was to examine the

needs of the gifted students, evaluate gifted programs for their effectiveness and recommend any new programs that were needed to meet the needs of the gifted population. In response to the provisions, Sidney P. Marland Jr., the Commissioner at the time, issued a report of his findings. Marland felt that the gifted programs were in danger and declared "his intention to initiate a series of major activities at the federal level with the hope of inspiring and pressing for more commitment on behalf of the gifted throughout the nation's schools" (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 40). There was talk that the Federal Bureau of the Handicapped would be renamed the Bureau of Exceptional Persons in hopes of securing a place for gifted education within the public school system. However this did not come to pass because, maybe "the American public could never feel equally sympathetic to the needs of children at both end of the ability spectrum" (p. 40). Despite the resurgence of gifted education, the underprivileged minorities were still neglected. Educators at this time were eager to reach these populations. "However, the profession was stymied in its efforts to find a clear way of discerning high-level academic potential that was buried under a thick overlay of social and economic handicaps" (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 40).

Although gifted education was receiving more attention, many people were not happy with the state of the public school system. In 1954 schools were mandated to become more racially integrated as a result of the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In what is now referred to as

“white flight”, many middle class families moved from big cities which were becoming more racially diverse to smaller suburban areas. Many of these families believed that the “black” schools would not provide an adequate education so they moved to racially homogeneous suburbs for a better educational experience for their children. In order to attract these families back, magnet schools were created. The magnet school, which was located in the inner-city, offered enrichment programs in particular subject areas such as math and science. The United States Department of Education defines a magnet school as: “a public elementary school, public secondary school, public elementary education center, or public secondary education center that offers a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds” (www2.ed.gov/policy, Section 5302). According to Tannenbaum the magnet schools were so called because they wanted to attract the ablest of students whose presence improved the atmosphere of the entire school. An intent of magnet schools was to encourage racial integration. Due to the bias of many IQ tests administered at this time in history, most students who qualified for gifted programs were white. Therefore an unforeseen consequence of reintegration can be viewed as a way of attracting more intelligent students by offering a more rigorous or specialized curriculum. Again the gifted students were used as pawns for the sake of repairing social problems. (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 41)

The fifties, sixties and seventies were full of ups and downs for gifted education. Throughout the last three decades there has been a wide range of literature advocating for, or against, the creation and implementation of gifted programs. The egalitarian-excellence debate continues to be at the forefront of gifted education discussions. There doesn't appear to be a consensus happening any time soon. Tannenbaum (1993) writes:

Advocates for the gifted have enough commitment and influence on policy makers to keep many special enrichment services ongoing in the foreseeable future, while those who protest such services also enjoy sufficient influence to dampen full-scale support for the needs of highly creative and accelerated achievers at school (p. 47).

In order to help explain and/or promote certain types of gifted curricula, many different scholars have written and published articles regarding what they believe to be the best approaches to educating the gifted population within American public schools. In the next section I will review and explain some of the most popular gifted programs in America today.

Gifted Programs and Models

There are numerous articles written about gifted programs and models. In *Developing Gifted Programs*, Moon and Rosselli define a program as: "an educational experience that is planned and implemented

in a specific location or region for the purpose of enhancing the development of identified gifted and talented students” (p. 499). A program then is a specific curriculum that is chosen by a school district to meet the specific needs of their student population. A model, on the other hand, is much more broad. A model can be viewed more like an overarching framework of curriculum design. In their article *Toward Best Practice: An Analysis of the Efficacy of Curriculum Models in Gifted Education*, Van Tassel-Baska and Brown begin by describing two “mega-models”, created by Julian Stanley and Joe Renzulli. The two models represent both sides of the division that has been created in gifted education: acceleration and enrichment. The Stanley Model of Talent Identification and Development, created by Julian Stanley, focuses on acceleration while The Renzulli Schoolwide Enrichment Triad Model (SEM), created by Joe Renzulli, focuses on enrichment.

The Stanley model is focused on students who test higher than average on verbal and mathematical reasoning. The Stanley model consists of 4 major principles: 1) use of secure and difficult tests that identifies the highest performing students in math and verbal reasoning. 2) a diagnostic testing-prescriptive instructional approach (DT-PI) that allows for the appropriate amount of challenge and access to special classes. [The DT-PI approach identifies a student’s strengths and weaknesses through assessment and tailors instruction based on the results.] 3) accelerated classes in core academic subjects. 4) curriculum flexibility.

Students who qualify are able to participate in fast paced subject matter classes. The Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY) is a program that follows the Stanley Model. Established in 1971, SMPY initially focused on students who reasoned exceptionally well in mathematics. In 1980, it was extended to include verbally gifted youth. SMPY offered these students curriculum acceleration and/or flexibility. The Stanley Model has been in operation for over 30 years. Although it has been received well by students and parents, schools are not eager to implement it because of the model's focus on acceleration. Schools are hesitant to adopt programs that are acceleration based because of equality issues. Therefore, The Stanley Model's success has been limited to after-school or summer school settings. (Van-Tassel Baska and Brown, 2007, p.345)

The original Renzulli Model was created in 1977. According to Joseph Renzulli, his Enrichment Triad Model, was "designed to encourage creative productivity on the part of young people" (Renzulli and Reis, 1993, p. 370). This creativity would be developed by exposing the students to different topics and fields of study. There are three different types of enrichment in the Triad Model. Type I enrichment was designed to expose the students to events, people, places or topics that would not be covered in the regular classroom. Type II is made up of different materials and methods meant to promote creative and critical thinking skills. Some of the specific activities associated with Type II varies from student to student

depending on the topic she/he has chosen. Type III enrichment allows the student to take their self-selected topic and “assume the role of first-hand inquirer” (Renzulli and Reis, 1993, p. 371). After many years of research and testing, a newer more flexible approach (SEM) was created in 1988. The Triad model accepted only those students that scored at the top 1-3% on intelligence tests. The SEM differs from the Triad model in that it allows for the top 15 to 20% of the high potential students to be accepted. This more flexible acceptance approach is called the Revolving Door Identification Model. Renzulli labeled it more flexible because it allowed more students to be identified and accepted into the program. Not only did it broaden the percentage allowed through testing, it also allowed for students to be accepted using alternative methods. A student could be accepted based on teacher recommendations, potential for creativity and task commitment as well as self or parent nomination. Once students are accepted into the SEM, they are eligible for three different types of services. (Renzulli and Reis, 1993, p. 372) The first are interest and learning style assessments. Students are given both formal and informal tests to ascertain their interests. Students are encouraged to pursue those interests. Curriculum compaction is then provided based on which portions of the regular curriculum have already been mastered. The third step is offering the students access to the three types of enrichment under the Triad model.

According to Renzulli, there are two broad categories of giftedness: schoolhouse giftedness and creative-productive giftedness. Schoolhouse giftedness refers to test-taking or lesson-learning giftedness. This is the type that is most easily measured through IQ and standardized tests. It is the most common type used to determine if a student qualifies for a gifted program. According to Renzulli and Reis (1993), the second type, creative-productive giftedness, can be described as “one’s abilities to work on problems and areas of study that have personal relevance to the student and that can be escalated to appropriately challenging levels of investigative activity” (p.370). He believes that both types are important, that there is usually an interaction between the two types and that special programs should make appropriate provision for encouraging both types of giftedness as well as the numerous occasions when the two types interact with each other. (Renzulli and Reis, 1993, p. 369) The SEM focuses on creating alternate work for students who have mastered the content being covered in the classroom. It incorporates three types of enrichment and emphasizes creative thinking. Some recent studies seem to suggest that SEM benefits all students, not just the gifted population.

A third model, The Purdue Three-Stage Enrichment Model for Elementary Gifted Learners (PACE) and the Purdue Secondary Model for Gifted and Talented Youth, combines both enrichment and acceleration and was created in 1979. “Stage I focuses on divergent and convergent thinking skills; Stage II provides development in creative problem solving

and Stage III allows students to apply research skills in the development of independent study skills” (Baska, 1993, p. 352). This model also consists of eleven components. Each component is meant to assist the students in enrichment and/or acceleration opportunities. The components are: counseling services, seminar, advanced placement courses, honors classes, math-science acceleration, foreign languages, arts, cultural programs and extra-school instruction.

Some of the other models are: The Maker Matrix, The Parallel Curriculum Model (PCM), Sternberg’s Triarchic Componential Model and Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM). Each model consists of a particular type of approach to subject matter and the student’s interaction with it. The Maker Matrix is used mainly by teachers to help them develop classroom curriculum. Recent work on the model has focused on its problem solving in multiple intelligences. (Baska and Brown, 2007, p. 348) There are five problem types within each intelligence.

Type I and II problems require convergent thinking. Type III problems are structured but allow for a range of methods to solve them and have a range of acceptable answers. Type IV problems are defined, but the learner selects a method for solving and establishing evaluation criteria for the solution. Type V problems are ill-structured, and the learner must define the problem, discover the method for solving, and establish criteria for creating a solution.

(Baska and Brown, 2007, p. 348)

Several school districts across the country have used this matrix as a framework for developing and organizing classroom level curricula.

The next model, the PCM, is made up of four dimensions or parallels. They may be used in combination or alone. They are: the core curriculum, the curriculum of connections, the curriculum of practice, and the curriculum of identity. According to the PCM, “the core curriculum is the basis of all other curricula and it should be combined with any or all of the three other parallels. It is the foundational curriculum that is defined by a given discipline” (Baska and Brown, 2007, p. 348). The second parallel, the curriculum of connections, encourages and assists students in seeing the correlations among and between subjects. The third parallel, the curriculum of practice, is meant to expand a student’s knowledge through application of a given discipline. The final parallel, the curriculum of identity, is used to help students see how a particular subject or discipline fits into their life. Students are encouraged to use this parallel as a way towards self-understanding. Because this model is relatively new (2002), there is not much research done on the number of schools that have implemented it or on its effectiveness .

The third model, Sternberg’s Triarchic Componential Model is based on Sternberg’s information processing theory of intelligence. According to his theory, there are universal components of intelligence that are the same for everyone. Sternberg believes that intelligence can be separated into three different types: analytical, creative and practical.

Analytical intelligence has to do with making judgments that are more abstract in nature. Creative intelligence is domain-specific. A person may be able to think creatively in art for example but not in dance or science. Practical intelligence are those abilities that enables a person to make everyday decisions. Sternberg used these three kinds of intelligences to help create his Triarchic Componential Model. In this model, he breaks mental processes down into three different components. The executive process component is used in planning and decision making. The performance process component is used in problem solving within domains and the knowledge-acquisition component is used when acquiring, transferring or remembering information. Students who have been instructed in this model have shown the greatest gains in reading comprehension scores. There are studies currently being conducted on the effectiveness of this model within the classroom.

The fourth and final model is the Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM). The ICM was designed by Joyce VanTassel-Baska in 1986. This model has three main dimensions: advanced content, high-level process and product work and intra- and interdisciplinary concept development. (VanTassel-Baska and Brown, 1993, p. 350) The ICM has been used to develop curriculum frameworks in core subject areas such as math, science, social studies and language arts. National education standards were used as a template and as a result, the curriculum units created from the ICM align very well with state standards. The ICM has been used to

develop and plan curriculum in many districts in the United States, Australia and Canada.

In addition to the many articles written that describe the different gifted models and programs that have been created, there are some that have been written in support of a particular model or program. In *A Nation Deceived*, Volumes I and II, a report funded by the John Templeton Foundation and edited by Nicholas Colangelo, Susan G. Assouline and Miraca U. M. Gross, the various authors lay out the reasons they believe an accelerated curriculum is the most effective approach to educating gifted students. In their report, they discuss topics such as the long-term and academic effects of acceleration, public policy and acceleration and studies of acceleration. This report was written to tackle the “misconceptions about acceleration and dispelling their impact through research, examples of effective practice, and real-life stories of students. This multi-pronged approach may help the general public and educators develop more favorable attitudes toward acceleration” (Colangelo et. al., 2004, p. ix).

Like acceleration, the enrichment model has its own proponents. In his article *The Schoolwide Enrichment Model*, Renzulli describes his model in great detail and lays out the specifics of why his model is the most effective approach. “Not only has this model been successful in addressing the problem of students who have been under-challenged but it also provides additional important learning paths for students who find

success in more traditional learning environments” (Renzulli and Reis, 1993, p. 367).

For my study it is not only important to understand gifted education but a persons place within it. The concepts of habitus and field, created by social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, are also important here because they help explain Gadamer’s hermeneutic concept of horizon.

Bourdieu

Two of the theoretical concepts created by Pierre Bourdieu are habitus and field. Habitus is “an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted” (Bourdieu,1977a, p.95). Habitus is used to explain the consistency of human action and interaction within dynamic social events and situations. Habitus has also been referred to as a ‘social inheritance’. Grenfell and James (1998) write that habitus also implies “habit, or unthinking-ness in actions, and ‘dispositions’” (p. 14). The term habitus describes the structures behind a person’s attitude toward something or they way in which they grasp or understand an experience. Bourdieu writes that habitus is “the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.18). Habitus is a concept utilized by Bourdieu as a way of “comprehending social activity” (Grenfell and James,1998, p.15). It is “creative, inventive, but within the limits of its structures, which are the embodied sedimentation of the social structures which produced

it” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.18). In other words, habitus is a reflection of society. According to Bourdieu,

[Habitus] has the function of overcoming the alternative between consciousness and unconsciousness...And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself ‘as a fish in water’, it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted. (Grenfell and James, 1998, p.14)

It is only when a person is confronted with situations or events that are not a part of the structuring structures of his/her habitus, that his/her dispositions may become visible and/or problematic. Bourdieu pays special attention to the relation between habitus and education:

The habitus acquired in the family underlines the structuring of school experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specifically pedagogic message), and the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences (e.g., the reception and assimilation of the message of the culture industry or work experiences) and so on, from restructuring to restructuring. (p. 15)

A person’s initial disposition towards school is determined by the habitus he/she acquired from his/her family. This relationship is important in my study because the experiences of my participants will more than likely, be a result of their habitus.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is very similar to the hermeneutic concept of horizon. According to Gadamer, a person's horizon "represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision...The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer, 2004, p.301). A person who is outside looking towards the horizon can only see so far. Her range of vision is determined by her physical location. Just as a person's visual horizon is related to where she is in relation to the earth, a person's hermeneutic horizon is related to her past experiences and the meaning that was made from them. Like the habitus, the horizon is a reflection of society. For Gadamer society, which is determined and formed by history and culture, is the context in which a horizon is formed. Like habitus, a person's horizon is responsible for what a person perceives is happening and the meaning he/she makes out of that perception. These processes of meaning making are not conscious but rather take place without most people realizing it is occurring. A more in depth explanation of horizon and hermeneutics is included in the Methods section of this paper.

Bourdieu's concept of field is tied very closely to habitus. Field is "a structured system of social relations at a micro and macro level" (Grenfell and James, 1998, p.16). Field may also be defined as "a network or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992, p. 96). One uses his/her habitus or horizon to make sense of the field in which he/she is currently located. According to

Bourdieu “habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and with value, in which it is worth investing one’s practice” (Grenfell and James, 1998, p.14). This concept of field is relevant because Bourdieu considers education to be a type of field.

Education is a field, made up of identifiable interconnection relations. It also involves ‘gifts’, this time scholastic...But no field ever exists in isolation, and there is the sense of fields within fields within fields...they connect with and partially share the principles of the superordinate field, all whilst having their own particular context characteristics; for example, the shifting aims and objectives of different phases of education, the ways they are organized and who is involved. (Grenfell and James, 1998, p. 20).

Gifted education would be considered one such subfield. “Each subfield [has] its own way of doing things, rules, assumption and beliefs” (Grenfell and James, 1998, p. 20). These rules, assumptions and beliefs are what enable people to participate in a field. A person’s ability to succeed within a field is a result of the type and amount of capital he/she possesses. In order to get a more complete description of field, it is important to also describe Bourdieu’s concept of capital.

“Bourdieu uses the word *capital* to describe the social products of a field or system of relations through which individuals carry out social intercourse” (Grenfell and James, 1998, p.18). Bourdieu describes social

interactions in terms of a game that is being played and the people involved as players. Just like in a game, there are rules that govern all social activities. Players with the most skill and/or knowledge will have the advantage and usually win. Likewise those people with the most capital will be the most successful.

[People are either] in or out of the game...There are good and poor players, winners and losers...There are rules which govern how the game is played, what is and is not allowed and how deviancy is dealt with...By entering the game, individuals implicitly agree to be ruled by it and immediately set up personal relations with it, as well as with other players. (Grenfell and James,1998, p.18)

Bourdieu discusses several different types of capital: Economic, Social and Cultural. Economic Capital is money wealth. Social Capital is a “network of lasting social relations” (Grenfell and James,1998, p. 20). Social capital could be viewed as capital that is earned as a result of a person’s interactions with other people. Social capital is important to education because the person whose experiences most resemble his/her school environment, will be the most successful. Those whose experiences are the least similar to their school interactions, will be less successful. Cultural Capital is the product of education. Bourdieu breaks down Cultural Capital into three forms: an individuals dispositions and attitudes toward learning, an individuals connection to objects such as books or dictionaries and an individuals connections to institutions of

learning like schools or universities. While each type of capital is defined separately, the different kinds of capital are interconnected.

Capital attracts capital, but,...we do not enter fields with equal amounts, or identical configurations, of capital...some individuals, therefore, already possess quantities of relevant capital bestowed on them in the process of habitus formation, which makes them better players than others in certain field games. (Grenfell and James, 1998, p. 21)

According to Bourdieu the amount or type of cultural capital an individual possess effects his/her success and attitudes toward school. Bourdieu goes on to say that the more structurally similar a person's habitus is to the school's, the more successful he/she will be. The most privileged students, or those who possess a greater amount of economic capital tend to perform better in school because economic capital "has a determinate effect on habitus not only in ways of thinking which more closely approximate that of schools but in terms of a whole cultural disposition" (Grenfell and James, 1998, p. 21). Bourdieu's concept of players in certain field games is in line with Gadamer's idea of play which will be discussed in further detail in the Methods section. All of these Bourdieuan concepts are important for this study because they will help in understanding and analyzing the participant's reaction and experiences in gifted education programs.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the overwhelming number of books and articles written about giftedness and gifted education, there is amazingly little written about a gifted person's experience in a gifted program or their thoughts/opinions about being labeled as a gifted learner. In *A Nation Deceived Volume I*, there is one chapter titled: "Voices on Acceleration" which includes the opinions of one student, one superintendent and one school board member (Colangelo, Assouline, Gross, 2004, p. 58). The student was asked to describe her experience with acceleration. According to the authors, her response was only 3 sentences. Her total interview takes up only one page of an eighty-two page document. In *A Nation Deceived Volume II*, there is a chapter that deals with the possible effects an accelerated program could have on a student. The author writes:

By now, the evidence concerning the positive academic effects of acceleration in all its many forms has been well accepted and, for the most part, academic issues are no longer a serious concern for educators or parents of gifted students. (Robinson, 2004, p. 59)

However most of these studies are quantitative and focus on the success of the program from a statistical perspective. In her article *Impact of Gifted Programs from the Students' Perspective*, the author, Nancy Hertzog writes: "Little is known about the impact of students' participation in gifted programs. Program evaluators have centered their studies on program effectiveness, program improvement, and specific short-term learning

outcomes” (Hertzog, 2003, p.131). Later on she writes “the impact of experiences in gifted programs on individual children has rarely been addressed in the literature. Evaluators have typically assessed the quality of students' experiences in the gifted program using teacher, administrator, parent, and student questionnaires” (Hertzog, 2003, p.132)

For her study, Nancy Hertzog interviewed 50 college students and asked them probing questions about the impact they believed the gifted program had on their lives both in and out of school. She chose her participants through surveys handed out to upper level courses in the College of Education and the College of Engineering. She chose those two majors because they “represented students with potentially different strengths and talents” (Hertzog, 2003, p.134). Out of the approximately 1,000 surveys distributed, 104 surveys were returned and 50 students were selected after being interviewed. The participants were given an open-ended interview that was recorded and later transcribed and coded. According to the author, each interview took approximately one hour. Even though Hertzog writes that “students representing diversity (i.e. not Caucasian) were targeted for interviews” (Hertzog, 2003, p.136), the students that participated in her study were “predominately Caucasian, female and from middle-to high income families” (Hertzog, 2003, p.136). Her study, she states “fills a gap in the current literature by examining through narrative how participation in gifted programs has affected the lives of college students. The qualitative nature of the study describes

"experience" as told from the students' perspectives and provides windows into viewing intangible, unintended, or immeasurable outcomes of gifted education services" (Hertzog, 2003, pp. 134-135). Looking back at Bourdieu's concept of capital, I noticed the students chosen seem to possess similar cultural, social and economic capital-the amount and combination of which helped ensure their success. In addition to that, their habitus most closely resembled that of the school. In fact the author writes "the students interviewed said that gifted education had an overwhelmingly positive impact on their lives" (Hertzog, 2003, p.139). How much did their backgrounds and life experiences contribute to the memories of their gifted education experiences? Hertzog's study does not explore this relationship. While her study provides space for the students' voices to be heard, it does not offer a context within which the voices can be positioned. What my study will provide, is a description of the environment within which my participants have developed and cultivated their points of view. "The most privileged students do not only owe the habits, behaviour and attitudes which help them directly in pedagogic tasks to their social origins; they also inherit from their knowledge and *savoir-faire*, tastes and 'good taste'" (Grenfell and James, 1998, p. 21). I hope to use the knowledge and understanding of such inheritance to make sense of my participants' stories.

My study will be looking at the data from a hermeneutic perspective. What this does is allow the words spoken by the participants

to be contextually analyzed. Through language, the participants will be describing past and present experiences. By utilizing hermeneutics, my study will strive to make clear and describe the types of understanding and meaning making that goes into each participant's experiences and the retelling of such experiences. What hermeneutics offers is an explanation of how a person's past experiences, their horizon, determines what and how they understand or feel or believe. A more in-depth description of hermeneutics and how I plan to employ it is provided in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Data Sources

I interviewed three teachers and three parents from two different districts around the city for a total of 12 interviews. I recorded the interviews which lasted approximately one hour each. After all the interviews were completed they were transcribed by someone else. All of my participants were women. I was not excluding men but in the districts I was allowed access to, there were no male gifted teachers or at least none made available to me. All the parents I interviewed were mothers. This was also not intentional. The parents who were available and who had experiences dealing with the school and the teacher just happened to be mothers. My initial reason for choosing both parents and teachers was that I hypothesized there would be a difference in horizons or at least a significantly noticeable difference in experiences that would require conversations with two different populations. Once I began analyzing the data however, it became obvious that this was not the case. I found that the similarities and differences did not fall into place the way I had imagined they would before I interviewed them. I also hypothesized that perhaps there would be similarities among the participants in each district. This too was not so. Because the experiences they were recalling and retelling happened during their childhood, their recent profession or station in life had little to do with the type of experiences they described in their interviews. All of this became clear to me after my initial interview. In

the first interview I asked them questions about their childhood experiences in school and their current experiences with school with either their students, children or both. After writing horizons for over half of the interviews it became apparent that a lot of their own life story was missing from the first interview. I needed to interview them again but realized that 12 was unnecessary for two reasons. First, there was way too much information to be analyzed and I could not do it effectively and thoroughly enough for the scope of this particular project. Second, as mentioned earlier, I realized the categories I had created (teacher, parent, administrator) were not informative or as meaningful as I had previously thought. Their experiences as children did not have any relationship to the label I gave them. As a result, I narrowed my data sample down to two people from each district not paying attention to whether they had been previously labeled by me to be a “teacher” or “parent”. The criteria I used was willingness of participant to be reinterviewed and amount of information they had given me on the initial interview. I reinterviewed four women. Two from one district and two from another. This time the focus of my interview was on their childhood and their relationship to school/ education and giftedness as they were growing up (See Appendix A).

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has been around for thousands of years and is defined as a theory and method of interpretation. Historically, hermeneutics has been used to aid in the interpretation and understanding of the Bible.

Contemporary hermeneutics is concerned with more than just the written text. It encompasses both verbal and nonverbal communication. One important aspect of hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is a description of the process of understanding either the spoken or written word. If a person is confronted with something that is unknown, he/she attempts to position the foreign item into that which is familiar. "We can learn about the unknown only by recognizing it as "something already known" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 68). The circle is also described as an "unfinished spiral" by Gallagher. This is because understanding does not happen all at once nor does it ever end. "The circular movement is necessary because nothing that needs interpretation can be understood at once" (p. 62). Gadamer believes that absolute truth or knowledge is impossible for humans and therefore human understanding is always incomplete and constantly being revised. This concept of a circle underscores the importance that cultural, historical and literary context plays in understanding and comprehension. Gadamer claims that a person can not understand the whole without referring to the parts and can not understand the parts without being able to see the whole. In his book, *Hermeneutics and Education*, Sean Gallagher describes how hermeneutics is key in learning and education. "Learning involves an essential incompleteness of knowledge, a noncoincidence between teacher and student, a hermeneutical circularity that remains open" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 74). According to Gallagher, the circle must

remain unclosed in order for learning to happen. The knowledge of the teacher and the knowledge of the student should not fully coincide or overlap. In order for learning to occur, there must be an incompleteness of knowledge. This is what keeps the circles open and makes learning possible.

Gallagher contends learning is comprised of three different types of circles. First, there is a dialogue between a learner's background knowledge and the subject matter which Gallagher calls the hermeneutical circle of interpretation. A student's horizon (what she knows, or has experienced) determines what she understands about what is being taught. Next, there is a relationship between the teacher's understanding and her pedagogical presentation. A teacher's horizon determines what she knows and how she goes about presenting the information to her students. Last is the dialogical circle which includes interchanges between the teacher and the student within the classroom. The circle of understanding needs to remain open in both the teacher and the student. All three of these circles are a part of my participants' experiences as both students and teachers. The first circle, the dialogue between the learner's background knowledge and the subject matter, is apparent when my subjects are talking about what they knew in relation to what was being taught and how sometimes their knowledge was beyond, or deeper, than what the teacher was presenting. The second circle, the relationship between the teacher's understanding and pedagogical presentation,

becomes known when I make connections to what my participants understand about what it means to be gifted or teach the gifted based on their experiences and how they use that to inform their practice. The third and final circle, interchanges between the teacher and student in the classroom, applies to both their life as a student and as a teacher. Most of their past educational experiences involve interaction with their teachers. They learned, even at a young age, the type of teacher they did, or did not want to become, based on these experiences. The exchanges they have presently with their own students continually reinforces what they believe about being an effective teacher.

