Unwrapping Giftedness: How Mothers of Elementary School-Aged Children Assessed as Intellectually Gifted Make Meaning of the Gifted Construct and Participate in Educational Decision Making

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Abstract

This qualitative study was designed to explore the experiences and perceptions of a group of mothers whose elementary school-aged children met the criteria for intellectual giftedness in an Ontario school board. Guided by Beach and Mitchell's image theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the study sought to identify (a) the meanings mothers ascribed to the concept of giftedness, (b) their experiences of the assessment, identification and placement process, and (c) the factors deemed important to educational decision making.

A postpositivist orientation and rigorous qualitative research methods were employed. Data were collected in two phases: an internet-based survey comprised of demographic items and open ended questions, followed by in-depth interviews with five purposefully selected participants. Resultant data from 45 surveys and 15 interviews were coded and organized according to the survey questions and central elements of the theoretical framework. Eight research findings revealed that the experience of mothering gifted children was complex, challenging, emotional, and at times, isolating. Many mothers struggled with the concept of giftedness and how it pertained to their children. As mothers navigated the assessment, identification and placement process, the lack of accessible, timely, and consistent information from the school board posed a considerable barrier, prompting many to reach out to other parents of gifted children for information and support. Factors deemed important to decision making about educational placement included maternal perceptions related to the various options, child specific and practical considerations, and the attainability of specialized gifted programming. Educational decision making was identified as the most difficult aspect of the maternal experience. Given that the study participants were unusually well educated and well resourced, the findings were particularly revealing. The study findings add to a small but growing body of research that furthers our understanding of image theory in real life decision making. In addition, the findings give voice to the experience of mothering children identified as gifted, thus making a valuable and original contribution to the literature.

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Chapter 1

> *When parents discover that their child is gifted, they may be delighted with the news — at first. Then they become anxious about how to meet the special needs of the child, both at home and at school. Some parents feel inadequate and overwhelmed by the information. Typical reactions include, "Am I smart enough to guide my child?" "How will my family and friends react to this?" "Will I be able to find the right educational program?" and, "Do I have enough time and money to properly stimulate my child?"*
>
> (Silverman & Shires Golon, 2008, p. 205)

For many parents, finding out that their child is "gifted" marks the beginning of a roller coaster journey. Initial feelings of parental pride (Applebaum, 1998) are often replaced with uncertainty as parents begin to unwrap the complexities of giftedness. This study sought to investigate how mothers of children assessed as intellectually gifted "make sense" of the gifted construct, and how they perceive that they make decisions related to educational placement. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experiences of a sample of mothers of young children identified as intellectually gifted. It was anticipated that the knowledge generated by this research would afford new insights into the maternal experience of the assessment, identification, and educational placement process and thus inform parental advocacy, special education policy and practice. This qualitative research project employed survey and in-depth interview techniques to explore and describe the phenomenon under examination. Participants of this study included 45 mothers whose elementary school-aged children were found to meet the criteria for intellectual giftedness in an Ontario urban school district. Of those who completed the initial survey, five mothers were purposefully selected to participate in a series of in-depth interviews, the objective of which was to examine their experiences of the assessment, identification, and placement process.

This chapter begins with an overview of the context and background that frames the study. Next, the problem statement, statement of purpose, and related research questions are presented. A discussion of the research approach, researcher's perspectives and assumptions follows. The chapter continues with a discussion of the proposed rationale and significance of this research project, and concludes with definitions of the key terminology used in the study.

Background and Context

According to Subsection 1(1) of the Ontario Education Act (1990), an exceptional student is defined as a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to require placement in a special education program. Giftedness is recognized as an intellectual exceptionality, described as:

> an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, p. A19).

Intellectually gifted students constitute the second largest group of exceptional pupils in the province of Ontario, surpassed only by those with communication exceptionalities (e.g., learning disabilities). In the 2008 – 2009 school year, 15,618 elementary school students were identified as gifted in Ontario, representing 1.2% of all students, and 16.2% of those identified with learning exceptionalities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

Existing legislation dictates that exceptional students are entitled to "appropriate special education programs and special education services without fees by parents or guardians" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990). Parents of exceptional students are expected to collaborate with their local school district in the delivery of special education programs and services for their children, as evidenced by the parental roles and responsibilities outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2001, p. A10). More specifically, parents are expected to: (a) become familiar with, and be informed about board policies and procedures in areas that affect the child; (b) participate in IPRCs (Identification, Placement, and Review Committee), parent-teacher conferences, and other relevant school activities; (c) participate in the development of the IEP (Individual Education Plan); (d) become acquainted with the school staff working with the student; (e) support the student at home; (f) work with the school principal and teachers in solving problems; and (g) be responsible for the student's school attendance. If the parent of an exceptional pupil is dissatisfied with an IPRC decision with respect to identification and/or placement, the parent has the right to appeal to a special education tribunal hearing (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990 - amended 1997; see c.31, s. 31).

What is clear from the Ministry of Education documentation is that intellectual giftedness is a recognized exceptionality, necessitating differentiated programming and services for those

identified. In addition, parents are expected to be active participants in the assessment, identification, and educational placement of their gifted children. What is less clear, however, is *how* parents navigate and experience their involvement in the special education process.

It has been suggested that when parents are told their child is gifted, they react in much the same way as parents who are told that their child has an intellectual disability (Ross, 1964). What parents react to, Ross contends, is not the label itself but confirmation that their child is "different", which then raises concerns about the child's social and emotional well being. Despite the potential similarities between the experiences of parents of gifted children and parents of children identified with other exceptionalities, significantly less is known about the parental experience of giftedness. A possible explanation for the relative lack of research in this area is that disability and giftedness are often viewed as occupying different ends of a continuum (Doyle, 2002). In this way, giftedness is perceived as an advantage rather than a deficit; hence, gifted learners are not often recognized as students with special needs (Florida State University, 2009) and by extension, the parenting of gifted children is not considered to be problematic. However, a number of authors assert that the experience of parenting a gifted child does present particular challenges (e.g. Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Freeman, 2000; Hackney, 1981; Jolly & Matthews, 2011; Keirouz, 1990; McMann & Oliver, 1988; Meckstroth, 1992; Moon, 2002; Morawska & Sanders, 2009). For example, parents of intellectually gifted children often feel an immense responsibility to help their child reach his or her potential (Hackney, 1981; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak, 2006), yet many fear that they may not possess adequate skills and resources (Silverman, 1993; Zuccone & Amerikaner, 1986).

The concerns of parents of gifted children have received some research attention. More than twenty years ago Keirouz (1990) identified six major areas of concern for parents of gifted learners: family roles and adaptations, sibling relationships, parental self-concept, neighbourhood and community issues, educational issues, and development of the child. Later research by Shichtman (1999) found that parents of high achieving gifted learners were most often concerned with issues of socialization, particularly in the elementary school years. When considering educational placement options, parents often express the concern that removing a child from their neighbourhood school to access differentiated gifted programming will result in elitism, isolation, or an inability to get along with the mainstream (Silverman & Shires Golon, 2008). Although a number of parental concerns have been identified in the literature, researchers have

noted that the challenges encountered by the parents of gifted learners are not well understood by educators (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Shichtman, 1999), administrators (Cross, 2002), or by society in general (Silverman & Shires Golon, 2008).

There is an abundance of literature to suggest that parents of gifted students play a pivotal role in nurturing academic talent (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Freeman, 2001, 2002; VanTassel-Baska & Olszewski-Kubilius, 1989), facilitating social and emotional development (e.g., Moon, 2002; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2002, 2008), and choosing appropriate academic placements (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983) . However, the vast majority of research to date relating to parental involvement has focused on its role in facilitating children's academic performance and not on the parental *experience* of involvement (Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005). This gap in the research has also been noted by Coleman, Guo, and Dabbs (2007) who wrote, "the insider perspective, the meanings of people who are gifted and talented as well as those who teach, counsel, and *parent* the gifted and talented, is urgently needed" (emphasis added, p. 61). The need for a greater understanding of the parental experience of giftedness has been well documented, particularly with regard to the conceptualization of giftedness (Jolly & Matthews, 2011; Solow, 1999), family values (Hertzog & Bennett, 2004), and educational decision making (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008; Ray, 2005).

Problem Statement

Gifted learners represent a significant proportion of the special education population. In many jurisdictions, parents of intellectually gifted learners are legally obliged to collaborate with local school districts in the delivery of special education programs and services for their children. Although the importance of parental involvement has been acknowledged in the literature, very little research has focused on how parents of gifted learners perceive and experience their involvement in the assessment, identification, and placement process, or how they make educational placement decisions for their children.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

In order to shed light on the phenomenon of mothering a young gifted child, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What meaning did the participants ascribe to the concept of giftedness?
2. How did participants describe their experience of the assessment, identification, and placement process?

3. What factors did participants perceive were important in their educational decision making?
4. What, or whom did participants perceive as facilitators in their decision making?
5. What, or whom did participants perceive as barriers in their decision making?

Research Approach

Following the approval of the University's Research Ethics Board, the researcher studied the lived experiences of 45 mothers of children assessed as gifted in an Ontario urban public school board. Participants were mothers of elementary school-aged students who had been assessed as intellectually gifted in accordance with the school board's criteria between January, 2005 and November, 2010.

Guided by postpositivist principles, the research design employed predominantly qualitative research methods to give voice to the maternal perspectives. Survey and in-depth interviewing were the primary data collection methods used. Both the survey and the interview guide were piloted with a target population prior to formal data collection. The online survey contained items to elicit demographic data as well as many open ended questions. A total of 45 surveys were completed over a six week period. Thirty five participants expressed an interest in continuing with the second phase of the study. From this pool, five mothers were approached to participate in a series of three in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2006), the purpose of which was to further explore their experiences. Interviewees were purposefully selected to maximize the diversity of experiences presented (Patton, 1990). The data obtained from 45 surveys and 15 individual interviews formed the basis for the findings of the study. Participants and their family members were assigned pseudonyms. All interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed by the researcher and reviewed by the participants to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

All surveys and interview transcripts were read and re-read. Passages that were deemed compelling or significant were marked in brackets. To illustrate emerging themes and patterns, data summary sheets were then created for each survey and interview question. Next, data were further analyzed by clustering them around the central elements of the theoretical framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding categories were developed and refined on an ongoing basis. In a subsequent phase of data analysis, interview transcripts were reduced to individual profiles.

The researcher. As the parent of two children who have been identified as intellectually gifted, I have first-hand experience of the phenomenon under study. Like many of the narratives captured in this research, my lived experience of giftedness is one imbued with a sense of responsibility and conflicting emotions. A synopsis of my experience follows below.

When my eldest daughter's senior Kindergarten teacher recommended that she be assessed for giftedness I was flattered that an educator with more than thirty-five years of experience perceived (as I did) that she was a bright student. Motivated mostly by curiosity, I decided to sign the consent form for a school-based assessment, which cautioned parents that only 4 in every 1000 students were likely to meet the board's criteria for profound giftedness. "So she's probably *not* gifted", I thought, yet rationalized that the assessment might provide additional insight into her learning needs. Little did I know that what I had viewed as an innocuous test would serve to change the course of my parenting experience.

Several months later my daughter arrived home from school with the assessment results, consisting of three sets of raw scores and percentiles. With only abstract documentation to make sense of the figures (and no mention of the word "gifted") I turned to the internet to decipher the results. The information I found seemed to suggest that my daughter's test scores were consistent with the school board's criteria for intellectual giftedness. A phone call to the learning support teacher later confirmed that she was indeed eligible for congregated gifted programming, provided we were willing to go through a formal identification process. At that time I was also advised that accepting a spot in the congregated gifted program would mean leaving her neighbourhood school and the French immersion program. Although my husband and I considered these to be significant concessions, we were keen on the prospect of a more challenging learning environment. After visiting a gifted class with our daughter we decided to accept an offer of placement in a congregated class at a nearby school for Grade 1. The decision making experience was an emotional one as I felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility to "do the right thing", whatever that meant. Sharing the placement decision with others also proved to be challenging as I had not anticipated the passive-aggressive responses I would receive from my peer group.

Two years later, my parental journey took some unexpected turns when it became apparent that our younger daughter — then in a Grade 1 French immersion program — was experiencing some academic difficulties. More specifically, her reading skills were below grade

level and she often inverted certain sounds when speaking. Homework had become a nightly battle of wills due to her frustration levels. Given my teaching background, I suspected a learning disability and believed that she should be assessed as soon as possible. To avoid any direct comparisons to her elder sister I arranged for an assessment by a private psychologist at our own expense. As suspected, the psychologist's report confirmed a central auditory processing disorder. To my surprise, the results also indicated that she met the school board's criteria for profound giftedness (as the psychologist delivered the news, I remember feeling relieved that the gifted label — for better or worse — would serve to unite rather than divide my daughters). Acting on the psychologist's advice we decided to transfer her to the regular English program at her sister's school where she would receive remedial reading assistance. Having the girls at the same school was a welcome bonus, even though the board's transportation policy meant that only one of them qualified for bussing. When our younger daughter was offered a placement in a congregated gifted class at the same school for Grade 3, we decided to give it a try as her reading skills had improved markedly and we were pleased with our elder daughter's experience of the program.

In retrospect I feel that my daughters (now aged 15 and 12) have benefited immensely from their respective educational trajectories. However, *my* experience of their gifted identification and educational placement has been less positive. For example, as an active and contributing member of my school and neighbourhood communities, I was disappointed that I was unable to find support in those environments, particularly when my daughters were first identified. I did not find school board staff to be particularly helpful and many parents in the neighbourhood were decidedly unsympathetic. Like any parent, I only wanted what was best for my children; yet I was made to feel like an overbearing stage mother by some for even considering a gifted placement. After a couple of uncomfortable exchanges on the school playground, I learned to say as little as possible about my daughters' "giftedness".

It was this sense of isolation that prompted me to establish an informal coffee group for parents of gifted children (or "PoGs") in 2005. In speaking with other mothers, I realized that my experience was far from unique. Many mothers in the group divulged that they too had struggled with the concept of giftedness, and what, if anything, to "do" about it. Moreover, most mothers reported that they had also experienced resistance from educators, friends, and family members when discussing issues pertaining to their children's giftedness. My desire to explore

these tensions — and to give voice to this "underground" maternal experience — provided the impetus for this research project.

Given my varied background as a parent of two gifted learners, facilitator of a networking group for parents of gifted children, and former classroom teacher, I feel uniquely positioned to explore the experiences of mothers of children assessed as intellectually gifted. However, it is acknowledged that while affording many valuable insights, my positioning might also be perceived as a potential liability. Hence, a number of strategies were employed to strengthen the credibility of the research including the use of multiple data sources, member checks of interview transcripts, an independent audit of the data by a competent peer, and the identification of researcher assumptions as outlined below.

Assumptions. Four primary assumptions were made based on the researcher's experience and background. First, it was assumed that mothers would take on the lion's share of tasks and responsibilities associated with their children's schooling. This assumption was based on the researcher's personal experience (the vast majority of parents in the researcher's parent network are mothers), and research to support this notion (e.g., David, 1993; Duquette, Orders, Fullarton, & Robertson-Grewal, 2011; Jolly & Matthews, 2011; Lareau, 2002). Second, the concept of giftedness was viewed as a social construct rather than an objective, measurable "reality" (Borland, 2005). As such, it was presumed that participants would ascribe multiple meanings to the concept of giftedness, shaped in part by their personal experience and knowledge of giftedness (Solow, 1999), family values and relationships (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007) and cultural influences (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1986; Ngara & Porath, 2004; Philipson & McCann, 2006). A third assumption was that current societal notions, media representations, and prevalent myths and stereotypes about giftedness would impact the maternal experience, as suggested by Keirouz (1990) and Winner (1996). Finally, it was assumed that the identification of maternal values would be central to understanding mothers' decision making with regard to the assessment, identification, and placement of their gifted children. This presumption was grounded in the theoretical work of Lee Roy Beach (1990; Beach & Mitchell, 1990), as well as more recent research in the field of gifted education specific to parenting (e.g., Hertzog & Bennett, 2004; Kulieke & Olszewski-Kubilius, 1989; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008; Ray, 2005).

Rationale and Significance of Study

The rationale for this study stems from the researcher's desire to enable mothers of gifted children to share their experiences, and to give voice to a phenomenon that to date has remained largely unexamined.

An increased understanding of the maternal experience of giftedness may extend our theoretical knowledge in a number of ways. In addition to making a unique contribution to the literature, findings of this research will provide insight into: (a) how mothers conceptualize giftedness; and (b) how maternal values influence educational placement decisions. Findings of this study have the potential to be of benefit to parents of gifted learners, providing valuable insight into the types of decisions they may encounter as their children transition through the school system. The identification of potential facilitators and barriers may be used to improve parental education and advocacy efforts. Educators and administrators may also benefit from an enhanced understanding of the maternal experience. For example, findings of this research could be used to identify needs, gaps, and opportunities in professional development for educators with regard to facilitating more effective partnerships with parents of gifted learners. As special education becomes increasingly decentralized through funding cutbacks and inclusive practice, it is likely that many more classroom teachers will come into contact with parents of gifted learners, thereby increasing the relevance and utility of the knowledge generated by this research.

Definitions of Key Terminology Used

Assessment - For the purposes of this study, assessment refers to the process used to determine if a student may be identified as intellectually gifted. Most school boards in Ontario continue to rely heavily on ability and intelligence testing in the identification of gifted learners. Educational assessments may be conducted in-school via a Learning Support Teacher, school board psychologist, or privately through a clinical psychologist. Other sources of information that may be considered in the assessment process include student records (e.g. OSR), student profiles or checklists (usually completed by teachers and/or parents), recent samples of student work, and/or interview data.

Exceptionality – The province of Ontario recognizes five categories of learning exceptionalities (Behaviour, Communication, Intellectual, Physical and Multiple). These categories are used to identify students who may benefit from special education programming. Identification criteria for each category are determined by individual school boards.

Identification – Parents may request a formal identification through an IPRC (Identification, Placement and Review Committee). As per Ministry of Education regulation 191/98 of the Education Act (1990) all school boards/districts are required to establish one or more IPRC. Each committee is to be comprised of at least three persons, one of whom must be a principal or supervisory officer of the board. The IPRC meets and determines if a student should be identified as an exceptional pupil, and if so, what placement options should be considered. Regulation 181/98 entitles parents and pupils 16 years of age or older to be present at and participate in all committee discussions about the student and to be present when the committee's identification and placement decision is made.

In the context of the current study, identification represents the decision of parents to pursue a formal identification of intellectual giftedness for their child(ren), thereby facilitating differentiated programming opportunities.

Individual Education Plan (IEP) – Once a student has been identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC), principals are required to ensure that an Individual Education Plan is developed within 30 school days.

Intellectual giftedness – The Ontario Ministry of Education defines *intellectual giftedness* as*:* "an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated" (2001; p. A19).

As the criteria used to identify gifted learners vary from school board to school board, the researcher relied on the operational definitions of giftedness and profound giftedness employed by the local public school board to guide participant selection.

- *Gifted*: a score at or above the 98th percentile on the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (CCAT) or the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC).
- *Profoundly gifted*: scores at or above the 99th percentile on 2 of the 3 CCAT subscales, and at least 90th percentile for the third subscale, or a 99.6th percentile score or above on the WISC.

Placement - The IPRC may consider a range of placement options for exceptional students depending on the school board's resources/special education services. These options may include: regular class with indirect support, regular class with resource assistance, regular class with withdrawal assistance, special education class with partial integration, or special education class full time.

Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the experiences of a group of mothers whose elementary school-aged children were found to meet the criteria for intellectual giftedness in an Ontario urban public school board. Specifically, the researcher sought to investigate how mothers of children assessed as gifted made sense of the gifted construct, how they experienced the assessment and identification process, and how they perceived that they made decisions with regard to educational placement.

To carry out this study it was necessary to engage in a critical review of the current literature relating to the phenomenon of parenting gifted children. This review was ongoing throughout the data collection, data analysis, and data synthesis phases. Three major areas of literature were critically examined: 1) conceptions of giftedness; both in general, and specific to parents of gifted learners, 2) parental experience of child giftedness, and 3) parental decision making relating to educational placement. Multiple sources were utilized to conduct this focused literature review including peer reviewed journals, periodicals, dissertations, books, technical reports, legislation, and (to a lesser extent) popular media. These sources were accessed primarily through University-based digital databases including Scholar's Portal, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), RACER, and ProQuest Digital Dissertations. Internet-based resources such as Google Scholar were also employed. Although the search focused primarily on materials published within the last fifteen years, a delimiting time frame was not strictly enforced. To preclude research on the basis of publication date seemed ill advised given the dearth of literature in the area of parenting gifted learners (Dai, Swanson, & Cheng, 2011; Jolly & Matthews, 2011; Morawska & Sanders, 2009). Moreover, it was believed that a review of the historical development of the concept of giftedness would provide valuable context for the study. Given the setting of the study, the literature review focused primarily on North American sources.

This chapter is divided into three parts. Part one will include a brief review of the historical development of the concept of giftedness. The objective of part one is to illustrate that the concept of giftedness has been associated with multiple meanings and interpretations since its inception in the late 1800s. It will also establish that the construct of giftedness has been the

subject of much criticism, even within the field of gifted education. In addition to these scholarly viewpoints, the limited research relating to parental perceptions of giftedness will be examined. In part two, literature pertaining to the experience of parenting gifted children will be explored with a focus on parental concerns, parental involvement, and educational decision making. In the third and final part, the theoretical framework used to guide the study will be presented and discussed. The purpose of the subsequent literature review is threefold: 1) to provide background and context for the research project; 2) to demonstrate that research relating to the experience of giftedness from the parental perspective is thin; and 3) to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the maternal experience of child giftedness.

Conceptions of Giftedness

Historical development. The term "gifted" was first used by Francis Galton in 1860 (1869/1892/1962). Galton proposed that adults who demonstrated exceptional talent in a particular area were "gifted", and that children could inherit the potential to become gifted adults. In the early 1900s, giftedness became synonymous with very high intelligence with the development of standardized IQ tests (e.g., Binet & Simon, 1916/1980; Terman, 1925). According to Lewis Terman's *Genetic Studies of Genius* (1925), those who scored in the top 1% (i.e., IQ of 135 or higher) were considered gifted. Terman is perhaps best known for his longitudinal study of over 1500 gifted children (or "Termites") which began in 1921 at Stanford University[1]. His initial study focused on the children's educational progress, special abilities, interests, play, personality, and family traits (Terman & Baldwin, 1926). Early data indicated that gifted children were usually social and well adjusted, and in comparison to their typically developing peers, were physically taller and did better in school. As he tracked the study participants through adulthood Terman reported that IQ alone was not necessarily a predictor of success. Terman's research did much to challenge the stereotypes often associated with giftedness, and offered one of the first glimpses into the families of gifted children.

At about the same time, Leta Stetter Hollingworth (1942) conducted a study of exceptionally gifted youngsters with IQs of 180 or higher. Like Galton and Terman, Hollingworth believed that IQ was inheritable; yet she also believed that a nurturing home and stimulating educational environment were crucial to the development of gifted potential,

[1] The *Terman Study of the Gifted* continues to this day, and is the oldest and longest running longitudinal study in the world.

particularly for girls (1926). Hollingworth's conception of giftedness was novel for the time period as it challenged the notion of giftedness as a static, innate trait.

Quantitative, psychometric approaches to giftedness continued to dominate the literature for much of the 20th century as psychologists strived to refine their testing instruments. By the 1960s, psychometric instruments were also being developed to measure constructs other than intelligence such as creativity (Guilford, 1967) and musical ability (Seashore, 1960).

Broader conceptualizations of intelligence and giftedness continued to emerge in the late 1970s, beginning with Joseph Renzulli's (1978) *Three Ringed Conceptualization of Giftedness*. Renzulli's theory proposed that gifted behaviour results from the interaction of three relatively well-defined factors: above average intelligence, task commitment, and creativity. The major contribution of Renzulli's model is that it was one of the first conceptualizations to effectively challenge traditional trait-based views of giftedness. Although some have questioned the research base used to identify the three clusters (Jarrell & Borland, 1990), Renzulli's three-ring conception has been touted as highly influential, and "perhaps the most well-known theory of giftedness" (Plucker & Barab, 2005).

Mainstream conceptualizations of intelligence were further expanded by Howard Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, or MI (1983). Gardner initially proposed that individuals are capable of at least seven independent, domain specific forms of intelligence: *linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal,* and *intrapersonal* (he later added *naturalistic*). According to MI theory, each individual possesses a unique cognitive profile based on of the relative strengths and interrelationships of the various intelligences. Gardner and his colleague Joseph Walters (1986) cautioned that there are certain limitations to MI theory as that it "clearly lacks axioms, postulates, a set of testable hypotheses, and other paraphernalia of a theory in the hard sciences" (p. 32) and indeed it has been criticized for a lack of empirical support (e.g., Waterhouse, 2006). Another potential drawback of MI theory according to Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) is that it is often translated to mean that everyone is gifted in at least one of the multiple intelligences, and that parental desire to nurture these perceived gifts may be intensified as a result. These perceived shortcomings, however, have not precluded MI theory from being embraced, particularly in the educational domain (Smith, 2008).

In yet another multidimensional conceptualization, the *Triarchic Theory of Intellectual Giftedness*, Robert Sternberg (1984) emphasized three kinds of intelligence (*componential,*

experiential and *contextual*) as the foundations of giftedness. Those who exhibit componential (or analytic) giftedness, Sternberg argues, are analytical thinkers who tend to do well on standardized intelligence tests. Experiential (or creative) intelligence refers to an individual's capacity to deal with novel tasks and situations, and to "automatize" their responses. Contextual (or practical) intelligence is at the heart of Sternberg's theory, and refers to a person's ability to adapt, shape, and select behaviours to function effectively in their environment. Sternberg asserts that these adapting, shaping and selecting behaviours must be purposeful and relevant to one's life in order to be deemed intelligent. Hence, environmental and cultural specificities will influence what is considered intelligent and who is thought to be "gifted".

Contemporary conceptualizations. The pioneering works of Renzulli, Gardner, and Sternberg inspired a new generation of researchers who continue to expand our notions of intelligence and giftedness. The proliferation of contemporary conceptualizations motivated Sternberg and his colleague Janet Davidson to produce a second edition of their landmark edited volume, *Conceptions of Giftedness,* in 2005. In justifying the need for an updated version of the book, the authors wrote, "The field has changed, as have some of the major contributors to it. We therefore believe that the time is ripe for this second edition . . . which reflects the current state of the field" (p. xvii).

Many of the emerging conceptualizations of giftedness bear some resemblance to the concepts proposed by Renzulli, Gardner, and Sternberg. For instance, Winner's (1996) *rage to master* is reminiscent of Renzulli's concept of task commitment. Gagné's (2005) *Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent* (DMGT) — which delineated the differences between talent and intelligence — were built on the ideas of Howard Gardner. Other conceptualizations, such as Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence (or EI) model and Porath's (2000) notion of social giftedness[2] serve to further broaden the multi-faceted perspectives of intelligence and competencies popularized by Gardner and Sternberg.