Hermeneutics is not interested in laying out the steps a person takes towards understanding a situation or a text. Hermeneutics is about helping to explain the conditions that allow understanding to take place. It is not prescriptive but rather descriptive. The specific style of hermeneutics I will be using comes from Hans-Georg Gadamer. His particular type of hermeneutics has been labeled 'moderate hermeneutics' by Sean Gallagher.

Moderate hermeneutics contends that no work is free from prejudice; that there can not be an objective interpretation because everyone operates from a set of biases which are embedded in language. Since no one is free from language, no one is free from prejudice and bias. In his book *Truth and Method*, Gadamer describes hermeneutics as a process of making meaning.

An important concept to Gallagher and Gadamer's description of hermeneutics is the notion of play. Hermeneutically speaking, the act of interpretation (which includes the concept of play) involves appropriation, transcendence, and distanciation. On the following pages, I am going to describe and define play and all of its parts. In order to understand why and how I am using hermeneutics, it is important to have a grasp on what hermeneutics is and how the different concepts fit together.

Play

Starting from the use of the word *play* in phrases like: play of light, play of the waves and play of forces, Gadamer contends that play is "movement as such which has no goal but constantly renews and repeats itself" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 47). Gadamer points out that when one is involved in play "that the player loses herself in the game, that at a certain point the game takes over" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 49). As a result of becoming lost in the game, the player comes out of the game transformed. The transformation is what makes play educational.

It has been a widely accepted principal in education that play is important for the growth and development of a child. Vygotsky, Piaget and Dewey have all written about the benefits of play to the physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health of a child. During play a person learns not only about herself, but about others and the world around her. In their book *Piaget Primer*, the authors write that play allows a child to "master his environment" (Singer and Revenson, 1996, p. 56). They also

claim that when children “try on” different roles through play, they learn about society and their place within it. (p. 55) Gallagher helps to explain the educational aspect of play. “[Play] involves venturing into the unknown, going beyond ourselves and experiencing the unfamiliar...In play we become so fascinated with the world that we move beyond ourselves, we transform the limits of self...The result is self-transformation” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 49-50). So through play a person is able to better understand or comprehend the world and him/herself. Gallagher writes that for Gadamer “...the temporal structure of play entails that the player gives herself over to the play. The player is taken up by a presence outside of herself and is thus involved in a self-forgetfulness which is a projection beyond herself...this analysis of play suggests we are constantly learning about ourselves in light of our experiences” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 53). The last part of this quote is important to my study. In order for the interviews to be successful, the women I interviewed had to be serious and ‘give herself over to the play’. In doing so each participant should come away from the interview having learned something about herself. As the interviewer, I learned, or was made aware, of attitudes or bias that I was not aware of previously. As each participant told her story, I was reminded of certain experiences I had forgotten. I also viewed some of my past experiences in a different way after the interviews.

An important aspect of play is seriousness. Gadamer writes “seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather,

seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play. Someone who does not take the game seriously is a spoilsport” (Gadamer, 2006, p.103). In order for play to truly be play, the player must lose herself in the game. Another important aspect of play is that of self-presentation and formation. Gallagher writes that playful activities do not arise out of nothing. “...they find themselves within a meaningful context. They emerge from our past experiences” (Gallagher, 1992, p.76). Within the act of playing a player is, in essence, trying out different versions of him or herself. This idea of play is also present in Bourdieu’s concepts of a field.

A field is not simply a set of structures. It is “a space of play which exists as such only to the extent that players enter into it who believe in and actively pursue the prizes it offers” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 18). The players involved in the field or ‘game’ must be serious about it. The players have, by participating in the game, agreed to certain rules and stakes. They are, as Bourdieu puts it, “in collusion” with one another. The fact that they are playing shows that they are serious about the game and are willing to give themselves over to it. Within each game, there is capital being used, transmitted or exchanged. “...the hierarchy of the different species of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) varies across the various fields....their relative value...is determined by each field” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). A person’s willingness to participate in a game could be a reflection of the type of capital she believes is available

to her. If someone does not want to adhere to certain rules and regulations or doesn't think she has what it takes, that person may refuse to play. This holds true within the field of education and the subfield of gifted education. Within a gifted education classroom there are certain expectations and abilities required. A student's participation (or lack thereof) may be due to the student's refusal to be in collusion with the teacher and other students, a belief that she will not be able to succeed in such an environment or a combination of the two. The idea of playing is central to hermeneutics and is not limited to children.

If Gadamer is correct, and I believe he is, then from a hermeneutic perspective, people (both children and adults) are constantly at play. Whether it be in their role as a gifted teacher or coordinator, or as a parent of a gifted child or even the gifted child herself. Everyone is using the different roles that they occupy to help make sense of themselves and the world. In the case of my interviews the roles would be "interviewee" or "dissertation subject." They are not just "gifted teacher", "educator" or "mother". In the process of participating in the interviews, they are occupying a variety of roles. How they view themselves in each role comes across in the language they use to describe themselves and their experiences. According to Gallagher, play is comprised of two different types of interpretative acts: transcendence and appropriation. A third interpretive act, not necessarily tied to play, is distanciation.

Transcendence and Appropriation

When a person is at play, it is important that she is serious and is able to lose herself in the game. Losing oneself is important because only when one loses themselves are they able to become transformed. Play involves going beyond oneself into the unknown. Play is about experiencing the unfamiliar. During play one must be able to see beyond what is to what could be. Gallagher writes: "In play, we become so fascinated with the world that we move beyond ourselves, we transcend the limits of the self.... The self-transcendence that is essential to play involves a projection towards one's own possibilities"(Gallagher, 1992, p. 50). While at play that which is not real becomes real and that which appears not possible becomes a possibility. During play a person is engaged in transcendence. While in this transcendent state, she becomes aware of different possibilities. When a person is finished immersing herself in play, she is able to reemerge as a different, transformed individual. "The self is nothing other than this playful process of transcendence and appropriation taking place through the possibilities opened up in art, in action, in all educational experiences" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 52). According to Husserl, transcendence is "a projection toward the not yet realized" and appropriation is "the retention of what has already been realized" (p. 53). While a person is at play there is a type of interaction going on between the person and her environment. She transcends or "comes out of herself" during play in order to be fully aware

of all possibilities available to her. That which she brings back into herself, or appropriates, results in her transformation. Gallagher asks “Can we say...that transcendence involves an interpretation of the world and that appropriation involves a reinterpretation of self, anew self-understanding?” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 53) The transcendence and appropriation structure of play makes it interpretational. Through every experience or act of play people are constantly learning about themselves. Gallagher contends that all educational experience involves play. Within an educational experience then, a person is not only learning facts and information but is simultaneously learning about herself, what kind of a person she is and what type of person she would like to become. The interview is an act of play. What type of person is she projecting and why? What is it about her experiences that impel her to tell the stories she told? Why did she choose the words she did? An answer to these questions can be found in interview. The way in which I perceive her is not an accident. She created her image through discourse. The way in which I perceive her and my interpretations of her stories are tied to and limited by my experiences.

Distanciation

When a person encounters something unfamiliar they need to understand it. In order to come to an understanding, they use interpretation. Interpretation requires the person to use the familiar to help make sense of the unfamiliar. That which is familiar has already been

interpreted but is constantly being reinterpreted in light of new experiences and interpretations. "Interpretation, one might say, requires some room in which to move in its dialectic between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The context of the familiar, out of which we move toward understanding the unfamiliar is supplied...through language" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 124). The idea of distancing accounts for our ability to encounter the unfamiliar. Gadamer's comments on distancing come from textual hermeneutics. When presented with a text, it must be understood as something in need of interpretation, something that is unfamiliar to the reader. There is an historical or what Gadamer calls temporal distance between the text and the reader. When a reader interprets the text a new meaning is created. "Interpretations, therefore, never simply repeat, copy, reproduce, reconstruct or restore the interpreted in its originality. Interpretation produces something new...temporal distance is not something that must be overcome...temporal distance [is] a positive and productive condition enabling understanding" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 128). The dialogue created from the interviews is something new. It is, in a sense, an interpretation of the participant's history or horizon as they have chosen to tell it. Gallagher (1992) offers a list of four features to help define the notion of distancing:

- Distancing involves objectification. That which is unfamiliar and needs to be interpreted, becomes an object and stands on its own.

- Distanciation involves transcendence. Gadamer states that an object's meaning goes beyond its originator. The object is not subject to the interpreters meaning alone. In order for a person to interpret an object, he must open himself up, transcend himself and let the object speak.
- Distanciation allows for the productivity of interpretation. According to Gallagher, both the interpreter and the originator operate from subjective intentions. There is a distance created between these subjectivities that allows for something new to emerge.
- Distanciation involves a projection of possibilities. When faced with an unfamiliar object, the interpreter is bound by history or tradition. What that means is the possible interpretations a person may come to is limited to that person's horizon. But through distanciation it is possible to project and objectify all the possibilities.

During my data analysis, I was not focused on the model or program that my informant had experience in or with. The participants spoke about the gifted program or programs they are involved in or that they are familiar with. However, I went beyond the program they described. I analyzed and interpreted what they said and how they said it. I looked for patterns and themes within each interview to illuminate the identity their words created.

Example of a hermeneutic analysis

To better understand how I analyzed parts of my interview data, I am providing an example from an interview that appears later in the document. The excerpt is taken from my interview with Sandy. I will provide the text and then an explanation of how I used hermeneutics to analyze it.

“Both her mother and her grandmother suffered from depression. Her grandmother would go into deep, deep depression and would have difficulty getting out of it. She remembers her mother going into her room and staying there for days but eventually she would “pull herself” out. She thinks it was her desire to be around people that helped her. Sandy describes her mother as being “strong and amazing.” Sandy says she has the same problem but does not come out of her depression as easily as her mother did because she doesn't have the same desire to be around people that her mother had. It is difficult living with depression but Sandy uses her mother as an example of how to get through it. She knows all the drama going on with her father did not help her mother's depression and was probably the root of a lot of it. “The one person she was supposed to be able to count on wasn't there to help her.”

Here Sandy is performing distanciation as she distances herself from the situation and her mother. Recall that distanciation means creating a distance between subjectivities that allows for something new to emerge. Here, as stated, Sandy, in distancing herself from both her mother and her

situation, creates the necessary distance to achieve a greater objectivity toward both herself and her situation. As she performs this distancing she also transcends herself. To transcend means to 'come out of herself' and become aware of all the possibilities available to her. Here Sandy realizes there are many different responses she and her mother could have and through transcendence she can imagine the options available to her. In this case she sees her mother as being "strong and amazing" and is comparing herself to her mother. The distancing and transcendence leads Sandy to the act of appropriation as she achieves a new realization of herself. She realizes that she is not like her mother and is unable to "pull herself" out of depression. She also realizes that it was her mother's desire to be around others that ultimately helped her. She doesn't have the same desire and therefore, has a harder time coming out of her depression. In this tale of depression we can see Sandy struggling with her decisions consciously (reminding us that while hermeneutics is not frequently a conscious affair, nevertheless people are practicing its various dimensions). At the end of the excerpt she speaks about her father. In this she returns to distancing in order to make judgments about him as when she says he was "the one person she was supposed to be able to count on" but that he "wasn't there to help her". This description of but one passage in my analysis illustrates the process I used when analyzing parts of the interview data hermeneutically.

Self Identity

Paul Ricoeur refers to spoken speech as *discourse*. (Muldoon, 2002, p.48). For Ricoeur the term discourse means “the messages which we produce freely on the foundation and the structure of language” and the “acts of language equal to or greater than the sentence” (p. 48). Spoken language, or discourse, is one of the ways in which people communicate with others. Ricoeur writes, “Discourse refers to a world which it claims to describe, express or represent (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 133).” The stories people tell and the words they use reflect the way they perceive themselves and their experiences. The women I interviewed are recreating a part of their history for me. In the book *On Ricoeur*, Mark Muldoon writes, “History is a complicated process whereby human beings produce themselves and produce culture through the use and production of language” (p. 48). The words they speak are communicating their history and at the same time, (re)creating their identity. Through discourse they are making meaning of their experiences and using those experiences to help explain who they are in relation to their history, to the world and to me. “The act of speech appears as a way of trespassing or overcoming the fundamental solitude of each human being such that some small aspect of our individual lived experience might be communicated...language as discourse is, at least in principle, an open and unlimited process of creation of meaning (Muldoon, 2002, p.49).” Speaking therefore, is a way for people to explain to others that which is

going on inside of them that only they can perceive. Their words give meaning to their experiences. Describing their individual lived experiences allows them to situate themselves within the world and helps them understand their place in it in relation to others and their experiences. Language is one way in which people find common ground and a way in which they can attempt to make sense of themselves, others and the world.

For my participants, I used hermeneutics to expose the process they used to make sense of their experiences and themselves. What this also means on a larger scale is that people continually make meaning and create their identities through language and past experiences. Recognizing this relationship is important as is the realization that our past alone does not influence our future but what we make of our past and how we go about describing it and internalizing it.

Each of my participants created very distinct identities during our two interview sessions. The identity that was revealed by them, to me, was a result of the words they chose and the events they described. During my data analysis each participant created a specific identity. Mindy presents herself as being athletic, fair, guarded and confident. Sandy talks a lot about gender and gender roles, illness, weakness and strength. Ann's stories are about hard work, being accepted and caring or concern for others. Victoria talks about a tough upbringing, security and personal safety. The identities that I perceive them as having are affected by my

own identity. My identity during this process was one of interviewer/teacher and my perception of their individual identities is a result of who I am or at least who my participants perceived me to be during the interview. What I take from their interviews and the topics or themes that are apparent to me are also a result of my own horizon. Whether or not my participants would use the same words to describe themselves is not important. What matters for the sake of my interview is the identities they chose to create for me at that particular moment. The interview is now a past experience for them and as such, becomes a part of their identity and may have an affect on how they present or represent themselves in the future.

Communication

The impetus for this dissertation was my interest in what I perceived to be communication problems between and among teachers and parents. I was very intrigued by what I saw as miscommunication specifically dealing with gifted students and curriculum. Although I was always aware of it, after conducting and analyzing the data I realized even more that communication is more than just the words we say. Communication, or lack thereof, is about the words we choose but also about the words we don't choose. It is also related to all of our past experiences that make up our horizon. The experiences we have lived through and the meaning we have taken from them are also a crucial part of communication because how we perceive events and people and how we talk about them are a

result of what we have experienced and the meaning we have made from such experiences. I also learned something that I believe is much more valuable to me not only as an educator but as a person.

The biggest lesson I have learned from doing this does not have to do with communication problems with teachers and/or parents. I discovered that understanding the reasons why or how a person comes to perceive or view the world is key to meaningful communication among all people. For educators this is important because we are dealing with and communicating with people every day. It is an important part of truly understanding someone. While it is not possible, nor do I believe it is necessary, to have a full understanding of everyone's horizon or know all their past experiences, what is crucial is being aware that a person's horizon is what determines how they see the world, how they situate themselves within society and how they understand others. When miscommunication occurs the reason for such problems is a result of some kind horizon disconnect. When miscommunication happens more times than not, it is not recognized because most people assume, and incorrectly, that their view of the world, or at least a situation is shared with the person or persons to whom they are speaking. Sometimes this is true and sometimes it is not. Sometimes the differences are so subtle that the people speaking to each other believe they share a perspective that they don't. Doing this dissertation has caused me to approach communication with people in a different way. It has forced me to not just listen to what a

person is saying (or not saying) but to also try to understand why or how she came to believe what she does and how it may differ from mine.

Data Analysis

I wanted to do this project because I am interested in the communication or miscommunication that occurs between and among parents and teachers. I chose to interview people involved in gifted education because it was within that population that I witnessed several instances of what I considered to be a break down in communication. What started out as a project about miscommunication and understanding became something much more.

Words are an important way to express thoughts, opinions, wants and needs. Words can be either written or spoken. Spoken words are usually more dynamic and spontaneous than written ones. When an author writes words down, she has the luxury of going back over her words and changing them until they relay her message most effectively and efficiently. Words are usually spoken without as much forethought. Often times they are spoken in response to someone or something else. According to John B. Thompson, Ricoeur emphasizes that “text is not merely the inscription of some anterior speech, as if speaking were the oral fount of every written work. On the contrary, speaking and writing are alternative and equally legitimate modes of the realisation of discourse.” For Ricoeur written words are not merely spoken words inscribed on paper. It is another type of experience all together. They are two separate

but equal methods of communication. They are both meaningful and important but different. They should not be treated as if they are the same.

My original approach was to treat the interview as text and do three readings on each. The three different readings make up what Reynolds refers to as a “hermeneutic arch”. The first reading is what is referred to as “naive”. In his book “Reading Curriculum Theory” Reynolds (1989) writes that this stage “consists in reading a text and guessing and grasping the apparent meaning” (p.45). It is simply a description of the reader's initial reaction to the text. The second is the “structural” reading. In this stage “a work is analyzed by its genre and its style to other works of the same type” (p. 47). Third is the “understandings” reading. This stage deals with comprehension or understanding. “This understanding is comprehension i.e., appropriation” (p. 48). Reynolds describes appropriation as the following:

The first characteristic of appropriation occurs when a reader interprets a text and the interpretation ends in self-interpretation with the consequence that the interpreter understands himself better as a result of doing the interpretation. (p.48).

Partaking in the first stage was not necessary because my initial reaction to the text, or the interview, occurred during the interview process. Also while my reaction is important in terms of my bias it is not important in gaining understanding about their experiences. I already addressed my

bias in the introduction. The second stage was also not appropriate because the texts I was analyzing were not of a particular genre nor did I choose them based upon such categorization. Comparing them to other interview transcripts would not get me to my desired result: learning about these particular women and their particular experiences. The only stage that was relevant to my study is stage three. This stage is important and is addressed in my study but not as part of the hermeneutic arch.

After attempting this type of reading, it became apparent that treating the interview data as written text was not leading me to the understandings I was after. Although still contextually bound, the present context of the speaker and the purpose for saying the words were known to me. What I did not know however, was the participants reasons for using particular words or choosing particular stories. My job then became to analyze the data to uncover the ways in which each participant made sense of her past and why she chose the words she did. My goal was to discover or uncover the conditions under which her horizon was created and how those conditions and experiences come into play in the decisions and attitudes she has today. Doing this allowed me to make sense of their making sense.

Both the spoken word and the written word are contextually bound. The written word is able to survive year after year, decade after decade. For this reason it deepens understanding if the reader has a sense of when and why the words were written. To gain a deeper and more

complete understanding of written words it helps to understand the conditions under which they were written. More often than not, it isn't possible to talk to the author. Therefore it is her words combined with the historical, cultural and political climate in which it was written, that helps the reader come to a more complete understanding.

It is a bit more complex with the spoken words. When people speak they do not necessarily intend for those words to be written down. Spoken language is more informal and organic than written language. It is also much more interactive. A person changes what she is going to say or what was said based on the response of the person to whom she is speaking. During the interviews, I was recording what my participants were saying. The interview was a semi-scripted dialogue that I initiated and controlled. Their spoken words were eventually transcribed into written words but are still considered spoken language.

The large number of interviews I had was too much for the scope of this project. Instead of using all twelve I choose two from each district for a total of four. The four I chose were based solely on amount of information already given and willingness to be reinterviewed. After determining which four women I would use I reinterviewed them. The first set of interviews were focused more on their current situations and experiences. When I reinterviewed them the focus was more on their childhood and their experiences in school and gifted programs as a student.

My first task was to read over the interviews and use their words to recreate their horizon. My second task was to read each interview in search of emerging themes. To do this I looked for the repeated use of words or phrases. I used the themes I uncovered to create the thematic readings. After writing these two documents, I took all four participants and looked for similarities among them. I took those similarities and tied them bigger cultural norms. In conclusion I showed how these women's experiences, although unique in some ways, were connected together by the expectations and culture they live in.

One of my goals was to uncover the horizon of the participants and how it helped to shape their decisions and attitudes toward school and gifted education. I wanted to try to uncover the reasons behind their particular responses. Each story or life history paints a particular picture. As a person speaks they are making sense of what they are saying and choosing their words accordingly. They are consciously choosing certain words and sharing certain stories. Each story is important individually and each person will have different reasons for why they told each particular story. I put all the stories from one participant together which helped me recreate their history, as it pertains to gifted education, as well as gave me a sense of the type of self they created. I am not striving for the truth, for in hermeneutics there is no such thing.

Language is at the heart of a hermeneutic study. The conversations, or interviews, I had with my participants is a form of text, or as Ricoeur

calls it, discourse. The words used are important in a hermeneutic interpretation because language is how a person situates her self within the world. Prejudice and bias are not only present in the participants but in myself as well. I did not ignore them or excuse them away. On the contrary, I address them and have tried to come to some understanding about how or why a person has developed such bias/prejudices and how they play a role in the horizon or life-history she described to me. I also addressed my own bias and prejudices. I attempted to construct an understanding of my own horizon and have included this in my study because what I hear a person say and the questions I ask are determined by it.

Gadamer's idea of play is very crucial here. The interview is an event or experience. During this event, we were at play. My participants were playing a certain role and constructing a certain history and identity. They created a specific type of 'self' they wanted to portray. In turn, I was playing a role as well. As the interviewer I created a specific type of identity. The way each of us want to be perceived is shown through our language. The words we choose and how we decide to phrase what is being said, are all part of playing this role. Because hermeneutics is concerned with context, it is important to hear how they describe a past experience. It helped me to better understand them and their horizon and helped me become more aware of my own horizon and prejudices. Hearing the experiences that my participants have gone through also,

perhaps, helped them to make discoveries about themselves. The retelling of an event is itself a unique experience. Even though they are retelling an experience, they are choosing their words and they are constantly going through the process of meaning making as they are describing events. As the researcher, I am also in the process of making meaning out of what they are telling me. In addition, having their stories written down and read by others will become a new and different experience. Not only will my participants and I make meaning out of it, those who read about the personal experiences will go through their own process of meaning making. The understanding that comes from it will be different for different people based on their horizon and prejudices. Everyone is constantly making meaning from the events and experiences they have in their life. Hermeneutics is a technique used to uncover or discover the processes that people go through many times a day. There is not one correct interpretation. There is only an interpretation that fits a certain situation at a certain moment. As a result of my study, I hope to gain a better understanding of how my thoughts, feelings and attitudes about gifted education come from my past experiences and how I interpreted them. And the type of person I am, or that I believe I am, is communicated to others through language. As I construct my story, I am also constructing and creating my own identity. At the same time, I hope to help others to see that a person does not come to his/her conclusions about education or more specifically, gifted education, quickly or by chance. Instead I hope

to show that a person's views and the way they describe themselves or how they wish to be portrayed, are all a result of their horizon and the culture it is situated within. The reasons behind many of the opinions and ideas a person has may not be apparent to that person just as my own reasons are not always apparent to me.

CHAPTER 4: THE PARTICIPANTS

Sandy's Horizon

Sandy is a native Arizonan. She was born in Phoenix in 1954 and has lived in Arizona her entire life. Sandy comes from a family of six. She has an older sister, an older brother and a younger sister. Sandy's family is of European decent. She is light skinned with bright blue eyes and straight light brown hair.

When Sandy was born she had stomach problems and spent the first year of her life on medication and under a doctor's care. The opening to her stomach was too small so she was constantly throwing up. As she got older her condition improved so she was taken off her medication. Because the medicines she was given were narcotics, she went through a period of withdrawals. She eventually outgrew it and has suffered no long lasting physical issues as a result. This event is important because it is the first of several experiences Sandy has with hospitals and medication and these experiences affect some of her future decisions.

Another experience with hospitals and medication occurs when Sandy was 13. Her younger sister, who was 10 at the time, was diagnosed with a very rare form of bone cancer. For the next two years her sister spent much of her time in hospitals and needed to take numerous pills every day. Sandy remembers seeing the bottles of medicine around her house all the time. Her experience as a baby and her experiences with her sister influence a decision Sandy many years later.

When Sandy was 18 and attending college she gets married. However because of her young age and her busy school schedule, she and her husband decided not to have children right away. She had to choose some sort of birth control. She decided not to go on the pill because of the memories she had of her sister and the withdrawals she went through as an infant. Because of her aversion to pills she saw the IUD as a perfect option. The IUD was fairly new at this time. This decision was a crucial one for her because she had a very negative reaction to the IUD. She suffered from a high fever, received hundreds of injections and had numerous tests run before the doctors realized what was wrong with her. At one point she was very close to dying. By the time the doctors discovered what was wrong with her, the infection had spread and she had a complete hysterectomy.

Having a hysterectomy at such a young age, she was twenty at the time, was hard for Sandy because she loved children and always wanted to have some of her own. It took Sandy awhile to come to terms with this fact. So the story of her being sick as a baby is an important memory for Sandy because it was just the first of many negative experiences with hospitals and medication.

Sandy comes from a family of six which she says was normal for that time. "Every body had siblings...a family of four [kids] at that time wasn't all that big". The four children in her family are her older sister and brother, her younger sister and her. Her younger sister died from bone

cancer when she was only 12 and Sandy was 15. There was only about three years between her and her younger sister. Because there was not a big age difference between them, they spent a lot of time together and were very close. Sandy remembers her sister being babied by the rest of her family because she was the youngest. As a result, she didn't have to talk much. When she did, she spoke with a speech impediment. No one from the family could understand her except for Sandy so she served as a translator for her most of the time. This is important for Sandy because the closeness she and her sister shared came as a result of this. Sandy not only spoke for her but read books to her at night if her parents were unable to do so. This bond is very important and Sandy mentions it because losing her sister was made that much more difficult because of their close relationship. She says she still thinks about her sister everyday and that she has never and will never, get over losing her.

Although there were sad and tragic events in Sandy's life, she still remembers many positive aspects of her childhood. She spent most of her time on weekends and during the summer outside playing with the neighborhood kids. The neighborhood was full of children and there was always someone to play with. Television was new and she remembers it as being not very good. Her parents did not grow up with one so they didn't have shows they cared about. Her parents only watched the news. She says she and her siblings would watch cartoons on Saturday mornings and after that, they were outside playing. She recalls spending

most of her free time playing with the neighbors outside. Her house was the house all the kids came to. Sandy believes this is because of her mother. She says her mother was a people person and always welcomed others into their home. All of that changed when her sister got sick. Sandy recalls that at that time, most people did not fully understand cancer. When her sister was diagnosed with it, kids stopped coming by because they were afraid they would catch it. Sandy remembers many people believing cancer was contagious. Even though she still played with her friends and neighbors, they stopped coming over to her house and even after her sister's death, they stayed away. Her sister's death not only impacted her family, it impacted her entire neighborhood as well.

As a young child, Sandy says there were "a lot of opportunities for me to learn things-I didn't know you weren't supposed to learn this stuff. I didn't understand you weren't expected to be able to do things until you reached a certain age and I was like [my older siblings] are reading, I guess I should be reading so I taught myself how to read". She remembers her parents' friends saying things like, "How do you do it with her?" or "We feel sorry for you." Sandy says people used to call her "high strung".

I had to know everything right now and I had no patience for people to brush me off because I was just a little kid I wanted to know now and I had questions that probably weren't-I didn't realize it was out of the ordinary thought because I just thought I was being like my

brothers and sisters...I didn't understand the whole age thing-that I would learn that in time.

This is an example of distancing through transcendence. When she says "I didn't realize it was out of the ordinary..." she is stepping outside of who she is and using what she currently knows or understands to help explain an aspect of her self that she didn't realize, at the time, was unusual. Gallagher (1992) writes that distancing, "reveals many possibilities as they are mediated through the unfamiliar. In confronting the unfamiliar, in coming to understand and to relate it to the world which defines me, I open up that world, I transcend that world in a production of possibilities that reveal myself to me. (p. 144). Through her experiences, Sandy has learned there are other possibilities in the type of child she could have been. In realizing who she wasn't, she also begins to understand who she was. This leads to appropriation which, according to Gallagher, is "a self-understanding which is a self-formation" (p. 144). Once Sandy returns to herself she is not the same person she was before. She retains the knowledge she acquired about herself and as a result of this information, is a different person. "The self that is re-appropriated is the self that has undergone transformation" (p. 144). The circularity of meaning making is apparent here as well. Sandy is older now than she was back then. She uses what is familiar to her, gifted children and gifted education, and what she knows about them to make sense of how she behaved as a child. When she says, "I would learn that in time", she

realizes, maybe for the first time, who she was and who she later became. Gadamer says that human understanding is always in a process of revision. He describes it as circular because human interpretation is an incomplete and never ending process. As Sandy grew, her understanding of the world changed. This in turn changed her. As she looks back at herself now, understanding or remembering this part of her persona changes her yet again.

Sandy's mother didn't feel that was "high strung" or hard to handle. She remembers her mother always being very accepting of who she was. Growing up Sandy says there were times when she needed to appear less intelligent than she really was.

There were definitely times that...[I] needed to just cool it, there was no doubt about that but I had learned that lesson really hard. It was really hard for me and my parents would just laugh...they always accepted me the way I am that really feels-that is the strength that I have. As strange as I am, I am okay.

Here, Sandy is remembering times when she was involved in play by pretending to be someone and something she wasn't. According to Gadamer, one important aspect of play is that of self-presentation and formation. As she grew she realized that it was necessary to "play various roles" in order to present herself as a different person depending on who she was with or the situation she was in. This self-presentation effects who she is and how she views herself.

When Sandy was young, she says her parents were great at answering her questions but her older siblings were not.

They disliked that I asked the questions completely. It very much bothered them that I had enough sense to even ask these questions because I was asking questions that they were also asking and didn't know the answers to so it really-I was a pain. To this day, they still see me as kind of a pain and I can't help it. That is just the way I am.

Here again, Sandy is engaged in transcendence and the circularity of meaning making. She transcends her present persona and speaks about the type of person she believes she was, "I was a pain." Then she uses this description and brings it back to her present self, "To this day, they still see me as a kind of a pain and I can't help it. That is just the way I am." She accepts this persona and reappropriates it as a way of describing who she is.

Sandy says her mother accepted her even if she didn't really understand her. Although she knows her older siblings loved her she never had a close relationship with them because she felt they didn't really get her. She doesn't speak much about her father in this way because he was gone a lot.

Sandy's parents own a contact and eyeglass manufacturing company. When Sandy was growing up, she remembers them always being very busy and working long days. It wasn't just her father either. She remembers her mother working just as much as her father. She

remembers a lot of mothers working. "I think there is somewhat of a myth of the stay at home mother of the 50's. They wanted it to look like that but that's not how it really was." Sandy's mom was one of the working mothers. Sandy remembers most of the mothers in her neighborhood either working or volunteering or both. It is important for her to mention this because both of her parents worked but her mother also ran the house. In her family, her mother did more than her father. He worked. Her mother worked. However, her mother also took care of everyone in the house. She was also the one who took care of her sister when was sick. Her mother was an example for her. She went against the stereotypes of what women should be like and it was her mother who allowed Sandy to believe women are or can be more than what social roles dictate.

Although they remained married until her mother passed, her parents did not have the best relationship. Sandy's father had a girlfriend who he would go and live with for extended amounts of time. The longest period was when Sandy's sister was dying of cancer. Her father was never around and did not help take care of her sister. Because they owned their own business her mother was able to go to the store and get money out of the till to buy food and pay bills. Sandy says it was one way her father controlled her mother. Another way was to make sure her car never quite worked. As a result, Sandy's mother had to rely on the generosity of her friends and neighbors to take them places. Sandy describes her mother as being stronger than her dad. "He was gone most of the time my sister was

sick because he had such a hard time with it. Anything that required strength or courage or fortitude he couldn't deal with." Sandy and her mother were there for her sister. Her older sister, who was 18 at this time, was already married and living on her own. Her brother was in high school but he was very busy with school and sports. Sandy describes her mother as the one who kept her family together. Her father, on the other hand, ran away to another woman during the most difficult time in their life. As Sandy got older she had more of an understanding of what happened and she tried to talk her mom into divorcing her father but she says, "It just wasn't done back then." So they remained married until her mother's death a few years ago. Sandy goes back to this experience as confirmation that even though women are stereotypically "the weaker sex", it just is not true. Her mother's strength is what gave Sandy the idea that women could be anything other than what society said they could be. As a young child, Sandy was not aware of what was going on. It wasn't until she was older when she finally understood what had happened. She loved her mother and doesn't fault her for staying because "that's just what you did."

Another relative Sandy had a close relationship with, besides her mother and younger sister, was her maternal grandmother. Sandy said she had a huge influence on her. Her grandmother was very intelligent but because she was a girl, was only able to attend school until sixth grade. She says her grandmother wanted a career and very much resented not

being able to. She never wanted children but she got married and had them anyway because, according to Sandy, “that’s what you did.” Sandy says her grandmother resented her own children so Sandy’s mom grew up feeling unloved. However, she had a few grandchildren she really loved and Sandy was one of them. “I just related to her very well.” Sandy’s mother did not get along well with her mother in law who lived with them. “There was a lot of tension in the house so I spent more time with my mom’s mom. The strong women in Sandy’s life definitely had an impact on her because she realized that even though they adhered to gender roles, they retained their strength and individuality.

Both her mother and her grandmother suffered from depression. Her grandmother would go into deep, deep depression and would have difficulty getting out of it. She remembers her mother going into her room and staying there for days but eventually she would “pull herself” out. She thinks it was her desire to be around people that helped her. Sandy describes her mother as being “strong and amazing.” Sandy says she has the same problem but does not come out of her depression as easily as her mother did because she doesn’t have the same desire to be around people that her mother had. It is difficult living with depression but Sandy uses her mother as an example of how to get through it. She knows all the drama going on with her father did not help her mother’s depression and was probably the root of a lot of it. “The one person she was supposed to be able to count on wasn’t there to help her.”

Once Sandy and her younger sister started school, it became the responsibility of her older sister to take care of them until their parents came home. Although she was in charge, Sandy doesn't remember seeing her older sister very much. There is a six year age gap between the two older children and the two younger children. "Yeah, and there was a gap between the older kids and the younger kids in my family because they were only going to have the older kids and they didn't have the pill-then there were a couple more of us and that was okay—it worked out". 'It worked out' because Sandy had her sister and the older two had each other. Even though there was a big age difference there was one thing that bonded Sandy to her siblings and her parents.

Sports was a big part of Sandy's life growing up. Her mother was really into sports, specifically baseball. Sandy believes her mother became interested in sports to have something in common with her father and brothers, to be "part of the boys." Sandy's grandfather played baseball and her grandmother loved baseball. This was one of their main connections. Sandy's great uncle, her mother's brother, was "the golden child" because he was a boy, smart and good at sports. As a result, Sandy's family was also into baseball, especially her brother who ended up with a career in sports. Sandy is still very interested in baseball and watches it with her husband and daughter. Like her mother it is one thing she has in common with her brother and her father.

Baseball helped Sandy relate to members of her family. It was the one thing they all had in common. Most of the time Sandy felt like her family didn't completely understand her because she was the only one in her family who was in gifted classes. Her brother is smart but she doesn't know if he would have qualified for gifted because there were no gifted classes offered at that time. Her older sister was held back a year but Sandy believes she was actually quite intelligent. "Looking back knowing what I know now, she probably should have been identified as gifted. She is very, very creative."

Sandy is using what she knows as a gifted teacher to help make sense of something that happened when she was a child. As a result, she understands it differently than she did at the time. This causes Sandy to have a new understanding of her sister and her situation.

According to Sandy, her sister did not have any learning problems. Having her sister be held back when she didn't need to be is important for Sandy because it is an example of how the schools failed her and her sister. Included in Sandy's memories are numerous stories of frustration about school not meeting her intellectual needs.

Sandy started kindergarten at age 5. There was no preschool so her parents tried to enroll in her school early but were unable to.

They wouldn't accept me because I was too young...so, my brother and sisters came home with books that I thought I should read-text books. They were in school and I was anxious to start school

because I thought that is where I should be. And so I would just watch them do their homework and read the book while they had it open...I learned everything from the book. So by the time I did get to go to school, I was way, way ahead of everyone else. Not just because I was intelligent, which I was but I also had already read the book. I knew the curriculum I knew all of it already and I was able to teach myself or ask a few questions and it would get explained.

Sandy and her family moved to Mariposa when she was 6. She was to begin first grade but when they realized how advanced she was, they moved her up to second grade. Sandy says that was how the schools dealt with her being academically advanced. "I did basically skip first grade-once I got there. Kindergarten wasn't really appropriate for me and I made it through there and then first grade, I had already done everything so they just pushed me on. That is how I kind of felt about a lot of the times. Every time there was something that I had completed or I could do really fast, just push her on and not really spend the time with me".

This really frustrated Sandy because all she wanted was for someone to understand what she was going through and teach her at her level. She didn't feel taken care of by her teachers and school.

When she entered third grade Sandy witnessed the beginning of the growth explosion in Mariposa "There were very few people that lived

here...there wasn't even a university yet, there was just a college. It was a teachers' college-education was very important here". She remembers there were over 40 students in her third grade class.

We had double sessions all the time. There weren't enough schools and yet they were building as fast as they could. Mariposa was growing extremely fast. That was a big problem too because they didn't have the resources or they couldn't worry about special populations within the population. They were just trying to get enough text books and enough desk and chairs-literally every day we would have new kids at school. Every single day. It was a tough time to be a gifted kid.

Every school year was discouraging and frustrating. Sixth grade was a particularly difficult year for her.

I guess I just had finally had enough of this. Every year I kept waiting-when are we going to get to something that I want to do and something that I don't know about already. I honestly was on of those kids-they talk about gifted kids knowing 80% or more every single year. I was a good little girl and I did what I was told but it was so frustrating and after that many years-what, six years of school being a disappointment and that it really was the way it came across to me. I was so excited to go to school and ever year it was like okay, this will be the year and then it wasn't and I could tell after a week or two and it was just such a drag. By the time I got

to 6th grade, I had had it. I was a real behavior problem in 6th grade. My parents had to come in all the time, which they couldn't believe. It was like why do we have to come in for you? Your brother, yea, but you? That just didn't make sense to them but it was really frustrating. It was my way-I had no real way of communicating to people my needs but that is what I did. My 6th grade teacher, he was a very nice man and he was very patient but nobody is that patient....I knew I was bored and I knew what was wrong and I told [my parents] but they couldn't understand. That didn't make any sense. You are in school. You can't be bored. Obviously, they grew up in the 20s and 30s, I mean, even getting to go to school was a huge privilege really and they didn't see-you are in school. Appreciate that you are in school, that is all.

Sixth grade was difficult because Sandy had enough of being disappointed every year. She did not have anyone to tell because her parents thought she should be grateful just to be in school. Her only outlet was to be a behavior problem because she would get attention. It was negative but the teachers noticed her which isn't something they normally did.

She is describing an instance where she consciously changed the type of person she was or at least she changed the way she was perceived. Again, she is playing various roles. The way in which she was behaving was not getting her the result she desired. She decided to

change her behavior to see if that would get her the results she desired. Sandy mentions her boredom with school “didn’t make any sense” to her parents. The experiences of her parents, or their horizons, were such that they were not able to understand why she would be bored. Sandy’s horizon and her parents’ horizons were incompatible and resulted in a lack of understanding between them.

Sandy was frustrated and bored and there wasn’t much the teachers could do because there were no gifted programs available at her elementary school at that time. However, she does remember a program/school associated with the university called Payne Training School.

My parents tried to get me in. My dad tried really hard. My parents did not go to college so the whole college thing was a mystery to them and so they didn’t really know how to go about this. He went to some offices at the university somewhere and talked to some people and basically got shut down and felt that he probably didn’t know what he was talking about as they told him you don’t know what you are talking about. A kid like me wouldn’t have just appeared like that as far as they were concerned. We found out later that really you have to know someone at the university to get your kid into the school. well it was for all the professors’ kids basically. I would have fit in beautifully but...I didn’t know anybody. I didn’t know the right people.

Again Sandy is faced with a frustrating situations. She couldn't attend a school that would have been a perfect fit for her because her parents didn't know the right people.

Her sixth grade year was the impetus for her to want to be a gifted teacher. "I wanted it to be better for kids like me." Although she really liked her sixth grade teacher she says he put her in her own desk in the corner. She did her own thing and Sandy says she was "very lonely. It wasn't what I wanted." The biggest question always lurking in her mind was why. She constantly asked Why? Why? Why? and she said no one could give her an acceptable answer. She wanted to be able to give students like her acceptable answers and offer them the understanding she never received.

When Sandy entered middle school her frustration and boredom decreased some. She loved middle school. Not because of academics but because of the variety of extra-curricular activities she could be a part of.

Oh, school part was horribly boring but the social part was so much better [than elementary school] that there were so many more kids there. And there were activities like girls could do something called GAA, which was Girl's Athletic Association after school and I was very athletic and I really liked that. I joined that right away. We also had cheerleading and I got to be a cheerleader and I liked that. There was student council and I got to be involved in student council. We also had, when you were in 8th grade, you got to choose an elective and so I chose journalism because I liked to

write and I got to work on the yearbook and the newspaper. So I had all those things going and that made the world of difference.

One class she recalls specifically in middle school is home economics. She resented having to take it because she already knew how to sew. She wanted to take shop instead but couldn't because she was a girl. It was during her middle school years that she got really interested in construction. She wanted to take shop because she saw it as a way to do construction and still be a girl. She says girls weren't supposed to have erector sets but she did.

It was a secret. My parents bought it for me and I kept it in the living room and no one was allowed to go in there. Just tons of boxes that I used to build everything with. I loved my Barbie dolls because I could make things for them, not because I wanted to clothe them...I had whole cities. I got the monorail set going with the erector set. It was a huge outlet for me. That was all I had. There wasn't anything in school that helped with creativity or any of that kind of stuff that I know that these kids need.

Sandy is describing an example of playing among various roles. She plays with her erector set in secret and while doing so, is able to be an engineer. When she does this, she is "trying out" a different persona than the one she is while in public. For many years, Sandy plays various roles as she strives to formulate who she wants to become.

She remembers many times during her middle school and high school years having difficulty socially because of her intelligence. Her siblings would stand up for her if people were picking on her at school. Even though they weren't particularly close at home, they always defended her to their friends. She says, "I wanted to be like all the other girls and date guys. I didn't want them intimidated by me but they were...that is just the way it was."

Sandy felt guys were intimidated by her because of her intelligence. She says she "wanted to be like all the other girls". Physically she was like all the other girls. She was even popular and a cheerleader. What made her feel like she was different was her intelligence. And even though, like she mentioned before, that she tried to 'not act smart', it didn't matter. She was smart and everyone knew it.

She doesn't remember there being any higher level classes in middle school. None were available to her until high school. Sandy skipped a lot of high school "because I already knew the stuff". As a result, she graduated from high school at age 16. She had just gotten her driver's license.

The high school wasn't going to let me graduate because they said nobody is going to let her go to college. She is only 16 years old. Nobody takes college kids at 16 and you are not going to send her away to school, she is only 16, blah, blah. They weren't going to let me finish but I had already completed everything. There wasn't

anything left for me to take...so my dad went down and he said, look I don't care what you say about college accepting her or not accepting her or whatever your other excuses are-has she finished the requirements for you? They said, yeah,she has finished the requirements awhile back actually and he said then give her a diploma and let us the hell out of here. He just stuck to his guns about that...what was interesting about that, my dad always liked, he liked to go in and have a fight with someone verbally-stand up for some cause but when push came to shove, he wasn't going to pay for my college. I was a girl. That was a waste of money. My brother could go to college all he wanted...it was just the principle of the thing that they were telling me I couldn't and he doesn't like being told that you can't because he has proven over and over again in his life that is not true. As soon as somebody told him he couldn't, he would show them he could. He went to bat for me on that as a principle and to prove that he didn't care if I went to college or not but he wasn't going to pay for it.

Sandy graduated in the top 1% of her class. She was not valedictorian or salutatorian because she says two of the "real" seniors got those distinctions. "I didn't feel as comfortable with those kids and I didn't feel it was my place." She uses the term "real seniors" because she was so much younger than her classmates. She felt it the honor should go to the students who were the appropriate age.

Sandy moved away from home at age 17 to attend college. She remained in state and double majored in secondary and elementary education. Her secondary degree was in English.

That is what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a teacher. That was going to be the greatest thing and after about a semester I discovered that that was really the stupidest major that you could have because it was so easy, it was worthless. I figured if I am going to pay for this education, I want an education. I double majored in secondary and elementary education and my major in secondary was in English.

Sandy says she always wanted to be a teacher. She doesn't know why, she just always did. In kindergarten, she wanted to be a kindergarten teacher, in first grade, a first grade teacher and so on. Even though much of her school experience was frustrating, Sandy wanted to be a teacher because she wanted to be able to be the kind of teacher she never had. She would be able to offer the understanding that her teachers lacked.

Sandy initially attended a local university. She had to work full time as well because her father wouldn't pay for her tuition. "I was a girl. That was a waste of his money...he didn't care if I went to college or not but he wasn't going to pay for it". When she turned 17 she transferred to another local university in a different city where she also worked full time. "I needed that much stimulation and as soon as I could I left home...and moved out. I couldn't afford anywhere else". Her parents could have paid

for school and she admits that her mother often slipped her money. She had to pay for everything her first year because she did not have any scholarships.

I think that was partially because they were taking the stand that my dad took and give her the diploma and all that, they weren't going to help me out and I think you need to have help from counselors and stuff in your high school to get those scholarships...I had to do that one all on my own.

When Sandy was a sophomore she went to the financial aid office to see if she could get any assistance.

[I] said can I get any help at all here? I am a sophomore now and these are my grades and of course they were a 4.0...they gave me a job in the office of scholarships and financial aid so then every scholarship or grant that came through that I was eligible for, they put my name on the top of the pile because I worked there. I got everything paid for pretty much-I still had to do books and things and still living expenses but I worked there.

One incident Sandy describes as "traumatic" happened during her sophomore year. Sandy loved to build things and decided to "treat herself" to an engineering course. At the beginning of the semester the professor made her and the three other girls in the class stand up in front of the class of about 75 students.

He turned us around and he said, 'Boys, I want you to take a really good look at these four women. These women are here for their MRS degree'...then he sat us down in the front row and then he said, 'make sure you know who they are and stay away from them because that is all they are after.' It was so disgusting to me, I got ill, just physically ill. Two of the girls dropped out which, of course, is what he was trying to do and the other two of us had to stay because we were on scholarship and if you drop a class when you are on scholarships, you lose your scholarships. At that time, that is how things worked. We had to stick it out and it was very tough.

She loved the content of the course but ended up with a B which she thinks is the first B she ever received. Although Sandy knew about gender stereotypes this was one of the first times it was expressed in such an overt manner. This experience, which she describes as "traumatic" may have been so because while she was growing up she was allowed the freedom to "play" an engineer. Having gone through such an event forced her to acknowledge the part of her that wanted to be an engineer and, at the exact same time, disassociate herself from this important part of her persona.

This experience motivates her to this day. She is constantly telling her female students that they can and should take math and science courses. "I push the math..if you are wanting to get into certain occupations, you have got to have that math background". Her own

daughter is studying to be a veterinarian. “She was really able to continue her math studies. I never really got to continue that and that has always been sort of sad for me”. Sandy did not continue because of her traumatic experience and the jobs that it was assumed she would have did not require a great deal of math and/or science.

For the first three years of college, Sandy was married. When she turned 18, she married her high school sweetheart. They bought a house together close to the university. She and her husband were married for about three years when they decided to separate. It was not long after their separation that Sandy suffered from the pelvic inflammatory disease that would nearly kill her and leave her unable to have any children. She remembers her mother being there every day while she recovered like she was there for her sister. “I didn’t get to have any children. I wanted kids. I was a teacher. It was hard for me to come to grips with.” Sandy eventually made a full recovery and graduated from the university.

She got her first job right out of college as a reading specialist. She taught freshman through seniors who needed to be able to read at the 9th grade level in order to graduate. Many of them had repeated a grade or two. Because of this, there were a few students who were only a few months younger than she was. “I was the oldest in the class but only by a few months, so it was a very interesting way to start my career”.

She spent a few years after that as an honors English teacher. Working in that class helped her to realize how much she liked teaching in

that environment. “I always knew I wanted to work with these kids but I took a circuitous route to get to them”. The route she took meant she had to return to school for her gifted endorsement. “I did that real quick. That wasn’t that big a deal”.

After she earned her gifted endorsement she began working in the Mariposa school district. At the beginning of her career she would travel to different schools. She remembers students had to qualify on gifted teaching in all three areas tested: reading, math and spacial. Now she says it doesn’t matter. A student qualifies for gifted services even if it’s only one area. In her school district gifted classes started being offered at gifted centers. It moved slowly away from centers to site based. Eventually the entire district went to pull-out programs. The current program at her district is a pull-out but Sandy wishes it was a self-contained program instead. “I think that is the best way to serve gifted kids. They are gifted 24/7. They are not gifted Wednesdays at 2:00”. She believes that clustering should be done in conjunction with a pull-out program but that it still isn’t enough. “If you are doing a pull-out, you need to cluster as well. But just clustering isn’t going to do it either. I think it is a great thing to do for gifted kids but it shouldn’t be the end all, be all”.

The program she works in currently is mostly enrichment with an element of acceleration. Her goal as the gifted teacher is to “find where [the students] are at and...take them from there as far as I can go with them”. Sandy says the following about her goals for her students:

I truly believe in differentiation. That isn't a buzz word for me. That is life. That is a philosophy and to me that means you meet the child at where the child is and you take them as far as you can. So every child and every child deserves that, not just gifted, but the gifted truly deserve it because they are held back so much and wherever they are at in every subject, you need to find that point and you need to do whatever you can to take them further...I also think that you need opportunity for them to do higher order thinking.

Later, she says the message she wants to get across to her gifted students is one of tolerance and acceptance and there is nothing wrong with you.

That's the message and I don't think that message comes across to gifted kids. I think they feel they are in trouble because they know it all. They spoil the lesson. It's a terrible feeling...I know how hard it was as a kid not being understood. By peers, family, teachers. That is the worst hurt of all the hurts I have had. Not being understood. They don't get it."

She thinks people will probably always be that way but she wants to help her students so they don't have to go through all she went through.

Sandy is currently married. She and her husband adopted a daughter who is now 21 and attending college. As a child, her daughter was in gifted classes. They lived in a district that had self contained gifted classes but Sandy chose to have her attend school in her district because

she could hand pick the teachers. She says as far as school goes her daughter “needed so much more than what she got”. Her daughter finished high school in three years just like Sandy did.

Sandy’s view is that gifted students need gifted teachers.

Absolutely you have to be gifted. So many gifted kids will sit there and be compliant and do what they are supposed to do, especially if they are a girl...don’t think you can know how that feels unless you have been through it.

Sandy wants to ensure that her students don’t have to go through what she and her daughter went through. She wants her students to know she understands them and that even though they already know what’s being taught at their grade level, they still need to be pushed and challenged. Gifted students need to be challenged to think about things in different ways and not left to themselves because they already “get it.”

Themes

The two main themes that run throughout Sandy’s retelling of her childhood are age and gender. Two other themes that are also evident are one of feeling important or being noticed and the role genetics plays in a person's life. All of these themes are not only present in the stories she tells about her childhood experiences but are also apparent when she talks about teaching and her thoughts on being a teacher of gifted students. Within these themes is an underlying sub-theme of resistance to labels. Another integral part of Sandy's life that does not appear as a

theme is that of medication and hospitals. They are not their own theme because they don't necessarily impact her as a teacher but they are intertwined with many of the stories she tells about her childhood.