Other conceptualizations of giftedness have emerged in response to perceived inadequacies of previous models, particularly with regard to the importance of the learning environment in the development of gifted potential (i.e., Barab & Plucker, 2002; Borland, 2005). For example, Gagné's (2005) DMGT theory proposed that the development of natural abilities (gifts) into expert skills (talents) is dependent on the influence and interaction of environmental

[2] Defined as an unusual ability to make inferences about others' thoughts, emotions, intentions, and points of view.

catalysts, intrapersonal catalysts, learning/practice, and chance. Similarly, the complex correlations between biology, environment, and behaviour were explored by Ceci's (1990) bio-ecological model of intelligence and Simonton's (2005) emergenic-epigenetic model. Dai and Renzulli's (2008) *Contextual, Emergent, and Dynamic Model* (CED) attempts to situate giftedness in its "functional context" by suggesting that those who demonstrate gifted behaviour form dynamic, functional relations with a specific environment, and that unique *temporal trajectories* may prompt emergent properties that feed into further development. In other words, gifted behaviour is the result of the dynamic interplay of a number of forces (e.g., genetic, environmental) coupled with developmental factors over time. Dai and Renzulli identified three dynamic facets — selective affinity, maximal grip, and being at the edge of chaos — thought to essential to the making of gifted behaviour, or *exceptional competence*. The CED model is one of a growing number of conceptualizations of intelligence and giftedness rooted in complexity thinking (e.g., Davis & Sumara, 2006), which purports that humans are dynamic, open living systems, capable of self-organization and self-regulation in response to environmental demands.

In addition to environmental factors, increasing research attention has been paid to the role of cultural context in the conceptualization of intelligence and giftedness (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004). As Plucker and Barab (2005) proposed, "all definitions of giftedness imply the necessity of social context because such a context is requisite for determining whether (and how) a person, action, or product will be defined or judged as gifted" (p. 202). In the second edition of *Conceptions of Giftedness*, Joan Freeman (2005) explored how cultural context impacts who is identified as gifted. Additionally, Sally Reis (2005) — a frequent collaborator of Joseph Renzulli's — discussed giftedness from a feminist viewpoint, arguing that complex societal structures often prevent talented girls and women from achieving their creative productive potentials. In more recent research, Robert Sternberg linked the cultural dimensions of giftedness to his notion of successful intelligence, defined as "what is needed for success in life, according to one's own definition of success, within one's own sociocultural context" (2007, p. 148). Further evidence of the burgeoning interest in the socio-cultural aspects of giftedness is the 2006 publication of Phillipson and McCann's book, *Conceptions of Giftedness: Sociocultural Perspectives*, which depicts conceptualizations of giftedness as perceived by 14 diverse cultural groups.

Challenges to the concept. The concept of giftedness has not gone unchallenged. For example, critical theorists maintain that the gifted construct has been created and utilized by those "in power" to perpetuate differentiated learning opportunities for certain groups; most notably those from white, middle-class backgrounds (Brantlinger, 2003, 2004; Oakes, 2005; Sapon-Shevin, 1993, 1994). This viewpoint has been fortified by research evidence to suggest that gifted testing and identification practices discriminate against certain sub-populations. Among the groups found to be proportionately under-identified as intellectually gifted are girls (Stormont, Stebbins, & Holliday, 2001), students of colour (E. W. Gordon & Bridglall, 2005; Morris, 2002), learners from cultural and/or linguistic minorities (Callahan, 2005; Ford, 2002, 2004; V. Gordon & Nocon, 2008; Mazie, 2009; Milner & Ford, 2007), students with multiple exceptionalities (Webb, Amend, Webb, & Goerrs, 2005), and those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Ambrose, 2002; Callahan, 2005).

According to Leslie Margolin (1993), another issue related to the identification of giftedness is that in identifying some students as gifted, other students are labelled "non-gifted" by default. Gallagher (1994), among others (e.g., Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Davidson, Davidson, & Vanderkam, 2004) have noted that many Americans are uncomfortable discussing individual differences in intelligence or academic ability. McCoach and Siegel (2007) suggest that this discomfort is linked to the lingering tension between excellence and equity found in US educational system. Offering a different point of view, Mazie (2009) proposed that differences associated with native endowments such as race, beauty, parentage or *intelligence* are often viewed as unfair, and that "the only kind of inequalities that are consistent with a just society are those stemming from one's own efforts and exertions" (p. 9). Mazie draws on luck egalitarian theory to suggest that a way to equalize perceived inequities is for political societies to attempt to nullify or minimize the effects of luck on individuals' life prospects. From this perspective, the identification of gifted learners (and the provision of specialized programming) would be counterintuitive to restoring the balance, and would therefore be discouraged.

Some have questioned the utility of the term "gifted". Charges of elitism, exclusion, and the use of the term gifted for what he calls "nefarious purposes" led education scholar James Borland (2005) to wonder whether the term giftedness has outlived its useful purpose, and if perhaps the best conceptualization of giftedness is no conceptualization at all. Borland does not

deny the existence of high ability students, however he does propose that the concept of the gifted child in American education "is a social construct of questionable validity." Other scholars in the field have raised similar concerns. For example, after analyzing four analytic levels of the field (practice, research, theory, and philosophy), Ambrose, VanTassel-Baska, Coleman, and Cross (2010) concluded that from a theoretical standpoint, *gifted* and *talented* "are nebulous concepts" (p. 459). The authors maintain that while there has been an explosion of different conceptualizations in the field in recent years, "virtually none of the popular conceptions of giftedness have received enough [research] attention to fully substantiate them" (p. 466). Moreover, Ambrose et al. proposed that this situation has lead to fragmentation within the field as to what constitutes giftedness and how we might further our understanding of it. Indeed, the questions of *who are the gifted?* and *how do we reliably identify them?* continue to permeate the research literature (Konstantopoulos, Modi, & Hedges, 2001; Mazie, 2009).

Parental conceptions of giftedness. Feldman and Goldsmith (1990) stated that it in order for parents to effectively nurture giftedness they must "initially recognize that the child demonstrates unusual ability and decide that this ability merits further development" (p. 7). This would infer that parents have some knowledge or understanding of what giftedness *is*, as well as an awareness of what might constitute an "unusual ability"; however, very little research exists with regard to how parents of gifted children think about or make meaning of the concept of giftedness.

A singular doctoral research was found that explored parental conceptions of giftedness. In this study, Razel Solow (1999) conducted in-depth case studies with four parents of children identified as gifted by their local school system with a view to exploring and describing parental conceptions of giftedness. Each family had two to three children ranging in age from 3 to 19 years of age. The parents, all of whom lived in Virginia, were purposefully selected to reflect a range of ethnic, geographical, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Interestingly, all parents stated that they had not consciously or coherently thought about their conceptions of giftedness prior to the interviews, prompting Solow to suggest that parental conceptualization is not necessarily a deliberate process. None of the parents felt that giftedness was synonymous with intelligence, nor did they believe that giftedness could be measured by an IQ test. Instead, parents thought of giftedness as a "whole concept" that described the "whole child". Rather than focusing exclusively on their children's intellectual prowess, parents viewed their children's

giftedness in social, emotional, humanistic, moral, and spiritual terms. For these parents, giftedness was "more than the sum of its parts". A similar finding was reported by Hertzog and Bennett (2004), who found that a group of parents of gifted learners in the Midwestern US "perceived and addressed their gifted [children's] needs holistically."

Solow (1999) proposed that parents' conceptions of giftedness were shaped by five categories of influence: parents' value systems, their roles as parents, their involvement with the school system, their families of origin, and if applicable, their understanding of their own giftedness. According to Solow, understanding how parents conceptualize giftedness is important as parents' underlying thinking influences how they perceive giftedness in their children.

Three things are clear from the review of literature thus far: (a) giftedness is a dynamic and evolving concept; (b), the notion of giftedness is intertwined with a number of societal tensions; and (c) research pertaining to the ways in which parents conceptualize giftedness is extremely thin. In the subsequent section (part two), research relating to the parental *experience* of child giftedness will be compared and contrasted.

Parental Experience of Child Giftedness

Research interest in the families of gifted children can be traced back to the early works of Galton (1869/1892/1962), Terman (1926), and Hollingworth (1926). Yet despite well over a century of formal study, Jolly and Matthews (2011) maintain that "surprisingly little progress" has been made in the study of parents of gifted children. Jolly and Matthews arrived at this conclusion after reviewing and synthesizing 54 empirically-based journal articles and dissertations relating to the parenting of gifted children published between 1983 and 2009. Published research was sparse, yielding approximately 2 articles per year. The manuscripts were grouped into three broad thematic areas: parent involvement/interaction, parent perceptions of giftedness and ability, and parent satisfaction with gifted programming. Interestingly, these three themes were generally aligned with the research agenda suggested by Colangelo and Dettman (1983) in an earlier review of research on parents and families of gifted children.

Although there have been numerous calls for research in this area, Jolly and Matthews maintain that researchers have given only cursory treatment to the topic and that substantial gaps remain in "what we know about the parents of gifted children and their parenting practices" (p. 27). This sentiment has been echoed by a number of authors in recent years including Pomerantz

et al. (2005), Coleman, Guo, and Dabbs (2007), Morawska and Sanders (2009), Hertzog and Bennett (2004), Olszewski-Kubilius (2008), and Ray (2005). Specific weaknesses identified by Jolly and Matthews in what they describe as the "inconsistent" and "sporadic" research base include a lack of theory driven research, inadequate description of the criteria used to determine who is considered gifted, and small sample sizes. A number of topics are suggested for future research including: parents' understanding of giftedness; attitudes, values and expectations of families of underserved gifted children; parent/school relationships; parents of gifted underachievers, and how parents support and influence their children at home. It is believed that the findings of the current study will further our understanding of the parental experience in several of these identified areas.

Parental concerns: An overview. An aspect of the parental experience that has received consistent research attention relates to the concerns expressed by parents of gifted children. In an often cited study, Hackney (1981) asked parents to share their "deep concerns" about having a gifted child in the family. Five main areas of parental concern were identified: altered normal family roles, altered parental self-image, adaptations made in the family, issues created between the family and the neighbourhood or community, and issues created between the family and the school. Almost a decade later Keirouz (1990) conducted a similar review of the (albeit limited) research on the concerns of parents of gifted children and concluded that ". . . parents of gifted children face a myriad problems which are different from those faced by parents of nongifted children" (p. 56). Keirouz identified six categories of parental concern: family roles and adaptations, sibling relationships, parental self-concept, neighbourhood and community issues, educational issues, and development of the child. Many of these concerns were similar to those identified by Hackney, and also by Colangelo and Dettman (1983) in an earlier literature review.

A common concern noted by Keirouz (1990) and Hackney (1981) was that the identification of giftedness in one or more children could alter relations within the family. The study of potential labeling effects on sibling relationships was a popular topic of research in the 1980s and 90s (Colangelo & Brower, 1987; Cornell, 1983, 1984, 1989; Grenier, 1985; Tuttle & Cornell, 1993). Dewey Cornell (1984) reported that first born children were most likely to be identified as gifted by the school and placed in specialized programming. He concluded that second born children who were also recognized as gifted were better adjusted than second born children who were not identified as gifted. In contrast to these findings, Chamrad, Robinson,

and Janos' (1995) study of 366 family triads found that having a gifted sibling is likely to lead to positive consequences as viewed by the gifted child, sibling, and mother (p.135).

Giftedness, as Kearney (1992) pointed out, is a "family affair"; hence, discrepancies in the gifted child's development can affect siblings, parents, and extended family members as well as the gifted child. For example, if alternative placement options are pursued for a gifted child, these placements may "have repercussions that can reverberate throughout the family system and across generations" (Kearney, p. 9). Strained relationships and conflict in families with gifted children have also been noted in the research (Albert, 1980; Moon, Feldhusen, & Dillon, 1994). Familial tensions may be intensified if parents do not clearly communicate their parenting approaches and expectations with each other (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983) or the gifted child is thought to be underachieving (Rimm, 1995). Parents who have a mixture of gifted and typically developing children at home may be concerned about how to apportion their time and attention to meet each child's needs (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983).

In addition to family-related concerns, parents may worry about their gifted child's socio-emotional development, particularly if it is out of synch with their intellectual development (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983). For example, in Shichtman's (1999) qualitative case study of 10 middle-class families of exceptionally gifted[3] middle school and high school students, she found that parents were most concerned about the socialization of their young gifted children. This concern was prompted by an awareness that their children did not seem to follow the socialization pattern of most other children (i.e., they had few friends, often because they were unable to find peers with similar interests and/or abilities). Eight of the ten parents in Shichtman's study were able to locate programs and activities outside of the school system that they perceived would increase the likelihood that their children would form successful friendships. Fortunately, parents' socialization concerns tended to decrease as their sons and daughters reached high school age and were more able to find intellectual peers.

Research indicates that parents of gifted learners often question their ability to effectively parent a gifted child, and may struggle with their own self-concept as they adapt to their new role (Hackney, 1981; Keirouz, 1990; Silverman & Shires Golon, 2008). Psychologists Silverman and Shires Golon (2008) observed that parents of newly identified children often question their

[3] As determined by their acceptance into the Johns Hopkins University Talent Search program, meaning that their SAT test scores placed them in the top half of one percent in comparison to their age peers.

ability to adequately support their child's needs. Similar concerns have been reported by other researchers, including Strom, Strom, Strom & Collinsworth (1994) who found that parents of gifted learners often feel a responsibility to provide adequate and appropriate stimulation to help their child to reach his or her potential, yet may not know how to achieve this goal. Indeed, parents' inability to secure educational placements and/or community-based programming perceived to be consistent with their gifted child's needs has been identified as a source of concern (Keirouz, 1990; Schilling, Sparfeldt, & Rost, 2006).

While a number of parental concerns have been identified and discussed in the literature, researchers have noted that how parents of gifted learners experience and deal with these concerns is not well understood by educators (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Shichtman, 1999), administrators (Cross, 2002), or by society in general (Silverman & Shires Golon, 2008).

Parental Involvement

In this section, the concept of parental involvement is explored; first in general terms, and then in relation to the parents of gifted learners. Literature pertaining to educational decision making is also summarized.

The concept of parental involvement has been variously defined in the literature (Fan & Chen, 2001). Grolnick and Slowiaczek's (1994) definition characterizes parent involvement as ". . . the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within a given domain" (p. 238). The authors contend that parents' values, time commitments, and availability of resources will shape their involvement in a variety of domains including school, social activities, and athletics. Alternatively, Epstein's (1995, 2001) framework of parental involvement includes six dimensions: parenting; communicating; volunteering; learning at home; collaborating with the community; and decision making.

Several authors have reported a positive correlation between parent involvement and student achievement (e.g., Epstein, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, & Walker, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Jeynes, 2007; Pomerantz, et al., 2005). Fan and Chen's (2001) meta-analysis of quantitative inquiry in the area of parental involvement, however, revealed "considerable inconsistencies" in the research findings with regard to the link between parental involvement and educational outcomes. Additionally, Pomerantz, Moorman & Litwack (2007) have suggested that it is not the quantity, but the quality of the parental involvement that is of import. The authors propose that the potential benefits of parental involvement to a child's

academic success may depend on *how* and *why* parents are involved in their children's education, and that further research is necessary to identify the factors that could maximize the benefits of parental involvement.

In the context of giftedness, parents and families of gifted learners have been described as "the most critical component in the translation of talent, ability and promise into achievement" (Kulieke, Olszewski, & Buescher, 1987, p. 6). A number of authors have explored the role of parents of gifted learners in the development of academic potential (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1996; Freeman, 2001, 2002; Olszewski-Kubilius & Lee, 2004; VanTassel-Baska & Olszewski-Kubilius, 1989) and social and emotional growth (Moon, 2002; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2002, 2008). Parents may support their gifted children in a number of ways, such as shaping the home environment, modeling and setting high standards and expectations for achievement, volunteering in the school setting, providing enrichment opportunities, engaging in advocacy, and academic decision making. Kulieke & Olszewski-Kubilius (1989) contend that how parents enact their involvement is largely dependent on the values they espouse. Values found to be important to parents of gifted learners included academic achievement, working hard, success, and being active and persistent. The authors proposed that parents of gifted learners strive to inculcate these values in their children by directing them along certain paths and into particular domains and disciplines (p. 55).

To date, the vast majority of research relating to parental involvement has focused on its impact on the academic performance of the gifted child rather than on parents' *experience* of their involvement (Pomerantz, et al., 2005). Hence, little is known about what motivates parents of gifted children to be involved in their development, or how this involvement affects parents on a personal level. In their recent review of the state of qualitative research in the field of gifted education, Coleman, Guo, and Dabbs (2007) highlighted the "urgent need" for further research into the insider perspectives of the parents of gifted and talented children.

Educational decision making. As educational decision making is a central focus of the study, the next section will consider parental decision making as a discrete form of parental involvement. For most parents of gifted children, the first step in the gifted journey begins with the decision to have a child assessed. Once a child has been assessed as gifted, parents may face additional decisions with regard to formal identification and educational placement depending on the availability of specialized gifted programming in their local school district (Colangelo &

Dettmann, 1983). Research suggests that educational decision making presents several potential challenges for parents of gifted learners. For example, Keirouz (1990) noted that the number of programming and curriculum options available to gifted students may be overwhelming to parents. Some parents may fear that removing a child from their neighbourhood school will be perceived as elitist (Silverman & Shires Golon, 2008). Decisions about educational placement may be further complicated when the social and emotional needs of the gifted child are factored into the decision making process (Dangel & Walker, 1991). Silverman and Shires Golon (2008) assert that decision making may be especially difficult for parents of gifted children, who are often highly intelligent themselves, and thus likely to consider multiple variables, connections, and potential outcomes. The authors add that little has been written about how parents of gifted students navigate the "gray areas" when making educational decisions for their gifted children.

One exception is the doctoral work of Ray (2005), who sought to identify factors that influenced parental decision making with regard to child participation in the Duke University Talent Identification Program, or TIP. Ray found that those parents who opted to have their children participate in the middle-school talent search made the decision following personal conversations with their child, individuals with specific knowledge of the talent search, or both. Parents who elected *not* to have their children participate in TIP based their decision on their personal beliefs about gifted children, or on more practical considerations (e.g., time, cost, travel, perceived lack of benefit). Ray's study findings point to the importance of parental values and conceptualizations of giftedness in educational decision making. Solow's (1999) doctoral study of parental conceptualizations of giftedness (described on page 18) also made the link between parental perceptions of giftedness and decision making, stating that these perceptions shape parents' behaviour toward, and decision making about, their gifted children.

The importance of parental perceptions on decision making was also demonstrated by Whitton (2005) in her study of 20 Australian mothers who thought of their pre-school children as gifted. The study examined the factors that were important to mothers in choosing their child's first school placement. Whitton found that how mothers perceived their children's giftedness, as well as their learning and social needs was critical in the selection of an appropriate school environment. When mothers perceived — as they often did — that the local school would not be able meet their child's advanced educational needs, they were motivated to investigate other educational options. To this end, a number of mothers visited a range of schools and interviewed

staff to determine each school's policy on instructing gifted children. The placement option thought most likely to differentiate the curriculum for gifted learners was generally preferred. What is interesting about Whitton's research is that mothers were not required to provide proof of their child's giftedness to participate; rather the determination of the child's giftedness was based on parent and teacher *perceptions* of giftedness. In this study, it appeared that perceptions of giftedness were enough to prompt maternal involvement with regard to academic placement.

To summarize, research in the area of educational decision making as it applies to gifted students and their parents is decidedly thin. Solow (1999) and Ray (2005) have emphasized the need for continued research in the area of parental perceptions, values, and educational decision making. As Solow writes, "with better understanding of the ways in which parents' thinking affects decision making for their gifted children, educators and counsellors will be better equipped to inform and support them" (1999, p. 374).

Educational decision making: A middle class phenomenon? There is much theoretical and research literature to suggest that school choice is a privilege exercised by middle class parents (e.g., Lucey & Reay, 2002; Musset, 2012; Power, 2004), and mothers in particular (Andre-Bechely, 2005; Brantlinger & Majd-Jabbari, 1998). Several authors have explored the ways in which middle class parents draw on their cultural, social, emotional, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) to maximize educational opportunities of their children (Brantlinger, 2003; Brantlinger, Majd-Jabbari, & Guskin, 1996; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Reay, 2000). For example, Brantlinger (2004) proposed that middle class parents claim to value progressive forms of inclusive, equitable schooling, yet still push for advantaged and segregated school arrangements for their children. Similarly, Lareau and Horvat (1999) found that one of the ways parents seek to provide advantages for their children is by facilitating their participation in specialized gifted programs or enrolling them in schools with high academic tracks. In so doing, middle class parents ensure that their children are well positioned for success in the global economy and are thus able to replicate (or ideally improve upon) their parents' socio-economic and class status.

From a theoretical standpoint, Sally Power (2004) proposed that when parents select schools, they are not seeking merely a good education, "but are also expressing particular values and attempting to foster in their children particular sets of dispositions" (p. 25). Hence, school selection is a value-laden choice exercised at the family level. Power argued that the cumulative

effect of individual family decision making at the local level may have more influence on the (in)equitability of the education system than national reform efforts in the US. A study by Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) would seem to substantiate Power's view in a Canadian context. The authors conducted a mixed methods investigation of the logic, values, and concerns that informed parental decision making for 1,871 parents of children in Grades 1, 3, and 6 in two urban school boards in Alberta. Possible placement options included public schooling, alternative programs, private schools, and in one school board, congregated gifted (or GATE) classes for eligible students[4] from Grade 4. Study findings indicated that school choice was closely linked to the demographic profile of the parents. While those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tended to choose an alternative school for their children, parents with higher household incomes and educational attainment levels were more likely to choose specialized programs and private schools. Factors affecting parental decision making included the proximity of school to home, the school's academic reputation, special programs offered, and the degree to which the school shared the parents' values and beliefs about education. Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) proposed that parents from middle class backgrounds have several advantages in the school selection process. For example, they are able to purchase homes in high-income neighbourhoods with "good" schools (what has been referred to as *school selection by mortgage*). Moreover, middle class parents have the financial resources to pursue private psychological assessments to determine if their children qualify for special programs, such as GATE. If the assessment results fall short of the cut off, the authors argue that "parents with social networks and economic resources can find options that compensate for the initial disappointment of not qualifying for the program" (p. 103). Finally, middle class parents have the skills, networks, and resources to lobby for the kinds of programs they feel would be of benefit to the their children.

Given that it is middle class parents who appear to be driving this market approach to public schooling, Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) questioned whether the needs, values, and preferences of low-income, religious, or ethnic minority families are reflected in the provision of alternative school options. While they concede that there are some advantages to the market approach, they posit that the greatest weakness of the model of public school choice is "that it privileges middle class parents who have the social and cultural capital to navigate their way through the school

[4] IQ of at least 130 on WISC-IV using Canadian norms.

selection process and those parents who have the time and necessary capabilities to organize groups to lobby for the establishment of particular alternative programs" (p. 105). Hence, it stands to reason that students placed in specialized gifted classes are more likely to be from middle class families. Indeed, the over-representation of this group in gifted programs has been highlighted by a number of authors (see Ambrose, 2002; Callahan, 2005).

Summary. In this section, three areas of literature were critically examined: 1) conceptions of giftedness; 2) parental experience of child giftedness, and 3) parental decision making relating to educational placement. Literature in these areas is sparse, and calls for further research — particularly with regard to parental values and decision making — are numerous.

In the subsequent section, the theoretical framework used for the study is presented and discussed.

Theoretical Framework

Situated within the postpostivist paradigm, this research project aimed to describe the experiences of mothers of children assessed as intellectually gifted. In particular, this study focused on the maternal lived experiences of gifted conceptualization, and educational decision making. First, I will explain why I chose to focus solely on the maternal experience. Next, I will clarify the treatment of the term "gifted" within the context of the study. Finally, I will outline how the principal tenets of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) *ecological systems theory* and Lee Beach and Mitchell's *image theory* (Beach & Mitchell, 1990) will be employed to provide the theoretical underpinnings for the research project. For a visual representation of the theoretical framework, refer to Appendix A.

Focus on maternal experience. A number of authors (e.g., David, 1993; Lareau, 2002; Reay, 2000) have highlighted the gendered nature of parental involvement, suggesting that it is mothers who tend to bear the brunt of the practical and educational work associated with their children's schooling. This pattern has also been noted among parents of children identified with learning disabilities (Valle, 2009), and intellectual giftedness (Duquette, et al., 2011; Jolly & Matthews, 2011; Quart, 2006; Whitton, 2005). For example, in their recent literature review of over 50 articles on the parenting of gifted children, Jolly and Matthews (2011) stated that "it seems clear that parents (and mothers, in particular) currently shoulder much of the responsibility for meeting the educational needs of their high ability child or children" (p. 23). This finding is consistent with the personal experience of the researcher, and provides further justification for

exploring the phenomenon under study from the maternal perspective. As the literature pertaining to the experiences of parents of gifted learners in general is thin, it seemed prudent to focus the research lens on the group most involved with the phenomenon.

Giftedness. As demonstrated in the literature review, a vast array of gifted conceptualizations exist, ranging from traditional, positivist definitions (e.g., Binet & Simon, 1916/1980; Terman, 1925) to multidimensional conceptualizations (e.g., Gardner, 1983; Renzulli, 1978; Sternberg, 1984), and most recently, to models rooted in complexity theory (Dai & Renzulli, 2008). Given the multiplicity of complex, geographically specific (Borland, 2005) and often contradictory (Ford, 2002) conceptualizations of giftedness, it is essential to discuss the ways in which the term "gifted" will be utilized within the context of the proposed study.

Local operational definition of giftedness. Drawing on the Ministry of Education's definition (see p. 2) individual school boards in Ontario are charged with the task of devising their own criteria for the purposes of identifying intellectually gifted students. Although more contemporary conceptualizations of giftedness have been well received in the educational domain, in practice, most school boards continue to rely heavily on traditional IQ measures in the identification of gifted students (S. W. Brown et al., 2005).

The operational definition employed by the local public school board to identify giftedness was used to guide participant selection. Mothers of elementary school-aged children whose school-based or private assessment results met the local public school board's criteria for either giftedness or profound giftedness (as outlined on page 10) were invited to participate in the study. In so doing, it was assured that participants had experienced the same phenomenon, and had the same educational placement options available to them.

Ecological systems theory. Just as conceptions of giftedness are not created in a vacuum, the experience of parenting does not occur in isolation. Pomerantz, Grolnick, and Price (2005) point out, ". . . the role of parents in facilitating student achievement is embedded in an ongoing, bidirectional socialization process between parents and children, which is influenced by social-contextual forces" (p. 273). Hence, it was felt that Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory would provide a useful framework with which to explore the maternal experience of child giftedness as it recognizes the bi-directional influences of multiple environments, or *systems*. Originally conceived to elucidate the phenomenon of child development,

Bronfenbrenner's theory is grounded in the belief that a reciprocal relationship exists between the person and his or her ecological environment.