Age. Sandy talks a lot about being younger than her classmates. In most instances, she uses it as a guideline for learning and academic expectation. She first mentions it when describing her family. "I am the youngest now but I wasn't during the formidable (sic) years...birth order makes a difference when you are talking about giftedness. The first born are more often identified [as gifted]." It is interesting that she brings that up because she is not the oldest. During the "formidable" years she would have been considered one of the middle children. She also alludes to birth order when describing her younger sister. "My little sister had a speech impediment. She was the baby. Everyone babied her and did everything for her. I think she might have developed more language had she not been so babied." Sandy attributes many of her sister's issues with being the youngest and not with any intellectual disabilities. In fact, Sandy believes that her sister was very intelligent. When describing why her younger sister was held back a year in school she says,

When she was in first grade and supposedly learning how to read, she didn't like the stories. They were boring so when she was asked to read by the teacher, she would start reading and then she'd go off on her own. Out loud. All the students were turning the pages trying to follow along but she was making up her own story

and it was a much better story. And so they said she didn't know how to read. So they said she should be held back.

Sandy refers to first grade as being the time when children are "supposedly learning to read." In most elementary schools this is typically the grade or age at which most children begin to read. She refers to that assumption to show her sister was ahead of her peers and not behind as her teachers thought. Like Sandy, most schools tend to use a person's age to determine what should be taught. However, she remembers her parents were not like that. "My parents never thought about the fact she is only three. It was never like that. They put a newspaper on my high chair and asked me to read the headlines and I did. Lo and behold, okay, she can read". Although her parents did not teach her how to read, they did not discourage it or think she was too young to be able to. Later, when Sandy is describing her relationship to learning and knowledge she says, "I didn't know you weren't supposed to learn this stuff. I didn't understand you weren't expected to be able to do things until you reached a certain age and I was like [my older siblings] are reading, I guess I should be reading so I taught myself how to read". And then again she says,

I had to know everything right now and I had no patience for people to brush me off because I was just a little kid I wanted to know now and I had questions that probably weren't-I didn't realize it was out of the ordinary though because I just thought I was being like my

brothers and sisters...I didn't understand the whole age thing-that I would learn that in time.

The "that" she seems to be referring to is the timeline that elementary schools operate from. The chronological order of learning. She wasn't aware of it at the time but once she entered school, she would realize many of the things she could do were not expected from a child her age. She says she wasn't 'supposed to' know and wasn't 'expected' to learn certain things. Before she entered school, age was not a consideration for her. If she wanted to learn it, she did. After starting school however, Sandy realized her age was very important and at times, limiting.

Sandy recalls her parents couldn't register her for school when she was ready because she was "too young". She thinks she was ready at age 3 or 4. There were no preschools so she had to wait until kindergarten. Sandy remembers being very excited to start school. When she entered kindergarten she already knew how to read and do math. Because of this, Sandy skipped kindergarten and first grade. Sandy says because she skipped two grades, teachers often had trouble with her age. "I did basically skip first grade-once I got there. Kindergarten wasn't really appropriate for me and I made it through there and then first grade, I had already done everything so they just pushed me on." Schools at this time were not equipped to deal with children who learned things at a different time or rate than what was typical. As she progressed through school, her age became more and more of an issue.

A lot of the teachers at that time thought there were mistakes on the records or something. I couldn't possibly be that young. I was 10 in sixth grade. In fact I remember my 7th grade teacher saying no, you are not 11. How old are you really...she couldn't believe I was as young as I was.

Sandy was always younger than the other students in her grade.

"Everyone knew I was younger that's just the way it was." Her teacher called her mother and said, "She's telling everyone she's only 11." Her mother reassured the teacher that Sandy was indeed 11. She says, "that made my teacher take a step back and look at me differently." Sandy believed her teacher looked at her differently because she was doing work and learning things that students two years older than her were learning. Perhaps Sandy felt the teacher gave her more respect because she was just as capable, if not more so, than her older peers. Sandy graduated from high school at a young age. "I was 16 when I graduated from high school. I had no business being out of school at 16." Although she says she had no business being out of school, there was no reason for Sandy to stay in school. She had already completed all the required courses and had enough credits to graduate. The school counselors told her and her father, "Nobody is going to let her go to college. She is only 16 years old. Nobody takes college kids at 16". Her age is much more of a concern than her intelligence. She had taken all the requirements. Her age is what was

holding her back. Eventually her father convinced the school to allow her to graduate.

Sandy also refers to age when describing some of her teachers. “She was elderly, older than my mother, very experienced. She was more like a grandma to me. Very kind woman.” Her favorite teacher was her gifted teacher and she describes her as “being very young and very tolerant, like my mother, and being accepting.” Here Sandy equates certain personality traits with age. An elderly teacher is “experienced, like a grandma and kind” while her younger teacher is “tolerant, accepting and like her mother”. Age was not only a consideration in the classroom. Everything about her day at school was categorized by age. She distinctly remembers that the school bus route was different for the older kids than it was the younger kids and that her brother did not want to have to walk home with his younger sister. She remembers her school kept the younger kids and the older kids separated as much as possible. Because of this, Sandy did not see her older siblings at school. They also rode different buses and had different routes. Once, at the beginning of the school year, Sandy did not know how to get home. As a result she had to go home with her brother. “He didn’t want to walk with his younger sister.” He made sure she knew the route so he wouldn’t have to walk with her again. Her age kept her separated from her older siblings at school. This separation carried over to her house. Sandy remembers spending more time with her younger sister than her older one. She doesn’t remember her older sister

being around much or that either of her older siblings wanted to spend much time with her and her younger sister.

Gender. In addition to age, Sandy also talks a lot about being a girl. She uses the words “boy” and “girl” as a way to categorize people and label activities. Intertwined with this however, is her resistance to stereotypical female roles. Sandy is very aware of the roles that have been established for women and men by society. She talks about experiences and categorizes them as being either “for boys” or “for girls”. At first glance, it appears that she views the world as being very black and white in this situation. However, she relays many stories that are counter to this stereotype. She knows the stereotypes are there but she is not always willing to follow them. When describing a teacher new to her school, she recalls seeing him and thinking, “Oh no, it’s a male teacher. Now we are going to have to do a lot of math.” For her math was a subject boys did or that enjoyed. Because the teacher was male, he must enjoy math and therefore require it from all of his students. They, as girls, must not like or enjoy math. However, she very much enjoyed math and says it is an area she wishes she had been allowed to learn more about.

Another example of gender stereotyping occurs when she wants to take shop in high school. “I asked but they wouldn’t let us because I was a girl”. She had to take home economics instead. She didn’t want to because her grandmother had already taught her how to sew. “You had to take home economics which really bothered me because I already knew

how to sew". She wanted to take shop because she loved constructing and building things. Since she was unable to take shop, her parents bought her an erector set.

I really loved construction and so I saw this was a way I could do construction and still be a girl because we weren't supposed to have erector sets and stuff even though I did. It was a secret. My parents bought it for me and I kept it in the living room and no one was allowed to go in there".

It is interesting that she says, "I could do construction and still be a girl." There is an implied stereotype or cultural norm she refers to here. Girls aren't supposed to build things or like construction. She wants to be able to do it but is afraid for others to find out because she couldn't "still be a girl." Sandy wants to adhere to the stereotyping of girls while at the same time rebel against them. Being viewed as a girl is important to her.

However, she doesn't necessarily always want to do "girl" activities. When describing her behavior for most of her elementary school years she says, "I was a good little girl and I did what I was told". For Sandy being a 'good little girl' meant she obeyed her teachers and did what was asked. She didn't cause problems because that is what girls are supposed to do- be compliant and do what they are told. She alludes to this when describing some of her gifted students. "So many gifted kids will sit there and be compliant and do what they are supposed to do, especially if they are a girl."

Sandy admits she always had a dream of being an engineer. She says she loves to build things but that, “girls aren’t allowed to be that. You had to be a nurse, a secretary or a teacher”. The professions she chose were, and still are, dominated by women. In many universities at that time very few, if any, females were engineering students. Sandy realized this and yet still had the desire to learn about engineering. She describes a situation at the university she attended when she decided to “treat herself” to an engineering course.

I was very nervous about it and there were four women in the class. 50-75 people and only four women...The professor brought us up to the front of the room and made us stand up at the front of the room, the four of us...this is a true story-I know you probably hear things like this but this really did happen. He turned us around and he said: Boys, I want you to take a really good look at these four women. These women are here for their MRS degree....he said to stay away from them because that is all they are after and it was so disgusting to me, I got ill, just got physically ill...two of the women dropped out which is of course what he was trying to do.

This event had a huge impact on her. She calls it “traumatic” and says it resulted in her getting the only B she ever received on a report card. It was traumatic for her because it was such a concrete example of the kind of stereotyping she had been around her whole life. Most of the time it was subtle and like she says, “just the way it was.” This experience was not

subtle and reinforced the type of assumptions that she, her mother and her grandmother struggled against.

Sandy makes many references to the number of boys and girls in her family. Being a boy appears to be preferred.

My brother is the only boy. I should have been a boy. He wanted a brother and didn't talk to my mom for six weeks because he wanted a brother so badly. I was an oops and so was my sister. That is why we had to move. When she was a girl my mom went into a deep depression b/c we didn't have enough bedrooms so we had to move to Mariposa.

If Sandy had been a boy she could have shared a room with her brother. She and her sister were already sharing a room. There wasn't enough room for another person in their room and there weren't another bedroom in the house so they needed to move.

When describing her mother's family she talks a lot about the number of boys vs. girls. "My grandma had a favorite that was my mother's brother. He was about 18 months younger than my mom. He was the youngest. He was the golden child. Partially because he was a boy, smart and he was good at sports. My mom was hugely involved in sports. Maybe to be more connected to her father and her brothers and be part of the boys." Even though she says her mother didn't want to be like her mother in one way, she was. "My mother's favorite was always my brother. Just like her mother's favorite was her son. I knew it and we

accepted it and we love him too so much. He's just like my mom so it's really okay." When describing her own children and the children of her brother and sister she says, "We are short on boys in our family."

Even though many of the women in her family preferred boys, Sandy relates more and is closer to the women in her family. "My grandmother is a huge influence on me. I spent a lot of time with her... I just related to her very well." Sandy sensed that there was tension in the house because her mother did not get along with her grandmother. "So, I spent time with my mom's mom." Sandy says her grandmother wanted to have a career but never got past the sixth grade because "that's all she could go because she was a girl." Sandy says her grandmother was very intelligent and deeply resented having to get married and have children. Her grandmother had a few grandkids she really loved and Sandy was one of them.

Another example of boys being favored is evident when Sandy talks about college. She says her parents didn't care if she went to college or not but they weren't going to pay for it. "I was a girl. That was a waste of his money. My brother could go to college all he wanted. [My dad] would get another job if he had to but I was a girl". She mentions it again later on. "They didn't discourage me but they weren't going to pay for it. My dad wasn't going to pay for it, no, no, but if I could figure out a way to go-bravo". Sandy's parents had the money to send her to college but they did not pay for her. Even though her dad would have paid for her brother

to attend college, he didn't have to. Sandy is the only person in her family to attend college and earn a college degree.

As a teacher, Sandy references gender and gender stereotypes when describing her students.

Boys brains are built to do better in math and in spatial-it is just the way things are. Now I am generalizing, I am stereotyping-I know that. It is true that the majority of boys' brains develop to be able to understand that better. Girls' brains develop better to understand verbal communication...That is the way it is.

Sandy was very hurt by this type of stereotyping. Her family and her environment perpetuated gender stereotyping. There are times when she chooses to operate against them. Yet, they are very much a part of how she views the world. She admits she is stereotyping and then adds, "It is just the way things are" or "that is the way it is." Although not always participating in gender stereotypes, Sandy nevertheless views the world as being divided into male and female. Despite her many negative experiences with that type of worldview, she has embraced it and indeed, does not appear to be able to view it any differently. This is apparent in the number of times she uses the phrase "that is just the way it is" or some variation. This type of thinking is due to her failed attempts to subtly reject gender stereotypes as a child. This struggle that appears to be going on between wanting to do what she wants and yet following the rules of what

it means to be a girl may be a result of her desire to fit in with her family and her peers.

Being accepted. While in high school, Sandy recalls trying very hard to fit in socially with her peers. “I wanted to be like all the other girls and date guys. I didn’t want them intimidated by me but they were”. They were intimidated by her because she was smart. She wanted to fit in but felt that her classmates didn’t embrace her because of her intelligence. It set her apart and not in a good way. Sandy’s desire to be noticed and the feeling that she didn’t fit in began at home before she started school. Her parents owned their own business and, according to Sandy, were “young and very, very busy and they had all these kids”. She comments a lot about how busy her parents were with the business and all the children. “My parents were both really, really good at- if we could get their attention, they gave us their attention completely and fully”. She does not seem to hold grudges against her parents. On the contrary, she talks often about how she felt very loved by them. “The time that they could spend with me was high quality time so I appreciated that.” However it appears that she didn’t always get the attention she felt she deserved. She felt this way around her older siblings. She says they thought she was “a pain. There is no doubt about it. I was definitely a pain. To this day, they still see me as kind of a pain and I can’t help it. That is just the way I am”. Her siblings thought she was a pain because she was much younger and asking questions they couldn’t answer. Questions they didn’t know how to

answer or they were not smart enough to even ask and it annoyed them. There were also feelings of, what she describes, as jealousy. "My own brothers and sisters wanted to be smart too but I can't make them that, but don't hate me because I am". Sandy remembers school as being one disappointing year after another. "It was so frustrating and after that many years-five I guess of school being a disappointment and that is really the way it came across to me". Every year started with high expectations. "I was so excited to go to school and every year it was like okay, this will be the year and then it wasn't and I could tell after a week or two and it was just a drag. Every year I kept waiting-when are we going to get to something that I want to do and something that I don't know already". It started in Kindergarten.

Kindergarten wasn't really appropriate for me and I made it through there and then first grade, I had already done everything so they just pushed me on. That is how I kind of felt a lot of the times. Every time there was something that I had already done...just push her on and not really spend time with me.

Sandy felt as if the teachers just wanted to push her on or move her to the next grade because they did not have the time or resources to give her what she needed.

They didn't have the resources or they couldn't worry about special populations within the population. They were just trying to get enough text books and enough desks and chairs-literally every day

we would have new kids at school...It was a tough time to be a gifted kid

Sandy remembers 6th grade in particular because it was the year she started misbehaving at school.

By the time I got to 6th grade, I had had it. I was a real behavior problem. My parents had to come in all the time...It was my way-I had no real way of communicating to people my needs but that is what I did.

Sandy told her parents she was bored and they knew what was wrong but it didn't make sense to her parents. "You are in school. You can't be bored...they grew up in the 20s and 30s, even getting to go to school was a huge privilege really and they didn't see...appreciate that you are in school, that's all. So even though Sandy felt love from her parents they did not understand her completely. They knew the root of her frustration and her boredom but they didn't have a true appreciation for what she was feeling and experiencing.

These types of negative experiences are part of what drives Sandy to do what she does. Sandy says the biggest goal for her students is to feel good about themselves. Many of her former students tell her it is what they remember most about her class.

They remember how they got to voice their opinion and not think that somebody was going to say something like you nerd, you jerk, whatever...they got to be themselves. They got a chance to really

go as far as they could go and it was okay. It is safe to do that in my classroom and they are not going to get teased and they are not going told things like, hey, you should know all these answers.

She remembers what it feels like to have the people around not understand her. "Having gone through all that kind of stuff myself as a kid and not having an adult in the educational world to say hey I am okay-that is what I want to provide for the kids...for them to walk out of here feeling they are okay just the way they are, whatever it is. I love it. That is what it comes down to". Sandy recalls feeling "very lonely". She didn't want to feel that way but she did. As a teacher she wants it "to be better for kids that were like me." She strives to maintain an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance.

There is nothing wrong with you. That's the message and I don't think that message comes across to gifted kids. I think they feel they are in trouble because they know it all. They spoil the lesson. It's a terrible feeling...it's a big deal to me...I know how hard it was as a kid not being understood. By my peers, family, teachers. that is the worst hurt of all the hurts I have had. Not being understood.

They don't get it."

One of Sandy's desires for her students is that they don't have to go through all she went through.

Role of genetics. There are several times throughout the interviews where Sandy says the phrase: "That's just the way it is" or "That's just the way I am". Using that type of language gives the impression that Sandy believes that genetics plays a major role in how a person develops and what he/she knows. She uses these types of phrases when describing herself and her students. She first uses it when describing her relationship with her older brother and sister. "I was asking questions...I was a pain. There is no doubt about it. I was definitely a pain. To this day, they still see me as kind of a pain and I can't help it. That is just the way I am." Her intelligence enabled her to be able to ask questions her siblings couldn't answer and it annoyed them. She is not apologetic because that's just how she is. She was born that way. Later on she says, "My own brother and sister wanted to be smart too but I can't make them that, but don't hate me because I am and that whole thing." Here again, Sandy refers to genetics when she says "I can't make them that." She was born smarter than her siblings and that's just the way it is.

Sandy also alludes to genetics when discussing the strengths of boys vs. girls. She says, "Boys brains are built to do better in math and in spatial-it is just the way things are. Now I am generalizing, I am stereotyping-I know that. It is true that the majority of boys' brains develop to be able to understand that better. Girls' brains develop better to understand verbal communication and it is necessary for the race to survive. That is the way it is." Here she is referring to traits that boys and

girls are born with. The ability to understand one subject over another is for her, something a person is born with. It's "the way it is." Later on she comments on her female students who are good in math. "Some of my best math students are girls-there is no doubt about it but they are an anomaly." Good female math students are not the norm. That isn't how most normal girl brains develop. She also goes on to list some attributes that she describes as "part of being gifted." Two she mentions are being left-handed and having allergies. "It all goes with it. It is how the brain develops. Certain things that happened that allow you to be gifted." For Sandy, a person's brain is wired a certain way and being gifted is a matter of a person's genetic makeup.

Ann's Horizon

Ann was born in Rochester, New York in 1960. Her family moved around a lot so she ended up living in many different states. Her family consists of her, her younger brother Jack and her parents. Her family is of European decent. She is light skinned with brown eyes and hair.

When she was about four her family moved for the first time to Arizona because of Jack's asthma. The doctor told her parents that if they did not move, they risked losing their son. As a result, her father was transferred to Arizona. This move is important because his job in Arizona results in Ann and her family having to move many times. His job was to help hospitals that were in danger of having to close. Her father knew that people would lose their jobs if he didn't fix the problems. Ann remembers that no hospital ever had to close. "You never knew how long [a job] was going to take, so we just moved. If it took six months, we were there six months. If it took two years, we were there two years, so we moved a lot, moved a lot." This job is also important for Ann because many years later the stress of his job causes her father to develop serious heart problems which causes her family to stop moving and finally settle down in one place.

Ann and her family lived in Arizona for about four years. Jack's asthma was under control so it was at this time they started moving for her father's job. She remembers her family moving to places like Michigan and Ohio. She says moving around was "just what her family did" and that it

was “all she knew.” She says “I don’t really know if you make a determination of I like this or I don’t like this because it was all I ever knew.” As a child moving was a big part of Ann’s horizon. It was, like she said, all she ever knew. Now that Ann is older and has had many other experiences i.e., expanded her horizon, she is able to look back and realize she never analyzed whether or not she enjoyed moving because she didn’t know anything else. It isn’t until Ann experiences not moving that she is able to make a determination about whether she likes one more than the other.

Ann made friends fairly easily. They did a lot of activities as a family such as bowling and skating. When they would move to a new town, her mom’s goal was to discover what activities there were to do as a family and they would do them. “We made friends that way.” Her mother also made sure Ann and her brother were involved in sports knowing that “if I keep them at home, they aren’t going to meet anybody.” The moving they did affected Ann’s personality. Because she moved so much she was forced to meet a lot of new people and had to make friends quickly. This also drew her family together because at times, they didn’t know anyone else.

When Ann started school she started teaching her brother everything she learned. She remembers him waiting at home next to a chalkboard. She enjoyed doing this because she loved teaching him and he was very curious and always wanted to know what she was doing. This

continued until her brother developed an ulcer. She thinks he developed the ulcer because at three, what she was teaching him was more than he could absorb. However, he had an insatiable desire to learn more, to know why. As a result, Ann's mother told her she could no longer teach him what she learned in school. Once she stopped teaching him his ulcer went away. This experience is important for Ann because it was her first experience with teaching someone something they didn't know before. It is also important for Ann as a gifted teacher. This incident helped her to better understand what it means or what it can mean for children who are gifted. Her brother's insatiable curiosity needed to be satisfied but he also had limits as to what he could process because of his age. Having gone through this with her brother gives Ann an appreciation for the difference between many gifted children's intellectual and emotional maturity.

Ann says her mother was always aware that Jack learned things quickly. At this time, at least in the places Ann and her family lived, no one referred to her brother as being gifted. Others would say "Oh he's so smart." or "He's talkative for his age." No one used the term "gifted" to describe him. Ann remember her mom saying things like, "People didn't talk about kids being gifted. People didn't label kids as being gifted or not gifted. We just didn't do that." This is important for Ann because her brother not being identified as gifted resulted in him not getting his academic needs met which caused frustration at school and at

home. Ann remembers his struggles and, as a teacher of gifted students, is motivated by his experiences.

When Ann was in first grade, they moved to a really small town in Michigan. She doesn't remember much except that it was a tiny town with only one street light. It was a small, tight community. She went to school there for first and second grade. They moved to a bigger city in Michigan for part of her third grade year. Sometime during her third grade year, her family moved to Ohio. They lived in Columbus for the remainder of her third grade year and then moved back to Arizona where Ann started her fourth grade year. They lived in Arizona for about six months, then moved to California to a small area outside of Los Angeles. She finished her fourth grade year there and then moved to Tempe, Arizona. Ann attended fifth and sixth grade in Tempe. Towards the middle of her sixth grade year, her father had a heart attack. "It was a pretty significant heart attack which required triple bypass open heart surgery.

After he recovered, the doctors encouraged her father to find a job that was not quite as stressful. He enjoyed his job but it was too much for him after his surgery. Ann says, "He floundered wondering what he wanted to do." Eventually he found a position at a small hospital in Flagstaff. The rest of the family did not move to Flagstaff at first because her mother was skeptical. "She knew my father. She knew, that to a certain extent, he thrived on that challenge. She said I don't think your dad is going to be able to do this." Ann's mother didn't want to relocate the

family if he wasn't going to enjoy the position. There was only four months of school left. Ann's mother told her father to work the job for four months. If he really liked it she would move the rest of the family. This is the first time they did not move as an entire family. Her father ended up really liking the job and Flagstaff. "Flagstaff reminded him of his home back in New York." At the end of the school year Ann, her mother and brother moved to Flagstaff. She lived in Flagstaff where she finished both middle school and high school. She enjoyed it there. "I did like it. It was different. The hardest thing for me was I had never known a time when we didn't move. I did 7th grade and then I started to get antsy. Because to me, that's what you did. You'd stay some place a little while, and then you'd move. That's what you did. The harder adjustment was staying and that was just weird as far as I was concerned."

Ann loved school. She remembers it as a "great" place. It wasn't hard but she remembers having to study to get good grades. "I'm not gifted by any shape or form of the imagination but school wasn't hard for me. I was one of those high achievers...I put in the time and I got the reward." Gallagher writes, in his analysis of play "that we are constantly learning about ourselves in light of our experiences" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 53). As mentioned previously, play is made up of transcendence and appropriation. When Ann speaks about whether or not she is gifted she uses her experiences in school and with her brother to make the judgment that she is not gifted. She transcends herself and chooses, out of all the

labels she could have or descriptions about herself she could use, to classify herself as “high achiever.” She uses what she knows about her brother to make the determination about herself. She rejects the label of gifted settling instead for that of high achiever. She appropriates this persona and chooses to describe herself in this way.

Ann says her parents helped with school a lot. Her father helped her with math and her mother with English. She says her father, like her brother, sees the big picture and then breaks it up into pieces. Ann says she is a “detail oriented person” who sees the pieces and puts them together to get to the “big picture”. Ann says the problem with her father and brother helping her is that their pieces were too big and they couldn’t understand how to make them any smaller. Her father did help her but that many times it didn’t end well because he would say “the answer is obvious. Well Dad, it’s not obvious to me. It was hard for him because he did so many steps intuitively. It was hard for him to come down to my level. How did you get from here to there?” Ann says her father would be described as “holistic nonverbal. He could see the whole picture which is what made him good at what he did. “He saw the big picture. That doesn’t come naturally to me. I am much more detail oriented.” Her mother was an English major so Ann says she “filled in the other half.” Although no definition of giftedness specifically states the ability to see the big picture and then break it into smaller parts, like her father and brother can do, are necessarily gifted traits, Ann seems to connect them because her brother

thought that way and he was gifted. Since she was never labeled as gifted in school she attributes her tendency to be detail oriented as not gifted or below the type of thinking her father and brother engaged in. Ann is using what she knows about her gifted brother and father to help make sense of who she is. By comparing how they learn to how she learns she is reaffirming the persona she has created for herself as “non gifted”. Each time she discusses herself she mentions her brother as an example to herself of what giftedness is always coming back to the same conclusion: her brother is gifted, she is not. In this way, she is describing the circular structure of interpretation. She understands her experiences in light of and in contrast to her brother’s experiences.

School was very different for her brother. Ann describes him as “a typical gifted kid with no common sense. None...he has the common sense of a gnat.” School was easy for him because “He had a photographic memory...he never cracked a book in high school, yet whizzed through everything...we now know he was gifted. We didn’t know that unfortunately when he was going through school.” Ann remembers that very few of the schools they attended had gifted classes for her brother.

A few of the schools we were in had what they called enrichment classes. You went to the enrichment class and they were very open-ended, which he loved. But the problem was that they...weren’t tied to anything academic, so he still then had to back

into his math class and do...their homework and their reading assignment.

In Tempe he attended what Ann calls, “a very progressive school.”

It was an open format. There wasn't a gifted program but they had an extensive differentiation program...you could be a fourth grader working with a sixth grade teacher. There wasn't really grades, it was more where you are. They pre-tested and just moved kids all over the place which was perfect for my brother...because he could work above grade level...it was accepted practice.

Her mother knew that particular school would benefit her brother.

Things were different when they moved to Flagstaff. Ann says “he chronically got in trouble in school. My mother was forever at the school trying to explain.” No one discussed moving him up a grade. Most teachers focused on his behavior and his “bad choices.” Nobody equated his behavior problems with his high intelligence. Ann remembers her mother sent a deck of cards with him and told him, “Play solitaire on your desk and keep your mouth shut,” for lack of a better thing to do. She did not know what to do with him.” Ann says her mom did this,

Thinking that the teacher would go I have to do something with this child. The teacher was thrilled. Not what my mother had in mind. She was hoping that it would be a catalyst to get him something else to do. Surely no teacher is going to let a kid sit and play

solitaire for four hours. Wrong...Well he wasn't happy so that only lasted a few days.

Her mother had to keep coming up with things for her brother to do in class. This incident is important for Ann as an educator of gifted children because she knows first hand what will happen to the student that is getting challenged or getting his needs met intellectually. As a gifted teacher, she knows that for many children misbehaving is one of the ways for them to communicate their need for something more or different from the teacher and/or school.

When Jack entered sixth grade things got a little better. One day his teacher, Mr. Rivas, who was also the football coach, gave Jack the football playbook. Her brother took it home and had it memorized by the next day. When his teacher realized this, he had Jack tested by the district gifted specialist. "Sure enough, surprise, he's gifted. And quite gifted at that." He worked with the gifted specialist every Tuesday. Ann says that was "the saving grace for him because it allowed him access to the specialist." Ann remembers it was his favorite day of the week. "He would have been on his death bed and still gone to school." She worked on fluency and gave her students the freedom to figure things out. She never gave them the answer. He also worked on higher level thinking skills and higher level math. Although he loved this class it was only one day a week. The rest of school was still not challenging for him. She remembers college being a struggle for him because "he had no study skills zero,

because he had never been challenged. He'd never been forced to go beyond what he could just put in his head and remember, because that was all that was required of him."

Ann and her brother have a complicated relationship. Growing up they had a good relationship. They weren't extremely close but they got along. She describes her brother as "my father's pride and joy. He could do no wrong which wasn't always in my brother's best interest. He got away with things he shouldn't have." Her relationship with her father was different. "He was much harder on me. I was daddy's girl but the expectations were much different because I was a girl and the first born." She believes her father was easier on her brother because of his health issues. "Part of it was because my dad got sick when Jack was still pretty little. There was a part of my dad who didn't want to lose time with his little boy and so that was an issue to a certain extent." Their relationship is strained right now because of Jack's interactions with their mother. "My mom still babies my brother. Jack is one, I don't know how he does it but he can convince someone of just about anything...he has always been able to manipulate people but not me. It's always been that way." As a result, Ann says she has had to act as a buffer between her mother and brother. Her brother's relationship with her dad is important for her because she has seen what can happen when an adult is too easy on a child or when a child isn't held to high standards or expectations. Her father was harder on her and as a result, she did very well in school. Her

brother, even though he's the more intelligent of the two, had a harder time in school. As a result, Ann makes sure she has high expectations out of gifted children. Many of them, like her brother, do not have to work too hard to achieve good grades. Some of them also don't hold themselves to high standards. Ann has high expectations of her gifted students. She also makes sure they work hard and are challenged.

Ann always loved teaching kids. One specific incident in middle school helped her realize it was what she wanted to do. "When I was in middle school, I tutored elementary school kids. I developed a program, in fact, using the library at the elementary school and I leveled all the primary books and put stickers on them for the different levels of reading...I got a state award for that when I was in middle school." From that moment on, she wanted to be a teacher.

Here is an example of Ann playing with or trying on different persona as she tried to figure out what she wanted to be. In this particular incident, she was playing the role of "teacher". Looking back on this experience, Ann realizes it was this time that she realized she wanted to be a teacher. There were many different things she could have decided to do and she recalls this instance as one that helped her decide she wanted to be a teacher.

Ann received a scholarship to a state university where she got a dual major in elementary education and special education and a minor in

library science. She says her parents were not thrilled with her career choice.

My father repeatedly said, “Do you have any idea what teachers make? You can’t support a family on that. You can’t-they’re under-appreciated. It’s just not a good choice honey”...I loved him dearly [he] made this statement one time, “You have a brain. Why aren’t you going to use it?” Because he didn’t perceive that I would have to use it to teach.

However, after watching her teach a group of learning disabled students her father said to her, “You’ve made your choice. That’s where you’re going to go. That’s what you need to do.” Ann's father realized that teaching was her passion and that she needed to teach to be happy.

Ann first several jobs were as a librarian. After several years, she got a job teaching third grade in an ELP/ALP pilot program. “The ELP were the gifted kids. The ALP’s were the high achievers. They were all clumped in one classroom.” She remembers it being a phenomenal program but it was her first experience working with gifted students. “It was really my first taste, apart from my brother, of gifted kids. Because prior to that, my focus had always been on the special education population and I’d work with special ed. kids.” Even though Ann found the children to be very different, she discovered that her teaching didn’t have to change that much. “I found that the same types of learning activities that I had to do with my LD kids I had to do with my gifted kids, because they all learned differently. They didn’t pick up curriculum the way the

traditional kids picked it up, so I did that.” She remembers one student in particular, who was “twice exceptional”. He was a non reader and had learning disabilities and yet had an IQ of 145. She says he was the student who really motivated her to want to work with gifted students.

I am going to get to that kid. It’s in there...I found out he was extremely quantitative and very spatial...He could soar through math but would get tripped up on the word problems because he couldn’t read them. His language processing issue made language an issue so I took language out of math...it gave him confidence...there was no magic pill to make it go away but he saw there’s a way to get around it. He graduated from college in engineering.

Ann cared about this student because he was, in a way, like her brother. Her brother, although not disabled or handicapped in the way her student was, had difficulties in school partially because there wasn’t a teacher who was able to get to him. No one at school took the time to figure out what his strengths and weaknesses were to help inform their instruction and allow her brother to feel more successful.

As a result of working with him, Ann went back to school and earned a Master’s degree in gifted. She says because of her wide range of education and experience, she would usually get the high achievers/ gifted students and the lower students with learning disabilities. “I didn’t

have any middle kids...which worked well. I mean, we just adapted it and basically I taught two classrooms.”

Eventually Ann gets married and moves to Texas because her husband was in the military. She remembers moving around a lot for the next 16 or 17 years. She has three sons. Her oldest son, Michael, was identified gifted in third grade and was part of a one day pull out program. Her middle son, Ben, is identified by Ann as a high achiever. Ann says her youngest son, Charlie, is by far the smartest. Charlie’s teacher wanted him to skip kindergarten but Ann did not agree. “I was never a big proponent of that...you’re younger than everybody. I was like, I don’t think I want to do that. I just-we’ll figure out something else.” She remembers Charlie being frustrated at times when he was used as a tutor for the other students. “I don’t have a problem with peer helping, but when your child comes home and says “I’m so tired of always having to be the teacher.” That’s not his job... so had to work through that.” Charlie was placed in a gifted program and received services in reading and math but, as Ann mentions “Children are gifted all day long. They’re not just gifted during reading and math...I watched him struggle.”

All of the negative experiences her brother and her sons had help Ann as a teacher. She knows what it’s like to live with gifted children, how they think about things and she knows what it is they want or need in a classroom.

Because her husband was in the military, Ann and her family moved around quite a bit. They usually ended up living on base where Ann says, “The children are used to protecting each other. You are never the new kid because they’ve all been the new kid...When a new kid comes, you’re immediately absorbed into the group.” When Ann’s oldest son, Michael, was in sixth grade they moved to Virginia. It was a completely different environment and Ann recalls how hard it was for him. “It is very east coast, very upper middle class...He couldn’t find-he was used to having a close niche with his teachers. He was used to that one-on-one relationship, and he didn’t have that and he really had a hard time, really struggled.” It got so bad she said he “melted into sobs on the floor [saying] I want to die. I want to kill myself...turns out he had a suicide plan.” Ann doesn’t believe he would have gone through with it because she had a student who attempted suicide and Michael kept saying he couldn’t do that to his mom. As a result, Michael was put on an anti-depressant which Ann said has been very helpful.

Another stressful incident that affected her boys occurred on 9/11. Ann’s husband worked at the Pentagon and they spent most of the day trying to find out if he was alive or dead. They did not find out he was alive until around 7:30 that night. Ann remembers it being “A long vicious day.” Ann says all of her boys received counseling for awhile following that event. Eventually they moved to Colorado where Ben had to attend a different school than Charlie. She did not realize it but Ben was worried

about not being able to get to Charlie in the event of an emergency. As a result of his stress, he developed shingles and the doctor recommended that Ben be in the same school with Charlie. She says, "They moved him in even though it overflowed a classroom, which was wonderful. I mean, I was very appreciative."

Ann ended up in Arizona. Having her husband gone for military assignments put too much stress on their relationship and eventually she divorced her first husband. She felt lonely and cried a lot. She said it wasn't a good example for her boys and created tension in the house. Many years later she was remarried to a man with two children, Allan and Beth, who she says are "very, very bright kids." Allan was in the gifted classes in elementary school. In their first high school, Allan and Charlie participated in some IB classes. Ben wasn't able to because the program hadn't started yet and Beth did not want to. Charlie is no longer in any IB classes. He currently attends the same high school as his older brothers and takes a few AP classes. Ann says he told her, "I want to be a kid." Ann describes Beth as a "social butterfly" and says she could "make friends with a doorknob." Beth, who is a sophomore, is very smart and a good student. Ann says being social does not get in her way. "She's been very blessed in that area and she can afford to be the social butterfly because I'm still pulling the A's."

Ann's children are involved in music and sports. Charlie is the most musical. He plays the trumpet and the piano and writes some of his own

music. Michael plays the piano but never pursued it. Ben played the piano for awhile and then told his mother, "I'm never going to be a musical person. Can I please stop doing this." Allan plays the flute and Beth plays the guitar. All of her children have played at least one sport. Beth plays volleyball, softball and soccer. Allan wrestled. Charlie plays basketball, Michael played lacrosse and baseball and Ben played lacrosse and basketball.

Ann's two oldest sons have graduated from high school. One still lives in town and is working towards becoming a veterinary technician. The other one attends college in New York on a scholarship. She currently teaches a pullout class in the Gold Canyon district. "I have content replacement, third, fourth, fifth and sixth in reading and math. She helped write the gifted language arts curriculum currently being used in her district. She is currently working on writing the math curriculum and she will help write science and social studies curriculum after that. She doesn't believe a teacher needs to be gifted in order to teach gifted students. She says:

You don't have to be gifted to teach gifted kids. You need to have an appreciation of learning and I think you have to have love of learning. I think you have to be willing to see kids for who they are and to be able to recognize learning styles in children and to be accepting of those styles. I am a firm believer that how you get from A to B doesn't really matter as long as you get there. Whatever path

you take is fine as far as I'm concerned, just get there. Part of that was I was the tutor. I was the person who worked with the kids who didn't get it.

Ann isn't gifted herself but she believes her personal experiences with a gifted brother and gifted children has prepared her to be an effective teacher of gifted students. She realizes she is intelligent but doesn't label herself as gifted. For her, a gifted person is one whose intelligence is above his/her peers or one who thinks about things differently than others.

I asked Ann about her favorite place she lived in. As an adult, it was Colorado Springs, CO and as a child it was a small town in Michigan. Ann says she liked them both for similar reasons. She recalls that both places had a sense of community or small town mentality. These are important to Ann.

I think it is important for kids to feel a sense of belonging. I think that's what gets kids into trouble. That lack of I don't belong anywhere. No ones watching me. I grew up knowing everyone was watching me...I think that's important...That feeling that people know who you are and what you're doing. I didn't have a lot of anonymity. I'm not sure anonymity is good for kids. I think it's important for people to know what' going on. We lose kids when they don't have someone who holds them accountable. I think that's one of the best things about having a gifted specialist at a school. I have had some of the same kids since kindergarten so

you develop a relationship with them that carries on. They feel that connection...I think it's important to kids that someone is paying attention to you...somebody cares. I felt that growing up that it mattered to someone how well I was doing. Someone besides your parents. Someone outside of your family.”

Ann remembers her brother feeling like he didn't belong. He said he always felt like he was strange or different in a bad way.

He found acceptance in high school in the band because he could do anything on a percussion instrument. In the classroom, his comments were considered out there or strange. That may be part of the reason why I pay so much attention to my gifted kids and the social aspect. I know how fragile they are. They know they aren't like other kids. They don't think like other kids. To pretend like they don't realize it isn't realistic. I never want a child to leave feeling like they don't belong. Once a student is one of my kids, they are always mine. That's important to me.

Themes

There are three main ideas that appear in Ann's story. They are that life is a struggle, people need to feel they belong and people need to feel protected or be protected. Ann spent much of her life moving from one place to another. She uses several different words that allude to movement of some kind. She uses the word struggle 10 times in her first interview. Other words she uses, which are related to struggle, are

pushing and pulling. Two other themes that emerge are belonging and protection.

The prevalence of words about movement may be a result of Ann's childhood. Her family's initial move to Arizona was for her brother's health. Once his health improved they starting moving again. They moved numerous times because of her father's job. Ann's father helped write the Medicare program in place today. Because he knew the program so well he was called in whenever a hospital had "messed up" their Medicare. Her father's job was to come in, find the problems and fix them. "You never knew how long [a job] was going to take, so we just moved. If it took six months, we were there six months. If it took two years, we were there two years, so we moved a lot, moved a lot". Her family did not stop moving until Ann was in high school. She says moving around was "just what her family did" and that it was "all she knew." According to Ann moving around did not bother her. "I don't really know if you make a determination of I like this or I don't like this because it was all I ever knew." After she graduated from college she got married. Her husband was in the military and Ann started moving all over again. The constant relocation, both as a child and then again as a wife and mother, did have an affect on Ann. It becomes apparent in the words she uses which give the feeling of a back and forth movement. The belonging and protection themes are also related to her experiences with moving.

Struggle. There are many definitions of the word struggle. The one that is most appropriate for Ann is, “ to be coping with inability to perform well or to win; contend with difficulty” (dictionary.com). Operating under this definition, students who struggle are trying succeed, or win, but are having difficulty doing so. It is not a calm or relaxed word. It creates a feeling of discomfort and discontentment. Ann uses the word struggle to describe two different scenarios. Students struggling with school curriculum and struggling socially.

Struggle and the curriculum. Ann uses struggle for the first time when describing her brother’s college experience. “[He] got to college and found that college didn’t work that way, really struggled in college”. Ann’s brother had a difficult time in college because he “never cracked a book”. At the university her brother felt challenged for the first time. Her use of the word here gives the allusion that he was resisting because he was worried that he would not do well. For the first time in his life he could not do school the way he wanted to. The way he was accustomed to. Therefore, it was a struggle for him.

She uses the word again when describing the curriculum differentiation that occurred while she was a teacher. “It was done for those kids who were struggling...”. She is referring to students who are trying to cope with a curriculum that is too difficult. They want to win but are challenged in meeting expectations.

Ann uses the word struggle to describe how her children and students feel in relationship to school. In one instance, she is describing her experiences as a special education teacher. Her students were only with her part of the day. The rest of it was spent in other classrooms. She recalls some of her students would come back to her, "if they were struggling later in the day". Many of them would struggle with the curriculum in the regular education classes and her job was to help them complete the work and cope with the stress or frustration they had with what they were learning. Her gifted students didn't have difficulty with the curriculum or the content of what they were learning but they had other problems. "They're going to go through life always struggling...it's the social piece". According to Ann, gifted students will have to cope and learn to live with being gifted because of the problems it can create with their peers.

Her own children were in pull-out gifted programs that did not completely meet their needs. Ann points out, "Kids are gifted all day long. They're not just gifted during reading and math". Because of this she says, "I watched them struggle" until they got into high school where they could take advanced courses. Ann felt they didn't struggle anymore with not being challenged because they were able to choose classes that were at their level intellectually.

Social struggle. When talking about her own sons and their social adjustment to moving Ann chooses struggle again, this time in a social setting. “Michael struggled. Michael struggled more because of we moved...from a military post school”. Ann remembers the schools on base as being very welcoming and protective. All the students came from military families so they could relate to being the new kid. Whenever a new student arrived Ann says they were “immediately absorbed into the group”. One time Ann and her family did not move to a military post. She recalls there were “cliques” and her son had a hard time making friends. “Michael struggled with that...he had a really hard time, really struggled”. Michael had difficulty fitting in at this particular school. It was not the curriculum he was struggling with, it was the social aspect. He was working hard to find friends, to fit in somewhere but it was not happening easily. This same son eventually needed to go on anti-anxiety medication. His father had a hard time with it. Ann said because he was a military man he thought his son shouldn't go on medication. “Suck it up, you're showing weakness”. That was very hard for Michael because “he wanted to please his dad”. He ended up taking the medication because he needed it but Ann says, “he struggled with that”. This struggle came from a desire to please his father because he loved him and didn't want to disappoint him but he also knew he needed to do to be healthy.

Pull. In addition to struggle, Ann uses several other words that create a sense of movement. One word she uses several times is pull. Many times she uses it when referring to a type of gifted program. A pull-out gifted program is one in which the student gets pulled out of her regular classroom and is instructed in the gifted classroom. The gifted students are typically pulled out during math, reading or both. Each period usually lasts about one hour. A gifted student could be in her gifted class for one to two hours every day. According to dictionary.com, pull means to “draw towards oneself or itself, in a particular direction, or into a particular position.” In the case of the gifted programs the students are pulled out of their class repeatedly, day after day. The school is removing the students from one class and placing them another. This creates a sense of not being stationary. The gifted students are, in a sense, in constant motion moving from one classroom to the next.

Another instance pull is used is when she is describing the need for a district-wide gifted curriculum. She remembers at one time there “a very autonomous curriculum in that every school kind of did their own thing”. This was not an ideal situation because some schools were being very effective and others were not. As a result “You had parents pulling their kids out of the program”. The fact that parents were removing their children out of the program was an indicator that something was not working. She doesn’t use the word “take” or “remove”. She chooses, instead, to use the word pull. This give the impression that the parents

were removing their children with force and not of their own accord. But rather, they were forced to pull out their children due to failure on the part of the school to meet their needs.

The final situation in which Ann uses pull is when she is describing her daughter. She says her daughter is very outgoing. Ann describes her as “a very social kid...she’s my social butterfly”. It isn’t a problem for Ann because she still earns high marks on her report card. “She can afford to be social because she’ll pull in the grades...she can afford to be the social butterfly because I’m still pulling the A’s”. Her choice of the word pull here is significant. She could have used words like “earn” or “receive”. Pull is a physical, active word while receive is more passive. Pull gives the impression that a person is moving somehow and is purposeful in their action. This makes sense because when Ann describes her own school experience she says she “studied her tail off” and she “put in the time and got the reward. I had to study but I learned how to because I had to do it to get the grades I wanted.” This is the opposite of how she describes her brother’s experience in school. “He got good grades”. She chooses the word ‘got’ when describing his experiences because her brother did not have to work for his grades. The definition of get is “come to have or hold (something); receive” (The New American Oxford Dictionary, 2001, p. 713). The word get is very passive. It indicates only that someone received something but not that they had to do anything to get it. Ann

uses the word pull when describing her daughter so it is clear she had to work for them.

Push. Ann uses the word push 12 times during the interview. Like pull and struggle, push indicates movement. It is defined as, “to press upon or against (a thing) with force in order to move it away or to press or urge to some action or course”. (dictionary.com) Every instance of the word push is used when she is describing gifted students’ experiences in school. There are three distinct directions she associates with push. The most frequent is a pushing forward (which is says as push on or push out). There is an instance when she uses the term “pushing in” and another when she says “pushing to the side”.

The first time she uses it to indicate a pushing forward she is talking about her brother. She describes how his gifted class was enrichment only and not tied to anything academic. As a result he had a hard time when he returned to his regular classroom.

He still had to go back into his math class and do their homework and their reading assignment in there because they didn’t push kids on. They didn’t recognize that, okay, you know what, he is a fourth grader but he’s reading at a ninth grade level, this fourth grade basal really isn’t appropriate.

In this situation, Ann believes that her brother should have been pushed on, or given more challenging curriculum because what he was doing was

not at his level. She feels that his teachers or the school should have moved him forward in the curriculum.

She later uses push when discussing her job as a literacy resource coach. She says her task “was to work with teacher and students to push the boundaries of reading, which was great for me because it allowed me to push those high kids and to take them on”. To push the boundaries is to move them forward. A boundary is a line that delineates the limits of something. In this case the limits of what they were reading, allowed to read or expected to read. Ann wanted to make sure the gifted students were not stopping at boundaries set forth by the school but that they were constantly moving them forward.

Ann also uses the word push a couple of times to describe how she dealt with her sons’ teachers. When one of her sons was identified as gifted, she said it became a matter of her “pushing to say, ‘You have to do something with him.’ What I didn’t want was a repeat of what happened to my brother”. Later on she uses push in the same way when talking about one of her other sons.

He wanted more. They didn’t know what to do with him...Then it became a matter of pushing more things and saying, “Okay. Well, when he’s done, can he do this?” ...They didn’t have a problem with that they just didn’t have anything in place for him to do”.

In both of these situations she alludes to pushing a person or people to action. She wanted her sons to receive services her brother never did.

She was there to ensure that her sons' teachers were working to meet their needs, even if it meant forcing her ideas onto them.

The next time push appears, Ann is describing her sons' experience in an International Baccalaureate (IB) program. "[They] are all enjoying the push, although not always the homework". The push she is referring to comes from the courses they are taking. Most of their classes are Advanced Placement (AP) and she believes they are being challenged academically.

The final two occurrences of push are related to gifted students and their intellectual curiosity and desire to know more. She is describing different ways she tries to motivate her gifted students and help them be comfortable with who they are. "You will go on in your life to do things that they will not do because of how you learn, and because of that intense desire you have to constantly push that envelope." The phrase 'push that envelope' means to approach or extend the limits of what is possible. She is encouraging her students to go beyond what they believe they can do. She doesn't want them to settle but to challenge themselves to go above and beyond. She uses push again later when describing her favorite thing about gifted students.

That insatiable curiosity, that need to know, that constant push, why, why. The thing that frustrates most teachers because they feel like they're challenging them, they're not challenging you, they're challenging knowledge, I need to know why. I love that about them.

Here Ann uses push to describe the way gifted students behave in the class. They are pushing not the teacher but knowledge. Their questions allow them to constantly move themselves forward in their education.

Ann uses the term push in a new way when describing one of her cluster groups. She labels it a push-in. On a web page titled "Program Delivery Models for the Gifted", it defines push-in as an approach "in which gifted students remain in regular classrooms and are visited there by a resource consulting teacher, often a specialist in gifted education" (Van Tassel-Baska, 2011, ¶ 3). In this scenario the teacher is roaming from room to room while the student remains in the same class. The push here could be describing what the teacher is physically doing, she is placing herself into the regular classroom or describing why she is doing it. She is in the classroom to help the gifted students academically, helping them to move forward more quickly by providing accelerated content.

There is one moment where she uses push to indicate a moving aside as opposed to moving forward. Ann uses it to describe teaching at a school with a weak gifted program. The gifted students were pulled out one day a week and bused to a pullout school. According to her, there were no services offered to the gifted students once they returned to their home school. "Very little was done to adjust their curriculum, which drove me crazy. Because it was like if you've acknowledged that these kids are gifted, why are we not adjusting everything that they do"? All the

differentiation was done for students at lower levels. She says the philosophy was, “those gifted kids will be fine. They’re going to be okay”. As a result she says “they just kind of pushed [the gifted kids] to the side”. Pushing something aside gives the impression of moving it out of the way. Just like barriers are moved to the side of a road to make it passable, Ann feels that gifted students are sometimes pushed to the side by teachers to clear their way and get to those students who really need it.

Toward the very end of the interview, Ann uses the word battle. She uses it to describe why she gives her home phone number to her gifted students. “Because when a gifted kid locks on something, your evening is over because that kid cannot unlock it...a simple phone call to me to say to them...bring it to me tomorrow morning...they will release it and the rest of the evening is saved”. She feels that if the students don’t have her number “they’re going to battle with mom and dad and the family all night long, and it’s not worth it”. It’s saved because the family can move on to and focus on other things besides homework. A battle is a type of struggle. The definition of battle is “a lengthy and difficult conflict or struggle...to fight or struggle tenaciously to achieve or resist something” (The New American Oxford Dictionary, 2001, p. 139). Ann wants to help her students by helping them to be able to let go and not engage in a lengthy conflict.

Protection. Several times throughout the interview, Ann talks about protecting and being protective. The word protect means, “to keep safe from harm or injury” and protective means, “capable of or intended to

protect someone or something” (The New American Oxford Dictionary, 2001, p. 1369). She uses these words when speaking about her children and her students. When referring to her own children, she uses it when describing their experiences in military post schools. “These children are used to parents deploying. They’re used to protecting each other”. Then later, “That’s how they take care of each other. They’re a very protective group of children”. In this case her children are protected from feeling like the new kid or feeling alone. She says the minute students arrived they were “immediately absorbed into the group”. According to Ann they all knew what it was like to be “the new kid”. As a result, they did whatever they could to make others feel safe and included.

She uses protect again later when she describes her role as a Learning Disabilities (LD) teacher. She worked “as a liaison between the student and the classroom teacher, helping that classroom teacher understand you were [a] buffer for [the students], you were their protection against the rest of the world. They needed protection”. Ann felt it was her job to help students with learning disabilities have a safe place to go during the school day. While they were out in the regular classrooms they were vulnerable and exposed. She wanted her classroom to be a place of refuge where they could spend some “down time”.

Later she uses protect when speaking about her gifted students. Ann believes that many people underestimate what gifted children can do. “They’re fascinated by what’s going on in the world and often time we- out

of desire to protect them we try to shelter them from some things". Here the word is portrayed negatively. It is not protect from harm but rather an overprotecting. Ann believes students should feel safe and protected but not overly so.