Central to Bronfenbrenner's theory is the notion of *ecological transition*. These transitions occur "whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered as the result of a change in role, setting or both" (p. 26). Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that every ecological transition is both a consequence and an instigator of the human developmental process. Finding out that a child is gifted is an example of an ecological transition as parents' perceived roles and responsibilities are likely to be altered as a result.

Bronfenbrenner's theory was originally comprised of four nested concentric environments: the *microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem* and *macrosystem*[5] (see Figure 1 for a graphic depiction of system and examples relevant to this study). Together, these systems form the developing person's *ecological environment*. A description of each of the four systems follows the Figure.

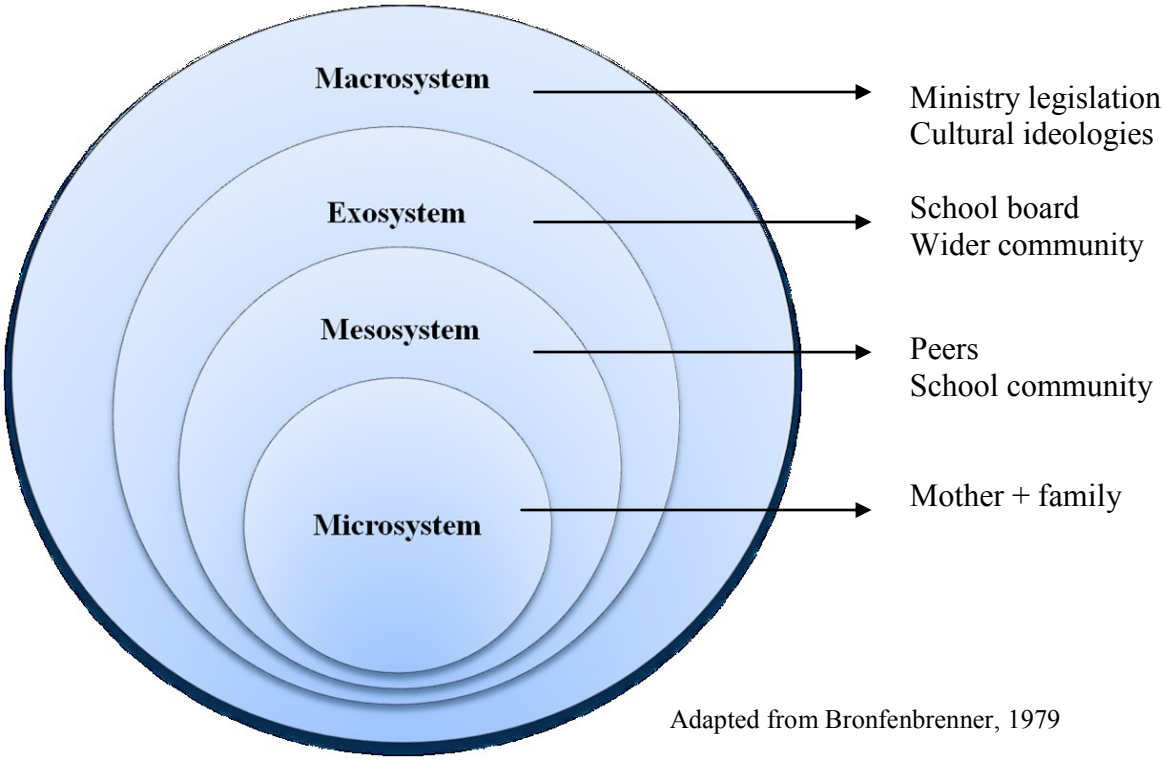


Figure 1 – Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

[5] Bronfenbrenner later adds a fifth system, called the *Chronosystem* , considered to be the evolution of the external systems over time.

Microsystem. The microsystem is located at the core of the concentric circles and represents the primary setting in which an individual participates. Bronfenbrenner described the microsystem as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (1979; p. 22). He proposed that a person's behaviour and development is mediated by their *perception* of their environment. As such, how an individual perceives his or her role(s) is influenced by environments (e.g., cultures, sub-cultures) located outside of the immediate setting or system.

Within the context of this study, the immediate family of a child assessed as gifted constitutes a microsystem. The mother's perceptions of her role, activities (behaviours) and interpersonal relationships (i.e., dyads with her spouse, gifted child, and any other children in the family) were a central focus of the research.

Mesosystem. According to Bronfenbrenner, the mesosystem consists of the interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person perceives him/herself as an active participant. The mesosystem is perhaps best described as a system of microsystems. Most individuals are active in multiple microsystems, which may or may not be directly linked. Those that are directly linked are considered first order networks, while those settings that are indirectly linked (i.e., through an intermediary source) are deemed second-order social networks. Bronfenbrenner argued that the degree of interconnectedness experienced by the developing person is influenced by "the extent and nature of knowledge and attitudes in one setting about the other" (1979, p. 25).

Three influences at the mesosystem level were of particular interest in this study: participant's extended family (parents, siblings, in-laws); peer group (e.g., friends, work colleagues), and school community (e.g., teachers, special education teachers, principals) Participants' perceptions of the bi-directional relationships experienced in the school community were thought to be of particular relevance to the maternal experience.

Exosystem. The exosystem "refers to one or more settings that do not include the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (1979, p. 25). For parents of school-aged children, this includes the local school board (Millstein, Peterson, & Nightingale, 1993). The influence of the school board is particularly relevant to parents of gifted learners as the board is responsible for developing special education policy, gifted identification criteria, and

specialized programming. It was anticipated that the actions of the local public school board would be the most influential settings at the exosystem level.

Macrosystem. The outermost system, or macrosystem, refers to the socio-cultural context (e.g., cultural values, customs, laws) in which the developing person finds him or herself. In the context of this study, it includes the prevailing belief systems and ideologies related to giftedness that exist, or may exist in the wider culture. With regard to legislation, the provincial Ministry of Education is a powerful constituent of the macrosystem in that it defines what intellectual giftedness "is" as well as what accommodations and modifications are to be made available to students identified as gifted. As special education legislation varies from province to province, the trajectories experienced by parents and students are largely dependent on the environment in which they live.

Criticism of ecological systems theory. A common criticism of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is that it does not adequately recognize the biological and/or genetic characteristics of the developing person. Nancy Darling (2007) noted that later iterations of Bronfenbrenner's work (1986, 1999, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) stressed the *bio*ecological component, focusing on the active role of the developing person "at the centre of the circles." The most recent bioecological version of Bronfenbrenner's theory has been utilized for this study as participants' individual experiences were of primary interest.

Rationale for using ecological systems theory. Several other theories were considered in the design of this study, including the genre of family systems theories (i.e., Epstein, 1987, 2001; Fine & Carlson, 1992; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, Bronfenbrenner's theory has been used extensively in the study of parenting (Darling, 2007). Secondly, given that extant research (e.g., Hackney, 1981; Keirouz, 1990; Shichtman, 1999) has identified a number of system-like environments (i.e., family, neighbourhood, school) in relation to the concerns expressed by parents of gifted children, it was felt that Bronfenbrenner's characterisation of the environment as a set of nested systems would be invaluable in the exploration of the maternal experience.

Although ecological systems theory has been used extensively to explore the experiences of families of children with disabilities, it has been used less often to further our understanding of gifted children and their families. In one of the few examples, Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius,

and Arnold (2005) used Bronfenbrenner's model as a theoretical foundation for examining the development of giftedness and talent in children. Only a handful of empirical studies have utilized Bronfenbrenner's theory as a theoretical framework. The earliest study found focused on the academic underachievement among verbally gifted children from an ecological systems perspective (Redding, 1989). A systems approach was employed by Hopper (2003) in a doctoral research project to assess the impact of home schooling on the development process of intellectually gifted learners. More recently, two studies utilized ecological systems theory to describe the psycho-social needs of gifted adolescents in the general population (Mueller, 2009), and in a specialized residential STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) school for gifted learners (Cross & Frazier, 2010). All four of the aforementioned studies placed the gifted or talented learner at the centre of the concentric circles.

Only two studies were found that focused on the parental experience of giftedness using a systems approach. In the first, Alsop (1997) sought to understand the experiences of 42 families of gifted children in Australia. A rather tenuous connection was made to Bronfenbrenner's theory; however, the study does provide some insight into the parental experience with regard to three system-like contexts: support groups (family and friendship networks), the general community (resources and access to agencies), and the educational community. Data collected via questionnaire indicated that parents had experienced negative responses across all three contexts. Parents were distressed by the lack of support from their families and friends, noting that they were surprised and unprepared for the negative responses and unreliable information they received. In terms of the school environment, most parents stated that they did not feel well supported. Parents reported a significant gap between what they expected in the way educational provisions (i.e., special school, special classes, differentiated curriculum, designated teacher for gifted, counselling for parents) and what was available. The vast majority of parents indicated that they had heard stereotypes from school staff with regard to gifted learners (e.g., gifted children experience burnout, will plateau at school, will have social/emotional problems if treated differently from their peers, have pushy parents). Alsop concluded that parents of gifted learners had experienced "considerable difficulties in the educational context "(p. 33), and were often disregarded by educators. More than half of parents indicated that they had not consulted community resources, either because they believed none to be available, or did not regard them as appropriate. Alsop concluded that parents of gifted learners felt largely unsupported in all

three contexts studied, and that access to counselling support for gifted families was therefore warranted.

In the second study, Debbie Clelland (2011) used ecological systems theory as a framework for understanding the information needs and concerns of parents of gifted children in four Canadian provinces (BC, Ontario, Alberta, and Newfoundland). A total of 525 parents of gifted children completed an online survey comprised of fixed and open ended questions. The four information needs identified most often by parents were: (a) how to ask their child's teachers for extensions for learning by adapting projects for breadth and depth of learning (identified by 157 parents); (b) emotional development in gifted children (n=130); (c) how to tell their children's teachers about giftedness (n=115); and (d) how to teach their children to advocate for themselves (n=106). Clelland argued that from an ecological systems perspective, the prioritization of these information needs would suggest that parents were more focused on their children in the school setting. The author also found that parents felt pressure to provide the "right" kind of learning environment for their gifted children, whether by advocating for their needs in the school environment, or by creating opportunities for talent development. Parents often expressed concern that their children were not sufficiently challenged at school, bored, and/or underachieving. Clelland reported that for these parents, "the home-school interaction presented a high level of concern" (p. 77).

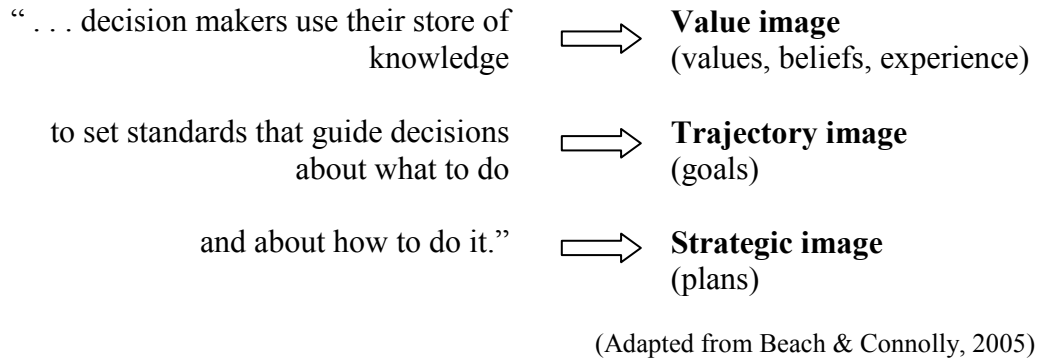
The studies by Alsop (1997) and Clelland (2011) demonstrate that ecological systems theory is a useful framework to explore parental experiences and to identify areas of tension.

Image theory. There are a number of potential decision points in the assessment, identification, and placement journey for parents of intellectually gifted children (as illustrated in Appendix B). To facilitate the exploration of mothers' educational decision making experiences, Beach and Mitchell's (Beach, 1990, 1998; Beach & Mitchell, 1990) *image theory* (IT) of individual decision making was employed. The authors contend that:

> . . . decision makers use their store of knowledge (images) to set standards that guide decisions about what to do (goals) and about how to do it (plans). Potential goals and plans that are incompatible with the standards are quickly screened out, and the best of the survivors is then chosen. Subsequent implementation of the choice is monitored for progress toward goal achievement; lack of acceptable progress results in replacement or revision of the plan or adoption of a new goal. (Beach & Connolly, 2005, p. 160)

Beach developed his behaviourally-based, *naturalistic decision making* (NDM) theory as an alternative to *classical decision theory* (CDT) (Falzer, Moore, & Garman, 2008). A distinctive feature of IT, the authors claim, is that "it posits that decision making involves the simple application of multiple strategies, in contrast to CDT, which posits that decision making involves complex applications of a single strategy" (p. 5). Falzer et al. purport that IT is one of the most fully articulated and extensively researched of all of the second generation decision theories.

Central components of image theory. Beach (1990) created three mental representations to describe the process of decision making: the *value*, *trajectory*, and *strategic* images, as depicted in Figure 2.



(Adapted from Beach & Connolly, 2005)

Figure 2 – Beach and Mitchell's Image Theory

The value image consists of the decision maker's "prescriptive and proscriptive values, standards, ideals, precepts, beliefs, morals, and ethics which are collectively called *principles*" (Beach, 1990; p. 6). The value image sets the standard for how things should be, as well as how the decision maker and others ought to behave (Beach & Connolly, 2005). The trajectory image consists of the agenda of goals the decision maker hopes to achieve, as dictated by their principles and possible problems in the environment (Beach, 1990). Finally, the strategic image is the step-by-step plan the decision maker uses to achieve each goal of the trajectory image (Galotti, 2002). In creating this plan, Beach and Connolly (2005) maintain that the decision maker anticipates the future and devises concrete behavioural tactics to achieve the desired result. In addition, the decision maker must ensure that multiple plans designed to achieve various goals do not interfere with one another.

Framing. Central to IT is the notion of *framing* which Beach and Connolly (2005) describe as the foundation for understanding a situation and what to do about it. In the process

of framing, the decision maker draws on their knowledge and prior experience to ascertain what is happening and if there are any problems that require attention (Beach, 1990). Beach and Connolly (2005) proposed that knowing the frame a decision maker uses can go a long way in "predicting and understanding the decisions he or she makes" (p. 23).

Pre-choice screening of options. At the heart of Beach and Mitchell's decision making model is the process known as the "pre-choice screening of options" (Beach, 1993). During this phase, the decision maker typically winnows the number of options under consideration to a relatively small number, sometimes one or two (Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009). Any options that are considered to be incompatible with one or more of the three images (value, trajectory, strategic) are screened out. The outcome of the pre-choice screening will determine the decision maker's next move. If only one option remains, the decision maker must decide whether or not the surviving option is acceptable. If the pre-choice screening results in more than one option, the decision maker may opt for their preferred option, or use other strategies to arrive at a final choice. If there are no survivors in the pre-choice screening process, the decision maker "presumably attempts to discover new options" (Galotti, 2009; p. 458).

Research utilizing image theory. In 2002, psychologist Kathleen Galotti stated that a potential weakness of IT is that the majority of studies conducted by Beach and his colleagues have been carried out in simulated laboratory settings using hypothetical decision making situations. She wrote, "To date, only a few of the studies on image theory have encompassed the online processing of information during the course of a real-life decision" (Galotti, 2002, p. 23). Since then, Galotti and her colleagues have used IT to explore a number of everyday decisions such as selecting a college (Galotti, 1995) or college major (Galotti, 1999; Galotti et al., 2006), and choosing a birth coach (Galotti, Pierce, Reimer, & Luckner, 2000). Most recently, Galotti and Tinkelenberg (2009) used IT to explore how parents in a US city selected a first-grade placement for their child from a number of local educational options. Parents had a plethora of placement options from which to choose, including two no cost options in the public school system (Spanish immersion being one), two or three charter schools (depending on the year of data collection), one or two private religious schools, and home schooling. Qualitative survey and interview data were collected from 229 parents of kindergarten-aged students, pre and post

decision making. The criterion[6] mentioned most frequently by parents during the decision making process were convenience, followed by the curriculum and structure of the first-grade program, characteristics of individual teachers, class size, school climate, and cost. The weighting assigned to these criteria by parents did not change significantly over the six month period with the exception of convenience, which became more important as the decision point drew nearer. Parents tended to keep the number of options under consideration at any given time to a short list of about three with public and charter school options being considered most often. The options under consideration, however, were not necessarily consistent over the six month period. Roughly one third of the options shifted — as did some of the criteria applied — suggesting that parents' thinking about this decision changed over time. An unexpected outcome reported by Galotti and Tinkelenberg was that parents who had made this decision previously for another child did not necessarily make the same decision for subsequent children, implying that parents engage in the decision making process on a case-by-case basis. In light of the study findings, the authors concluded that "everyday decision making has a dynamic aspect to it, an aspect not part of typical laboratory-based investigations of decision making" (p. 466). While Galotti's body of work has been helpful in furthering our understanding of real-life decision making (including academic placement), it has done less to extend our knowledge about how decision makers *experience* the decision making process.

Rationale for using image theory. Unlike other decision making theories, image theory is exploratory rather than prescriptive. Beach and Connolly (2005) stated, "[we] are more interested in describing what people do than in prescribing what they should do" (p. 5). Moreover, the authors contend that proponents of IT are interested in the ways in which decision makers use information to arrive at decisions. It was believed that this approach was well aligned with the research objectives of the current study, i.e., exploring and describing how mothers utilize information from various sources — including their own value systems — to make educational decisions for their gifted children. Finally, as the literature search yielded only one study that employed IT in the context of educational decision making (Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009) it was believed that a valuable contribution could be made to the small but growing field of "real life" decision making.

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[6] Instead of the somewhat vague "principles" (Beach, 1990), Galotti used the terms *criteria* and *factors* to illuminate the decision maker's value image. Galotti's terminology was adopted in the survey and interview instruments for the current study.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the rationale for focusing on the maternal experience of child giftedness was presented, and the concept of giftedness was defined for the purposes of the study. Three major areas of literature were critically examined: 1) conceptions of giftedness; both in general, and specific to parents of gifted learners, 2) parental experience of child giftedness, and 3) parental decision making relating to educational placement. Next, the theoretical framework — comprised of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Beach and Mitchell's image theory — was outlined and discussed. Previous studies that have employed these theories in the context of gifted education and decision making were reviewed.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, describe, and examine the experiences of a group of mothers whose elementary school-aged children were assessed as intellectually gifted. It was believed that a greater insight into the maternal experience would be of benefit to special educators, policy makers, and parents of gifted learners. In seeking to comprehend this phenomenon, the study addressed the following five research questions: (1) What meaning did the participants ascribe to the concept of giftedness?; (2) How did participants describe their experience of the assessment, identification, and placement process; (3) What factors did participants perceive were important in their educational decision making?; (4) What, or whom did participants perceive as facilitators in their decision making? and, (5) What, or whom did participants perceive as barriers in their decision making?

The methodology is described in the chapter and is presented in the following subsections: (a) rationale for research approach; (b) participant selection; (c) summary of information needed; (d) overview of research design; (e) data collection methods; (f) data analysis and synthesis; (g) ethical considerations; (h) issues of trustworthiness; and (i) limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with an overview of the survey participants, including individual profiles for the five interview participants.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Approach

In contrast to quantitative research which involves the systematic testing of hypotheses to establish "facts", qualitative research is "pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 2). Inherent to the interpretivist paradigm is the notion that "as reflective human beings, we construct our realities, for the most part, in discourse communities" (Piantanida & Garman, 1999). Hence, qualitative research methodology seeks to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people ascribe to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) from the perspective of the participants themselves (Merriam, 1998). Another difference is that quantitative studies rely on statistical analysis to interpret findings while the researcher is the conduit of meaning making in qualitative research (Coleman, et al., 2007; Maxwell, 2004). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) maintain that the role of the qualitative researcher is "to seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect" (p. 2). Through description and analysis, the qualitative researcher "builds a complex,

holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 2007, p. 249).

Qualitative modes of inquiry are a relatively recent development in gifted education (Borland, 1990; Coleman, Sanders, & Cross, 1997), which is perhaps not surprising given that the field was predicated on positivist conceptualizations of intelligence. In Coleman, Guo, and Dabbs' (2007) meta-analysis of research published in four North American journals specific to gifted education[7], the authors assert that the first qualitative study in the field —an ethnographic account of students' activities in a preschool for gifted children — appeared in 1985. Further analysis revealed that 40 studies published between 1985 and 2003 met the authors' criteria for qualitative research. Coleman, Guo, and Dabbs assert that while there is growing acceptance of qualitative research methodology in the field, further research is warranted: "The insider perspective, the meanings of people who are gifted and talented as well as those who teach, counsel, and *parent* the gifted and talented, is urgently needed (emphasis added, 2007; p. 61). A more recent meta-analysis of the same four journals conducted by Parker, Jordan, Kirk, Aspiranti, and Bain (2010) found that of 506 articles published between 2001 and 2006, only 15.6% employed qualitative research methods. Parker et al. propose that qualitative research methods, along with descriptive and co-relational research designs, provide an alternative to the "gold standard" of experimental design espoused by US government agencies (Committee on Scientific Principles for Education Research, 2002; United States Department of Education, 2002). Moreover, the authors argue that qualitative research findings add a depth of complex information to the field of gifted education, and that "the qualities and contributions of these types of research should not be rejected or neglected by the research scholar or by the interested public" (2010, p. 214).

As the main purpose of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of mothers of gifted learners, it was the researcher's contention that the use of exclusively quantitative methods was unlikely to elicit the richness of data required to address the research questions effectively.

Postpositivist orientation. The study was guided by postpositivist orientation; an epistemological paradigm that emerged in the twentieth century in response to perceived

[7] *Gifted Child Quarterly, Journal for the Education of the Gifted, Roeper Review, and Journal of Secondary Gifted Education.*

inadequacies with traditional scientific modes of inquiry (for challenges and critiques of positivism, see Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Popper, 1965). Philips and Burbles (2000) characterize postpositivism as "a *nonfoundationalist* approach to human knowledge that rejects the view that knowledge is erected on absolutely secure foundations – for there are no such things; postpositivists accept *fallibilism* as an unavoidable fact of life" (p. 29). Postmodernist thinker Patti Lather maintains that confronting the hegemonic "lust for absolutes" is valuable in that it "produces an awareness of the complexity, historical contingency and fragility of the practices that we invent to discover the truth about ourselves" (1992, p. 90).

Given the reflective nature of the paradigm and the multiple aims, beliefs, and methods that exist among postpositivists (Borland, 2000), postpositivism is perhaps best described as an *orientation* rather than a unified school of thought. Arguably the best-known (and most comprehensive) postpositivist approach is Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *naturalistic inquiry*[8]. In their book of the same name, the authors describe five axioms of the naturalistic worldview in contrast to the positivist paradigm. First, Lincoln and Guba assert that as people interact with other people, objects, and events, the reality in which things exist is individually constructed, leading to multiple constructed realities rather than a single objective reality or "truth". The second axiom is that the relationship between the researcher (the knower) and the object of inquiry (the known) is both interactive and inseparable. As such, researcher objectivity is illusory. Third, Lincoln and Guba posit that because people live and events take place in a particular space and time, study findings cannot be generalized to wider populations. Findings may be *transferable*, however, to similar contexts. The fourth axiom deals with the notion of causality. Lincoln and Guba maintain that as "everything influences everything else, in the here and now" (p. 151), to label one element in a situation as a *cause* and another *effect* would be highly arbitrary. Instead, they suggest that postpositivist researchers explore "out of the complex of mutually interactive shapers . . . those that afford some meaningful perspective in relation to the purpose that the investigator has in mind" (p. 152). The final axiom of Lincoln and Guba's naturalistic stance is that it rejects the positivist assertion that inquiry is value-free. As researcher neutrality is not possible, Lincoln and Guba suggest that it is preferable for researchers to explore and declare their values rather than to be "covertly ideological" (p.185). Moreover, the authors urge naturalistic researchers to strive for *value resonance*, or harmony among their personal

[8] Now known as *constructivist inquiry* (see Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

values, the axioms of the theory guiding the research, the axioms of the methodology employed and the values underlying the research context. In this way, naturalistic inquiry can proceed meaningfully and produce findings and interpretations that are widely accepted and credible.

Gifted education scholar James Borland (1990) contends that five axioms of the postpostivist stance adopted by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are especially suited to the nature of research and practice in the field. To illustrate his point, Borland notes that a consensus has yet to be reached as to what giftedness *is*, and that the proliferation of definitions — and resulting variations in the characteristics of students placed in specialized programs — has often been viewed as a problem solvable by more (i.e., positivist) research. Through a postpostivist lens, however, the concept of giftedness cannot be defined in absolute terms. Hence, Borland proposes that "the wide spread confusion" often associated with multiple definitions "may instead be an inevitable, even desirable, consequence of the fact of locally determined multiple constructed realities" (p. 166). In essence, what is "gifted" for one person may not be "gifted" for another. Borland emphasizes that giftedness *should* be defined differently in different settings, but that these definitions must be logical and consistent with the realities perceived in each of those contexts. The value of the postpostivist approach, then, is that instead of debating the "true" definition of giftedness, researchers can focus their attention on whether a particular school board "is using a definition that meets the criterion of credibility for that district" (p. 166). While Borland does not advocate for a complete abandonment of the positivist approach, he does believe that postpositivist methods should be considered as: (a) a fundamental compatibility exists between the paradigm and gifted education; and (b) the application of such methods would afford new and valuable insights into some phenomena "of real concern" in the field.

Researcher's perspective. A postpositivist orientation was also appealing on a personal level as I have never been comfortable with definitions of giftedness expressed in terms of IQ scores or percentiles. Although a positivist construct of giftedness was employed to identify participants for this study (as most school boards continue to rely on standardized test scores to identify gifted learners for the provision of differentiated services), my own view of giftedness is decidedly broader in scope. My perspective is somewhat aligned with the Ministry of Education (2001) definition which describes intellectual giftedness as an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability requiring differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular classroom to satisfy the level of educational

potential indicated. However, my personal conceptualization also encompasses other characteristics frequently associated with gifted learners such as heightened sensitivity (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2004), intensity (Winner, 1996) perfectionism (Callard-Szulgit, 2003), and asynchronous development (Morelock, 2000). In my opinion, the reliance on standardized measures to identify gifted learners in the school system — though expedient — fails to recognize the complex social and emotional needs that often accompany advanced intellectual capabilities.

The decision to have my children formally identified was informed solely by my desire to access the educational opportunities I believed were best suited to their needs. The labeling of my daughters as "gifted" was an unwelcome corollary. I do not think of, nor refer to them as "gifted"; in fact, I avoid using the term in relation to my children. It was my growing awareness of this disconnect between the educational definition of giftedness and the meanings mothers ascribed to the concept in the context of their own children that prompted me to undertake this research project. A postpositivist orientation seemed the ideal framework to explore multiple purposes and meanings ascribed to the concept of giftedness.

Postpositivist methods. From the postpostivist perspective, knowledge is subjective (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and conjectural (Popper, 1965). Thus, the challenge for the researcher is to ensure that these conjectures are supported by the most rigorous substantiation possible, while at the same time realizing that these conjectures are subject to challenge and reconsideration (Philips & Burbles, 2000). Creswell (2007) proposed that "most postpositivist researchers will likely view inquiry as a series of logically related steps, believe in multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality, and espouse rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis" (p. 20). Indeed, this study was carried out in multiple steps (see p. 101), using a number of the methodological characteristics identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) pertinent to data collection (i.e., naturalistic setting, qualitative methods, researcher as data gathering instrument, gathering of tacit knowledge, purposeful sampling) and analysis (i.e., emergent design, thick description, inductive data analysis, special criteria for trustworthiness). Each of these characteristics is discussed in subsequent sections.

Participant Selection

For qualitative research, the selection of study participants is purposeful (Patton, 1990, 2002). The value of purposeful sampling lies in the selection of "information-rich cases" that

will provide insight and understanding into the phenomenon under study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). To ensure that participants had experienced a specific phenomenon (Endacott, 2005), criterion-based sampling (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993) was used to identify participants for this study. All study participants were mothers of elementary school-aged children (Kindergarten to Grade 8) who were assessed between 2005 and 2009 and found to meet the criteria for giftedness established by a single urban public school board in Ontario.

The decision to focus on the maternal experience was based on extant research (e.g., David, 1993; Duquette, et al., 2011; Jolly & Matthews, 2011; Lareau, 2002; Reay, 2000), coupled with my own observation that it is mothers who tend to assume the bulk of the tasks and responsibilities associated with their children's schooling. Limiting participation to mothers within a single school board ensured that participants had experienced an analogous phenomenon in that the criteria used to identify gifted students were consistent, as were the differentiated programming opportunities available to those identified as gifted. The focus on mothers of elementary school-aged children is related to the preponderance of young students assessed and identified as gifted in this particular school board, likely due to the provision of congregated gifted programming starting in Grade 1. A delimiting time frame of five years (2005-2009) was selected for two reasons. First, the criteria for gifted identification used by the school board did not change appreciably over the five year period. Second, it was believed that limiting the time frame to the preceding five years would facilitate participants' recollection of events with regard to the assessment, identification, and educational placement of their child(ren).

The research group included 45 participants, all of whom completed a preliminary survey comprised mostly of open ended questions. Upon completion of the survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to take part in phase two of the research project, consisting of three in-depth interviews designed to further explore the maternal experience. Next, five mothers were purposefully selected from the pool of 35 interested participants, using diversity and intensity of experience as filters for inclusion. Further demographic information for the survey participants is included in table format at the conclusion of this chapter (see Table 2 on page 59).

Summary of Information Required

This qualitative study focused on the experiences of 45 mothers of elementary school-aged children assessed as gifted within a single school board. Five research questions were

explored. The information required to address these research questions was informed by the literature review and theoretical framework (as discussed in Chapter 2) and can be grouped into three broad categories: contextual, demographic, and perceptual. Contextual information describes the culture and environment related to the research setting; in this case, the city and local public school board. Demographic information illustrates who the research participants are (e.g., background, education, household income, etc.). Finally, perceptual information depicts participants' perceptions as they relate to the phenomenon under study. The general contextual, demographic, and perceptual information, as well as the specific information required to answer the research questions is presented in Table 1 on the following page.

Table 1

Overview of Information Needed

General Information Required for Study

Type of Information	What the Researcher Requires	Method
(a) Contextual	Definition of giftedness (provincial and local), local school board criteria for gifted identification, academic placement options offered to identified gifted students in school district under study. Provincial and local school board statistics regarding the proportion of students identified as intellectually gifted (2005-2009).	Document review
(b) Demographic	Descriptive information related to participants including age, highest level of education completed, household income, number of children, number of children assessed as gifted, number of children identified as gifted, number of children identified with other exceptionalities, and current educational placement of gifted children.	Survey
(c) Perceptual	Participants' descriptions and perceptions of the assessment, identification and placement process as they relate to the phenomenon under study.	Survey, Interview

Information Required to Answer Research Questions

Question	What the Researcher Requires	Method
Research Question 1. *What meaning did the participants ascribe to the concept of giftedness?*	Participants' perceptions of how they "made sense" of the concept of giftedness, both in general, and in relation to their child(ren)'s assessment.	Survey Interview
Research Question 2. *How did participants describe their experience of the assessment, identification, and placement process?*	Participants' recollections and perceptions of their journey through the assessment, identification and placement process. What thoughts, emotions, and/or experiences did participants associate with each stage?	Survey Interview
Research Question 3. *What factors did participants perceive were important in their decision making?*	The factors participants identified as important to participants in their decision making related to the phenomenon under study (e.g., the decisions to have child assessed, formally identified, placed in specialised programming).	Survey Interview
Research Question 4. *What, or whom did participants perceive as facilitators in their decision making?*	Participants' perceptions of the kinds of support that enabled them to progress through the assessment, identification, and placement process.	Survey Interview
Research Question 5. *What, or whom did participants perceive as barriers in their decision making?*	Participants' perceptions of the impediments or obstacles they encountered while navigating the assessment, identification, and placement process.	Survey Interview

Overview of Research Design

In this section I will provide an overview of the research design by summarizing the steps taken to conduct this study. The *Research Design Flowchart* (Figure 3) provides a graphic representation of the process. A comprehensive discussion of the methods and techniques used for data collection and analysis follows the graphic.

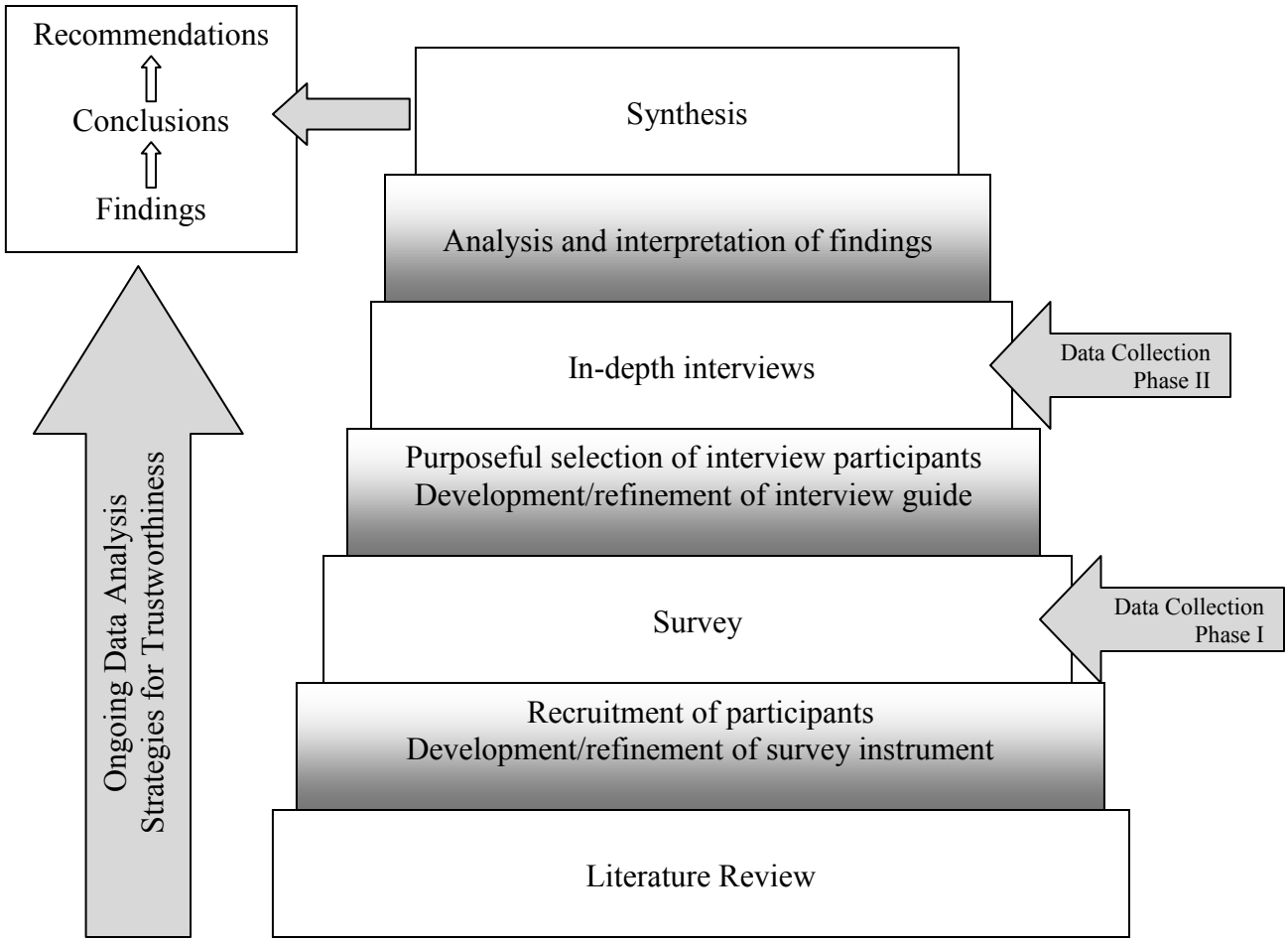

Figure 3 – Research Design Flowchart

Description of steps in research design

Step 1 - Literature review. Prior to the commencement of data collection, a selective review of the literature was conducted to locate previous studies and to ascertain the contribution of other researchers in three general areas: (a) conceptualizations of giftedness - both in general, and specific to parents of gifted learners; (b) parental experiences of child giftedness; and (c) parental decision making relating to educational placement. The objective of the literature

review was to gain a more thorough understanding of the potential issues and tensions faced by parents of gifted learners. The review of the literature was an ongoing process, informed in large part by emergent themes in the data.

Step 2 - Recruitment of participants/Development and refinement of survey. Following the proposal defence, the researcher applied for and received approval from the University's Research Ethics Board prior to proceeding with the recruitment phase. Next, the researcher approached the local chapter of the Association for Bright Children (ABC) to request their assistance with participant recruitment. It was agreed that an invitation to participate in the study would be included in an upcoming membership mail-out. In the interim, the survey instrument was piloted sequentially by four volunteers and modified in accordance with the feedback received.

Step 3 - Survey: Phase I of data collection. Potential participants were invited to participate in an online survey designed to collect demographic and perceptual data related to the research questions. Hard copies of the survey were also available upon request. Informed consent was collected from all participants prior to their participation.

Step 4 - Development and refinement of interview guide/Recruitment of interview participants. A preliminary analysis of the survey data was undertaken and potential interview participants were identified. Next, a matrix of prospective interview participants was constructed and five participants were selected on the basis of participants' diversity and intensity of the experience. The interview protocol was piloted with two volunteers. Small adjustments were made to the interview guide.

Step 5 - In-depth interview: Phase II of data collection. Three semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with each of the five selected participants. All interviews were transcribed and were member checked by participants.

Step 6 - Analysis and interpretation of findings. Survey and interview data were read and reread. An initial coding scheme was developed and recurrent themes were identified.

Step 7 – Synthesis. The coding scheme for survey and interview data was refined and the data analysis was completed. As depicted in Figure 3, the results of the data synthesis were used to generate findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Data Collection Methods

Two data collection methods were used in this study: surveying, followed by in-depth interviewing for purposefully selected participants. It was believed that this two phase data collection strategy would yield the breadth and depth of demographic and perceptual information required to address the five research questions. The potential benefits and drawbacks of each data collection method are discussed below.

Surveying. One advantage of survey methodology is that it is "relatively unobtrusive and relatively easily administered and managed" (Fowler, 1993). Survey management and accessibility may be further enhanced through the use of online survey software (Sue & Ritter, 2007; Wright, 2005). An identified weakness of surveying technique is its limited ability to explore complex ideas and relationships; however, this weakness may be minimized through the inclusion of F questions (Fowler, 1995). According to Patton (2002), open ended responses "permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents. . . [and] enable the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories" (p. 21). As the objective of the survey was to gather participants' experiences and perceptions, a high percentage of open ended questions were included in the survey instrument.

Interviewing. Interviewing can elicit detailed, context-rich personal accounts, perceptions, and perspectives in the participants' own words (Creswell, 1997, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In-depth interviewing in particular can facilitate the exploration of complex interactions and process as well as cultural nuances. Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that because interviewing happens in "real time", participant responses can be clarified or expanded upon immediately through follow up questions. A number of potential limitations of interviewing were also noted by Marshall and Rossman. For example, interviewees may be unwilling (or perhaps uncomfortable) to share the personal information the interviewer hopes to explore, or they may be unaware of recurrent patterns in their lives. The authors also note that interviewing requires a significant skill set (e.g., superb listening skills, as well as an ability to frame questions and follow up for further elaboration). Finally, interviewing can yield large volumes of data that can be time consuming to transcribe and analyze. Despite these potential drawbacks, interviewing was believed to be the most appropriate data collection method for the purposes of this study.

The advantages and drawbacks associated with each data collection method were taken into consideration in the design of this study, described in detail below.

Phase I: Survey. The survey served three main purposes: (a) to gather demographic data about mothers and their immediate family members; (b) to explore mothers' experiences with regard to the assessment, identification, and placement process, and educational decision making; and (c) to recruit mothers for the second (interview) phase of the study. Survey items were designed to elicit demographic and perceptual information related to components of the theoretical framework. Most of the survey questions were open ended to allow participants to write freely about their experiences. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix C.

Development and refinement of survey instrument. Following ethical approval, the online survey was piloted with a target population in order to obtain feedback about the questions and to test the technical elements of the survey (Sue & Ritter, 2007). The draft survey was piloted with four mothers in sequence, beginning with a mother of two elementary school-aged children identified as gifted in another province. This particular mother was approached because she had recently completed her own doctoral research in the field of gifted education using a similar survey technique. Several changes were made to the survey based on her feedback, the most significant of which was a reduction in the number of questions. The amended survey was then piloted in sequence with three local volunteers each of whom had at least one child identified as gifted in the local public school board. The second mother to pilot the survey had recently completed her own qualitative doctoral dissertation and was able to offer valuable insights on the research process. The survey was further refined based on the volunteers' comments. Given that: (a) the content of the survey did not change appreciably over the course of the pilot study (most changes involved the deletion of questions); and (b), the local volunteers met the criteria for the study, the online survey data generated by these three participants were included in the final data pool.

Recruitment. Study recruitment notices (see Appendix D) were sent to 450 members[9] of the local chapter of the Association for Bright Children (ABC) as part of the organization's fall 2009 mail-out to advertise their Saturday morning enrichment program. The researcher made a short presentation about the study and provided further information to interested individuals at the ABC course registration evening in early October. Recruitment notices were emailed to the

[9] Not all of the members would have met the criteria for participation in the study.

researcher's own extended network of parents (n=75), many of whom were also members of ABC. Email recipients were asked to forward the recruitment notice to their own networks, as per Goodman's (1961) "snowball technique".

Collection of survey data. Survey data were collected primarily through SurveyMonkey, a secure Web-based survey host (www.surveymonkey.com). The online survey was accessible between September 30 and November 9, 2009. Of the 59 online surveys initiated by potential participants, 55 met the criteria for participation in the study. A total of 44 surveys were concluded online for a completion rate of 80.0% (44/55). In addition to the data collected online, one of two paper-based surveys requested by potential participants was completed and returned by mail. This single data set was entered manually into the SurveyMonkey database, bringing the total number of completed surveys to 45. It was believed that the survey was effective in gathering both demographic and perceptual information. The majority of participants wrote thoughtful and lengthy responses to the open ended questions, yielding a wealth of rich data. Moreover, the survey was effective in identifying potential interview participants. Of the 45 mothers who completed the initial survey, more than three quarters of the mothers (35/45, or 77.8%) expressed an interest in participating in Phase II of the study.

Phase II: In-depth interviews. Seidman's (2006) in-depth interviewing technique was employed in phase two of the data collection. At the root of Seidman's technique is "an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). Seidman's three-interview approach consists of semi-structured interviews each lasting 60 to 90 minutes. The first interview is designed to establish the context of the participant's experience and focuses on "how" questions. Seidman proposes that by asking *how,* the interviewer may enable participants to reconstruct and narrate their early experiences in their family, in schools, with friends, in the neighbourhood, and at work. The aim of the second interview is to give participants the opportunity to reconstruct the details of their day-to-day lived experience in context through the sharing of personal narratives. The third and final interview in Seidman's model encourages participants to reflect on the *meaning* their experience holds for them. This interview is retrospective in that it asks the participants to reflect on the previous two interviews in order to make sense of, or ascribe meaning to, what has been said thus far. The third interview may also be used as an opportunity for participants to project their

thinking into the future. An advantage of the three-interview technique is that it provides multiple opportunities for clarification, reflection, and meaning making (Seidman, 2006).

The interview guide consisted of a set of open ended questions arranged in the three interview format (past, present, and reflection). As with the survey, the interview items were designed to elicit responses related to components of the theoretical framework. Each participant was asked the same series of questions either in person or by telephone. Follow up, or "exploring" (Seidman, 2006) questions were used when necessary to draw out the essence of the participant's experience.

Development and refinement of interview guide. Following ethical approval, the interview guide was piloted with two volunteers from the researcher's parenting networking group. The pilot was used to determine if the interview questions could be understood, if the questions yielded useful data in relation to the research questions, and finally, to identify elements of the researcher's interview technique that supported or detracted from the objectives of the study (Seidman, 2006). Minor modifications to the interview guide were discussed with my supervisor, and all changes to the interview guide were documented (Patton, 1990). It was believed that certain questions might be enhanced by the inclusion of passages taken directly from the survey responses. In this way, interviews could be "personalized", participants' memories could be refreshed with regard to their survey responses, and participants would have an opportunity to confirm and/or clarify their responses where necessary. Finally, it was perceived that the inclusion of survey passages could provide a springboard for further discussion. The final interview guide is included in Appendix E.

Recruitment. From the pool of 35 interested survey participants, five mothers were purposefully selected to participate in Phase II of the study. Three filters were used in the selection of interview participants. First, it was decided that those individuals known to the researcher would be excluded from the pool in order to minimize potential issues related to researcher bias (Maxwell, 1997) and participant reactivity (Maxwell, 1996). The purpose of the second filter was to present a diversity of experiences (Patton, 1990), "to allow the widest possibility for readers of the study to connect with what they are reading" (Seidman, 2006, p. 52). Participants were selected on the basis of demographic characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, socioeconomic status, first language) and factors related to decision making (e.g., expressed values, child's current educational placement). Participants' *intensity* of the experience was used

as the third and final filter. In this process, the researcher seeks "information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 191). Individual profiles for the five selected interview participants are presented on page 65.

Collection of interview data. Interviews occurred between January and May, 2010. The researcher sought to interview participants in person wherever possible; "Because thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds are involved, the researcher needs to understand the deeper perspectives that can be captured through face-to-face interaction" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53). Twelve of the 15 interviews were conducted in person, with the remaining three interviews completed by telephone to accommodate participants' schedules. The researcher met with each interview participant in person at least twice. In keeping with Seidman's suggested format, interviews were spaced approximately one week apart. All interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed by the researcher. Focusing on one participant at a time, the transcription of each interview was completed and member checked before the next interview was initiated.

Methods of Data Analysis and Synthesis

This section will describe how the survey and interview data were managed, organized, and examined, resulting in the formulation of eight findings. In addition, the ways in which those findings were analyzed and interpreted will be discussed.

With regard to management, the survey data were downloaded from the online survey host into spreadsheet files. Page numbers and line numbers were assigned to each of the 15 transcripts to facilitate analysis. Words or expressions emphasized by the interview participants were italicized in the text. Elements of nonverbal communication (e.g., laugh, cough, sigh) were noted in parentheses. The two phases of data collection resulted in the accumulation of 45 completed surveys, 119 pages of consolidated survey data, and 268 pages of interview data.

As per Seidman's (2006) suggested protocol for in-depth interviewing, data analysis did not begin until all of the interviews were completed, transcribed, and approved by the five participants. Given the large volume of data, it was essential to reduce them in a significant way through a "winnowing" process (Seidman, 2006). According to Merriam (1998),

> "Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning" (p. 178).

Hence, the analysis of qualitative data is an iterative process requiring both deductive and inductive reasoning on the part of the researcher.

A number of steps were taken to process the survey and interview data. Bloomberg and Volpe's (2008, p. 100) "roadmap" for the process of qualitative data analysis was used as a guide. First, the data were reviewed and explored with a view to identifying "big ideas". Next, the data was re-read and examined more carefully. Passages deemed to be meaningful (Miles & Huberman, 1994) or interesting (Seidman, 2006) were digitally highlighted. A preliminary coding scheme for each question was devised to reflect the data patterns found. Data summary tables were then created for each survey and interview question as a way of illustrating emerging themes. The purpose of the data summary tables was not to reduce the data to numeric representations, but to illustrate recurrent patterns and to facilitate cross-case analysis of the data. Marked passages from each of the open ended questions (survey and interview) were then digitally cut and pasted into spreadsheets and grouped by code. Interesting passages that did not appear to fit any of the existing descriptors were kept in a file for further consideration. The coding scheme remained flexible to accommodate emerging ideas, themes, and categories. Throughout the process of winnowing and categorization, the researcher wrote memos to document her thinking. As codes were added, eliminated, or collapsed, the researcher recorded the rationale for these actions. To further substantiate the coding process, an inter-rater reliability check (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was conducted by a competent peer.

Following this extensive analysis, eight finding statements were formulated. Relevant participant quotes were selected to illustrate each statement, and key findings were summarized (see Table 8 on page 73). As the study was guided by two theories (Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Beach and Mitchell's image theory), marked passages, themes, and categories were considered in relation to the central components of each (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem exosystem, macrosystem; value, trajectory and, and strategic images). Next, the findings were interpreted through an analysis and synthesis of the findings relative to the researcher's experience, pertinent literature, theoretical framework, and research questions. The findings of this interpretation are presented in Chapter 5. For a matrix of the survey and interview data used to answer each of the five research questions, please refer to Appendix F.

Ethical Considerations

As with any research project, ethical issues related to the well-being of research participants are of utmost concern (Merriam, 1998; Schram, 2003). It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that participants are informed as to the purpose of the study, as well as any potential risks. Although it was not anticipated that participants would experience any damaging effects as a result of their involvement in the study, a number of protective safeguards were employed. The three main safeguards — informed consent, confidentiality, and data storage — are discussed in turn below. In addition, the notion of reciprocity is explored.

Informed consent. Informed consent was received from participants at each stage of the data collection process. For survey participants, an interactive consent form was embedded in the online survey and only those who clicked the box next to the statement "I have read the consent form and agree to participate" advanced to the survey proper. Of the 55 potential participants who met the study criteria, two did not advance beyond the consent page of the survey. Those who requested a paper-based survey received a standard consent form (Appendix G) as part of the mail out. In Phase II, shortlisted interview candidates were contacted by email to confirm their interest. Next, consent forms specific to the interview process were sent by email attachment to each participant (see Appendix H). The consent form was discussed with individual participants and endorsed prior to the first interview. Participants understood that all survey and interview questions were optional and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Signed copies of the participant consent forms were retained by the researcher and interview participants.

Confidentiality. When making decisions about the presentation and dissemination of data, the rights and interests of participants were the foremost consideration. The researcher was committed to keeping participants' names and any potentially identifying characteristics confidential. Thus, participants and members of their families have been assigned pseudonyms in this document, and some demographic information (i.e., occupation, place of work) has been modified.

Data storage. Cautionary measures were taken to ensure that all data and research-related records (i.e., digital interview files, transcripts, analytic notes) were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher and her supervisor.

Reciprocity. An axiom of the postpositivist paradigm is that the researcher and his or her study participants are partners in the creation of knowledge. Therefore, the researcher set out to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with the study participants, recognizing that perhaps the greatest benefit for participants is the opportunity to be *listened to*. According to Seidman (2006), effective listening requires interviewers to take participants seriously, to value what they say, and to honour the details of their lives. This edict guided the researcher throughout the interview process. As all five participants reported that they had benefitted from their involvement in the study, it was believed that reciprocity was indeed achieved. In a follow up email one interview participant wrote,

> I can't tell you how much I have enjoyed this process. It was a pleasure to meet you, and to talk "out loud" about these things. Re-reading the transcripts has been pretty powerful for me, as all that stuff had been in my head, but [was] never really voiced.

At the conclusion of the interview process, each interview participant received a thank you note and a Chapters gift card (value $50) as a token of appreciation. To recognize the significant recruitment assistance received from the local chapter of the Association for Bright Children, the researcher offered to discuss the findings with the association's membership as part of their annual Parent Lecture Series. Two lectures have been presented to date.

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the concept of *trustworthiness* embodies the multiple ways in which a qualitative researcher can convince his or her audience that an inquiry's findings are "worth paying attention to" (p. 290). The authors identify four constructs related to trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these constructs will be addressed in turn.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the degree to which the data collected accurately reflects the multiple realities of the phenomenon under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, are the findings accurate and credible from the perspectives of the researcher, the participants, and the reader? (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The credibility of this study was enhanced in a number of ways. First, considerable thought was given to the research design to ensure that the purpose of the study was well aligned with the epistemological approach, theoretical framework, data collection methods, and data interpretation techniques. Second, the researcher gathered data from multiple data sources (45 participants), which yielded a range of

perceptions related to the phenomenon under study. Third, the use of a two-phase data collection method allowed for a fuller, richer picture of the maternal experience to emerge. Additionally, the credibility of the findings were enhanced through a cross-checking — or what Denzin (1978) referred to as *methodological triangulation* — of data from multiple sources (LeCompte, et al., 1993). Fourth, prolonged engagement with the interview participants meant that mothers had multiple opportunities to share, clarify, and reflect upon their experiences. Finally, each interview participant was asked to review their transcripts to ensure the accuracy of what was recorded detect any "substantial discrepancies between the perceptions of the participants . . . and the investigator's reconstructions or representations" (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000).

Transferability. Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of this study could be applied to another context; for example, the experiences of mothers of gifted learners in other settings. Care has been taken to provide background, context, and sufficient details through thick description (Patton, 1990) in order that the reader may make his or her own judgement as to whether the findings are relevant to their own experience, or perhaps in some broader context (Schram, 2003). As Coleman, Guo, and Dabbs (2007) state, "it is the reader who decides whether the results fit his or her situation because contextual factors are essential to meaning."