This idea of being protected is not only tied to her own children but also her own childhood experiences. Even though she does not have learning disabilities nor is she gifted, she has an understanding of what it feels like to need protection and to feel safe. As a parent she understood the importance of her children feeling safe as well. The final topic of belonging is tied into protection. When a person feels they belong to a tight-knit community, they feel safe and protected by the other members of the community.

Belonging. When Ann recalls her favorite places they are her favorite because of how she felt when she lived there. As a child her favorite was a small town in Michigan. "Michigan was fun. It was a small tight community. It was very nice. Everyone was concerned." As a parent her favorite was somewhere in Colorado. "It maintained that community atmosphere...small town mentality. I think that is important. That sense of belonging." Ann goes into great detail to explain why it is important all children feel they belong.

That is what gets a lot of kids into trouble. I grew up knowing someone was watching me. People know who you are and what you are doing. I am not sure anonymity is good for kids....I think it's

important. We lose kids when they don't have someone to hold them accountable...Some kids feel nobody's watching. Nobody's concerned. They are prime targets for getting in the wrong group but if you are desperate for attention you will take what you can get. Kids need to feel connection.

Although not gifted herself, she remembers how her brother never felt he belonged at school. As a gifted teacher this is one thing she feels very strongly about. "One great thing about having a gifted teacher at the school. I stay connected to the students." Her brother is definitely one of the reasons she ensures her students feel accepted.

My brother didn't find it until sixth grade. Not that they didn't care but he felt like he didn't belong. He remembers thinking I am strange. I am weird in a bad sense. I am different from other people. I don't belong... I know he felt accepted by our parents but he didn't feel he belonged at school. It was an uncomfortable place to be. That is why I pay so much attention to my gifted kids and their social and emotional issues...I don't want a kid to feel they don't belong.

Ann says once a kid is in her class they are hers and they always will be. This is important to her. She often tells her students, "You may leave this classroom, but you'll always be one of my kids. You can always call me". She tells them this because, "I think that that's important for gifted kids, because often times they don't feel like they belong." She experienced

her brother and her own children having a sense they don't belong and that is why it is so crucial for her that her students don't have the same experiences. Ann tries to help the parents of her gifted students so they feel accepted at home.

Stop telling your child how smart they are because you've attached their intelligence to your love. You have to stop telling them that. You can tell them that you're proud of their effort. You can tell them that you're proud of what they have accomplished, but stop telling them you're proud of their intelligence. Because then when they don't get something, they fear that you're not going to love them anymore.

Ann saw the importance of her own parents being accepting of her and her brother and wants to ensure other parents treat their children the same way.

Having a sense of belonging is also important for her own children. When her oldest son had trouble in school it affected both of them.

I watched that sense of, that lack of belonging almost destroy my oldest child. His was not based off of being gifted, but it was that same sense of, "I don't belong." I don't ever want one of my gifted kids to feel that way. I always want them to feel like there is one place where you will always belong. No matter what, you will always belong there. I think that that's important for all of us.

Belonging then, is not something Ann believes is something only gifted students need. For her, everyone needs to know they are part of something. Her own experiences and her interactions with learning disabled and gifted students has caused her to be aware that it is a desire of and a necessity for all people.

Mindy's Horizon

Mindy was born in Lafayette, Louisiana in 1965 . She and her family moved to New Orleans when she was two years old because of her father's job. There are six children in Mindy's family. She is the youngest child. She has four older sisters and one older brother. Mindy's family is of European decent. Her surname is a combination of Dutch and German. She is fair skinned with brown eyes and naturally curly brown hair.

Mindy attended Catholic school for three years. She says she attended Catholic school because her parents were "devoutly Catholic" and because they did not like the local public school. Her mother was very involved and, according to Mindy, "ran every fundraiser". Because of this Mindy and all of her siblings received scholarships to help cover their tuition. Mindy attended kindergarten in the morning. Mindy's mother was at the school the entire day, so for the second half of the day Mindy was the 'teacher helper' for another kindergarten class in the afternoon. Mindy was an early reader so she remembers helping other kids with reading. She really liked being in the classroom and helping the teacher. This was her first experience teaching other children to read but it would not be her last. When she was in fifth grade she remembers helping some of her classmates who were immigrants from Vietnam.

There was a huge wave that came to New Orleans because of the Catholic charities there, it's very similar in climate and everything else. [A Vietnamese boy] was in my class and I taught him to read.

That's why I'm a teacher today...I felt like this was the most amazing thing in the whole wide world. Because of what I was doing, these boys could read. I just thought that was the coolest thing. That's what I decided I wanted to do.

So even though Mindy has some negative experiences in school the feeling she got by helping someone else learn how to read was more important and had more of an impact on her than her own interactions with teachers.

Mindy does not remember much of her first and second grade year but does not know exactly why. Perhaps it was because nothing exceptionally good or bad happened during these years. However, she does remember what she did over the summer. At the end of every school year her maternal grandparents would pick her and two of her sisters up and take them to their house. The girls would return home right before school started. She was accompanied by the sister that was only two years older. They were very close and were raised like twins, and one of her oldest sisters who wasn't involved in sports. The older one went along to help look after the younger two. The other three stayed at home mostly because of their sports schedule. Two of her siblings were, as she puts it "hard core" into sports and earned scholarships to play in college. Although she remembers doing this, she doesn't really remember much else that happened around this time. She admits to having a lot of holes in her memory and she doesn't know why.

I joke about the holes in my memory and ask them 'Did y'all lock me in a closet for years at a time?' and I don't think they did but really there are big gaps. I honestly feel like it's one big happy blur. The craziness in my family didn't start until I was 12 when one of my sisters got involved in drugs. I did a sweat lodge once and we were asked to comfort the hurt child within us....I started crying because I will never be as happy as I was back then....all I pictured was a big toothless grin. That's how I think of my childhood like a big happy blur...bless me huh. If I'm delusional I don't want to know it.

As she looks back into her childhood, Mindy transcends her current self for the child she remembers being. In so doing, she reappropriates this persona and uses it to help make sense of her past. She was happy as a child. She doesn't exactly know why or the incidents that lead to her happiness but she is willing to remember only that her childhood was a "big happy blur."

Mindy doesn't remember much until she was about 10. She says she remembers this time because it was at this age that she first saw someone shoot cocaine and that she started smoking pot. "I started drugs because it was fun. It was something to do." Some of her siblings were also into drugs so she saw a lot of drugs being used by her sisters. Her parents did not know about the drugs her sisters or her were doing. Her parents did not know because Mindy had money of her own. "I had a

stupid job. I collected numbers for a telemarketer. I also babysat. I used my money to buy pot. My parents were kind of ostrich head in the sand...my mom thought pot was incense...it was that goofy.” The craziness that she referred to earlier had to do with her sister’s drug abuse. Not only was that sister into drugs but one of her older sisters was dealing drugs and she knew about it. She threatened to tell their parents but her sister told Mindy it would “break mom and dad’s heart” so she didn’t tell them. “My older siblings, it was like That 70’s Show. There were a lot of potheads in my family. I knew what was going on”. She says her oldest sister who graduated from high school early and was prom queen was a pot smoker. She remembers all of her siblings being involved in drugs in some way, except for her brother. She believes it was because he was a very dedicated baseball player. When Mindy was about 12 her sister started running away for days, weeks and even months at a time. It was a very hard time in Mindy’s life. Mindy believes her sister started doing drugs because she was teased a lot at school.

People are mean. Her hair is very very curly. She was called the ‘n word’ all the time. Her self esteem was hurt. She picked the lowest common denominator to hang out with. She always picked the wounded people. I don’t think my sister said anything to my parents. It happened to me a little but I am tougher than she is. Alcohol was her drug of choice. She also did a lot of acid. She’s very visual so she always talked about the color aspect of it. She

knew that what she was doing was so hurtful to us so that's why she ran away.

Mindy says it was awful for her.

I can cry right now. From sixth grade through high school. We always wondered is she alive or is she dead? It was awful but it's also...I tease her that she helped prepare me for counseling, for life. It's what got me talking about the little black box that I've built in my heart. There's a piece of my heart in there that's locked away and can't be hurt. I had to keep something away from her. A part that couldn't be broken. It's why I can compartmentalize. No one knew that either one of my marriages wasn't going well. I've gotten very good at compartmentalizing my life.

This compartmentalizing is what helped Mindy make it through the days of not knowing where her sister was. Like she says, she created compartments as a way to survive the turmoil in her home life as a child. The ability to compartmentalize is what also helps her cope when different areas of her life are not going well.

Compartments are one way Mindy deals with what happened to her. She was not capable, mentally and emotionally, of completely understanding and absorbing what was going on with her sister. In order for her to survive she had to learn how to not process all of it at the same time. By acknowledging this she is accepting it as part of who is and who she had to become to make sense of and live with her experiences.

After Mindy completed second grade her family moved into a better neighborhood. Her parents liked the public school there so she left the Catholic school and attended her neighborhood public school. Mindy remembers her third grade teacher because she got into arguments about how to pronounce certain words. Mindy got sent to the office because she refused to consent to the teacher's pronunciation. This incident is important because it is one of the many negative interactions she had with a teacher and as a teacher she uses these experiences to help remind her of the type of teacher she does and doesn't want to be. She says that throughout her school career the teachers, "weren't really sure what to do with me." Mindy received all 100 percents in third through sixth grades. Her family had an idea that there was something going on with her because she had been given an IQ test by a relative at age 5 and scored a 159. There just weren't any programs available to her at school at the time. Towards the end of fourth grade, she was recommended and tested for a pilot gifted program. Mindy believes they started the gifted program because of desegregation laws. "People were all in an uproar about what's going to happen to our smart kids now that you're desegregating. As pitiful as that is, it's a big part of why gifted education was-what was that, 35 years ago they started gifted education in Louisiana. It was really kind of the forefront of gifted education, but for all the wrong reasons." She feels it is for the wrong reasons because she believes they started it as a

reaction to racial integration and not because the schools felt the gifted students needed something more out of the curriculum.

She remembers feeling singled out by her elementary teachers in a negative way. She thinks it may have been “because it interfered with their schedules and it made life difficult for them that I was being pulled out and that kind of stuff. Heard a lot of, well, you’re gifted, then why can’t you figure this out type of stuff.” This type of negativity continued throughout her fifth grade year. She was pulled out for half a day but she can’t remember how many days a week she went to her gifted class. She remembers having some time in class when there wasn’t anything for her to do except get into trouble.

I made a fake cigarette and sat in the back of the room and pretended to smoke. I was like, somebody’s going to notice me in this room. One day I started singing the Oscar Mayer-my baloney has a first name. Stood up, refused to quit singing until I finished the song. I was just begging them to notice that I was there and I wanted to learn something today please.

Although she didn’t necessarily want to be “bad”, she feels that she had no other choice. She felt that even negative attention was better than none at all and that perhaps one teacher would realize why she was behaving the way she was. However, Mindy says that never happened. As mentioned earlier, Gallagher writes that within an educational experience a person is not only learning facts and information but is simultaneously

learning about herself, what kind of a person she is and what type of person she would like to become. Her recollection of this incident is an example of such an educational experience. Mindy wasn't a "bad" person but she feels she needed to behave that way in school. She does not completely accept this persona nor does she describe herself as a "bad" kid. However, it was one persona she experimented with or "tried on". As an adult remembering this incident she acknowledges the fact that she played at being bad. There is definitely a part of her that correlates to being bad/desires to be bad but it is not who she was all of time. The times she spends doing drugs and hanging out with her friends are the moments she can "play" at being. However most of the time when she is in school she does not associate herself with this persona. For the most part she behaves herself. In many of her childhood experiences, Mindy displays a different part of herself depending on where she was, who she was with and what she wanted to accomplish.

When she moved onto middle school, she was still in a pull out gifted program. She says, "It got even trickier because I was also an athlete...I was told that I couldn't be in honors math and on the softball team because I just couldn't do everything I wanted to do and that kind of stuff." Mindy says her middle school was a very open school. There were not very many walls and many of the rooms just flowed together. She says this was terrible for her because it meant there were more distractions and it made it even more difficult for her to focus.

One of her strongest memories from middle school was being accused of cheating.

I took a science test, I failed it. I went to the library to look up the answers because that's how I was...what were those answers? Well the teacher saw me in there, looking at the text... you know, we rotate. And he saw me in there with other kids who hadn't had him yet and he thought I was giving them the answers. You don't know me very well if you think I'm giving them the answers after I flunked the test. Anyway so later he came into my gifted room and accused me in front of my gifted peers and said, 'I need to see Mindy because she cheated on my test today.' There goes my everything because I'm all about justice and I was a very righteous little kid. I reacted very badly and needed to be taken away. I was put into a room that was like a storage room. So I start throwing chairs and flipping tables. I had a really bad temper when I was a little girl.

Mindy's temper was part of her bad girl persona. However, she mentions how she learned to keep her temper in check because she didn't like to hurt people and she knew she would end up embarrassing herself. Mindy acknowledges this was not the type of person she wanted to be or become so learned how to control her temper.

When asked about where she got her sense of justice, Mindy replied: "That's supposedly a classic gifted trait. That right and wrong

piece.” Mindy says her father was very much about right and wrong. For him, she says, right was right and wrong was wrong. There wasn’t really a gray area for him. Mindy had an opportunity to talk to her gifted classmates and tell them what had happened. She did and after that, she says, she didn’t care what they thought. Her mother went to school and was furious with Mindy for her behavior and for cheating. When she learned the truth, she demanded the teacher apologize to Mindy. Mindy does not remember if he did or not. This incident is important for Mindy because, again, a teacher has mistreated her and not understood her. It is yet another reminder of the type of teacher and person she wants to be for her students.

Mindy was not disciplined much as child. Her older siblings got spanked and had soap in their mouth. She thinks that by the time they got to her they figured ‘What good did it do’ and that they may have just been tired. She basically raised herself after awhile. She says she knew enough to not get caught and admits her parents lightened up considerably with her.

When it was time for high school, Mindy’s parents decided to send her to a gifted magnet high school. “My parents felt that the public high school that my older siblings had gone to exposed them to a lot of stuff...they thought it wouldn’t be [at the magnet school] which they were completely wrong because it was there times a million because of where the school is located.” It was located in a very wealthy part of town.

However, there was no sports there and Mindy says “I had to give up a lot of the stuff that was equally as important to me.”

Mindy’s father was a geologist for an oil company. She doesn’t believe he was ever designated as gifted or attend gifted classes because she says, “It didn’t really exist back then.” She remembers he was number two in his high school graduating class. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom until Mindy was in sixth grade. At that time, she went to nursing school and became a nurse. Mindy’s mother received the highest score in the state of Louisiana on her nursing school exit exam. However, Mindy says her mother had some learning disabilities. “It was never diagnosed or actually said, but she had some kind of a reading disability. She never understood phonics, and so almost all of her reading was sight words...She just didn’t make an association to sounds.” This is important for Mindy as a teacher because her mother was very intelligent but had a learning disability and knowing this helps her understand her students who are the same way.

Mindy says her mom was in the PTA and spent quite a bit of time volunteering at school. Her mother made sure she did her homework but wouldn’t help them complete it. “She wouldn’t help us because in her head, when she would say this, she’d say, well the teacher needs to know that you don’t understand it. If I explain it to you, she’ll think that you got it.” Her father wouldn’t help much either. If there was a school project Mindy’s parents were hands off.

We were pretty poor...they would get the materials, but they wouldn't help us. We'd go there and they'd have these Taj Mahals that everybody else's parent built for them. Then I'd have my little shoe box. I didn't do any of the fairs because my parents would do nothing to help because they felt that was the right thing, their ethics and everything. I was competing against people whose parents did it all. I was such a competitive person that there was no way I was going to put myself in a position where I wasn't going to have a chance to win.

Mindy believes that being an athlete helped her deal with being in the gifted class.

They knew me before I became a gifted kid. I never wore it as a badge either. There were a lot of kids that were in my gifted program who thought they were all that because of it...I was kind of quiet about it.

Her family would celebrate athletic accomplishments but not academic ones. "My parents definitely honored it, but they felt like it would make my siblings feel bad if they made too much of a fuss about it...I was born this way. It's not like I deserved a fuss."

Going to college was very important in Mindy's family. She says they did not have much growing up, but says her parents set aside money for each child to go to college. "College was a given in my family. We were all raised knowing there was money for school."

Before college, Mindy's dad tried to talk her out of being a teacher. "He said-you could be a brain surgeon, you could be whatever. I was like, just because I can doesn't mean I should. I should be whatever I'm called to be, and that's a teacher." After she had been teaching for several years, one of her students came by to visit. After he left her dad said "I'm so glad you did this. I'm so glad you are as stubborn as you've always been and you didn't listen to me. You were meant to do this."

Mindy graduated from Louisiana State University, got a masters in gifted from the University of Southern Louisiana and a masters in counseling from an Arizona institution. Mindy says during her undergraduate courses she realized, "Every single cool experience I reported about [in college] was a gifted experience, something I had done in my gifted programs. I realized I want to be a teacher of the gifted no matter who I'm teaching. I knew that all that stuff that I did [in my gifted classes] was good for everybody." She says she never imagined herself teaching gifted kids. She thought she would "teach regular education like a gifted teacher but give them those things. I still believe that's how it should be." She also decided to get her Master's in gifted because she felt it would give her more opportunities. "Every job change I've had it's more, not because I was ready for the change, but because the change presented itself."

Her first position after obtaining her MA was in a fourth grade language arts gifted class in Louisiana. It was a pull out program. She'd

teach them language arts in the morning. Monday through Thursday the curriculum was accelerated and compacted. Friday was an enrichment day. "I just thought it was the coolest thing ever because all morning I did language arts."

After teaching gifted students for many years, Mindy decided to get a master's degree in counseling. She says she did it because of "the extensive amount of time that I spent counseling the parents of the gifted that I worked with... Just understanding that there's so much more to them than just being smarter. The intensity and all of those other things...I just found myself more concerned about them developing and who they were as opposed to whatever my agenda was supposed to be about." She wanted to open her own practice but was unable to due to changes in state law. Instead she worked as a school counselor. She said very few of the students she worked with were gifted. "They're the ones that many people perceive as having no problems, or they're dealt with in other ways, that kind of stuff." She said she left counseling and went back into teaching due to "philosophical differences" between her and the principals or directors she worked for.

Mindy says she is "totally ADD...I was the typical gifted ADD kid, so I was all over the place." Mindy was not diagnosed with or put on medication for her ADD until she was an adult. "That's when it really hit me. That's when I actually got on the medication was when I had to sit through meetings. I had so many pieces of paper to juggle...It was like, oh

my God, I lost that IEP, and going through that enough times. I was like, I gotta try something.” She eventually had to stop taking it because of some issues with her heart. She says that without medication “I’m a mess. I’m struggling this year big time.” Marijuana helped control her ADD but she doesn’t want to sign up for medicinal marijuana because of her job. “If I didn’t have this profession...but I’m not going to get on a register anywhere. I think it is far better than the other medicine I have taken and what they are doing to the rest of my body. I’m terrified of my job because this is where I’m supposed to be and it could get taken away from me. I stopped about a year or two into teaching.”

Mindy says she was not aware she had ADD as a child. Although it didn’t affect her academic grades, she said it did affect her behavior grade. She thinks it could have also been due to the fact that she was bored. “If you look at the list of behavior traits for children who are gifted and children who have ADD, it’s basically the same list, just slightly different wording. She says having ADD doesn’t make it easier to deal with her students who have it but it does help her to understand them.

I get it. I always tell them. I will say, I know that you’re not talking while I’m talking to be disrespectful purposely. However, it does not change how it makes me feel when you do...I can see on their faces, they’re like, oh God, I did it again. I want them to know this isn’t a judgment on you. However, as a teacher I need to get through my lesson and I can’t because you keep stopping me.

She says she doesn't think she could ever go back to teaching in a regular education classroom because she doesn't believe they would let her teach regular education students like she does her gifted students.

Mindy says what she expects of her students is for them to be inspired. "Whatever that means to them. Inspired to learn, inspired to achieve, inspired to dream...It's not being afraid to think and not being afraid to be who they are. Just you want to reach for the brass ring." She tells her students all the time to do what they want. "I tell them if you decide you want to clean the playground, that's cool. We need someone to clean the playground. But don't do it because it was your only choice do it because it's the choice you want...keep those options going. Every job is valuable and every job is honorable but find one you like."

Mindy recalls that she was not real impressed with teachers in her life. "Maybe that was part of what it was, made me want to go into it. I just want these kids to believe in the the beauty of the world and that it's there for them and that there's nothing out there that they can't have, but to follow their dreams." She says that she wants her students to be happy.

I had a parent going on and on about how her child wasn't trying hard enough...She was like, I just want his personal best. I was like, 24/7? Every time you make that bed, is there never a wrinkle? Are the corners perfect every time? She's like no. I was, what do you really want for your kid? Do you want perfection or happiness?...Anyway I just want them to be happy."

Mindy believe it is “imperative” that a gifted teacher be gifted. When I listen to teacher’s who are not above average I think ‘How do you get these kids?’ and maybe it’s presumptuous or arrogant of me to say that but I just feel like you are different internally...you see the world a little bit differently. There’s so much more different about them than just their intelligence and what that does to the way you interact with the world. I think that is very important. I think it’s one of the most important things. I think getting these kids is more important than the training I received. They’ve got so many cool programs out here that I can pick up and run with. I don’t need to write my own curriculum any more it’s written for me. But I need to know how to act with these kids and how to treat them and how to get them ready for this big mean world and maybe that’s me fulfilling that parent role but that’s what I’m supposed to be doing here is getting this kids ready for life.

She says she recently received a note from one of her student’s that said: *“Thank you for teaching me I can do anything. And that’s what it’s about and if you don’t get that. If you don’t know what it’s like to be in this world and...I don’t know it’s just such a big piece of it and it’s why I keep doing it because of that one little note...I say this year was worth it.”*

Mindy is currently single and has no children of her own. She said she always wanted kids, “As many as I could comfortably afford.” She has been married twice before. Her first husband was a friend from high

school. They were married and then moved to AZ. She says he told a lot of “little white lies” and she couldn’t trust him. He grew up with a father who was a gambling addict and perpetually lied to his family. She realizes he grew up in that kind of environment but she couldn’t take it any more. They were married for about 10 years. Her second husband was a recovering alcoholic. He came from a family of addicts. She says he was the kind of drinker who could drink himself to death and it scared him. He knew he would pass it to his children and he didn’t want to do that to a child. They talked about adoption but he did want to do that either because you don’t know the child’s genes or background and you could potentially get a child with the same type of issues only from another family and he didn’t want to risk it. She says she found that she could love her students “as much as their parents did, or more. So I was able to fill that need, that part of my heart, with other people’s kids.” She says she is happy and her life is full and she can live without her own children. When they divorced, she figured she could find a man that had children of his own. However, she found that she fell more in love with the children so she stopped dating men with children.

Mindy is currently a gifted teacher for two different schools in a gifted enrichment program. She plans on teaching gifted children until she retires.

Themes

Many themes stand out in Mindy's retelling of her life history and become apparent in the words she uses as well as in the incidents she chooses to share. Two themes are athletics and competition (specifically winning/succeeding and losing/not succeeding). Other themes are, being poor (social class), justice and being noticed/social belonging. Not only are these themes prevalent in the stories she tells about her past but also in the way she describes her thoughts and attitudes toward teaching and gifted education. Another important aspect of Mindy's life are drugs and drug use. She grew up around a lot of different drugs and even did them herself. While this is important to understanding her as a person, it does impact the way in which she teaches or the type of teacher she is. For these reasons I did not include it as one of her main themes. However she does mention drugs/drug use in several of the other themes presented.

Athletics. Many of Mindy's family members, including Mindy herself, were involved in sports. Mindy's only brother, who is 8 years older, graduated from high school with high honors and attended LSU with a full ride baseball scholarship. One of her sisters was also heavily involved in sports in high school and received a college softball scholarship. Mindy played softball and volleyball in middle school. In high school she left softball to play soccer in a city league because her parents took her out of her neighborhood school and enrolled her in a magnet gifted high school that did not have a sports program. "There were no

jocks at this school...we ran around the block for PE. That was our exercise. There was no sports at all". Her parents put her in the gifted magnet school to get her away from the drug problem at her neighborhood school. Mindy had to take a test to get in. She scored high enough and was admitted. To compensate for the loss of sports, her parents joined the local Country Club. She admits that she wasn't as into sports as some of her siblings but that she enjoyed them and missed being able to participate in them in school.

Mindy often uses the word "athlete" to describe herself. When describing her experience at school as a gifted student, the fact that she was an athlete is quite often mentioned in the same conversations. When Mindy is describing her school schedule she says, " [In junior high] it became trickier because I was also an athlete". Her parents decided to enroll her in another high school so she had to give up sports.

A couple of my friends chose to go to the regular high school. Like I said, I was an athlete, so the girls who were even more dedicated to the sport part [chose to go to the regular high school].

She states that being in sports helped her socially with her peers.

I think being an athlete helped though because I had a buy in to that population as well. They knew me before I became a gifted kid. I never wore it as a badge either. There were a lot of kids that were in my gifted program who thought they were all that because of it....I was kind of quiet about it.

Mindy felt that because she knew so many people outside of the gifted program and she knew them before she was labeled as gifted, that it helped her in school. She was an athlete first so she didn't have problems socially because she was friends with them before she entered the gifted program and she remained friends with them afterwards as well. The girls she played sports with remained her friends and looked past her being "gifted" because she knew them before she entered the program. She felt that her elementary and middle school teachers made it difficult but not her classmates. She remembers that she had a hard time with the teachers because they did not really want to work with her and her sport schedule. "I was told that I couldn't be in honors math and on the softball team because I just couldn't do everything I wanted to do and that kind of stuff". She describes her experiences with her elementary and middle school teachers as being "negative". She remembers feeling singled out and that being in gifted classes interfered with her other teachers' schedules.

Within her family, Mindy remembers there was much more focus on athletic achievements than academic ones. "

My mom would say we don't want anybody to feel bad. Don't tell anybody. Well when Chuck pitched a no hitter last week, we all went out to dinner...because it wasn't an academic thing, it wasn't celebrated the same way. Not that they didn't honor it, because my parents definitely honored it, but they felt like it would make my siblings feel

bad if they made too much of a fuss about it. Which I didn't do anything. I was born this way. Its not like I deserved a fuss.