Dependability. Dependability refers to the extent to which qualitative research findings are consistent, or "dependable" in relation to the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is therefore incumbent on the researcher to demonstrate that research procedures were well documented and that data analysis and interpretation methods were consistently employed. To this end, the researcher took the following steps to strengthen the dependability of the data:

- A preliminary data coding technique was developed and subsequently refined over the course of the analysis. The evolution of the technique, including the rationale for any changes made, was recorded through a series of researcher memos. This ongoing documentation contributed to a "transparency of method" (Merriam, 2002).
- An independent audit of the survey and interview data was conducted by a competent peer in order to demonstrate inter-rater reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

Confirmability. While the quantitative research paradigm asserts that research can be done "objectively", the qualitative research approach recognizes the influence of the researcher's personal orientation on the research paradigm (Kuhn, 1970). Thus, the challenge for the

qualitative researcher is to explore how his or her personal belief system and life experiences might influence the inquiry process. To this end, the researcher engaged in a series of memo writing exercises outlined in Joseph Maxwell's (1997) book, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*.

Another means of confirming the research findings is to demonstrate how the findings can be traced back to the original data. Hence, all raw data (e.g., online survey data, digital interview files, transcription files), data analysis, reflexive exercises, and memos were rigorously maintained and cross-referenced, creating what Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to as an *audit trail*. In addition to the steps outlined above, the researcher solicited the feedback of her advisor and colleagues throughout the data analysis and interpretation phases to ensure that the findings, interpretations, and conclusions were supported by the data.

Potential Limitations

A critical component of the qualitative research process is to recognize and understand those conditions and constraints that may weaken the study (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Therefore, great care was taken to identify the potential limitations inherent in qualitative research both in general and for this study in particular, and to limit the impact of those potential limitations wherever possible through effective research design.

Focus on mothers. It is acknowledged that this study focused exclusively on the maternal experience, which some may perceive as a limitation. Nonetheless, it was felt that the rationale for this decision was sufficiently explained and supported by the literature.

Researcher bias. As mentioned previously, the researcher is the main instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research. To minimize the potential effects of researcher bias or subjectivity, the researcher engaged in an ongoing process of reflexivity (memos and writing exercises as per Maxwell, 1997) to identify and explore the ways in which her worldview may affect the inquiry process. Maxwell's book takes the researcher through a series of inquiry exercises designed to mirror the research process including: *Goals: Why Are You Doing this Study?, Conceptual Framework: What Do You Think is Going On?, Research Questions: What Do You Want to Understand?, Methods: What will You Actually Do?* and, *Validity: How Might You Be Wrong?*

Recruitment issues. Participants for the study were recruited through a local parent advocacy group and an informal support network for parents of gifted children. Membership in such groups infers a degree of knowledge, networking skills, and language literacy. This was reflected in the participant group, the vast majority of whom had higher than average levels of educational attainment and household income. Hence, the participant group was not as diverse as the researcher would have liked.

Participant reactivity. Participant reactivity (often referred to as the *Hawthorne effect)* is a phenomenon whereby study participants modify an aspect of their behaviour simply because they are being studied. For example, participants might feel compelled to provide data that they believe is socially acceptable or useful to the researcher. Similarly, the behaviour of interview participants may be influenced by the interviewer's attentiveness, particularly if the parties are known to each other. Therefore, the researcher decided not to select choose individuals with whom a prior relationship existed. Additionally, the researcher strived to create a relaxed environment that would facilitate open, honest dialogue. Previous experience with in-person and telephone interviewing was helpful in this regard.

Overview of Participants

Survey participants. Demographic data pertaining to the survey participants is presented in Table 2 on page 59. The table provides an overview of the participants' age, personal experience of giftedness, educational attainment, employment status, household income, and number of children. These and other demographic variables are discussed in greater detail in the sub-sections following the table.

Table 2

Demographic Information for Survey Participants

Survey #	Name	Age Group	Mother gifted as child?	Highest level of education	Employment situation	Household income	# of children	# gifted children
1	Joanne	45 – 54	Not sure	Doctorate	FT paid	No response	1	1
2	Sonia	35 – 44	No	Master's	PT paid	$100,000- $124,999	2	2
3	Karina	35 – 44	Not sure	University	FT paid	$125,000+	1	1
4	Dawn	35 – 44	Yes	Master's	FT unpaid	$125,000+	2	2
5	Francine	45 – 54	Yes	Master's	FT paid	$125,000+	2	2
6	Jen	35 – 44	No	University	FT paid	$125,000+	2	2
7	Margaret	45 – 54	No	Master's	FT unpaid	$125,000+	2	1
8	Sarah	35 – 44	Yes	Doctorate	FT paid	$100,000 - $124,999	2	2
9	Ronna	35 – 44	Not sure	University	PT paid	$125,000+	3	1
10	Louise	35 – 44	No	Some college	FT unpaid	$75,000 – $99,999	4	1
11	Daphne	35 – 44	No	University	FT unpaid	$125,000+	2	1
12	Julie	35 – 44	No	Master's	FT paid	$125,000+	2	1
13	Iliana	25 – 34	No	University	FT paid	$100,000 - $124,999	2	1
14	Chris	35 – 44	No	University	PT paid	$100,000 - $124,999	2	2
15	Guylaine	35 – 44	Not sure	University	FT paid	$125,000+	3	1
16	Laura	35 – 44	Not sure	University	FT paid	$125,000+	2	1
17	Jessica	45 – 54	No	Master's	FT paid	$100,000 - $124,999	1	1
18	Anne	35 – 44	Not sure	College	FT paid	$125,000+	2	1
19	Miranda	35 – 44	Not sure	Some university	FT unpaid	No response	3	2
20	Heather	35 – 44	No	University	FT unpaid	$125,000+	2	1
21	Allie	45 – 54	No	Master's	FT paid	$75,000 – $99,999	2	2
22	Violet	45 – 54	No	Master's	PT paid	$125,000+	2	2
23	Michelle	45 – 54	Not sure	Some college	FT paid	$75,000 – $99,999	3	1
24	Heidi	45 – 54	Not sure	University	PT paid	No response	3	3
25	Linda	35 – 44	Yes	Some university	PT paid	No response	1	1
26	Margot	45 – 54	No	Master's	FT paid	$75,000 – $99,999	2	2
27	Sandra	35 – 44	No	University	PT paid	$125,000+	3	2
28	Hannah	35 – 44	Not sure	Master's	PT paid	$125,000+	3	3
29	Lisa	35 – 44	Not sure	University	PT paid	$75,000 – $99,999	2	2
30	Svetlana	35 – 44	Yes	University	PT paid	$125,000+	3	2
31	Padmal	35 – 44	Yes	University	FT paid	$125,000+	2	1
32	Carolyn	45 – 54	Not sure	Master's	Self-employed	$125,000+	2	1
33	Zhen	35 – 44	Yes	Master's	FT paid	$125,000+	2	2
34	Daria	35 – 44	Yes	Master's	Unemployed	$100,000 - $124,999	3	1
35	Barb	35 – 44	Not sure	University	FT paid	$75,000 – $99,999	2	1
36	Andrea	45 – 54	No	Master's	FT paid	$125,000+	2	1
37	Grace	35 – 44	No	University	FT unpaid	$100,000 - $124,999	2	1
38	Colleen	35 – 44	No	University	FT paid	$50,000 - $74,999	2	1
39	Megan	35 – 44	Yes	University	PT paid	$100,000 - $124,999	2	2
40	Claire	35 – 44	No	University	FT unpaid	$125,000+	3	1
41	Deanne	45 – 54	Not sure	University	PT paid	$125,000+	4	2
42	Ella	45 – 54	Not sure	University	FT unpaid	$100,000 - $124,999	1	1
43	Ruth	45 – 54	No	Master's	No response	$125,000+	2	2
44	Sheila	35 – 44	No	Doctorate	FT paid	$125,000+	2	2
45	Gwynne	35 – 44	No	University	FT unpaid	$100,000 - $124,999	2	2
						Total	99	68

Note: Employment situation: FT= Full-time, PT= part-time

Age. The majority of participants (30/45, or 66.6%) were between the ages of 35 and 44. Relative to the majority, one participant was younger (25-34 years), and 14 participants (31.1%) were older (45-54 years).

Language. All 45 participants spoke English and 10 participants (22.2%) reported that they spoke French. Nine participants noted that they spoke other languages (German, Bosnian, Serbian, Romanian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and Tamil).

Living situation. Participants were asked to select the phrase that best described their current living situation (i.e., two partner family, single partner family, blended family, or "other"). Forty-four participants selected *two partner family* (97.7%) and the remaining participant (Barb) selected *single partner family*.

Personal experience of giftedness. When asked if they were considered "gifted" as a child, nine participants (20.0%) responded in the affirmative. Almost half (21, or 46.7%) of the participants indicated that they were not considered "gifted" as a child and remaining 15 participants (33.3%) reported that they were not sure.

Educational attainment. All of the participants had attended a post-secondary institution, and the vast majority (88.9%) had completed at least one university degree. Fifteen participants (33.3%) had attained a master's degree, and 3 (6.7%) had completed a doctorate. Of the remaining participants, 2 (4.4%) had "some university", 2 (4.4%) had "some college", and one (2.2%) had completed a college diploma.

Employment. When asked to select the phrase that best described their current employment situation, 19 participants (43.2%) indicated that they were engaged in full-time paid work. Ten participants (22.7%) reported that they juggled part-time paid and part-time unpaid work (e. g., mothering, volunteer work). A further 10 participants (22.7%) selected "full-time unpaid work", (i.e., stay-at-home mother). Only one participant (2.3%) described herself as unemployed. Of the four participants who chose to define their employment status in their own terms, three indicated that they were self employed and one reported that she was working part-time while pursuing post-secondary studies.

Household income. Slightly more than half of survey participants (24, or 53.3%) reported a gross annual household income in excess of $125,000. Ten participants (22.2%) indicated a household income in the $100,000 to $124,999 range, and 6 participants (13.33%) cited household incomes between $75,000 and $99,999. One participant (Colleen) reported a

household income of $50,000 to $74,999. Four participants (8.8%) chose not to respond to this question.

Number of children. At the time of the survey, the majority of participants (88.9%) had either one or two children. Twelve participants had three children, and two participants indicated that they had four children. A total of 99 children were represented in the survey data.

Age of children. The age distribution of these children is illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Age of Children Represented in Survey

	Age in years				
	0-5	6-10	11-15	16+	
Birth order	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	Total
First child	1 (2.2)	18 (40.0)	23 (51.1)	3 (6.7)	45
Second child	7 (17.5)	23 (57.5)	9 (22.5)	1 (2.5)	40
Third child	6 (50.0)	5 (41.7)	1 (8.3)	0 (0.0)	12
Fourth child	1 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	2
Total	15	46	34	4	N = 99

The majority of first born children were aged 11 to 15 (51.1%). Forty percent of eldest children were between the ages of 6 and 10. Three first born children (6.7%) were 16 or older, and only one eldest child was five or younger (2.2%). Most second born children were between the ages of 6 and 10 (57.5%) at the time of the survey. Nine children were aged 11 to 15 (22.5%), and the remaining second born children (n=7) were between the ages of 0 and 5. As one might expect, third and fourth born children tended to be in the younger age groups, with 50.0% of third and fourth born children aged five years or younger.

Assessment status of children. Participants were asked how many of their children had been assessed for intellectual giftedness. Of the 99 children represented in the survey, 58 had been assessed once, and 19 had been assessed more than once (see Table 4 on page 62).

Table 4

Assessment Status of Children Represented in Survey

	Has child been assessed for giftedness?			
	No	Yes, child was assessed once	Yes, child was assessed more than once	
Birth order	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	Total
First child	2 (4.4)	31 (68.9)	12 (26.7)	45
Second child	12 (30.0)	22 (55.0)	6 (15.0)	40
Third child	7 (58.3)	4 (33.3)	1 (8.3)	12
Fourth child	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	2
Total	22	58	19	N = 99

Note: a total of 91 assessments were conducted for 77 children

Most children were assessed between Grades 1 and 3 (59.7%), which is likely linked to the public school board's annual screening of Grade 3 students prior to 2007. An additional 25 children (32.5%) were assessed in Junior or Senior Kindergarten. The remainder (6, or 7.8%) were assessed in Grades 4 to 6.

Of the 77 children who were assessed, 68 (88.3%) either met or exceeded the local public school board's criteria for intellectual giftedness. Slightly more than half were boys (37/77, or 54.41%) and 41.1% were girls (n=28). Gender was not disclosed in three cases.

In terms of who conducted the 91 assessments represented in the survey, 53 (58.3%) were conducted by a private psychologist, 27 (29.7%) were administered by a school special education teacher or LST, and 5 (5.4%) were completed by a school board psychologist. In the remaining six cases (6.5%) "other" was selected, with no further information provided.

Incidence of giftedness within families. Almost one-half of the families represented in the survey had more than one child who met the public school board's criteria for intellectual giftedness (46.7%). It is worth noting, however, that 7 of the 22 children who had not undergone an assessment were five years of age or younger and likely too young to be assessed.

Identification. The vast majority of those who met the public school board's criteria for intellectual giftedness had been formally identified via IPRC (66/68, or 97.1%). The local public school board is somewhat unusual in that it delineates two levels of giftedness: *profoundly gifted* (generally equated with a score at or above the 99.6th percentile on a CCAT/WISC) and *gifted* (above the 98th percentile, but below 99.6). Twenty-two students of the identified students (33.3%) met the criteria for profound giftedness while the remaining 44 students (66.6%) were considered gifted. This distinction is significant as the local public school board offered

congregated gifted classes for profoundly gifted students from Grade 1 (in English only), and for gifted students from Grade 5 (in English, and French immersion).

Of those children formally identified as intellectually gifted, 19 (28.8%) were also identified with a second exceptionality as recognized by the province[10]. Table 5 illustrates the incidence of dual exceptionalities by category. The most common dual exceptionality was Gifted/Communication (15.2% of identified gifted students represented in survey), followed by Gifted/Multiple (7.2%), Gifted/Behaviour (4.5%), and Gifted/Physical (1.5%). Six of the 10 children identified with Gifted/Communication exceptionalities had been diagnosed with a learning disability (LD). In the remaining four cases, participants did not elaborate on the nature of their child's exceptionality. Of the five children who were multiply identified, two were gifted/LD/ADHD, one was gifted/LD/hard of hearing and in two cases, additional information was not provided.

Table 5

Students Identified with Second Exceptionality

Exceptionality	Number of students identified	% of total number of students identified as gifted (n=66)	% of those identified as dually/multiply exceptional (n=19)
Communication	10	15.2	52.6
Multiple	5	7.6	26.3
Behaviour	3	4.5	15.8
Physical	1	1.5	5.3
Total	n = 19	28.8	100

Current educational placement. Of all students formally identified as gifted, more than half (38, or 57.6%) were placed in one of the public school board's congregated gifted classes. An additional 8 students (12.1%) were on a wait list for placement in a gifted class. Table 6

[10] *Communication*: most commonly associated with various learning disabilities; also includes students with autism, speech impairments, language impairments, and those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
Behaviour: learning disorders characterized by specific behaviour problems over an extended period of time that adversely affect educational performance, including (but not limited to) Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), compulsivity disorders, and anxiety disorders.
Physical: defined as physical limitations or deficiencies that require special support or assistance in the classroom. Includes students who have physical disabilities, are deaf-blind, or have visual impairments.
Multiple: combination of learning or other disorders, impairments, or physical handicaps as described in the previous categories. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001)

illustrates the breakdown of the educational placements of students identified as gifted at the time of the survey, arranged in descending order of frequency.

Table 6

Current Educational Placement of Students Formally Identified as Gifted

Educational placement	Number of students	% of total of gifted students
Junior gifted (English)	14	21.2
Regular French immersion	13	19.6
Primary gifted (English)	10	15.2
Junior gifted (French Immersion)	10	15.2
Private school	6	9.1
High school gifted/specialized	5	7.6
Regular English	4	6.1
Out of board	3	4.5
Not known*	1	1.5
Home school	0	0.0
Total	66	100%

Notes:
Total number of gifted placements:
Junior gifted (English) + Primary gifted (English) +Junior gifted (FI) + high school gifted, or 14 + 10 + 10 + 4 = 38/66, or 57.6%
*Insufficient information provided

Interview participants. As previously discussed, interview participants were purposefully selected from the pool of 35 survey participants who expressed an interest in phase two of the study.

Demographics. Demographics pertaining to the interview participants are presented in Table 7 on page 65.

Table 7

Demographic Information for Interview Participants

Participant	Age	Highest educational attainment	Employment status	Household income	Names and ages of children	Assessment status	Current Grade	Current academic placement
Margaret	45-54	Master's	FT unpaid	$125,000+	Alanna (12)	PG	7	Gifted FI
					Eileen (10)	NA	5	Private
Sonia	35-44	Master's	PT paid	$100,000-124,999	Matthew (10)	PG	4	Reg. FI
					Sophie (7)	G	2	Reg. FI
Colleen	34-44	University degree	FT paid	$50,000-74,999	Savannah (9)	G	4	Reg. FI
					Braden (5)	NA	JK/SK	Reg. JK/SK
Julie	35-44	Master's	FT paid	$125,000+	Charlotte (7)	PG	2	Reg. FI
					George (5)	NA	JK/SK	Reg. JK/SK
Heidi	45-54	University degree	PT paid	Not disclosed	Bailey (13)	G	8	Gifted FI
					Isabella (8)	PG	3	Primary Gifted
					Sian (6)	PG	1	Primary Gifted

Notes: Employment status: FT = Full-time, PT = Part-time
Current academic placement: FI = French immersion
Assessment status: PG = Profoundly gifted, G = Gifted, NA = Not assessed

It is acknowledged that only one interview participant (Sonia) was the mother of an identified gifted boy; however, interview participants were selected on the basis of the diversity and intensity of their experiences rather than the gender of their offspring.

Interview participant profiles. Drawing on survey and interview data, profiles for each of the five interview participants were created. It was hoped that these narratives would allow the reader to connect with the mothers' experiences. Profiles for Margaret, Sonia, Colleen, Julie, and Heidi follow below.

Participant 1 - Margaret. The first participant to be interviewed was Margaret, the adoptive mother of two girls: Alanna (aged 12), and Eileen (aged 10). Margaret and her husband Alan emigrated from Europe in the late 1980s to pursue career opportunities. Alan currently works as a business consultant. Margaret, who holds a master's degree in business, was employed in this field prior to adopting her first daughter from China. Margaret has been a stay-at-home-mother since then, though at the time of the interview she was contemplating a return to part-time work. Margaret and Alan's household income exceeds $125,000 per year.

Adopted as an infant, Alanna initially showed signs of developmental delay, which Margaret attributed to neglect in her first year of life at the orphanage. With care and stimulation, Alanna soon caught up and before long Margaret (and others) began to notice that

she was achieving developmental milestones more quickly than her peers. When Alanna reached school age she was enrolled in a private French girls' school as Margaret and her husband believed that learning a second language would be both practical and enriching. Alanna excelled in school and began to complain about the work "not being hard enough" in Grade 3. A private psycho-educational assessment conducted shortly thereafter confirmed that Alanna met the local public school board's criteria for profound giftedness. The assessment results also indicated that she was particularly gifted in the area of mathematics, where she reached the upper limit of the test instrument. Based on these results, the private school offered to enrich Alanna's academic program and to accelerate her in mathematics by two years. The principal of the private school also encouraged Margaret to explore the public school board's congregated gifted program for French immersion students, offered from Grade 5. Margaret applied for, and received an offer of placement for Alanna for the following school year. At the time of the interviews Alanna was a Grade 7 student in the congregated gifted FI program. Alanna continues to be accelerated in math via an online learning program, organized and administered primarily by her mother. Margaret is generally pleased with the congregated gifted placement; however, she asserted that she would not hesitate to switch back to the private French school if the situation changed.

Alanna's younger sister, Eileen (adopted two years after her sister), has not been assessed for intellectually giftedness. Now in Grade 5, Eileen has attended the same private French girls' school since Kindergarten. Margaret describes Eileen as her "normal bright" child, who, in contrast to her more sensitive sister, tends to approach life with a "glass half full" attitude.

Participant 2 – Sonia. Sonia is the mother of two children, Matthew (aged 10) and Sophie (aged 8), both of whom have been identified as gifted by the local public school board. Sonia has been married to her husband, Greg, for 21 years. Both are well educated. Greg — whom Sonia describes as "extremely bright" — has amassed 4 university degrees, and Sonia has a master's in business. Greg currently works as a consultant in the high-tech industry. Following her maternity leaves with each of her children, Sonia returned to her full-time job in management consulting. However, she has since "scaled back" her work, essentially to support Matthew and Sophie's academic needs through advocacy, in class volunteering, and at home enrichment activities. She now works from home on a part-time basis. Sonia reported that their household income fell between $100,000 and $125,000.

Sonia's journey with giftedness began when her son was in Grade 1. When Matthew started to experience difficulties in his Early French immersion class, his teacher suggested to Sonia that Matthew's behaviours were consistent with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). While Sonia was aware that something was "different" about Matthew, she was not convinced that these differences were indicative of ADHD. Sonia perceived that the only way to challenge the teacher's seemingly rigid assumptions was to rule out ADHD as the root cause of his difficulties. Hence, Sonia and her husband arranged for a full psycho-educational assessment through a private psychologist at their own expense. To Sonia's surprise, the assessment results indicated that Matthew met the school board's criteria for profound giftedness. In addition, a learning disability was identified. Sonia noted that she felt "vindicated" by the psychologist's report, and hoped that the assessment results would assist her in better advocating for Matthew's diverse learning needs.

The situation became more complicated when Matthew was diagnosed with severe hearing loss in Grade 4. Sonia was very impressed with the supports and accommodations Matthew received with regard to his hearing loss; however, she feels that the public school board has been considerably less effective in providing him with enrichment opportunities. Although Matthew was eligible for placement in the primary congregated gifted program, Sonia elected to keep him in the French immersion program at his community school where the teachers were familiar with his learning needs and he had established long term friendships. Sonia also believed it was important for her children to attend the same school. She hoped to shift Matthew to the gifted French immersion program (coincidentally located in their community school) at the Grade 5 entry point.

Sonia went through the assessment process a second time when she requested a school-based assessment for her daughter while she was a Grade 1 student in the Early French immersion program. The results of the school-based Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (CCAT) indicated that Sophie met the school board's criteria for intellectual giftedness. Sonia describes Sophie as the "stereotypical, straight-As, good at everything she does" type of gifted student. Over the course of three interviews Sonia came to the realization that she had focused her conversations almost entirely on her experiences with Matthew. Upon further reflection, Sonia reasoned that this was likely due to Sophie's comparatively straightforward learning profile, coupled with the fact that the process was more of a formality the second time around. She

stated, “the path has already been trodden [laughs]; we’ve already beat the flowers down and flattened them and she’s just coming along happily in the trail that we’ve made.”

Participant 3 – Colleen. The third participant to be interviewed was Colleen, mother of 9 year old Savannah, (from her first marriage) and 5 year old Braden (with husband Dave). Both children reside with Colleen and Dave. Savannah’s biological father lives in the same city and has regular contact with his daughter; however, Colleen asserts that she is the primary decision maker with regard to Savannah’s care and education. Colleen has an undergraduate degree and works full-time as an administrator for a local non-profit organization. At the time of the interviews, Dave had recently completed a career transition and was working in sales. Colleen reported that their household income was in the $50,000 to $75,000 range.

Colleen began to think about the possibility of giftedness when she noticed that Savannah could sight read at the age of 2. Soon after entering kindergarten, Savannah’s teacher told Colleen that she “had a feeling about Savannah” and recommended her for a school-based psycho-educational assessment. When the assessment was eventually completed by a school board psychologist in Grade 2, Colleen was told that Savannah’s 98th percentile score on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) was consistent with the school board’s criteria for giftedness. Colleen reported that she was “overwhelmed” by this information and immediately set out to do her own research on giftedness to “figure out for myself what all of this meant.” After extensive thought, Colleen decided to move her daughter from a regular English class to an Early French immersion class located in her neighbourhood school for Grade 2, noting that “it was Savannah herself who decided that she would be better challenged if she were to enrol in the French immersion program.” Colleen believes that the second language instruction did initially provide some degree of enrichment; however, she now feels that Savannah’s programming is at least two years below her capabilities.

By the time Savannah was in Grade 3 it became clearer to Colleen that some of Savannah’s behaviours were “different” from her peers. With the support of the school principal, Colleen pursued additional testing. At that time it was determined that Savannah’s behaviours were consistent with ADHD (inattentive type). More recently, Savannah has been receiving in-school support from an Occupational Therapist to assist with what Colleen describes as her daughter’s “physical awkwardness”.

As the parent of a gifted child, Colleen says that she feels a certain sense of responsibility; "my kid is gifted; that must mean that I have a special job to do . . . there is something expected of me." Colleen conceded that she isn't always sure "what to do." She maintained that parenting Savannah is a constant challenge as she is more sensitive than other children her age, and displays a heightened sense of empathy: "She is, and always was, a bit of an old soul in a young body." Colleen noted that her five year old son Braden is also highly compassionate, which she feels may be an indication of giftedness. She anticipates that she will request "giftedness testing" for Braden through the school board when he is older.

On the whole, Colleen perceived that she has not been well supported by the public school board staff with regard to Savannah's assessment, identification and academic placement, particularly with regard to her giftedness. Moreover, she believed that she has received limited support from her husband (who, in Colleen's opinion, "doesn't put a lot of stock in the gifted [concept]") and from Savannah's biological father, whom she feels focuses exclusively on the positive aspects of giftedness. Colleen is quite adamant that Savannah's giftedness is a mixed blessing: "Parents think they want gifted children. They think they want the extraordinary . . . but when you have it, all kinds of other stuff comes with it that you don't want."

Participant 4 – Julie. Julie is the mother of two children, Charlotte (aged 7), and George (aged 5). Both Julie and her husband Tim are employed by the local public school board where she is a middle school administrator and he is a special education teacher in the secondary panel. Together, their household income exceeds $125,000.

Julie's background in education (including a Master's degree) meant that she had acquired some professional knowledge with regard to intellectual giftedness. She asserted, however, that she and her husband were "quite resistant" to the concept identifying giftedness in their own children. Julie recalled that it wasn't until her daughter Charlotte — then in Grade 1 — started coming home from school in tears and complaining of boredom that she entertained the possibility of giftedness. Although she contacted Charlotte's teachers on a number of occasions to discuss enrichment opportunities, Julie perceived that her requests were largely ignored. At about the same time, Julie began a dialogue with a colleague who had an identified gifted child. The colleague suggested that Julie and Tim pursue a psycho-educational assessment for Charlotte outside of the public school board. This idea appealed to Julie as she knew that a private assessment would be significantly faster, and would also allow her to decide whether or

not she wanted to share the results with the board. Despite what Julie described as her "reticence to have a child identified as gifted", Charlotte's continued unhappiness at school prompted her to contact a psychologist recommended by her workmate.

Charlotte's psycho-educational assessment results indicated that her scores were consistent with the public school board's criteria for profound giftedness. Julie recalled that she wrestled with the meaning of the assessment results and the implications for Charlotte's education. On the psychologist's advice, Julie and Tim applied for a placement in the congregated gifted program through the school's Learning Support Teacher. When Charlotte was offered a spot for the following school year, Julie and her husband decided to turn down the placement offer as it would involve leaving her community school, a lengthy daily commute, and giving up the French immersion program. Julie noted that the stress of making this decision was compounded by the short timeline they were given (24 hours), and by the general lack of information and assistance they received from school board staff. After ruling out homeschooling and private school as viable options, Julie and her husband decided that they would apply for a spot in the congregated French immersion gifted program in Grade 5. Until then, Julie planned to advocate for differentiated learning in the classroom and to enrich Charlotte's learning at home as much as possible. Julie was grateful that her parents (who live nearby) were "proactive" in supporting her children's interests and abilities, and described the at home enrichment process as a "team effort".

In reflecting on her experiences, Julie noted that going through the assessment and identification process with Charlotte had increased her awareness of her younger son's learning needs. She anticipates that she will pursue a private assessment for George when he is a little older.

Participant 5 – Heidi. Heidi is the mother of three girls (Bailey, 13; Isabella, 8; and Sian, 6), all of whom have been formally identified as gifted in the local public school board. Originally trained as an occupational therapist, Heidi now works full-time as a project officer in the federal government where she is responsible for promoting employee engagement and health. Heidi enjoys her job and is passionate about her work. She is married to Dean, who also works for the federal government.

The concept of giftedness was somewhat familiar to Heidi prior to becoming a mother. As a child, Heidi recalled that she was grouped with older children at school, though she did not

remember the term "gifted" being used at the time. In addition, six of Heidi's nieces and nephews (all of whom are significantly older than her own children), were identified as gifted in their respective school boards. Despite the high incidence of giftedness in her family, Heidi stated that she did not think about giftedness in the context of her own children until Bailey was a toddler and people began to comment on her advanced verbal abilities. When Bailey was in Grade 1, her teacher told Heidi that she thought Bailey was likely gifted and offered to speak with the principal to arrange an in-school assessment. Heidi — who had a toddler at home and was pregnant with her third child at the time — admitted that she was "too preoccupied to pursue it." Bailey was assessed two years later as part of a board-wide CCAT screening for Grade 3 students. The standard result form sent home by the Learning Support Teacher (LST) indicated that Bailey had scored in the "above average" range for the quantitative and non-verbal subsets, and in the 99th percentile for verbal subset. The LST did not flag these results as remarkable. When Heidi shared Bailey's CCAT scores with a mother who already had a child in the gifted program, she encouraged Heidi to pursue private testing. As Bailey was now showing signs of disinterest at school, Heidi decided to follow the mother's advice. The private assessment confirmed that Bailey's scores met the public school board's criteria for giftedness. Heidi was not surprised by these results; rather she was relieved that she could now pursue a gifted placement for Bailey. Subsequent private testing for Isabella and Sian indicated that they were eligible for the primary gifted program for profoundly gifted students offered by the school board.

All three of Heidi's daughters have since been placed in congregated gifted classes. Bailey has been in a gifted French immersion class since Grade 5, while Isabella and Sian were offered placements in the primary gifted program - albeit, at different gifted centres. Heidi conceded that she made a conscious choice to accept the placements; however, she laments the fact that her children had to leave their community school in order to access gifted programming. Moreover, due to what Heidi calls "the board's lack of cohesion in its programming", she now has three children at three different schools which she believes has markedly increased the stress in her life. To illustrate her point, Heidi described the logistical challenges of juggling multiple school start times, transportation and child care arrangements, parent-teacher interview schedules, pizza day forms and holiday concerts. Heidi regrets that she has been unable to contribute to her daughters' school communities in the way she would like because of the

multiple demands placed on her time. For much of the reflective interview, Heidi revisited the placement decisions she has made over the years and wondered aloud what she might have done differently to simplify her family life while still meeting her children's learning needs.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the research methodology used for the study. Framed by a postpositivist orientation and employing a qualitative research approach, this study set out to explore and describe the experiences of a group of 45 mothers whose elementary school-aged children were assessed as intellectually gifted in a single public school board. Two data collection methods were employed: a survey, followed by in-depth interviews. All 45 participants completed the initial survey and five mothers were purposefully selected to participate in the in-depth interview phase. The systematic process used to manage, analyze, synthesize, and interpret the data was outlined. In addition, the steps taken to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data were described. Finally, demographic data relating to the survey participants were presented, along with individual profiles for each of the five interview participants.

A major theme in qualitative research "is the need to create spaces for the heretofore unheard voices and positions in human inquiry" (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 249). The intent of this study was to give voice to the experiences of the 45 participants and to shed new light on the phenomenon of mothering gifted children.

Chapter 4 - Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the experiences of a group of mothers whose elementary school-aged children were assessed as intellectually gifted. Of particular interest were mothers' conceptions of giftedness and their perceptions of their educational decision making experiences. This chapter presents the key findings derived from survey data from 45 participants, and 15 in-depth interviews with five selected participants. Eight findings are summarized in Table 8 below.

Table 8

Summary of Findings

Finding 1 - Conceptualization
Prior to their child's assessment, most participants recalled they had equated giftedness with intelligence. Following their child's assessment, participants were most likely to characterize giftedness as a "different" or "special" capacity for learning. A comparative analysis of participants' pre- and post- assessment data revealed a shift from viewing giftedness as a static trait or set of traits, to a more complex, multifaceted, and developmental state. Post-assessment, mothers tended to associate giftedness with potential and with particular social, emotional, and academic needs. Many participants were aware that the term "gifted" had multiple meanings and was variously interpreted.
Finding 2 - Motivation
When asked what motivated them to have their eldest child assessed, participants were most likely to report that "something about my child seemed unusual or "different", followed closely by "my child was experiencing difficulties at school", and "my child's teacher recommended an assessment". Wanting to know if a child was eligible for gifted programming was identified as a motivating factor less often than the desire to better understand a child's learning profile.
Finding 3 - Reaction
Upon receiving the assessment results to indicate that their child had met the local public school board's criteria for giftedness, the feelings recalled most often by participants were happiness, surprise, and relief. Almost one-quarter of participants noted that they were overwhelmed or confused by the assessment results, particularly if the assessment had been conducted at school. Other feelings expressed by participants included confirmation, worry, anxiety, and vindication. It was not uncommon for participants to express a range of conflicting emotions.

Finding 4 - Educational placement
A majority of participants reported that they had considered at least one alternative educational placement option for their gifted child(ren) following the assessment. Survey data indicated that most participants did elect to change their child(ren)'s educational placement, most often to a congregated gifted class in the public school board. When asked about the most difficult decision they have had to make thus far in relation to their gifted child(ren), most participants described some aspect of the educational placement process.

Finding 5 - Decision making
Generally speaking, mothers engaged in a filtering process to assess the compatibility of known educational placement options with three broad criteria: maternal perceptions pertaining to each option, child specific considerations, and practical considerations. Mothers usually arrived at a theoretical "preferred option". The attainability of congregated gifted placements was contingent on what was offered by the public school board. When participants were not offered their preferred option, were unwilling to accept the placement offered, or were unhappy with their current placement they tended to reconsider other options (e.g., home schooling, private school), and/or develop a longer term strategy to achieve their preferred placement.

Finding 6 - Facilitators
Most survey participants reported that they had consulted a variety of sources when making educational placement decisions. The facilitators described most often by interview participants included the local parent advocacy group for bright and gifted children, other parents of gifted children, and internet/print resources. Two interview participants identified a "champion" teacher or administrator who had been particularly helpful.

Finding 7 - Barriers
The vast majority of impediments identified by participants were encountered in the educational decision making process and as such were school board related. The most common barriers identified included a perceived lack of information and assistance from school board staff, poor communication of the public school board's policies and procedures, short time lines for decision making, a lack of gifted programming for primary-aged French immersion students, proximity to gifted centres, and a shortage of spaces in the congregated gifted program. Child specific characteristics and societal conceptions of giftedness and were also identified as barriers to the maternal experience.

Finding 8 - Relationships
Participants were most likely to report that having a gifted child had affected their relationships with school staff, their partner/spouse, family members, and close friends. Most participants perceived that their child(ren)'s identification of giftedness had impacted their interactions and relationships in some way. Citing stigmatization concerns, a majority of participants reported that they either did not share information about their child(ren)'s giftedness with others, or were careful about what information they shared and with whom. Participants often cultivated relationships with other parents of gifted children for information and support.

In the following sections, the eight findings presented in Table 8 are explored in greater detail. Data that support and explain each finding are presented. A broad range of experiences have been presented so that the reader may engage with the data on a personal level. Participants' own words have been emphasized as much as possible. Where appropriate, survey and interview data have been interwoven to provide additional breadth and depth to the maternal experiences.

Finding 1 – Conceptions of Giftedness

Early in the survey, participants were asked "Prior to your own child's first assessment experience, what did the term 'gifted' mean to you?" In the final stages of the survey, participants were asked what the term meant to them at this point in their journey. Ten broad categories of meaning emerged from the data. These themes are displayed in Table 9 below, arranged by context.

Table 9

Conceptions of Giftedness as Recalled by Participants

Prior to child's assessment giftedness associated with:	n (%)	At this point in time giftedness associated with:	n (%)
Intelligence	27 (61.4)	Different capacity for learning	14 (33.3)
Advanced abilities	10 (22.7)	Advanced abilities	10 (23.8)
Different capacity for learning	5 (11.4)	Multiple meanings, ambiguity	10 (23.8)
Excelling in school	5 (11.4)	Uneven patterns of development	6 (14.3)
Social difficulties	4 (9.1)	Potential	6 (14.3)
Creativity	4 (9.1)	Intelligence	6 (14.3)
No meaning	3 (6.8)	Creativity	3 (7.2)

Notes: 44 participants responded to initial question, and 42 participants responded to follow up question

As the data in Table 8 indicate, some of the conceptualizations of giftedness were consistently identified by participants in both contexts (i.e., intelligence, advanced abilities, different/special capacity for learning). Other conceptualizations were unique to one context or the other. The conceptualizations recollected by participants prior to their child's assessment seemed to focus on trait-oriented characteristics, while the conceptualizations expressed at the time of the survey were more nuanced (e.g., potential, uneven patterns of development, ambiguity). Each of categories will be further explored below, using quotes to illustrate the various meanings participants ascribed to the term "gifted".

Intelligence. Prior to their own child's assessment, 61.4% (27/44) of survey participants reported that they had associated giftedness primarily with intelligence, as reflected by their use

of adjectives like "smart", "bright" and "brainy". For example, Margaret recalled that giftedness had meant "the same as genius, and would apply to people like Newton and Einstein." The notion that giftedness was synonymous with intelligence was by far the most frequent response offered by participants.

Three mothers (6.8%) drew a connection between giftedness and a quantitative measure of intelligence (i.e., IQ score). Participants' understanding of the cut off score for giftedness, however, varied:

> "It meant that their IQ was in the top 5% of the population." (Chris)
>
> "Top 2% of population for intelligence (same criterion as MENSA)." (Dawn)
>
> "It meant achieving a high score on a test of intelligence. But I didn't have a clear idea of how high, or of how definitions could vary across different school boards." (Daria)

When asked what giftedness meant to them now, only 6 of the 42 participants (14.3%) used adjectives and phrases suggestive of intellect (e.g., possessing superior cognitive ability, intellectually enhanced).

Advanced abilities. In reflecting on their pre-assessment concept of giftedness, the notion recalled second most often by participants (10/44, or 22.7%) was that the abilities of gifted children were "well above average" when compared to their peer group or some established norm. Heather thought that a gifted child would have intellectual and academic abilities that "surpass the standard expectations for their age", while Sonia reported that she thought of a gifted child as one who would be "able to perform at a level beyond grade/peer level in one or more academic areas." In Colleen's opinion, a gifted student would demonstrate "exceptional intelligence or well above average intellectual capabilities in every area . . . well above his or her same age peers."

The characterization of giftedness as advanced capabilities was noted by the same number of participants (10) in the pre- and post- data. What differed in the post-assessment responses, however, was the assertion that these advanced capabilities could extend beyond the academic domain. For example, Linda stated that giftedness meant "above average physical, mental, emotional, social and real-life application abilities." A multifaceted picture of giftedness was also painted by Megan in her survey response:

> [Giftedness means] having an all-encompassing, profound depth of understanding and ability to grasp in ways beyond my understanding —or at least beyond my expectations,

still now — many various aspects of some activity, whether intellectual or physical (possibly other categories as well) far outside of the experience of the vast majority of the population.

Drawing on a concept introduced by Howard Gardner (1993), Heidi reported that giftedness meant "having a higher degree of ability in one or more or the areas of multiple intelligences."

Different or special capacity for learning. The third most common pre-assessment conceptualization recalled by participants was that giftedness entailed a "different" or "special" capacity for learning (5/44, or 11.4%). For these mothers, giftedness had less to do with intellect and more to do with *how* students learned. In Lisa's view, gifted children had the "ability to learn easily, quickly, differently, divergently." Similarly, Julie wrote that gifted children "may look at the same situation from a different perspective; they may also be able to process information more readily than a child who is not identified [as] gifted."

When asked what the term meant to them now, giftedness as a "different" or "special" capacity for learning was identified by 14 mothers (33.3%), making it the most common post-assessment conceptualization expressed by survey participants. Several mothers believed that their gifted children learned "differently" than other students, as evidenced by these responses:

"I understand now that it has more to do with how these children learn." (Daphne)

"It's a way to describe how [my daughter] learns . . . " (Ella)

For five mothers, giftedness meant that children learned more quickly. For example, Anne noted that giftedness was the "ability to learn at a faster pace than peers." Gwynne asserted that gifted children learned differently, typically faster, and with deeper comprehension. Dawn believed that gifted students would function at a highly advanced level, and "at at a faster speed, with more complex mental connections."

The word "special" was utilized by three mothers when describing the learning capacities of gifted children. Julie, a middle school administrator, wrote: "Each gifted child I've met is unique in their learning, personality, and approach, but they all share a bright spark in their own special way." For Francine, giftedness entailed "a special kind of learning ability which makes rote learning boring and allows kids to make leaps in learning." Finally, Ronna noted that for her, giftedness meant "a special and different way of learning that is mostly self-guided."

Giftedness was not always viewed as a positive difference. For example, Margaret believed that her daughter's giftedness was "not a blessing", and expressed concern that her

daughter "would not find a place for herself." Similarly, Louise explained that having a child who is identified as "gifted" might sound enviable, but "it comes with challenges that are not so enviable."

Excelling in school. Five of the 44 participants (11.4%) recalled that they had associated giftedness with scholastic achievement prior to their own child's assessment. Gifted students were described as those who "excelled in school" (Ronna), had "an easier time with academics" (Sarah), "had excellent grades" (Padmal) and were "in the top of [their] class" (Claire).

Interestingly, when asked about their present conceptualization of giftedness, not a single participant equated giftedness with academic achievement. In fact, one participant challenged this stereotype in her response: "To be gifted does not mean you get all A's and you are good at everything" (Deanne).

Social difficulties. Before their own children were assessed as gifted, four mothers (9.1%) reported that they had connected giftedness with social problems or deficiencies. For example, Joanne recalled that she had thought of gifted children as "extremely bright, but with some social problems, i.e., difficulty in being part of other people's world, only interested in certain things, not able to play with other children." In a similar vein, Allie wrote: "I thought it meant extremely intelligent, but also strange, a target for bullying, and nerdy." This "bright, but odd" idea was perhaps captured most succinctly by Sheila, the mother of two gifted children, who shared the following:

> "Prior to my own child's testing, 'gifted' really was just an adjective that might be used synonymously with 'smart', but with more ambiguous and less clearly positive connotations. Smart, but also deviant somehow."

When describing their current conceptualization, a few participants noted that their gifted child(ren) did experience social difficulties, usually within their peer group. Mothers were more likely to frame these challenges as a consequence of the disparity between their child's social and intellectual development rather than as a social deficit inherent to giftedness[11]. Only one participant (Iliana) made a direct association when she identified "social awkwardness" as a component of giftedness.

Creativity. Prior to their child's assessment, four participants (9.1%) reported that they had associated giftedness with artistic pursuits such as creative writing, visual arts, or music. For

[11] The notion of uneven, or "asynchronous" development is discussed in greater detail on page 157.

instance, Violet indicated that giftedness meant "having some sort of musical or artistic talent." When describing their current conceptualization of giftedness, three mothers (Sarah, Lisa, and Carolyn) mentioned creativity, and two identified "creative thinking" specifically.

No meaning. Three participants (6.8%) reported that the term "gifted" held no meaning prior to the assessment of their own children. Two of these participants had grown up outside of Canada. Karina noted, "I don't recall ever hearing the term 'gifted' either growing up in Poland and later living in Canada" and Natalya, also from Eastern Europe, asserted that "[giftedness] did not mean anything to me; I did not even know about it." The third participant (Margot) reported that she had been unaware of the term until her family doctor recommended a psycho-educational assessment for her young son.

Multiple meanings, ambiguity. The idea that the term "gifted" was vague, ambiguous, or even meaningless was most notable theme to emerge from the post-assessment data (10/42, or 23.8%). For example, Margaret purported that the term has "many interpretations." Daria believed that the term was devoid of meaning unless placed in an educational context: "It is a very complicated and essentially a meaningless term. If somebody says 'gifted according to the [school board] criteria' then that has some meaning." Claire noted that in her experience, parents of gifted children did not necessarily share a common understanding of the term. Hence, she believed that the experience of parenting gifted children was unique to the individual:

> After meeting other parents I believe that gifted can have different meanings for each parent of each gifted child. The experience for me with my child, and his abilities, is very different from my friends who have children with other abilities.

Some mothers struggled to find meaning in the term as it applied to their own children. For example, Hannah - the mother of three profoundly gifted children – wasn't sure what it meant given that all three of her kids "are within 5 IQ points of each other and have COMPLETELY different learning needs." To illustrate her point, Hannah noted that one of her daughters read at the age of three, while another struggled to read throughout the primary grades.

Five participants (11.9%) portrayed giftedness as a uniqueness that perhaps defied description or quantification, as illustrated in the following responses:

"To me it means special. It means extra, it means more. It means beyond." (Louise)

"I struggle with this a little. Gifted to me is more than any WISC can determine. It is that creative spark in thinking that so few have. It has very little to do with knowing a lot or being quick at answering questions." (Carolyn)

Interestingly, the analysis of the survey data revealed a tendency for some participants to put quotation marks around the word *gifted*. This would suggest that these survey participants were aware that the term could be interpreted in a variety of ways, or perhaps were struggling to ascribe meaning to the term.

Potential. When recollecting their conceptualizations of giftedness prior to their child's assessment, none of the survey participants characterized giftedness as "potential". Six participants (14.3%), however, used this word when describing their current thinking. For example, Sandra noted that "gifted to me now means raw potential for some natural strength that needs to be tapped and nurtured in different ways in order for it to emerge." Two other participants echoed the idea that the potential for giftedness may require support in order to be fully realized:

"[Gifted] means there is a potential for intellectual and emotional awareness that could be present with careful nurturing." (Grace)

"[Giftedness is] potential that should be nurtured and allowed to flourish and grow." (Karina)

Inherent in these responses is the presumption that giftedness must be recognized and supported in order to be developed.

Uneven patterns of development. Following their child's assessment, six participants (14.3%) indicated that their conceptualization of giftedness now included an awareness that gifted children may not be uniformly advanced in all academic areas.

"It means that they may be stronger in one aspect of their academics and weaker in another." (Deanne)

"[Gifted children] have exceptional abilities in some areas, which often means deficits in others." (Jessica)

Moreover, several participants noted the social and emotional development of gifted children could lag behind their intellectual development. As one mother put it, "my child is academically advanced in some areas, but his social and emotional development may not match." Dawn expressed relief that her children did *not* have uneven developmental profiles:

> "I now know all the difficulties that can come with giftedness . . . and the unevenness of abilities that gifted children can have (although luckily, not ours)."

In an attempt to further illuminate the maternal conceptualization of giftedness, interview participants were asked if they thought of any of their children as "gifted". Heidi was non-committal, stating:

> Well I guess in some ways yes, and in some ways no. I mean, they come up with amazing insights into things and their perceptions and understandings of things. They never cease to amaze me with the things they come out with.

Two mothers preferred to think of their children as "different" rather than "gifted":

> No, I don't [think of her as gifted][laughs]. And I know we've gone through an assessment with Charlotte, but I just think of her as *Charlotte*. I don't think she's . . . you know, I know she learns differently but that's as far as my thinking goes. (Julie)
>
> I think of my children as *different*. I don't necessarily think of them as "gifted" but I do know that they are different . . . I think that in some ways they are academically advanced given their age, and what the grade level expectations are of them. (Sonia)

For Margaret, the term provided her with a framework for understanding her daughter:

> For me, the labeling is not something I say *to* her, but it is to help me understand why she is doing the things she is doing . . . for me, the label is kind of useful [because] it helps you to search out solutions.

Summary. Prior to their child's assessment, giftedness was synonymous with intelligence for 61.4% of mothers. Following their child's assessment, participants were most likely to characterize giftedness as a different or special capacity for learning (33.3%). A comparative analysis of survey participants' pre- and post-assessment data revealed a shift from viewing giftedness as a static trait or set of traits, to a more complex, multi-faceted, and developmental state. Post-assessment, mothers tended to associate giftedness with potential and particular social, emotional, and academic needs. Many survey participants were aware that the term "gifted" had multiple meanings and thus was variously interpreted. Interview data corroborated the survey findings and provided further insight into mothers' conceptions of giftedness.

Finding 2 – Motivations for Assessment

Survey participants were asked to identify the factors that motivated them to have their child(ren) assessed. A drop-down menu of options was presented and participants were prompted to select the motivating factor(s) pertinent for each child in the family who had undergone an assessment. Table 10 displays the data collected for eldest children; however, similar patterns of motivation were found for all children, regardless of birth order.

Table 10

Maternal Motivations for Assessment

Motivator as described in drop-down menu	n (%)
Something about my child seemed unusual or "different"	22 (51.2)
Child was experiencing difficulties at school (social, emotional, academic)	20 (46.5)
Child's teacher recommended an assessment	19 (44.2)
Desire to better understand child's learning profile	18 (41.9)
To determine child's eligibility for congregated gifted program	14 (32.6)
Urging of family and/or friends	7 (16.3)

Notes: Participants could select more than one motivating factor.
43 survey participants responded

Participants were most likely to report that "something about my child seemed unusual or 'different'" (51.2%) followed closely by "my child was experiencing difficulties at school" (46.5%), and "my child's teacher recommended an assessment" (44.2%). Wanting to know if a child was eligible for gifted programming was identified as a motivating factor less often than the desire to better understand a child's learning profile (32.6% vs. 41.9%). Seven mothers (16.3%) indicated that they arranged an assessment at the urging of family or friends.

Survey participants were also given the opportunity to elaborate on their motivations for assessment in an open ended follow-up question. Thirty-five of the 43 participants (81.4%) chose to provide additional information. Many participants expanded upon, or clarified their motivations as selected from the drop-down menu. Others chose to elaborate on their reasons for assessing subsequent children. An additional motivator emerged from the survey data as four participants indicated that they hoped to use the assessment report to negotiate differentiated educational opportunities for their children. Each of these motivating factors is presented below in order of frequency.

Child was experiencing social, emotional, and/or academic difficulties. Eleven of the 20 survey participants who reported that they had sought an assessment because of their children's social, emotional, and or academic difficulties chose to elaborate on their responses. Two mothers stated that their children were assessed because they were experiencing difficulties at school: Ella recalled that the school had expressed concern that her daughter was writing upside down and backwards, and Hannah maintained that her daughter's poor grades and lack of in-class participation triggered the assessment.

Several participants were moved to have their children assessed because they seemed unhappy or were complaining of being bored at school. Deanne's son was refusing to go to Kindergarten because in his opinion, he was not learning anything, and it was a waste of his time. Interview participant Julie noticed that her daughter Charlotte was unhappy at school and despite having conversations with her daughter's teacher to discuss Charlotte's learning profile and abilities, Julie perceived that the programming was not being adapted to meet her needs.

Social difficulties prompted Megan to have her daughter assessed. She wrote, "Social problems were beginning to arise between her and her friends in her own grade, who generally [worked] at a different level or much more slowly than she did." Two mothers (Joanne and Ruth) reported that they sought psycho-educational assessments for their daughters because they were exhibiting signs of anxiety. In Joanne's case, she explained that "there were anxiety issues – [she was] very concerned with the world, the big picture, everyone in her class. It seemed obvious that she learned differently, yet there were enormous self-esteem issues — she seemed to be the only one who didn't believe in her own abilities."

To determine eligibility for gifted programming. When describing their motivations for assessment, 14 participants (32.6%) indicated that they wanted to know if their child was eligible for placement in a gifted program. Prior to their first assessment experience, 26 mothers (57.7%) indicated that they were aware that the school district offered congregated classes for gifted learners; however, only 10 mothers (22.2%) reported that they were familiar with the criteria used by the school board to identify gifted students. Seven mothers chose to elaborate on their survey responses. Sandra noted that she wanted to know if her child was eligible for gifted programming because "the size cap in gifted classes was very attractive given the large class sizes occurring in our school." For Svetlana, the motivation to have her eldest child assessed was rooted in her own positive experience with specialized programming:

> Having been through the enrichment stream myself . . . I knew how liberating a congregated class could be, and we were aware that the regular stream was stifling/depressing our eldest child. We wanted to know what our options were within the system.

Mothers of older children who had been placed in a gifted class were often motivated to have subsequent children follow in their siblings' footsteps. Megan explained that she decided to have her daughter tested "to see if she could just start attending the gifted program in the same school as our other child." Sheila and Heidi were influenced by their older children's positive experiences of the gifted program. Heidi wrote, "Our eldest did so well in the congregated program - it really changed her life, so we felt the younger two would benefit from a gifted program as well." Implicit in these responses is the notion that giftedness might run in families, as Sarah explained in the survey; "I knew that there was a higher likelihood of my second being gifted, knowing that my first was." In contrast, Gwynne recalled that she was not at all sure her younger son's assessment results would meet the school board's criteria for giftedness, as was the case for her eldest son two years earlier. Rather, Gwynne's decision to pursue an assessment was motivated by a sense of parental fairness: "I had my second child assessed in part because my first child had been assessed. I felt it was important to offer them equal treatment"[12].

Something seemed "different" or unusual. Six mothers elaborated on the notion of perceived differences as a motivator for their child's assessment. Two participants recognized that their children were intellectually advanced. Claire stated that she knew her son "was exceptionally bright, especially in math", while Iliana wrote:

> Ever since he was a baby, we were amazed by his learning abilities. He was around one year old when he started recognizing letters and numbers. We had no real doubt (and I let the teacher know on the first day of Junior Kindergarten) that our son was highly intelligent.

Two participants reported that their children's behaviour seemed unusual in comparison to other children. For example, Deanne recalled that in addition to speaking, reading, and writing at an early age, her child was able to "interact with adults beyond what a much older child would."