It is interesting that Mindy's family celebrated sport achievements over academic ones and yet they pulled Mindy out of her high school and her softball team so she could attend a gifted high school that did not have a sports program. She continues saying that she was "born this way. It's not like a deserved a fuss" in reference to her academics and is her way of understanding and explaining why her parents did not make a big deal out of it. However, people are born with athletic ability in the same way they are born with intelligence. She eventually earned a nursing degree but not without the help of Mindy's father. Perhaps that is why her family, according to Mindy, chose to highlight athletics over academics. "Very few of my friends were gifted. Most of my friends were friends that I had from sports and other things". Her family's focus on sports over academics may be why Mindy's identity appears to be tied more closely to sports than to anything else. She says the following about herself: "I was competitive and I wanted to win and I laid it all out there on the field." Her competitiveness and desire to win was not only evident in her athletics but in other areas of her life as well.

Competition. Mindy played several different competitive sports. Included under the topic of athletics is her talk about competition. Given Mindy's exposure and involvement in sports, her use of the word competition is not surprising. She describes the time when she took a

gifted exam involving blocks. She remembers one of her classmates being very upset and crying because of it. Her reaction was “It’s just a game to me. I thought it was great”. It is interesting to note her use of the word game. A game involves some type of competition and the assumption that when you are involved in a game you are competing against someone else. Mindy comes from a family that holds success in sports, or the playing of games, in high regard. Although involved in sports, she did not take it as seriously as some of her siblings. She thought it was great because she had confidence she would win which in this case, meant scoring high on the test. She says, “I didn’t do any [school] fairs because my parents would do nothing to help...I was competing against people whose parents did it all. I was such a competitive person that there was no way I was going to put myself in a position where I wasn’t going to have a chance to win”. As Mindy got older, she continued to stay away from situations in which she felt she could not win.

The first position I was offered was an eighth grade science honors. I said no...You don’t need a little girl with no science background and this gifted certificate that has nothing to do with what these kids are about. They’ve got circles around me already, I’m not going.

Mindy’s use of the words ‘little girl’ gives the impression that she felt unprepared and under qualified for the position. Like a young child without the proper experience going into an unknown situation, she did not want to

be a part of something she felt was not prepared for and felt she couldn't succeed in. If she didn't feel she could "win" then she didn't want to do it.

Mindy is a self-described athlete and although she loved competition as a child, her approach as a teacher is the opposite. She still strives for success but not in a competitive environment. As a teacher, Mindy focuses on ensuring that her classroom is a place where her students feel safe and aren't afraid to be wrong.

I think that it gives them a safe place to be wrong. Because it they're wrong in front of their gifted friends, who have also been wrong in front of them, after awhile they're like, okay , being wrong is not such an awful thing. (lines 677-680)

Her choice of the word "awful" is interesting. It shows that she, at some point, thought it was awful or her teachers made her feel it wasn't acceptable to be wrong. Either way, she has the mindset that being wrong is "awful". This ties into the statement Mindy made when talking about her teachers, "You're gifted, then why can't you figure this out?" At some point, Mindy got the impression that being gifted meant she had to know everything already. This would mean that she couldn't be wrong, at least not in her regular classroom. Mindy also says, "I think that having the opportunity...where they can let their light shine without fear is important". Her use of the word fear here is very telling. When she describes her relationship with her 'non-gifted' peers, she mentions that she "never wore it as a badge" and that she was "kind of quiet about it." This makes sense

because her family did not make a big deal about it. Mindy's assumption that a child would be afraid to show his/her intelligence is a result of, like her mother said, "not wanting others to feel bad". Mindy's past experiences result in her being sensitive to the idea that a gifted child could feel afraid to be smart and avoid being wrong.

Social Class. The second major topic is social class. When Mindy was very young she describes her family as being "pretty poor". She describes how her mother worked full time in the Parent Teacher Association to help pay for the private Catholic school she and her siblings attended. Throughout the course of the interviews, she makes nine references to money. Although her family was poor when she was young, at some point her dad inherited some money from his mother. After this, Mindy says they moved to an "upper crust" neighborhood. Although they lived in a better area her family still did not have a lot of money. At one point Mindy makes the statement: "With money, kids buy drugs." Mindy said this in a very matter of fact way as if it is a known fact. Her parents pulled her out of her neighborhood school because of the drug problem and put her into a magnet school where, according to Mindy, there was more drugs. The school was in a more affluent neighborhood where some of the students were from wealthy families. It was a magnet school that pulled students in from all around the city so not all the kids there were rich. However, her assumption is that the rich kids were involved in the drugs. "It was a school where you had some of the poorest people and

some of the richest people... which was a really cool situation". Even though the population of the school was very mixed she associated the drugs with the rich kids. According to her more money = more drugs. Her associate between money and drugs comes from her own experiences as a child. She witnessed her sisters using their money to buy drugs. She also used the money she earned to buy drugs. For her, this is how it is because that's how it was in her home.

She did not grow up in an affluent home. As a result her father felt she should have a profession that would allow her to live a more comfortable life. She describes a situation where her father tried to talk her out of becoming a teacher. "[My dad] was like, money, blah, blah, blah...We grew up not having anything. In his head I had aspirations of having a lot because I went to school uptown...I was like, dad, I don't need all that stuff. You think I like it, sure, but I don't need it". She said her family didn't have extras but that her parents put away money for Mindy and her siblings to go to college and that she was expected to go. "My dad thought being a teacher was a waste of my intelligence. Did I want to make that little money?" Mindy remembers her dad being concerned with her standard of living. "What do you mean standard of living? I grew up in this house." But she admits that she "always did like nicer things." Her mother gave her money for clothes but not for the brand name items.

She had a job throughout middle school and high school and used that money to buy the things she wanted, which for her were name brand

clothes and drugs. She says, "I had money to be a punk." Even though she says money isn't important to her, or rather the earning of a lot of money isn't important, the idea of social class or what social class a person is in seems to be something that she is aware of. "I went to school with people who had chauffeurs... the people who wrote The Planet of the Apes series...The Marsalis family". Her father tried very hard to talk Mindy out of being a teacher. "He said...you could be a brain surgeon you could be whatever. I was like, just because I can doesn't mean that I should. I should be whatever I'm called to be, and that's a teacher". So although Mindy is aware of money and social class she doesn't want to be defined by it or make her life decisions based on it.

She expresses the same type of thinking when discussing the future with her gifted students. She encourages them to go to college but understands not all of them will go, so she also talks to them about "whatever big thing you decide to do with your life...don't do it because it's your only choice but the choice you want. Every job is valuable just find one you like." Mindy's use of the word 'valuable' is not used to describe the monetary worth of a job. She uses the word to describe a person's relationship to money. If it is a job they have chosen and that makes them happy then it is valuable. It has value because it contributes to the student's self worth and happiness. She is aware, like most people, that money is important and that money matters. During her years at the magnet school, she saw the negative influence money could have. So like

herself, she encourages her students to not be driven by money but by what they want and like.

Justice as righteousness. Justice is another important theme. The New Oxford American Dictionary (2001) defines *justice* as, “just behavior or treatment; the quality of being fair and reasonable”. It defines *just* as “based on or behaving according to what is morally right and fair; deserved or appropriate in the circumstances”. Her ideas about justice come from this definition. She says she was a “very righteous child.” During her sixth grade year a teacher falsely accused her of cheating on a test in front of her gifted peers. “You don’t know me very well if you think I cheated on a test..there goes my everything. I was all about justice.” When asked where that came from she talks about how righteous her father was and how he was always so concerned about justice. “To him right was right, there was no gray area.”

She also mentions that justice is a supposedly “classic gifted trait.” It is this sense of justice that causes her to be so upset with the cheating allegations. She says she felt embarrassment and shame after the accusation. She later went to her class and explained what had happened. After she was able to do that she says she “didn’t care what [my classmates] thought.” She couldn’t live with her peers thinking she was dishonest or that she would have done something she felt was wrong. Later on after college, when Mindy was working in a program for emotionally disabled elementary students, she was confronted with issues

that collided with her notions of justice. “The program was too punitive and I didn’t think it was what those kids needed...they would promise them things and then take them away...They needed to know all the rules and we need to play by the rules. We can’t change them halfway...I couldn’t keep watching that happen...I can’t be a party to that. I can’t look like I’m also disappointing them daily”. There is an overriding sense of injustice that she feels is being done to those students and she couldn’t participate in it. Telling the students one thing and doing another is, to Mindy, not the right or just thing to do. When explaining it in more detail she says, “There’s that justice thing again. If you make a promise you keep it.” The school administrators were not doing what was right. They would say one thing but do another. The students were not being treated reasonably and for her, it was a matter of justice.

Being noticed/belonging. Many times throughout Mindy’s interview, she mentions her desire to be noticed at school. She talks about it when describing the part of the day she was in her regular classroom instead of her gifted one. “There wasn’t anything for me to do basically, except get in trouble, which I did really well...I was like, somebody’s going to notice me in this room”. Then later she describes a day she stood up in class and started singing. “[I] refused to quit singing until I finished the song. I was just begging them to notice that I was there and I wanted to learn something today please”. Mindy is smart enough to know what type of behavior would get her noticed. She knew behaving in such an

outrageous manner would get the attention of her teachers and parents. Mindy expresses her frustration with her teachers many times throughout the interview. She felt that she was a burden to them. She says the teachers made it “very difficult for her.” Instead of wanting to help her and create a environment where she could learn and grow, Mindy felt that she was a burden to her teachers. They did not want to be bothered with her and the complications her gifted class caused.

On several occasions, when describing her home life, Mindy tells stories which give the impression that she felt forgotten or not important at home as well. “For me and baby of six, by the time it got to me was watered down. Everything, discipline and everything else pretty much”. Later Mindy says, “I basically raised myself. My parents were not heavy disciplinarians. They were very strict with the older ones but by the time they go to me it was like, what good did it do? And they were tired. By then they had lightened up.” It is as if her older siblings grew up in a completely different home. Mindy can not remember much about her childhood. She says, “There are holes in my childhood. I kid with my family. Did y’all lock me in a closet? I don’t think they did.” She isn’t exactly sure why she can’t remember much. She describes it as being “just one big happy blur.” One memory she does have is when she didn’t get money on her golden birthday because her grandmother had died. Everyone of her siblings received money on their golden birthday. The family was to celebrate it but Mindy says “that got blown out of the water”

when they had to leave to attend the funeral. Mindy also talks about how she and two of her sisters went to her grandparents' house every summer. Mindy doesn't exactly know why but she says it could have been because her parents felt that they "needed a break."

Her not being noticed or being forgotten also ties into her family's focus on athletic accomplishments over academic ones. Mindy was the only one in her family that was in a gifted program. She wasn't able to compete in sports much due to her high school's lack of an athletic program. For Mindy all she could get recognized for is her academic accomplishments. Mindy says she was "upset about losing my friends and everything". Her parents insisted she go to the magnet gifted school, even though she didn't want to. Mindy's parents did not listen to what she wanted. When describing how she did in high school she says, "I had to have a 2.5 GPA to stay, and I had a 2.63 all the way throughout. I worked just hard enough". Doing 'just enough' was Mindy's way of getting heard. It was her way of having agency in a situation that was otherwise out of her control. They could make her go but they couldn't make her succeed or do her best. Mindy wasn't going to get noticed or be rewarded for doing well academically anyway.

The concept of 'doing your best' comes up again when Mindy is discussing her gifted students. She recalls a time when a parent was talking to her about her son. The mother was concerned because she felt her son wasn't "trying hard enough" or "giving his personal best." In

response, Mindy asked the mother if she always did her personal best in everything all the time? “I was, what do you really want for your kid? Do you want perfection? Or do you want happiness? Let’s focus on what’s going to make him happy instead of how are you going to get him to be perfect”.

Burden. The way in which she describes some of her childhood experiences make it seem that she felt like she was a burden to people. She felt she was a burden to the regular classroom teachers because she had a different schedule. She was a burden to her family that was already so full of children and activities. This comes across when she describes her interactions with her students’ other teachers. She says, “Having to do this, and the stress it puts on the teachers to have to figure out their schedule”. Later she describes her relationship with the other teachers. “They’re not mean or disrespectful or anything like that. They’re just so busy that I think that’s a piece of it. I need to help them understand how I can help them. I’m not here to put something else on you. Let me come in and help you”. As a gifted student and now a gifted teacher, Mindy very clearly realizes how her own students may end up feeling the same way she did. In order to be sure this doesn’t happen, Mindy is always very willing to work with the classroom teachers to ensure her gifted students have something to do when not in her classroom, which is something Mindy did not have when she was growing up.

Victoria's Horizon

Victoria was born in Florida in 1960. She has two younger biological brothers and two older stepsisters. She lived there for about four years. She and her family lived by the beach in what she called "a really nice area". Both her father and mother come from very affluent families. Her father's family owns a chain of gift shops and he worked for them. They lived near her paternal grandparents who paid for Victoria to go to a private Catholic school. She missed the September cutoff but she says she was ready for school. The school agreed to let her in at four because her grandmother threatened to pull three of her other grandchildren out if they didn't let Victoria in. "Money talks at the Catholic school so I got in."

In 1964, when Victoria was four years old and her father was 28, he and a friend, a cop, went out drinking. The bar they were in turned away a black couple. A few hours later, the woman returned with a knife and tried to stab her father's friend because she was angry and he was a police officer. Her father pushed him out of the way and was stabbed instead. Although she was only four at the time, Victoria remembers being with her dad that day. He had dropped her off at her aunt's house to go out with his friend. She remember her aunt begging him not to go out. But, Victoria remembers he went out a lot. Victoria says he was an alcoholic, as were his parents and grand parents. She says "it was a bad thing that happened that shouldn't have happened." Victoria says this because she believes if her father had been where he should have been, with her

mother in New York City, he would not have been murdered. Her mother was in New York having her brother tested for microcephaly at the New York University hospital. She went there because it was much better than the hospitals in Florida and she could stay with her family while her brother was being tested at the hospital.

After her father died, her mother moved the family to Queens, New York because her mother's family was still there. Victoria and her mother and brothers lived with her grandparents for about four years. Because she was already in school, she was able to transfer to Kindergarten in New York.

When Victoria was eight, her mother remarried and they all moved in with her stepfather. Victoria is very close to her stepfather and says she considers him her father.

Victoria's home life was not idyllic. Her mother suffered from mental illness. Victoria believes she was bipolar and refers to her as "maniac depressive". Although she didn't know exactly what was wrong with her mother as a child, she found her mother's medical records after she passed and discovered she was treated for depression and had a mental breakdown when Victoria was in high school. Victoria remembers her taking a variety of medication. As a result of her disease, there was a lot of fighting in her house between her parents. Her older sister would take all the kids in her car to get them away from the house. Victoria said this was "her saving grace." It helped her to be able to get out of the house and

away from the yelling. Her stepfather knew about her mother's condition before he married her. Victoria says "He has a thing for marrying weaker women. His first wife suffered from mental illness as well." She thinks her mother did the best she could given her mental illness, but says she could definitely have been a better mom. Her disease caused her to withdraw and spend time alone. Victoria wishes she would have been more present in her life.

In terms of education, Victoria says she and her siblings "run the gamut". Her oldest stepsister, Rebecca, is seven years older than Victoria. She was always in the highest class or what she was referred to by the school as the "one class". She had an accelerated curriculum in middle school where she skipped a grade and was able to graduate in two years instead of three. Rebecca graduated from high school, went on to college and now has a Ph.D. Her other stepsister, Melanie, five years older than Victoria, and is what Victoria calls "regular. Normal average." She graduated from high school but did not obtain a college degree. Victoria was in what her school labeled the "two class". It wasn't as advanced as the one class but she did receive some accelerated curriculum. She graduated from high school, finished college and has a Master's degree. She was the first grandchild in both her biological parents' families to graduate from college. Her younger brother, Luke, is only seventeen months younger than she and had trouble in school. Her parents wanted to hold him back but the school wouldn't do it. Victoria thinks this is one of

the reasons he had such a hard time. Luke eventually dropped out of high school without getting a degree. Her youngest brother, Paul, has microcephaly. Microcephaly or “small brain” caused him to have learning and developmental disabilities. Although only three years younger than Victoria, he has the mind of a 12 year old. Paul received special services at school and graduated from high school with a special diploma. Both her mother and stepfather were high school graduates but neither one had a college degree.

Victoria has a close relationship to all of her siblings except one. She is closest to the younger of her stepsisters and one of her brothers. She says they are close because they went through so much together at home. Her youngest brother, who is 3 years younger than Victoria, as already stated, has the mind of a 12 or 13 year old from being microcephalic and “suffers from schizophrenia”. Growing up she was close to him because she helped raise him. She and her oldest stepsister are not extremely close because of personality differences. She says her oldest sister, who is highly intelligent, thinks “she’s all that.” Her attitude does not sit well with Victoria so they don’t talk much now that they are older. When they were younger her sister would take all the children out of the house and drive them around. They were far apart in age and her sister moved away to college only 2 years after the families moved in together. Their age difference also made it difficult for them to be close

because her sister was out a lot with friends and her boyfriend and didn't spend a lot of time at home.

Victoria says her school in Queens, New York was in a "really good district" and she had a "great experience in public school." There were no gifted classes when she was in elementary and middle school. In elementary school they homogeneously grouped the students into the one class, two class, three class and four class. She was always in the two class. When asked what the difference was between the one and two class Victoria says,

There wasn't much difference. Pretty much it was the kids in the one class were probably what you would consider your highly gifted now. We were more like your pullout gifted is how I would think. We were the more well-rounded. You weren't as high strung about your grades, your parents weren't as high strung where the kids in the one class-there was a kid there if she didn't get a 98 or higher her father would have her head".

As already presented, Victoria's oldest sister was in the one class. She skipped a grade and finished middle school in two years instead of three. Victoria had the opportunity to also skip a grade but her parents wouldn't allow it. "When they got to me my mom wouldn't let me skip the grade because my sister hated it" . She says her sister hated it because "It was too much. She lost a lot of socialization. It was a lotta, lotta work, a lotta pressure...my sister actually said don't make her do it". During her middle

school years they offered classes called “Special Progress” or SP. This was a program where the curriculum was accelerated. She learned the same material but at a much faster pace than her peers. She continued through middle school in SP classes. When she got to high school she took honors courses. After high school, Victoria went on to college.

Victoria attended Queens college. She began in the nursing program and originally wanted to be a pediatric nurse. She had completed two years when she realized that she could not deal with losing a child. She still wanted to work with children so she changed her major to education. She also has an MA and a gifted certification.

Victoria is married and has one son, who is adopted. He attends school in the same district where she works, but not at the same school. He is in a pullout program in another school. She wanted him to be at her school in a self contained gifted classroom. He was initially enrolled in another school because Victoria was the pullout teacher and she would have been his teacher. “I didn’t want to be his teacher for four years”. Once he entered fifth grade, self contained was an option but by this time he didn’t want to leave his school and his friends. “I wasn’t going to make him and I really wanted him to have the self-contained teacher who is really wonderful. I moved the kid clear across the country in second grade. I could not uproot him again It was not right. Why? To make my life easier? He’s getting a great education”.

Victoria is currently a kindergarten teacher with a cluster of gifted children. In her district the gifted students are clustered and pulled out until fourth grade. In fourth, fifth and sixth grades they have self contained gifted classes. The courses offered in the pullout program are math and reading. In her class of 20 there are ten identified as gifted. Some are identified gifted in either reading or math and a few are identified gifted in both. One other kindergarten teacher has a gifted cluster of seven students. The elementary school does not offer gifted testing until the end of kindergarten. The children who are identified as gifted before entering the school have been tested privately. Victoria says, " Not all private testing is bad by any means but sometimes you wonder. It's like if they don't make it here and then all of a sudden they make it. You know, you wonder at that point". Since testing does not start until the end of the year not one of her students were tested through the school. She says the parents have their children tested early so they can be in the cluster classroom. "Parents have their kids tested to be guaranteed in the cluster 'cause people think cluster is better. I'm trying to tell them that it's not. They think that if your child is in the cluster class, gifted or not, it's the higher class". Victoria says this mind set is perpetuated by the parents. "It's like playing telephone. It's exactly what it is. It's like playing telephone. That's the only way I can compare it...If the parent can get it out of their head that clustering is not better than the other classes and that's a big issue. They have it in their minds no matter how much you try to tell

them...some of them get it. Some don't. Most don't and that's a problem".

Victoria feels that the cluster is not better because she has no "high achievers" the children she describes as:

Those perfect little children that will do anything to please you, don't have them...Those are the kids that are not in the cluster. You want that because those kids a lot of times are very, very smart but then don't get a chance to shine if they're in with gifted children...You want them in the other classes so they can shine because if they're with gifted kids, they'll never shine and you're going to demotivate them. Those are your pleasers. Those are the ones you really want".

Victoria doesn't think a teacher needs to be gifted in order to teach gifted students. She says, " You just have to be willing to understand their unique learning styles. You also must be willing to continually challenge them and foster their desire to achieve."

Themes

There are two main themes that appear throughout Victoria's story. The first one has to do with the idea that there are skills a should have which differs from their knowledge or intellect and happiness.

Intellect vs. skills. Victoria comments that many of her gifted kindergarten students have what she calls "gaps" and "holes". The use of these terms suggests that she believes that there are certain skills children should have . Most of her gifted students know or understand

concepts that are ahead of their classmates, but at the same time don't know how to write all of their letters correctly or don't know how to cut. When describing this she describes this as a "gap" or "hole" in their understanding.

There's just so many gaps. I'm finding my kids have so many holes...My gifted kids have a ton of holes in the primary grades. They can add and subtract but do they know what an odd or even number is? No. Are they writing their numbers correctly? No...So all those little gaps...and a lot of them can't cut...Reading same thing. Tons of gaps. They can read but they don't understand what they're reading all the time. Vocabulary, main idea, cause and effect, predictions.

She brings it up again later on. "They don't have quotation marks and commas. So that's where their gaps are. Yes, they can read. Their reading may be up there but their writing...sometimes they don't know how to put it into words".

The skills she describes: cutting, writing numbers and letters correctly and problems with printing are more basic and do not require a high level of intelligence to grasp. Reading and understanding complex math problems do. This is an instance where, because a child has been labeled "gifted" and is more intelligent than his/her peers, he/she should already know it. If it's less complicated they should already know how to do it. The skills she speaks of are important for success in school. By making this comment

Victoria is placing more significance on basic and motor skills than on the more sophisticated skills. This makes sense with what she said earlier in regards to not wanting her gifted students to feel superior to their classmates. They may know some things their classmates don't but they also might be missing some crucial pieces of knowledge that are important to their success in school. Gifted students are like their classmates in that they don't know more things, they just know different things.

Happiness and Unhappiness. Another theme that is prevalent across most of Victoria's interview is happiness. She speaks about it in many different ways. She speaks of her own happiness and unhappiness, of stress and pressure on children making them unhappy, of feeling safe and nurtured, and of feeling unequal and less than others, thus feeling less worthy than others, as leading to unhappiness. Having a highly gifted sister, a "normal average" sister and a brother with learning disabilities, Victoria grew up with a wide range of intellectual ability. Each sibling was different yet each was equally important. Their intelligence did not determine their worth and she passes this attitude on to her students. Victoria gives this impression when she says her parents were more concerned with her and her siblings doing their best than in the grades they received. "[My parents] were the type though as long as you did your best, that's all they cared about. They were really good like that because like I said, we had the gamut in my house. They were if you did well and

that was your best, great. If you blew a test and you studied your butt off, oh well. They were great when it came to that...”.

Stress and pressure leading to unhappiness. She talks about stress and pressure as feelings that can cause children to be unhappy. She first uses it when describing her and her sister’s classes. “It was always known that the one class with all the parents who pressured their kids and all the kids that were very high strung about their grades. [The two class] was just as smart, but we couldn’t care less”. She describes her sister’s class, the one class, as “the highly gifted...high strung” and her class, the two class, as “the pullout gifted...more well-rounded”. Later she describes her sister’s school experience as being “a lotta work, a lotta pressure...too much pressure”. Her sister told their mother not to let Victoria skip a grade like she had because “she hated it. It was too much”. Victoria also uses the words pressure and stress when speaking about parents of gifted children. “I think the parents pressure their kids way too much”.

Victoria also brings up the happiness and/or unhappiness of her son. When describing why he isn’t at her school she says, “I wasn’t going to make him [come here]...I moved the kid clear across the country in second grade. I could not uproot him again. It was not right. Why? To make my life easier”? The idea that he would be uprooted would have made him unhappy so she didn’t do it. She had to move several times as a child, first when her father was killed and then again when her mother

married her stepfather. Moving moved her farther away from her family. At one point in the interview she mentions that she would move back to New York if she could because of her family and friends. She doesn't feel as close to people here as she does to people back in New York. Perhaps it is her feelings of being uprooted that carry over to her son. She doesn't want her son to go through what she did so she decided not to move him.

Her son is part of the gifted program and people have asked her why he isn't part of the digital learning center. Her reply was, "It's just too much work". Here again she doesn't want her son to have too much work which could lead to stress which could cause him to be unhappy. When her son received his first B she said he was "not happy". In third grade she says he "was not a happy camper...[He] was not happy" because it was the first year he had had to work for good grades. She was teaching third grade at the time and said she could relate to parents who said their kids were also unhappy. Victoria recalls, "I said now they actually have to read the instructions and they actually have to do something and they're not happy. They're like yea. I said give me 'til November. If still by November you're still unhappy then pull your child out". Victoria is concerned not only with the happiness of her own child but with the happiness of her students.

Happiness and equality. Equality is also important to Victoria. It is obvious she is concerned with this by the ways in which she talks to and about her students. She grew up with that type of environment. Her

parents made sure to treat her and all of her siblings equally. "They were the type that as long as you did your best, that's all they cared about. They were really good like that because, like I said, we had the gamut in my house...they were great when it came to that". Her parents did not focus on the grade as much as the effort. This is important because her brother could never have gotten the scores her sister did. For her family it was about doing your best not about the result.