[12] In the end, Gwynne was surprised — and relieved — to learn that her younger son also met the criteria for the congregated gifted program, and would be able to join his older brother.

Barb noted that her son "did not react to certain situations the way other children his age did." One mother explained that her son's intense behaviours prompted her to pursue an assessment:

> "He clearly had special capabilities early on in childhood, such as very early intellectual development, but [he] also had very extreme behaviours that we were concerned about (aggressive and extremely sensitive)." (Louise)

Participant did not request assessment for giftedness. Six participants indicated that they had not been motivated to assess their child for giftedness at all, noting that an assessment had either been administered by the school board as part of routine testing, or had been pursued for other reasons. For example, Guylaine stated that the assessment was done without her knowledge. This assessment was probably conducted during the board's systemic testing of Grade 3 students[13] as was the case for Anne: "I did not have him individually assessed – it was part of the school board's routine testing." Two mothers explained that the affirmation of their children's giftedness was a surprise as they had pursued psycho-educational testing for other reasons. Grace, the mother of a child who was experiencing social, emotional, and learning problems, noted that "gifted testing was not what we went in for." Similarly, Ruth recalled that "we never considered our second child gifted, but [we] had him assessed to ascertain whether or not he had ADHD." Grace's daughter and Ruth's son were later identified as dually exceptional learners (gifted/LD and gifted/ADHD, respectively).

Tool to negotiate differentiated programming. In an emergent theme, four mothers believed (or in one case, hoped) that an assessment report would enable them to negotiate differentiated learning opportunities for their children. As these responses focused on general advocacy efforts rather than gifted program eligibility, it was believed that the creation of a separate motivational category was warranted. Two of the four survey responses follow below:

> "We felt our child was floundering in rote, repetitive learning, or learning activities that were not representative of her abilities. We felt a [gifted] identification would better help us advocate for her needs." (Julie)

> "[Without an assessment] my son's school was not willing to accommodate his accelerated rate of learning."(Carolyn)

For these mothers, the assessment was viewed as a stepping stone to differentiated learning opportunities.

[13] Annual board-wide CCAT testing of Grade 3 students was conducted in the public school board prior to 2007.

Recommended by teacher or health care professional. In response to the original survey question, 19 (44.2%) participants selected "my child's teacher recommended an assessment" from the drop-down menu. In the follow-up question, three additional participants clarified that an assessment had been recommended not by a teacher, but by a health care professional:

> "I went to see a psychologist as my first child was 'pushed' a year ahead in schooling and I had concerns about that. It was suggested to do the testing at that time." (Natalya)
>
> ". . . stomach aches and nerves about school led my family doctor . . . to suggest that we have her tested." (Ruth)
>
> "For our first, our family doctor recommended it. He has some behavioural issues that she thought were stress-related and she said 'he's really smart, you know.'" (Margot)

Desire to better understand child's learning profile. Eighteen participants (41.9%) reported that the desire to better understand their child's learning profile was a motivating factor in their decision to pursue an assessment. Three mothers chose to elaborate on this response. Ronna stated that she wanted to understand her son better and "to figure out why he was behaving the way he was." A psycho-educational assessment was sought by Sonia in response to the classroom teacher's staunch conviction that her son's learning challenges were ADHD related:

> . . . we were confident that he was not ADHD, but knew we would not get rid of this 'label' (by the teacher) . . . unless we sought an assessment (paid for by us personally with no health care coverage).

Karina was motivated to obtain information about her son's "abilities, disabilities, learning style, etc." as she thought that it would enable her to make more informed decisions about his education.

Urging of family member or friend. Only one participant (Linda) chose to elaborate on this motivational factor, indicating that her decision to have her child assessed was prompted by a discussion with a family friend whose child was enrolled in the congregated gifted program.

Summary. Open ended survey and interview data illustrated that maternal motivations for assessment were numerous and varied. Participants were most likely to seek an assessment because something about their child seemed "different", because their child was experiencing difficulties at school, or because the child's teacher or health care professional recommended it.

Only one-third of mothers stated that the assessment was motivated by their desire to know if a child was eligible for gifted programming. For some mothers, the assessment was viewed as a tool for negotiating differentiated learning opportunities. An awareness that giftedness could run in families prompted some mothers to have subsequent children assessed.

Finding 3 – Reaction to Assessment Results

Survey participants were asked to recall and describe how they felt when they learned that their child had met the public school board's criteria for giftedness. This survey question was open ended to allow participants to describe the experience in their own words. Responses to the question were often lengthy, as participants attempted to express the scope of their emotions. For example, Francine, the mother of two gifted children, recalled her experience:

> Both times, I felt validated in my belief that my children were exceptional and needed more challenge in their schooling. I also felt proud. I felt relieved that their boredom with school would be alleviated in the gifted program and that they would fit in better with gifted children like them. I was a bit worried that the second child would not fare well entering a new program in the middle of the year.

Francine's survey response was typical in that a range of diverse emotions (validation, pride, relief, and worry/anxiety) were expressed. Maternal responses to the question, *How did you feel when you received the assessment report/test results?* were coded according to the emotion(s) expressed by participants. The results of this coding exercise are presented in Table 11 below.

Table 11

Emotions Expressed by Participants Following Assessment

Emotions as described by participants	n (%)
Happiness, feelings of pride	18 (40.9)
Surprise	17 (38.6)
Relief	16 (36.4)
Confirmation/validation	12 (27.3)
Confusion	10 (22.7)
Worry/anxiety	5 (11.4)
Vindication	3 (6.8)

Note: 44 participants responded to this question and shared at least one emotion

Although the table does provide a snapshot of the feelings described by participants, it fails to convey the breadth and depth of emotions communicated by mothers in their responses. Hence, the following section includes a sampling of the rich descriptions provided by participants.

Happiness, pride. The feelings noted most frequently by participants were happiness and/or pride (18/44, or 40.9%). Feelings of maternal pride were evident in a number of survey responses, most notably the following:

> "Because the results indicated, 'very superior intellectual functioning' or giftedness, my first response was to feel proud of myself and my child." (Colleen)
>
> "I won't deny there was a certain pride as well in having 'proof' of just how smart my child was/is." (Sheila)

Interestingly, Margaret recalled that "there was an element of pride, but since my daughters were adopted there was no reflected glory that I too might be gifted."

Three mothers were pleased that their children had met the public school board's elevated criteria for profoundly gifted learners:

> ". . . I felt pleased that her scores were high enough to qualify as profoundly gifted. I felt like this would help her to get services at school and it was also gratifying to see that she really was as bright as I thought she might be." (Daria)
>
> "I was extremely pleased and relieved that there was a special program in place for children like my daughter and that she met the criteria for the programming." (Heather)
>
> ". . . I was thrilled; we weren't sure whether she would qualify [for the profoundly gifted program] (99.6th percentile), but she wowed us by getting 99.9th." (Dawn)

Other participants were more reserved in their responses. For example, Zhen stated that she was "happy to know that they have high learning ability." Upon receiving the assessment report from the psychologist, Miranda noted that she was "extremely pleased to have 'a manual' that explained and gave tips on how to best support children."

In some cases, mothers remarked that their feelings of pride were tempered by other emotions. Ronna noted that "we were proud of him, but also realized that he had special needs at school in regards to finding ways to motivate him." In another case, Dawn recalled that while she was pleased when her second child scored in the profoundly gifted range, she had hoped that he might score even higher in order to increase his chances of securing a placement in a congregated gifted class. Karina explained that her feelings of parental pride were quashed by

the reaction of others: “I felt very proud to be the mother of such a capable child and wanted to brag to everyone I knew about it, only to find out that most people didn't like hearing about my ‘gifted’ child.”

Surprise. The emotion expressed second most often by participants was one of surprise (17/44, or 38.6%). This sense of surprise took many different forms, as evidenced by the range of responses provided by survey participants. For example, several mothers reported that they were surprised to learn that their child’s results fell within the gifted range. Ella recalled that she was “a bit surprised - I didn't realize she was ‘gifted’, [I] just thought she was different.” Padmal reported that she was very surprised to learn that her son was “classified as gifted”, particularly as his primary teachers had never suggested testing, and “in fact, complained a lot about him talking [and] distracting others in class.”

Others, like Daphne, were surprised that their child’s assessment results exceeded the board’s criteria for profound giftedness (synonymous with a 99.6th percentile full-scale score):

> . . . despite feeling that he was bright, [I was] also a little surprised that he was. Perhaps that doesn't make sense, but when I heard that my child scored in the 99th percentile on these tests, it did surprise me.

In another case, Hannah had expected other learning issues to surface in the psycho-educational assessment and was understandably surprised to learn that her daughter met the board’s criteria for giftedness: “We were thinking she might have a learning disability . . . [so] having the profoundly gifted ID was a shock.” Conversely, two participants who had anticipated results in the gifted range were surprised to discover that their child’s assessment revealed a second learning exceptionality. Jessica wrote that she was “a bit shocked” as she “had expected the gifted designation, but not LD.” Similarly, Ella noted that she was “surprised by the gifted/LD profile.”

A number of mothers whose eldest children had been identified as gifted noted that they were surprised when subsequent children also met the gifted criteria as they had presented so differently:

> “For my second son, I was astonished. He seemed so normal and didn't seem at all bright compared to his older brother. [I] couldn't believe that he had such high scores too.” (Allie)

> "When our second child was shown to be gifted I was a bit surprised**,** mostly because she hadn't been having the social and behavioural problems our son had, so I suspected she wasn't profoundly gifted." (Megan)
>
> "For our second – [I was] a bit surprised that he met the guidelines for gifted - we didn't see the same 'brilliance' in him . . ." (Margot)
>
> "I was not certain he would qualify as profoundly gifted [like his brother], and I expected the testing to suggest a learning disability of some sort." (Gwynne)

It would appear that for these mothers, the social, emotional, and academic profile of the first child in the family to be identified provided a model of giftedness to which subsequent children were compared.

Confirmation, validation. Twelve participants (27.3%) indicated that the assessment results confirmed or validated their beliefs. For example, Linda stated that she was "not surprised with the results" and that the assessment was in line with what she had observed of her child over the years. Sheila reported that "in both cases the test results pretty much confirmed what we already knew." Francine and Daphne reported that the assessment results served to "validate" their beliefs about their children's abilities.

Relief. Sixteen participants (36.4%) indicated that they experienced a sense of relief upon receiving the assessment results. In a number of cases, mothers reported that the assessment results provided them with a plausible explanation for the difficulties their children had been experiencing at school. For example, Sarah reflected that "there was some relief in knowing that many of the 'difficulties' in school were in fact not strictly 'behaviour' problems, but rather boredom . . . problems that could be addressed in a positive fashion rather than [through] punishment." Sandra recalled a similar experience:

> We had pursued testing because of a very difficult situation between our child and his teacher and so it was all bad news at the beginning of this particular school year. Our first child is not gifted in an obvious "school smart" way. . . so we had begun to think he was having learning difficulties. It was a huge relief to find out that he had the natural ability and that it was just the particular set of circumstances he was in that were totally derailing him.

Sonia — who sought an assessment as a means of challenging the classroom teacher's belief that her son had ADHD — recalled that the results "brought a sense of relief that we now knew what

the issue was and could deal with it appropriately and effectively." Similarly, Louise was relieved to learn that the differences she perceived in her son could be attributed to giftedness rather than ADHD or learning disabilities. For Karina, the assessment results provided additional perspective with regard to her son's differences. She wrote, "my son is a little different from his age peers so it was comforting for me to know that he is perfectly 'normal' for a 'gifted' child."

Several mothers indicated that their sense of relief was tied to the expectation that the assessment results would afford additional help and/or understanding from the school system. Claire hoped that the assessment report might give her son "opportunities for enrichment at school", and Joanne perceived that there would be "some 'help' from the school and the teachers, and some professional guidance on how to deal with some of the hallmarks of giftedness." Others were relieved that the assessment results confirmed that their children were now eligible for congregated gifted programming offered by the public school board. This feeling was captured most succinctly by Sheila who wrote, "It was a relief to know that there was an academic program in the city that was meant to meet his unique needs and that these results were 'the passport' to the program."

Three mothers of gifted learners spoke of their relief in finding out that a subsequent child had also been assessed as gifted. Sandra recounted that she was relieved that her second son had "some natural ability" to work with, noting that "it was also good not to have that awkward situation of one sibling gifted and one not." Upon receiving the assessment results for her younger son, Gwynne expressed relief that his scores were in the gifted range "because it meant he could join his brother in the gifted program [and] I felt that it would be a huge blow to his self-esteem if he did not qualify." Finally, Megan was relieved for what she called "practical reasons" as the second assessment result meant that her daughter could attend the same school as her older brother. Megan was also pleased that "the same doors that had opened for her brother in terms of education and being challenged and excited in the classroom would be opening for her."

Confusion. From a conceptual standpoint, the notion of giftedness proved difficult for some participants to grasp as 10 participants (22.7%) claimed that the assessment results left them feeling confused or overwhelmed. Margaret recalled that "gifted" was not something that existed during her school years, consequently she "felt slightly overwhelmed" by her daughter's

psycho-educational report. Julie reported that she and her husband — both of whom are educators in the public school board — were "shell-shocked" by the results of the psycho-educational report. She wrote, ". . . we had trouble understanding what 'profound giftedness' meant and how, and if, it applied to our daughter. It took us a while to snap out of the 'shocked' phase."

On a more practical level, several participants reported that they had difficulty understanding the report, particularly when the assessment had been conducted by the school board. Heidi recalled that she was perplexed by the CCAT results because her child had scored at the 99th percentile in one area, "but average and above average in the others." Anne also reported having difficulties deciphering the CCAT report. She wrote, "[It] was not easy to understand. The school did not explain it to me, other than he met the school board's criteria. The letter arrived in the mail, with no follow-up, until I requested it." Sonia contrasted her experiences of her son's private assessment with her daughter's more recent school-based assessment:

> Compared to our experience with the private psychologist . . . the results [of my daughter's assessment] were not well explained or communicated. If we hadn't been through it the first time, we would not have been able to make any sense of the results, nor would we even have known to ask for an assessment.

In addition to feeling generally overwhelmed by the assessment results, some participants indicated that they weren't sure "what to do with this information" (Hannah). Megan also recalled that the next step in the process was unclear: "We had been told only that being 'gifted' could open doors to further educational resources — whatever that meant — and that it would be good for him to be identified."

Other mothers described the steep learning curve they encountered in processing the assessment results. For example, Colleen wrote:

> I eventually began to feel overwhelmed with the learning I realized I'd need to undertake to properly understand what "giftedness" meant, to advocate for my child and to deal with the IPRC process, IEP's, accommodations, etc. This was all new to me.

Violet, the mother of a dually exceptional learner recalled that "the combination of Gifted/LD opened the flood gates for accommodations that he would need and would benefit from. I was on information overload and wisely chose to work on one issue at a time."

Worry, anxiety. For five mothers the assessment results triggered feelings of worry and anxiety. For example, Allie wrote, "I felt grief for my first son. I was shocked that he was so far outside the normal curve, [and I] worried that he would be bullied and not fit in." Michelle recalled that she wanted to cry, as she worried that her child would have the "social skills of her grandfather", whom she described as a "genius". Another mother expressed that she felt "very anxious" because her son's assessment results meant that he had a new opportunity to attend the gifted program, but she worried about him leaving the French immersion program at his local school.

Vindication. Interestingly, two mothers used the word "vindicated" to describe their reaction to the assessment results. Gywnne reported that she "felt vindicated in having pursued the testing at all" as the results showed that her observations and comparisons had been correct. For Sonia, the assessment results "brought a sense of vindication that the teacher's label of ADHD (which she was fixated on) was not accurate." And although Iliana did not use the word "vindication" specifically, the sentiment of her response is consistent with the previous replies:

> . . . I had no real doubt that my son's intellectual capacity was way over the normal limit, but the teacher didn't seem to trust my judgment (of course, every mother thinks or wants to think that she has an intelligent child) . . . At the moment when the truth was revealed by the psychologist, I was so relieved: there was finally someone that trusted and proved my theory!

Discomfort. In an outlying response, Sandra expressed her discomfort with the assessment process. She wrote, "I worry about the integrity of the system for testing for giftedness. Is it accurate enough, is it available enough, is it meaningful enough?"

Summary. Upon receiving the assessment results to indicate that their child had met the school board's criteria for giftedness, the feelings recalled most often by participants were happiness, surprise, and relief. Almost one quarter of participants noted that they were overwhelmed or confused by the assessment results and what to do about them, particularly if the assessment had been conducted at school. Other feelings expressed by participants included confirmation, worry, anxiety, and vindication. It was not uncommon for participants to express a range of conflicting emotions as they processed the news that their child(ren) had met the public school board's criteria for giftedness.

Finding 4 – Exploration of Educational Placement Options

Survey data indicated that a majority of participants (38/45, or 84%) considered making a change to their child's educational placement after receiving their child's assessment results. A follow-up question asked participants to identify which alternative educational placements they had considered from a drop-down menu of locally available options. The results are shown in Table 12 below.

Table 12

Alternative Educational Placement Options Considered by Participants

Educational placement options	n (%)
Primary gifted (English)	32 (84.2)
Private school	13 (34.2)
Junior gifted (French immersion)	11 (28.9)
Regular French immersion	8 (21.0)
Junior gifted (English)	7 (18.4)
Home schooling	5 (13.2)
Other school board (i.e., Catholic, French)	2 (5.3)

Notes: Participants could select multiple placement options
Participants did not necessarily select same options for all children; this represents a consolidation of data.
A total of 38 participants responded.

The primary congregated program — available to those students who meet the public school board's criteria for profoundly gifted learners — was the placement option considered most often (32/38, 84.2%)[14] by survey participants. Private school was considered by 13 participants (34.2%), followed closely by two French immersion options: the junior congregated gifted program[15] (11, or 28.9%), and the "regular" French immersion program (8, or 21.0%). Five mothers (13.2%) thought about home schooling their children and two participants (5.3%) explored educational placement opportunities in other local school boards. Hence, survey data suggests that participants were prompted to consider a wide range of educational placement options following their child(ren)'s assessment.

[14] At least 39 students represented in the survey met this criteria; in a few cases participants were unsure as to which criteria had been met.
[15] For students enrolled in the Early French Immersion program who meet the public school board's criteria for giftedness.

Changes in educational placement. A data audit was conducted to establish the educational placement of students before and after their assessment. Students' educational placements at the time of the assessment and at the time of the survey are mapped out in Table 14. The purpose of the table is to illustrate the migration of identified gifted students to alternative placement options. Survey data confirmed that a majority of participants did make a change to their child's educational placement post-assessment, and that most mothers pursued and obtained a placement in one of the school board's specialized programs for gifted learners.

Table 14

Comparison of Educational Placement at Time of Assessment vs. Time of Survey

	Educational placement at time of assessment						
Educational placement at time of survey	Regular French Immersion (public) n = 38	Private School n = 11	Regular English (public) n = 9	Out of board n = 6	Not known n = 2	Home school n = 0	Total n (%) 66
Junior gifted (English)	5	3	3	2	1	0	14 (21.2)
Regular French immersion	11	1	1	0	0	0	13 (19.6)
Primary gifted (English)	7	1	2	0	0	0	10 (15.2)
Junior gifted (French immersion)	9	1	0	0	0	0	10 (15.2)
Private school	1	4	0	0	1	0	6 (9.1)
High school gifted/specialized	4	0	0	1	0	0	5 (7.6)
Regular English	0	0	3	1	0	0	4 (6.1)
Out of board	0	1	0	2	0	0	3 (4.5)
Not known	1*	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1.5)
Home school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0.0)
Total n (%)	38 (57.6)	11 (16.7)	9 (13.6)	6 (9.1)	2 (3.0)	0 (0)	66 (100%)

Notes:
Not known= insufficient information provided
Out of board = French board, Catholic board, boards neighbouring urban centre
* much older brother of elementary aged gifted student who had graduated from K-12 system

As depicted in the table, only 20 children (30.3%) remained in their original placement (11 in Regular French immersion, 4 in Private school, 3 in Regular English, and 2 out of board), meaning that 46 students (69.7%) changed school placements following their assessment. Of those students who changed placements, 38 (57.5%) were enrolled in some form of gifted programming offered by the public school board.[16]

[16] Fourteen students were placed in a junior congregated gifted class (English), 10 were in a primary gifted class for profoundly gifted learners (English), 10 were in a junior congregated class for gifted French immersion students, and five were attending high school (4 in the gifted stream and 1in the board's school for the arts).

The vast majority of the 24 students enrolled in the primary or junior congregated English classes had met the school board's criteria for profoundly gifted learners[17] and had been placed in the program between Grades 1 and 4. Half of these students came from the regular and Early French Immersion programs, with the remaining students coming from regular English (n=5), private schools (n=4), and out of board (n=2). In one instance, the original placement was not disclosed. In addition to the primary and junior aged students, two of the four high school aged students had moved from regular French Immersion to the congregated gifted program as primary students.

Not surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of students (9 /10) in the junior congregated gifted French immersion program were originally enrolled in the public school board's Early French Immersion program. The remaining student transferred to the program from a private school setting.

Wait list for gifted programming. A total of nine students (13.6%) were on a waiting list for a congregated gifted placement in the public school board. At the time of the survey, six of those students were in a Regular French immersion class, one was in a Regular English class, one attended private school, and one student was registered in another board. This would suggest that as many as 71% of the gifted learners represented in the survey might have been enrolled in a congregated gifted class had sufficient places been available.

"The most difficult decision". In an open ended question, survey participants were asked to identify the most difficult decision they had faced thus far in relation to their gifted child(ren). Analysis of the survey data revealed that 28 of 35 participants (80.0%) characterized some aspect of the educational placement decision as the most difficult.

Several mothers stated rather matter-of-factly that the decision to move their child to a new program or school had been difficult, as evidenced in the following responses:

> "Moving him to a new school in Grade 5 for the gifted program was a very difficult decision." (Padmal)
>
> "The hardest decision was to pull her from public school and send her to private school." (Hannah)

Other mothers elaborated more fully on *what* they had found difficult about the educational placement decision. The prospect of the "unknown" was daunting for some. For

[17] At least 19/24 as some mothers were unsure as to which criteria had been met.

example, Guylaine reported that "the most difficult decision was the unknown of having her change schools. The old adage 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' described her situation." Svetlana's angst was almost palpable:

> [I had] a lot of sleepless nights . . . I was tortured by the decision of whether or not to uproot my eldest from his school, where he had been from JK onwards and where he had friends and he knew who and what the challenges were. The idea of sending him to a school environment I knew nothing about and would not be allowed to gauge for myself unless he was offered a placement was like pushing my son off a cliff.

Moreover, Svetlana's concern that her two younger children (also gifted) might not be offered gifted placements in the future "resulted in a fear of double standards creating a rift between our kids."

Several mothers described the difficulties they encountered in arriving at a final placement decision. For example, when describing a recent situation in which her daughter was offered a placement in the primary gifted program, Daria noted that "there were so many issues to take into account, and they weren't all pointing the same way. I felt like I was dithering about it." Two mothers (Ella and Sonia) described the school placement decision as "agonizing". Ella felt that the decision was difficult because "sometimes there are no clear answers", while Sonia recalled that she had agonized over the options, trying to figure out "what would be best" for her son. Several mothers wrote of the heightened sense of parental responsibility they felt to: (a) educate themselves about giftedness; (b) support and nurture their child's potential; (c) become more involved with the school system; and (d) find an appropriate educational placement for their child. Although a few participants believed, like Svetlana, that all parents "have the responsibility to nurture their kids and help them develop to their full potential", a number of participants felt that their role had shifted or intensified since their children were identified as gifted. Dawn wrote, "Parents of regular children just have to send their children to school, but I have to make sure there's an appropriate spot to send my children to." Survey and interview data would seem to suggest that the complexity of the decision making process, coupled with intense feelings of maternal responsibility, were a heavy burden for some participants to bear. As Linda wrote, "wanting to do the right thing for one's child is always harrowing."

While the majority of the most difficult decisions described by participants related to educational placement, it is worth noting that a few did not. For example, Michelle's decision to

break ties with some of the neighbourhood school parents because they had a "hard time accepting" her child's giftedness and subsequent placement at another school, and Colleen's decision to begin pharmacological treatment for her daughter's behavioural issues fell outside the realm of educational placement. Also, not all mothers were able to identify a difficult decision in relation to parenting their gifted children. Karina maintained that she could not think of any particularly difficult decisions in her journey thus far, and Margaret asserted that "the decisions have not been difficult. The decisions seemed obvious. It is living with the outcomes that has been difficult."

Summary. A majority of participants reported that they had considered at least one alternative educational placement option for their gifted child(ren) following their assessment. Survey data indicated that most participants did elect to change their child(ren)'s educational placement, most often to a congregated gifted class within the board. When asked about the most difficult decision they had to make thus far in relation to their gifted child(ren), most participants described some aspect of the educational placement process.

Finding 5 – Influential Factors in Educational Decision Making

As discussed in Finding 1, participants reported that discovering that their child(ren) had met the school board's criteria for giftedness affected them in a number of ways. First, it prompted participants to explore their knowledge and understanding of the concept of giftedness. Second, the assessment results provided a new framework for understanding their child(ren)'s social, emotional, and academic needs. On a practical level the assessment results meant that participants could request that their children be formally identified as gifted, and placed in the public school board's congregated gifted program. The vast majority of participants (32/38 or 84.2%) stated that they did consider a congregated gifted placement (as illustrated in Finding 4) and 28 of 44 participants (63.6%) had at least one child enrolled in a congregated gifted class at the time of the survey. What was clearly expressed in participants' responses is that educational decision making was a significant and often difficult component of the maternal experience.

One of the objectives of the research project was to explore and describe *how* participants arrived at educational placement decisions for their gifted children. To this end, survey and interview participants were asked, *"How did you decide among the various placement options for your gifted child(ren)?"* This question was purposefully open ended to allow mothers to identify and describe the factors that informed their decision making. Many participants

provided lengthy and articulate responses to describe how they arrived at an educational placement decision. One such example is the passage written by Megan, the mother of two identified gifted learners:

> Both our children were social enough that home schooling wasn't an option. Private schools are too expensive and not always superior. We're not Catholic[18] and we have heard that French immersion does not provide adequate English instruction for our standards. Therefore, our only option was primary gifted. What we had learned of this program – which is really just that our children would no longer stand out and be different from everyone around them, and that they would be able to explore more freely their areas of [interest] instead of being frustrated and held back – seemed ideal.

Megan's response was typical of participants' responses in two ways. First, she identified multiple factors that were influential in her decision making (i.e., perceived needs of child, cost, beliefs relating to private education, language of instruction, perceived benefits of congregated gifted program). Second, Megan described a filtering process whereby she eliminated educational options that were perceived to be incompatible with those factors. Although other participants may have made different placement decisions than Megan, the factors that informed their decision making tended to be similar.