Victoria's classroom is made up of gifted and non-gifted students. She makes sure she has parents of both her gifted and non-gifted students help out in the classroom.

I do that for a lot of reasons. I have the [non-gifted] parents come in so they know their kid is not the only one 'cause they feel bad sometimes. Oh man. No, it's not just your kids. They're like oh okay. For the gifted parents I do it so they don't think their kid is all that. There's another kid that's just as smart if not smarter...That's how lucky they are that their children catch on...how lucky they are that they catch on fast.

She talks about the attitude she works hard to instill into her students.

It doesn't matter if you're gifted or you struggle...if I can catch it now and teach them that's why I think I believe in a cluster for kindergarten and not a self-contained...they need to be around their peers and learn how to be socially adept and how to accept other children and it's okay for you to be different also. That's why the

clusters work because there are kids just like them and there are kids that are not.

Victoria mentions being socially adept. The basis for her concern stems from several of her family experiences. First is Rebecca's experience with being promoted a grade. A move which Victoria claims she didn't like because of the socialization that was lost. Victoria describes this sister as feeling that she's "all that". If Rebecca hadn't been promoted and had time to develop herself more socially maybe she would have a better attitude and get along better with her family members. Her mother had a mental illness which made her different than other mothers Victoria was around. Her brother, Paul, had both mental and physical disabilities which made him different than most of the other kids at school. These different experiences created in Victoria a sensitivity to how hard it is when a person feels different. She says she wants to "catch it now" and teach them. Victoria sees her opportunity to educate her students on the importance of accepting everyone as something she can't let pass her by. Just like catching someone when they fall requires an immediate response, so too does teaching them how to accept others who are different.

Victoria makes sure the parents of her students know her thoughts on this.

I tell the parents straight up. Some of them listen, some don't but [the students] don't know who's gifted and who's not...I don't even tell

them. If they tell me my mom says I'm gifted, I say I don't want to hear that here because i'm like everybody learns at their own rate. It doesn't matter if you're gifted or if you're a struggler. I will not have it...I set the stage at open house. I said you have to be kind to people. You can't brag. No one likes a bragger. That's what gives gifted parents a bad rap...nobody cares but you to be honest. I'm very honest".

Part of helping students be happy is to let them be kids. They "just need to be silly". Victoria mentions this several times. "I had one mom that complained I wasn't challenging her child enough and I said he's six. Let him be six". And then again, " I joke with them all the time...they're little so I do a lotta games...they're five". It is important to Victoria that no one forgets her students are young children. Victoria doesn't and she doesn't want the parents to forget either. Gifted or not, Victoria believes it is important for kids to be able to have fun. She says one of her goals for her students is to "let them still have fun...Just to be a great kid. It helps being good to society, have fun learning". She wants her gifted students to be able to grow and not have negative stereotypes attached to them because they are gifted.

CHAPTER 5:THEMES ACROSS PARTICIPANTS

This last chapter, Themes across participants, is broken up into two main themes: Gender as a central defining characteristic of the lives of these women and Age and intellect. The gender theme is more robust than Age and intellect and is broken down into several headings and subheadings. The organizer below is included to help clarify the various different levels and how they all fit together.

Gender as a central defining characteristic of the lives of these women

1. Biological essentialism
2. Androcentrism
3. Gender Polarization
 - a. Characteristics of the gendered experience
 - i. Secretiveness
 - ii. Belonging
 - a. Characteristics of not belonging
 - b. Outcomes of not belonging
 - c. Remedies of not belonging
 - iii. Being noticed
4. Age and intellect

Among the four women I interviewed, there are themes that are similar among and between them. Since they spent all or most of their school years in American public schools, it is possible to compare their school experiences. American schools as a social institution shared throughout the nation, hold in common a set of expected social behaviors and expectations taught and/or reinforced for future generations. Rules such as keep hands to yourself, respect others, don't talk while others are talking and many others are behaviors school people teach us are expected from citizens in our society. Some of the unspoken behaviors and expectations that my participants speak about have to do with gender and gender roles, fitting in or belonging and the notion that age and intellect are connected.

Gender as a central defining characteristic of the lives of these women.

According to the social psychologist, Daryl Bem (1993), "Every culture contains assumptions about behavior that are contained throughout its social institutions and within the personalities of individuals". Linda Lindsay calls these assumptions "cultural lenses". (pg. 62, Lindsay) She claims that American culture contains three lenses related to gender. They are gender polarization, or the belief that females and males are fundamentally different and opposite beings, androcentrism, the belief that males are superior to females and biological essentialism, the idea that biology produces natural, inevitable, gender roles.

Biological essentialism. Biological essentialism, or the idea that gender roles are produced by biology, is one cultural lens that appears across several of the interviews. (To be clear, it is a cultural lens, not a biological fact that is in their discourse. They equate the taken-for-granted cultural notion of essentialism with biology, as if we are born with this distinction in place genetically. this “predisposition” is expressed through the interest people declare and the activities they prefer. As we shall see these women’s lives, in some instances, go against the essentialist grain.)

Sandy talks the most about gender. She refers to biological essentialism when she says, “That’s just the way it is” in regards to males and females. At one point she says, “Boys brains are built to do better in math and in spatial-it is just the way things are. Now I am generalizing, I am stereotyping-I know that. It is true that the majority of boys' brains develop to be able to understand that better. Girls' brains develop better to understand verbal communication and it is necessary for the race to survive” and later, “some of my best math students are girls...but they are an anomaly”. By stating ‘boys brains are built’ and ‘girls’ brains develop’ she is referring to genetics. Even though Sandy loves math and science, she often gives into gender stereotyping. When she is in elementary and there is a new teacher at her school she says, “Oh no, it’s a male teacher. Now we are going to have to do a lot of math.” Ann also alludes to biological essentialism (and also gender polarization) when talking about the intellectual strengths of boys and girls. Ann says her mother helped

her with English and her dad helped her with Math. Here again there is the division of what women know or are good at, and what men know. At one point Mindy hints at this when she describes herself as being a “little girl” when approached to teach science.

Androcentrism. Androcentrism, the belief that males are superior to females, is another cultural lens evident in my participants’ stories. Sandy is being androcentric when discussing the attitude her family has towards boys vs. girls. Examples of this are: her grandmother’s favorite was her son, Sandy’s brother was their mother’s favorite and Sandy’s father was willing to pay for her brother to go to school but not Sandy. Over and over she alludes to the idea that in her family boys were preferred over girls.

Ann also refers to this when describing her and her brother. She says “My brother was my father’s pride and joy...he could do no wrong...He was much harder on me...the expectations [for me] were much different because I was a girl.”

Gender polarization. The belief that males and females are fundamentally different is an incident she describes that deals with gender happens in college. She is one of only four females in an engineering course. The professor has them stand up in front of the entire class and says, “ Boys, I want you to take a really good look at these four women. These women are here for their MRS degree’...then he sat us down in the front row and then he said, ‘make sure you know who they are and stay

away from them because that is all they are after.” This incident has a huge impact on Sandy because although she is aware of the stereotype, this is the first time it was expressed so overtly.

Gender polarization is also evident in Ann’s stories. She talks about her brother being “the opposite of me”. When describing herself she frequently will use her brother as her opposite. She says he got the brains, she got the common sense. He sees the whole picture, she sees details. He is strong in math and science and she is better at English.

Characteristics of the gendered experience. Within the gendered experiences of my participants are various ways in which these experiences expressed themselves in their lives. The ones in which the women spoke of are secretiveness, belonging and being noticed

Secretiveness. The woman who speaks most about secretiveness is Sandy. Sandy has a part of herself that she doesn’t want others to know about. She mentions this when she is describing her erector set. “It was a secret. My parent bought it for me and I kept it in the living room and no one was allowed to go in there.” Sandy’s desire for an erector set goes against gender stereotypes and therefore she felt it was necessary to keep it hidden. Girls having erector sets is not the ‘norm’ so she has to keep it a secret. She didn’t want to play with typical girl toys like Barbies. She had Barbies that she loved because, “I could make things for them, not because I wanted to clothe them.” So although she has girl toys she

doesn't play with them in the typical girl way. Instead of wanting to take care of her Barbies she wanted to build things for them.

In her article, *Gender Role Development*, Laura Lindsey talks about the socializing influence of toys. "...toys carry a formidable force for socialization...toys for girls encourage domesticity...[boy toys]...foster self-reliance and problem solving". (p 67) Sandy was aware of this and as a result, wanted to keep her preference for 'boy toys' hidden.

Another aspect of secretiveness involves intelligence. Sandy feels as if she isn't like the other girls because of her intelligence. She says boys were intimidated by her. She says she tried to 'not act smart', or keep her intellect a secret, but that everyone knew she was so it didn't make any difference. That she even felt she needed to act less intelligent speaks to androcentrism. Girls are not supposed to be smarter or intellectually better than boys. Sandy tries very hard to fit into this role but she isn't very successful.

Mindy talks about this as well when she says she didn't wear her intelligence "as a badge...I was kind of quiet about it." In addition to the theme of gender there is the theme of fitting in.

Belonging. Belonging is very much a part of school life. When a person feels like she does not fit in or belong it is primarily due to her not following a certain set of expected social norms. Being labeled "gifted" or being in gifted classes already sets these women apart from most of their peers. They have friends but they still talk about how they feel like they

don't belong or fit in with their peers and/or their families. According to Dr. Kathleen Noble, "most women who are gifted, as you well know, think they're freaks, and feel horribly different -- isolated, alienated, ostracized, 'What's wrong with me?' "(Heylighen, 2012, p.7) These feelings are evident in gifted males as well. Three of my participants, Ann, Sandy and Mindy, talk quite a bit about feeling different or not fitting in or belonging. Within the theme of belonging there are three different sub-themes that emerge. They are: Characteristics of not belonging, outcomes of not belonging and possible remedies.

Characteristics of not belonging. Some of the characteristics of not belonging are: feeling strange, lonely and not accepted. Ann speaks about these characteristics when describing her gifted brother, her special needs and/or gifted students and her own children. She says:

[My brother] felt like he didn't belong. He remembers thinking I am strange. I am weird in a bad sense. I am different from other people. I don't belong... I know he felt accepted by our parents but he didn't feel he belonged at school. It was an uncomfortable place to be. That is why I pay so much attention to my gifted kids and their social and emotional issues...I don't want a kid to feel they don't belong.

Ann also experienced this with her own children. Her son, Michael, struggled at times to fit in as well. "Michael struggled with that...he had a really hard time, really struggled."

Sandy says in school she felt “very lonely. It wasn’t what I wanted.” This loneliness was due, in part, to the fact that she graduated early. She didn’t graduate with students her age and she describes the other students in her graduating class as the “real” seniors. She was with them but she didn’t feel as comfortable with them.

Outcomes of not belonging. One of the results of not belonging, mentioned by several of my participants, is acting out or getting attention by any means possible. By the time she reached sixth grade, Sandy says, “I had had it. I was a real behavior problem...it was my way-I had no real way of communicating to people my needs but that is what I did.” Ann also mentions that her parents were having to visit the school regularly because of her brother’s behavior issues. She remembers her brother was “chronically getting into trouble at school.”

Remedies for not belonging. All of my participants have experience with either being gifted or living with gifted individuals. As teachers these experiences are influential in how they deal with their gifted students. Ann’s experiences with her brother helps her to better understand the feelings of her students. She says once a student is hers, she will always be concerned for them and be available to them. “I think that that’s important for gifted kids, because often times they don’t feel like they belong.” She says children need to know that someone cares for them.

I think it is important for kids to feel a sense of belonging. I think that’s what gets kids into trouble. That lack of I don’t belong

anywhere. No one's watching me. I grew up knowing everyone was watching me...I think that's important...That feeling that people know who you are and what you're doing. I didn't have a lot of anonymity. I'm not sure anonymity is good for kids. I think it's important for people to know what's going on. We lose kids when they don't have someone who holds them accountable...It's important to kids that someone is paying attention to you...somebody cares. I felt that growing up that it mattered to someone how well I was doing. Someone besides your parents. Someone outside of your family.

Sandy remembers feeling lonely in school most of the time. Her experiences with feeling alone are what motivates her as a teacher to make it "better for kids that were like me." Sandy says she understands gifted students can feel they alone or that they aren't accepted for who they are. "Having gone through all that kind of stuff myself as a kid and not having an adult in the educational world to say hey I am okay-that is what I want to provide for the kids...for them to walk out of here feeling they are okay just the way they are, whatever it is. I love it. That is what it comes down to."

As a gifted teacher, Mindy believes her experiences help her understand her students and ensure they do not suffer from the same type of feelings she felt.

There's so much more different about them than just their intelligence and what that does to the way you interact with the world. I think that is very important. I think it's one of the most important things. I think getting these kids is more important than the training I received...I need to know how to act with these kids and how to treat them and how to get them ready for this big mean world and maybe that's me fulfilling that parent role but that's what I'm supposed to be doing here is getting this kids ready for life.

Being noticed. Another evident theme is that of being noticed.

Sandy and Mindy talk about being noticed when describing their own childhood experiences. Sandy talks about not liking school. She felt that she wasn't accepted because no one really understood her.

Kindergarten wasn't really appropriate for me and I made it through there and then first grade, I had already done everything so they just pushed me on. That is how I kind of felt a lot of the times. Every time there was something that I had already done...just push her on and not really spend time with me.

Like Sandy, Mindy she felt ignored much of the time in the classroom. Her loneliness also caused her to be a behavior problem. "There wasn't anything for me to do basically, except get in trouble, which I did really well...I was like, somebody's going to notice me in this room". She said the reason she misbehaved was because, "I was just begging

them to notice that I was there and I wanted to learn something today please.”

Age and Intellect. The idea of age being tied to the acquisition of knowledge is another theme that runs through the interviews. When describing themselves or their relatives, Ann and Sandy bring up age as an issue. Victoria talks about her students as having “holes” or “gaps” in their knowledge. The way in which our schools are organized, with children of the same age grouped together into separate grades, is an unstated but socially accepted belief and practice. This social practice is a reflection of the way in which Americans view children and learning. That is that children of the same age, for the most part, have the same abilities and the same level of intelligence.

Ann describes an incident from her childhood that involved her brother and the idea that he was too young for the information he was getting. When Ann was in kindergarten, her brother was about three. Every afternoon she would come home and teach her brother what she had learned that day. She says he was very curious and she loved teaching him. Eventually, however, he developed a ulcer. She believes this was because at his young age, what she was teaching him was more than he could handle. As a result, she had to stop teaching him. She also mentions her son, Ben, learning his multiplication tables at four, which was a young age. She worried that the school and his teachers wouldn't know

“what to do with him” because what he knew and what he could do was more advanced than most of his peers.

Sandy discusses age the most. She first mentions it when describing how she learned to read at age three. “ I didn’t know you weren’t supposed to learn this stuff. I didn’t understand you weren’t expected to be able to do things until you reached a certain age and I was like [my older siblings] are reading, I guess I should be reading so I taught myself how to read”. Later, she refers again to her curiosity and the accepted belief that a person’s age determines what she should be learning or should know.

I had to know everything right now and I had no patience for people to brush me off because I was just a little kid I wanted to know now and I had questions that probably weren’t-I didn’t realize it was out of the ordinary though because I just thought I was being like my brothers and sisters...I didn’t understand the whole age thing-that I would learn that in time.

“The whole age thing” she refers to is this American belief that age is the main indicator of a child’s intellectual ability and/or readiness.

Sandy skipped several grades. At one point she talks about how young she was compared to her peers. “A lot of the teachers at that time thought there were mistakes on the records or something. I couldn’t possibly be that young.” This idea of her being too young continues throughout her school years. She graduated high school at age 16. She

even says, “I had no business being out of school at 16.” All of her life Sandy learned things at an earlier age than her peers. She had finished all the requirements of high school and yet she still says she had “no business” graduating at 16. This statement shows just how very powerful this belief is.

Victoria talks about her students having “holes” and “gaps” in their knowledge. Although she never really explains why she chooses such words the use of them indicates that knowledge is something like a puzzle with some missing pieces.

According to dictionary.com, a hole is an area where something is missing and a gap is an interruption of continuity. Both of these words indicate that Victoria believes that her gifted students have something missing in their knowledge. In this case, several of her gifted students knew some things that were considered ‘above grade level’ but not others that were age and grade appropriate.

There’s just so many gaps. I’m finding my kids have so many holes...My gifted kids have a ton of holes in the primary grades. They can add and subtract but do they know what an odd or even number is? No. Are they writing their numbers correctly? No...So all those little gaps...and a lot of them can’t cut...Reading same thing. Tons of gaps. They can read but they don’t understand what they’re reading all the time. Vocabulary, main idea, cause and effect, predictions.

She brings it up again later on when she says, “They don’t have quotation marks and commas. So that’s where their gaps are. Yes, they can read. Their reading may be up there but their writing...sometimes they don’t know how to put it into words”.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the impetus for this dissertation was my interest in what I perceived to be communication problems between and among gifted teachers and parents of gifted children. After conducting my interviews and analyzing the data I have become more aware of what constitutes communication.

When people speak it is important to listen to the words they say and understand there is always a reason or reasons behind why they feel the way they do or see things the way they do. As a teacher I feel this knowledge is crucial because as I am trying to teach my students I need to understand that they each have a specific horizon. Their horizon may cause them to misunderstand what I say or misinterpret my actions. It is not possible, nor necessary, to completely understand a person’s horizon and background. What is important is realizing it is there and that people are constantly in a state of meaning making using what they have experienced to make sense of themselves and the world around them. Communication problems arise from a lack of acknowledgment or appreciation of another’s differing world view, perspective or horizon. It is difficult to comprehend the world in a way that is different or maybe even

counter to ours. If a person is not even aware that this is possible, then she cannot work on trying to overcome it. What completing this study has done for me is to allow me to realize that what I see or believe or experience is affected by my horizon. This, in turn, affects how I will react to or experience the future. I also realize this may be completely different than the way in which my students and/or coworkers view or experience the world. I do not think a teacher should go into a classroom with twenty to thirty children without understanding this concept. It's not enough to understand that everyone has had different life experiences. It needs to be taken a step further to the understanding that all past experiences affect all future experiences and that this affects how a person views herself, the world and her place in it. As a teacher I feel this is of the utmost importance because we are not just communicating with our students, we are attempting to teach them new concepts and ideas. As Gallagher points out, this is not possible unless both the teacher and the student keep the circle of understanding open. A teacher's understanding of the subject matter depends upon her foreknowledge. A teacher must be willing to enter the student's horizon so as to present the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. "To do this the teacher must try to go beyond his own understanding of the subject matter and attempt to project how the student might begin to understand" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 138). Gadamer points out that a student's understanding "goes beyond" the teachers. It is not that the student's understanding is superior but "that the student, with his own

experience-based for-conceptions, understand differently than the teacher...a student could fall short or miss the point, and thereby understand differently. In so doing, he may find another, unintended meaning, or he may misconstrue the lesson entirely” (p.134). Teaching then becomes more than simply the giving and receiving of information. The act of teaching and learning is hermeneutic.

The give and take of the play of discussion involves the hermeneutical circular structure. The circular, dialogical structure of the teacher-student communication is maintained by the difference between the fore-structure operating in the student’s comprehension and the fore-structure which conditions the pedagogical presentation (Gallagher, 1992, p. 75).

The hermeneutic circle is maintained by the differences between the student’s horizon (which affects her understanding) and the teacher’s horizon (which affects how and what she teaches).

The culture within which a person grows up in has an affect on her horizon. Culture is part of the environment or context within which people live. The importance of culture is evident in the stories that each participant told. The different labels they carry “gifted” and “female” carry with them certain expectations and stereotypes. The participants talk about how these labels affected how they viewed themselves and the world. Although this study was originally about communication, after analyzing the data, it became apparent that gender became a much more

prevalent theme. I did not ask them questions specifically about gender and yet it kept coming up. A significant part of their horizon is their gender. Being female comes into play in their stories. The fact that they are female affects how they perceive and make sense of their experiences.

As an educator, this study has helped me understand not just what it means to teach but how important the role of gender plays in the creation of a person's horizon. I have come to realize I need to keep in mind what I am learning about myself and the subject matter while engaged in the teaching process. I also need to keep in mind the importance gender plays in the creation of a person's horizon. Understanding the hermeneutic process and that gender matters, helps me in educating not only the gifted student, but all students.

Limitations and Strengths of Hermeneutics

All research methods have both limitations and strengths. The biggest limitation of Hermeneutics is that it deals primarily with language. Language is not a thing but rather a representation of things. In the case of this dissertation my participants were using language as a way to present and represent their experiences and themselves. A hermeneutic study then is limited because it is about only that which can be described through language. As Gallagher (1992) writes, "One can only attempt to understand language from within language and with an understanding that is shaped by language" (p. 101). There is no way to step outside of

language and use something else to interpret it. Therefore it is necessary to use language to understand and describe language.

While language may limit a hermeneutic study, there are aspects of hermeneutics that are strengths. Hermeneutics isn't about a search for the truth. It's concerned with revealing or making visible that which people do everyday. Like Gallagher writes hermeneutics is a circle of meaning making that never stops. Gadamer believes that absolute truth or knowledge is impossible for humans and therefore human understanding is always incomplete and constantly being revised. We are constantly in a state of meaning making. Understanding how or why this occurs through hermeneutics contributes to practical wisdom through understanding more about what it means to be human.

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APPENDIX A
Interview Protocol

For my interviews I used a semi-structured interview format. I had questions (listed below) that I would be sure to ask at some point during the interview. However, the interview followed what I call a “wandering conversation” style in which I let the participant determine the flow and direction of the interview.. This means that I began by asking my participant a question and, then, allow her answers to direct the interview. As the interview proceeded and took a certain direction. I would follow up with clarifying questions based on what she had told me. If she did not address a question I wanted to ask, I would make sure to ask it.

Questions

- Tell me about your background.
- Who is in your family?
- Where did you grow up?
- What did your parents do for a living?
- Where did you go to school? (Did you move around at all?)
- What are some memories you have of elementary school? Middle school? High school? What about your parents?
- What do you remember about them in relationship to your education?
- What was their relationship to you and school? Siblings?
- Were you ever part of a “gifted” program?
- Do you remember if they had one at your school?
- Do you know anyone who was/anyone else who was?
- Were your siblings in it?

- When did you decide to become a teacher?
- What does your family think?
- When did you get your gifted credential?
- Why gifted?
- Which programs have you taught? Benefits of each? Limitations?
- Did you help in the creation of the curriculum? How?
- If not, who created it?
- Do you have any children of your own in gifted?
- What affect do you think you being a teacher has on your relationship
 - w/your children's teacher?
- What are your expectations?
- Tell me your thoughts on the program.
- Is there anything you especially like?
- Is there anything you would change?

If you know, how does your child feel about the program they are in?

- How long have they been in it?
- What benefits do you want your child to get from being in the program?
- Are there any disadvantages?
- What do you think the goal or end result of gifted education should be?

APPENDIX B
Individuals with Disabilities Act

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1975 “required all states receiving federal funds for education to provide individuals with disabilities between the ages of three and twenty-one a free appropriate public education” (Coker, 2004, p.200). In 1969, the document “Provisions Related to Gifted and Talented Children” was added to the Elementary and Secondary Educational Amendments by a Congressional mandate in an effort to include gifted children under the ‘special education’ label in order for this population to receive federal funds and support (Tannenbaum, 1993, p.40). As a result of these two events, schools could receive funds for gifted education programs. Of the four participants in my study three would have seen the results of these events. Sandy, the oldest, was 21 in 1975 and had already graduated from high school. According to the stories she told, she was never a part of any classes designed specifically for gifted students. The middle two, Ann and Victoria, were both 15 when IDEA went into effect. Unlike her sister whose only option was grade skipping, Victoria was able to take honors classes in high school. Ann’s younger brother, who is gifted and about two years younger than Ann, was able to participate in pull out and enrichment classes in school. The youngest, Mindy, was 10 in 1975. She was also able to participate in pull out programs in elementary and middle school. She also attended a magnet high school. which was something that was not available to Sandy, Ann or Victoria. Although IDEA offered gifted students more educational options, the day to day experiences of my

gifted participants didn't change. They still experienced feelings of loneliness and not belonging. So while IDEA was an impetus for gifted education funding it did not change the way my gifted participants viewed themselves or make being labeled gifted any easier.

APPENDIX C
Bourdieu analysis

Habitus is a “system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72).

Here you can see that *habitus* is internalized. It is a set of structures that structure how we are disposed to act in the world (is not deterministic). They are objectively regulated and regular, meaning you can count on the consistency of a person to act thus and so (but such regularity doesn't preclude making a mistake, a decision outside of the regulations to which everyone effected must respond and recalibrate the system and bring it back. None of this involves a “consensus” (which would be conscious). It is not an “obedience to rules” (which would be more or less conscious). It is “collectively orchestrated” (no one can have her own *habitus*) but there is no being who is actively acting as conductor of our behavior.

We might call *habitus* a social atmosphere but this does not do it entire justice. It's not just atmosphere: it's a disposition to act in particular ways. These dispositions are regular without regulating, are objective

without being objectively constructed by individuals, and provide the “cultural logic” (Cristian Aquino-Sterling’s term) from within which we live our lives. It is not atmosphere alone because it also manifests its concrete behaviors. While no one can “see” her own *habitus* something of the *habitus* can be read in her behaviors. Most behaviors including what can be constituted as mistakes (the breaking of proper etiquette for instance) can be understood as variations of the *habitus*. This mistake, as already stated, jars the system of dispositions and the system has a tendency to stability. Thus, as also already stated, the system finds a way of reestablishing equilibrium and reasserting the authority of the *habitus*.

As with *habitus* horizon is also not just personal. It is also the horizon of the times: the socio-economic-cultural-political conditions that provide the context within which we pursue our lives. Horizon is the external condition within which the *habitus* is structured. This external condition is comprised of personal experiences but also sociological experiences that may seem distant from our immediacy but definitely provide the structure within which the personal experience unfolds. Thus horizon is both personal and social and *habitus* is more dominantly social.