Overview of decision making. With regard to the *process* of decision making, a similar two stage "filtering" approach was described by many participants. A graphic depiction of this process follows on the subsequent page, and a description of the each of the steps can be found on page 101.

[18] And therefore could not access programming in the Catholic school board, which offers pull-out programs for gifted students.

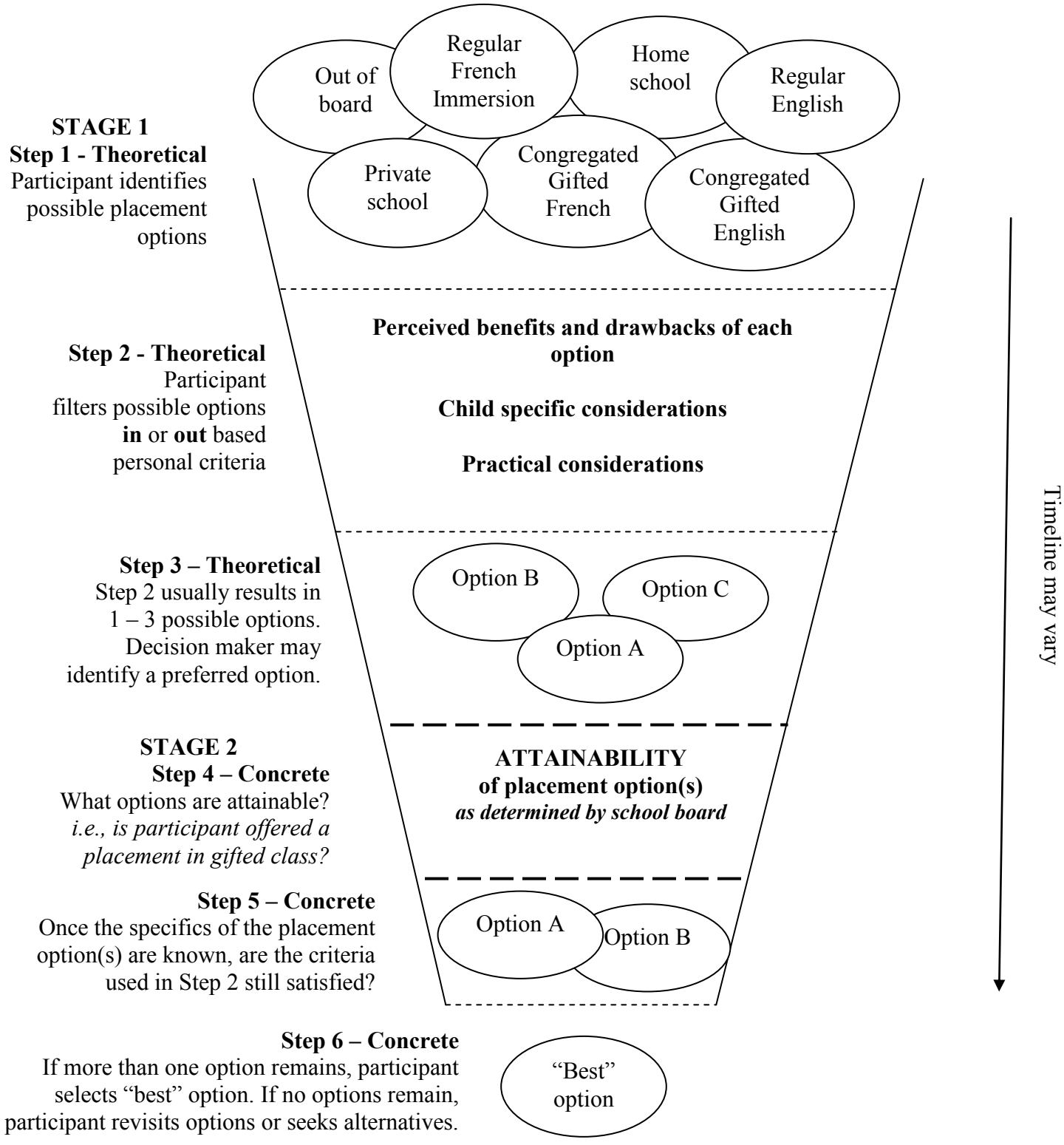

Figure 4 - Overview of Participants' Decision Making Process

Description of steps in participants' decision making. Participants often described a kind of filtering process as they considered educational options for their children. Descriptive data provided by survey and interview participants were used to create the figure shown on the page 100. The purpose of the figure is to illustrate how mothers approached educational decision making for their gifted children and what factors were influential to the process.

In **Step 1** of the *theoretical* phase of the decision, mothers identified possible educational placement options in their environment. A wide range of possible options were identified by participants, including regular English, regular French immersion, congregated gifted English (primary/junior), congregated gifted French (junior only), private school, placements in other school boards, and home schooling.

In **Step 2** of the theoretical stage, participants filtered the identified placement options in or out based on three broad criteria:

- Maternal perceptions related to each placement (e.g., perceived benefits and drawbacks to each option)
- Child specific considerations (e.g., perceived social, emotional, and academic needs)
- Practical considerations (e.g., proximity to home, affordability, transportation issues, perceived impact on family/work life)

Options perceived to be incompatible with any or all of these criteria were eliminated. Open ended survey data indicated mothers usually considered between two and five possible options at the outset and then narrowed it down to one, two, or three options using the filtering process. Mothers did not necessarily utilize all of the filters listed above, nor did they weigh the various factors equally or apply them in any particular sequence. Rather, it seemed that mothers engaged in this filtering process almost subconsciously.

By **Step 3**, most mothers had a theoretically "ideal" placement in mind. At this point, the *attainability* of the placement options identified in Step 3 became critical to mothers' decision making, particularly for those who desired a congregated gifted placement in the public school board. Typically there are more applicants than spaces in the program; therefore not all mothers who desired this option were extended an offer of placement. If a congregated gifted placement was desired but not offered, this option was not *concrete* and was therefore filtered out (**Step 4)**. If an offer of placement in a congregated gifted placement was extended, mothers then considered the specifics of the placement offer (i.e., location, start time, transportation

arrangements, gender breakdown of class, teacher, etc.) in relation to the same filtering criteria used earlier. If the criteria deemed to be most important at this stage were not satisfied, the placement offer was refused and this option was filtered out (**Step 5**). In the final stage, **Step 6**, mothers considered their remaining concrete options. If only one option remained, the participant had to decide whether or not to accept it. If more than one option remained, the option perceived to be the "best" was selected. If no educational placement options survived the filtering process, mothers tended to reconsider their criteria, revisit their options, or seek new alternatives.

Participants' timelines for decision making varied depending on a number of factors. For example, as the public school board extends the bulk of its placement offers for congregated gifted classes in the late spring for the following September, many decisions were made in this time period. On the other hand, placement decisions could be more drawn out depending on the timing of the child's assessment in relation to the school board decision cycle, or if a child was on a wait list. Moreover, mothers of primary school-aged children who desired a congregated gifted French immersion placement often had to wait several years to access the Grade 5 entry point.

Decision making experiences by placement option. The decision making experiences of study participants are explored in greater detail in subsequent sections. For further data pertaining to participants' individual decision making, refer to the matrix in Appendix I. Participants' quotes have been grouped according to their child(ren)'s educational placement at the time of the survey. The various educational options have been arranged in order of frequency as follows:

1. Congregated gifted English (primary and junior)
2. Regular French immersion
3. Gifted French immersion (junior)
4. Private School
5. Regular English
6. Out of board
7. Home schooling

For each of these placement options, the various factors that informed mothers' decision making are presented and described. The three main criteria (perceived benefits and drawbacks

of each option, child specific considerations, and practical considerations) are explored, as well as the perceived attainability of mothers' preferred educational placement options. Survey and interview data have been intermingled in an attempt to present the richness and diversity of the maternal experience. Emergent themes are noted, as are outlying or "negative" experiences.

Congregated gifted English. At the time of the survey, 20 of 44 participants (45.5%) had at least one child enrolled in a congregated gifted English class at the primary or junior level accounting for a total of 24 children, or 36.4% of all identified gifted students. Ten children were placed in the primary congregated class for profoundly gifted learners and an additional 14 students were in a junior congregated gifted class[19].

Maternal perceptions. Almost one-third of mothers (9/32, or 28.1%) stated that the primary congregated gifted program was the *only* option they considered for their child(ren), suggesting that it was highly valued by these participants. For example, Margot stated that once her two children met the criteria, "we sought a placement in primary gifted as soon as possible . . . no other options were sought." Similarly, Dawn remarked, "once [my daughter] qualified, it was the only option we considered." Grace reported that her decision to exclusively pursue a congregated gifted placement for her daughter was informed by a process of elimination:

> We were told not to consider French immersion because of our daughter's learning problems. We rejected home schooling because when she is happy with her peers, our daughter is very social. Private schooling didn't seem to offer the chance to be with other like-minded children and didn't offer the specialized teachers. Gifted classes seemed to be the only way of meeting the intellectual and social needs of our child.

Like Grace, many participants perceived that the congregated program would offer unique benefits for gifted learners. Mothers of older children who were already thriving in the congregated gifted program were motivated to secure placements for their younger children. The benefits most often associated with the congregated gifted program were increased challenge and stimulation, and the opportunity for gifted students to learn and socialize with like-minded peers. These maternal perceptions are further explored below.

Increased challenge and stimulation. Not surprisingly, several mothers believed that the congregated gifted program would provide extended learning opportunities for their child(ren).

[19] At least nine of the students currently enrolled in the junior class had entered the gifted program as primary-aged students, and therefore met the board's criteria for profound giftedness.

In describing her rationale for pursuing a gifted placement for her daughter, Dawn reasoned, "we wanted her to be in gifted so she would be challenged and stimulated." The prospect of a more rigorous academic program prompted Francine to change school boards in order to access the primary gifted class for her son. She explained, "gifted programming was not available in the . . . [school] board where he was, and he definitely needed additional challenges at school. I had heard very good things about the primary gifted program."

The opportunity to learn and socialize with like-minded peers. The notion that congregated gifted classes would enable gifted learners to learn and socialize with like-minded peers was mentioned by a number of mothers. This opportunity was particularly important to Karina, the mother of a dually exceptional child (gifted/communication):

> My primary goal is for my son to be happy and I couldn't think of anything that would make a 7 year old more happy then to be surrounded by friends he could play with. My criteria then for choosing the placement option were: a class with kids that could understand my son and that he could understand, kids who were on the same intellectual and emotional level as he was and kids that were his peers. The primary congregated gifted program had the highest statistical chance of meeting those criteria.

A similar rationale was presented by Iliana, whose kindergarten-aged son had recently been assessed as profoundly gifted. She explained why she was pursuing a congregated gifted placement in the public board for Grade 1:

> I would like him to be in a class with his peers. As a profoundly gifted child, he would be more comfortable (he would fit better) and he would very much enjoy the challenges of a congregated gifted class. I am sure he would blossom if he is offered the chance to be with children as intelligent as he is.

Although an offer of placement in the primary gifted class would necessitate a change in school boards, Iliana reiterated that she would be happy to make the change if it meant that her son could be with like-minded peers.

Preferable alternative to the regular stream. In addition to the perceived benefits described above, several mothers viewed the congregated gifted option as a preferable alternative to the public school board's regular programming. Miranda, whose two children were assessed while attending a private school overseas, stated that she requested a congregated gifted placement upon returning to Canada "because of the extremely poor program in the regular

stream." In another response, Sandra noted that she preferred the small class sizes associated with the junior gifted program (capped at 25). Other participants explained that they had sought out gifted placements because they had been unable to obtain meaningful enrichment or differentiation for their children in the regular classroom. For example, Carolyn recalled that she watched her son grow increasingly unhappy "while unsuccessfully trying to persuade his school to address his needs." For these mothers, congregated gifted classes were perceived to offer something "better" or "different" than what was currently being offered in the regular program.

While most participants seemed to acknowledge and appreciate what the primary congregated classes had to offer gifted learners, the program was also associated with certain drawbacks. The trade-offs mentioned most frequently included the loss of French immersion and a change in school community. These maternal perceptions are presented below.

Loss of French immersion. Of the 24 students currently placed in a primary or junior congregated gifted English class, 12 (50.0%) had transferred from the Early French Immersion (EFI) program. A number of participants expressed their dismay that primary congregated classes for profoundly gifted students were offered only in English, essentially forcing parents of young children to choose between French immersion and congregated gifted programming. Gwynne recalled,

> We had spent a lot of time and effort making the decision to send our child to EFI and believed in it strongly, so to have this option taken away in order to have access to a congregated gifted program was very frustrating and went against what we believed about acquiring a second language. I felt that I was making an enormous choice for a child who was only 5 years old. It did not seem fair to me that we had to give up French immersion in order to attend a [primary] gifted program.

Similarly, Ruth lamented having to "give up on the French immersion program" in order to have her children placed in the primary congregated class as she was "very keen on them becoming fluent." Heidi expressed concern that her youngest daughter — who switched to the primary gifted program in Grade 1 — left the EFI program without "a good grounding" in the French language. She noted, "there was . . . (and still is) concern about the lack of French education." In a follow-up interview Heidi wondered aloud why the primary gifted program was offered only in English, stating "Of anybody, they're the ones who could handle the French immersion, you

know?" These two mothers found it difficult to reconcile the perceived advantages of French immersion and perceived benefits of the congregated gifted program.

The loss of French immersion was perceived to be less of a concern for some participants, including Margot who believed that "the benefits of the gifted program far outweighed the fact that they would not learn French."

Change in school community. None of the participants who chose to place their children in a primary gifted class were able to access this program in their neighbourhood school. Margot explained that the consequences of choosing the gifted program were that her children would have to leave the French immersion program, and "attend school OUTSIDE our neighbourhood." Heidi noted that for her three daughters, placement in the gifted program meant "leaving the school they started at and leaving their siblings." She elaborated on this thought in an interview:

> I think there is a camaraderie of having the siblings being all at the same school, and the parents knowing each other, the sense of the community . . . the [ability to] contribute to the school community; all of that to me is very important and it's an important part of [the] school experience.

Megan also described the loss of community she and her children experienced after moving her two children from their local alternative school to the primary gifted program:

> Even though the gifted program is great, many aspects of the alternative program suited our children wonderfully (more outdoor recess, less sitting in desks in early grades, more inventive class projects and outings, parents welcome in the classroom to help out on a regular basis gave it a less institutional feel, etc.). It was also a special community which is rare in regular schools — we certainly haven't experienced it in our current school.

Not all participants were saddened to leave their community school, however, particularly if they had not felt well supported there. For example, Heather reported that she was told by the Learning Support Teacher and principal at her neighbourhood school "that there was nothing they could offer [my daughter]" in the way of enrichment or program accommodations. Heather expressed her resentment at having to make a choice "between subjecting my daughter to a three hour daily drive to school [and leaving] her at a school that blatantly told us that [she] didn't belong there." (In the end, Heather decided to home school her daughter for two years before accepting a placement in a junior congregated class closer to home.) Another mother argued that the inclusive model used in community schools was not ideal for students with

exceptionalities because teachers "don't have the skills" to cope with the growing diversity of learning needs. She continued, "I don't believe that in a community school that one teacher can deal with the kid with the various learning disabilities and maybe behavioural issues, and the average kid, and the gifted kid, and the kid with Asperger's." In these instances, mothers perceived that the community school would be unable to meet their child's needs.

Child specific considerations. In addition to weighing the perceived benefits and trade-offs associated with congregated gifted programming, mothers also considered child specific factors in their filtering process. Some participants reasoned that the congregated gifted program was a good "fit" for their child's particular academic, social, and/or emotional needs. Three mothers mentioned that the opportunity to observe a gifted class had confirmed this belief. For example, Michelle recalled that after observing one of the primary gifted classes at an open house, she knew it was where her daughter "belonged". Similarly, after researching the primary program for her daughter, Natalya concluded that she was "convinced it was the right fit for [her]." Sheila revealed that she felt compelled to explore the primary gifted program as her son was struggling in the regular classroom. She recalled that "there was no question about what to do because he was unhappy, under-stimulated, and socially rejected. The congregated gifted program was the only immediate alternative as far as I knew."

Mothers' perceptions of their children's language skills were often influential in their decision to pursue a congregated gifted English placement. When recounting her decision to move her son from the French board to the congregated gifted class for Grade 1, Violet recalled that she "gave up on the option of French immersion for him because he was so young when he entered the [congregated gifted] program." She conceded that in light of his learning disability, "he may not have been able to perform in a French immersion environment anyway, and may have been too challenged to cope with this option." In another example, Margot perceived that her eldest son in particular would "thrive better in an English program . . . because of his strengths in the language arts."

Not all participants were convinced that the congregated gifted English program would be suitable for their children. In one case a mother refused an offer of placement for her eldest daughter because there were "no girls in the Gr. 3 gifted class." Deanne discovered that the congregated program was not a good fit for her son after a short and ultimately unsuccessful stint in a primary gifted class. After a little more than a week, Deanne decided to move him back to

the regular program because she perceived that he was not adjusting socially. She wrote, "it was hard because I knew the program was excellent and would be beneficial [academically], but I needed to support my child's emotional and social needs."

Practical considerations. Many mothers indicated that practical considerations were influential in their decision making. This filter was particularly important once an offer of placement had been extended by the public school board for a specific class and location. The practical considerations reported most often by mothers (convenience, proximity to home, transportation, and financial) and explored below.

Convenience. For practical reasons, two mothers expressed relief when their younger children were offered gifted placements at the gifted centre schools attended by their older siblings. Similarly, Sheila maintained that her decision to accept an offer of placement for her second child was influenced by the prospect of having her children attend the same school for the first time.

Heidi was less fortunate as her three daughters were offered congregated gifted placements in three different schools. Although Heidi conceded that she had willingly accepted each placement as it was offered, she explained that she now had to manage multiple parent-teacher interview nights, pizza days, holiday concerts, and parent volunteer requests. In a reflective interview, Heidi wondered what she might have done differently to simplify her family life while still meeting her children's learning needs.

Proximity to home. The proximity of a congregated gifted placement to home was an important practical consideration. Participants were more likely to accept an offer of placement in a gifted class if it was located nearby:

> "The primary gifted program was available at a school located a reasonable distance from our home, so we accepted the placements there." (Gwynne)
>
> "As both kids were offered spots at [a nearby school] in the primary congregated gifted class, we were happy to take them out of French immersion and transfer them." (Ruth)

When the congregated gifted placement was located far from home, transportation arrangements were often a sticking point, as evidenced in the next subsection.

Transportation issues. Several mothers expressed concerns about the distances their children would have to travel in order to access congregated gifted classes. Distance related issues were of particular concern to mothers of young children who qualified for the primary

program. As there were only three primary gifted English classes in the board, travel times of one hour or more (each way) were not uncommon, particularly for students living in the east end of the city. The prospect of putting a young child on a bus for hours each day prompted some participants to refuse an offer of placement in the primary gifted class altogether, or to delay their child's entry into the gifted program (i.e., until the child was older and better able to cope with the commute, or until a spot opened up closer to home). For example, Sarah decided to wait until Grade 4 to move her child to a gifted class because "the primary gifted program was too far away, and we didn't want [him] on a bus for such a long drive downtown." Similarly, Padmal reasoned that "the primary gifted class for Grade 4 was too far away, so we waited until Grade 5 to move him to a gifted program in a school that we were familiar with, and was closer to home."

Financial. For two participants whose children were enrolled in private school at the time of their assessments, the public board's congregated gifted program was perceived to be a feasible —and economical — educational alternative to private schooling. Sheila noted, "I was glad to be able to save the private school tuition by switching her to the congregated gifted program."

Attainability. Although some mothers might have preferred a congregated gifted English placement for their children, an offer of placement was not always extended by the public school board. As there were generally more applicants than spaces for these specialized classes[20], some students were offered placements while others were assigned to a waiting list, sometimes for indefinite periods of time (as was the case for Violet's daughter, who had been on a waiting list for over two years, "to no avail"). A perceived scarcity of congregated gifted placements prompted some participants to seize the opportunity if it was offered to them, even if the placement offered was not in their preferred location. This idea was perhaps captured most succinctly by Heidi, who wrote: "there really aren't many options available within the [school board], so if so if you get a spot you have to take it or you may never get it again!"

Regular French immersion. After congregated gifted English classes, the educational option selected second most often was regular French immersion. This section will explore the factors that influenced participants' decision making with regard to this placement option.

[20] Fewer than 30 spaces were available to Grade 1 students in 2009 and 2010.

A small majority of children represented in the survey data were enrolled in an Early French Immersion (EFI) class at the time of their assessment (38/66, or 58%). As registration in EFI is a conscious choice made by parents prior to senior kindergarten, the high proportion of students enrolled in the program serves to illustrate the value participants' placed on the French immersion program. At the time of the survey, 13 children (20% of total) were placed in the regular French immersion program[21]. Of those 13 students, 11 remained in their original placement, one shifted from the regular English program, and another transferred in from a private school.

Maternal perceptions. Participants often identified a number of factors that influenced their decision keep their children in the regular French immersion program rather than to pursue or accept alternative placements, as illustrated in Sonia's survey response:

> After getting the results for our first child, we went through the full range of options. As he was in French immersion, at the end of Grade 1 he did not yet read in English, so he was not a strong candidate for the primary gifted class (English only). We ruled out private schools as we could not find one convenient to home or work and could not justify the added expense. We considered home schooling but did not feel that the supports were in place to make it happen and did not feel that it was the best choice for our son socially. My husband and I wanted our children to attend their neighbourhood school and to walk to school. The school is a centre of excellence for French immersion and we felt it was a good choice for our son to continue. French immersion offers a form of enrichment as well, and having strong social networks with all kinds of kids (not just "gifted" kids) is important [to us].

In another example, Daria recalled the factors she took into consideration when her daughter was offered a spot in a primary gifted class after two years on a wait list:

> The criteria that mattered to us included: location of school, transportation time, loss of French that would occur from leaving immersion, whether we thought she could get back into the junior gifted [French] class at her current school next year, whether we thought this was our last chance at a [gifted] placement, her happiness at the current school, [and] my opinion of the program at the new school. [Lastly], I have a bias towards congregated

[21] Breakdown of the 25 students who left EFI: 12 went to congregated gifted English (primary or junior), 9 moved to Gifted French immersion (Junior), 4 were in high school (language of instruction unknown), 1 went to private school, and 1 placement was unknown.

> gifted because I was in such a program as a child and loved it and would like my kids to have that same experience.

In the end, Daria decided to turn down the primary placement offer in favour of applying to the junior gifted French immersion program for the subsequent school year. Daria and Sonia's responses illustrate two factors frequently expressed by mothers; the perceived importance of French language instruction, and a desire to remain in the community school. These two factors are explored in greater detail below.

Desire to continue in French immersion stream. The desire to maintain French immersion programming was a key consideration for several participants. A number of participants indicated that they had selected the Early French Immersion (EFI) option for their children in Senior Kindergarten because they believed that learning a second language would enrich and extend their learning:

> "My daughters were placed in EFI to provide additional challenge." (Laura)
>
> "We chose French immersion to begin with to help keep our child interested in school and to provide a bit of a challenge." (Daphne)

In an interview, Julie identified the learning of a second language as a "real core value." She explained, "I think it taps into another part of their brains. That's where the value comes in for me; [and] why French is so important."

In addition to the supplementary challenges that French immersion might provide, several participants viewed the EFI program as an opportunity for their children to become bilingual. This seemed particularly important to participants who did not speak French themselves, including Sonia:

> The opportunity to learn French was also a critical factor in our decision making. Since French is not spoken at home, we need the school system to do that, and felt strongly that the current school was the best choice.

It must be noted that participants' interest in securing French immersion programming for their children is highly contextual as this study was conducted in a bilingual city, where a significant percentage of jobs require competency in both languages. Some participants suggested that their decision making was informed by their own language limitations. In an interview, Heidi — a federal government employee — explained that her career options were limited unless she "got

her French [training]." She continued, "So in [this city] for sure, it's good to have another language."

Participants' strong feelings about the value of French immersion prompted a number of mothers to turn down a spot in a primary congregated class for profoundly gifted learners (offered in English only) in favour of applying for a placement in the junior congregated gifted program for EFI students starting in Grade 5. Julie's survey response was typical of this line of thinking:

> We wanted to find a fit for her learning needs, while also maintaining her immersion learning. We opted to keep her in her regular early immersion [class] at her neighbourhood school. Our intent is to move her to a gifted program in Grade 5 which will allow her to continue her immersion learning until then.

Of those participants who planned to keep their children in EFI until the junior gifted French immersion intake, several explained that they were making a concerted effort to augment their children's learning at home in the interim. Participants' responses inferred that while the EFI program might offer an element of challenge, it was not likely to provide the degree of enrichment found in a congregated gifted class. For example, Daphne explained that as her son's school "doesn't do much of anything for gifted students" she and her husband sought out ways to supplement their son's education through home schooling science classes and piano lessons, "to help expand his interests and create new experiences for him." In addition, Daphne encouraged her son's participation in team sports "to keep him fit, but also for the social aspects" as she worried about him making friends and being happy.

Two interview participants described their efforts to enhance their children's learning experiences at home in some detail. Julie maintained that she and her husband (both teachers) are committed to "finding richer learning opportunities" for their daughter as they feel that meaningful differentiation is "not happening at school". In an interview, Julie elaborated on her approach to enrichment:

> [A] decision we had made in our family is that the kids don't watch TV. So we have a lot of time together . . . we're cooking together, or they're out in the wood shop with their dad learning about woodworking, or they are out in the garden with us.

Julie clarified that they "don't have a set schedule" or plan; rather they focus on non-academic activities that "make sense" and are of interest to their children. Like Julie, Sonia has been

underwhelmed by the differentiation her son has received in the regular French immersion program.[22] She maintained that "school is only one forum for learning", and that she and her husband provided enrichment at home "through extended learning opportunities, including visits to museums, extra-curricular activities, and travel."[23] Sonia elaborated on her enrichment philosophy in an interview:

> I'm the parent and if I'm not happy with the progress he's making at school or the things that he's being taught and I think there needs to be enrichment, then it's my job to do that at home . . . to find some way to engage him, to provide him with some kind of outlet. I can't expect the school to do everything.

The examples provided by Daphne, Julie, and Sonia would suggest that continuing in the French immersion stream was important enough that they were willing to bridge any perceived gaps in the program through the provision of at-home enrichment activities.

French immersion programming was not highly regarded by all participants, however. For instance, Megan reported that she had ruled out French immersion (regular and gifted) because she had heard that the program did not provide "adequate instruction in English."

Importance of community school. For participants whose children attended an Early French immersion class in their community school, the perceived benefits of alternative placement options were often weighed against the advantages of being able to attend school with siblings and neighbourhood friends. As one mother summarized, "We thought it was a good school and offered a lot of advantages to the kids and we felt it was an important connection to the community."

In the handful of cases where a junior gifted French immersion class was located in the participant's community school, mothers of younger children were often motivated to wait until this option became available. Sonia reasoned, "we . . . knew that the school he currently attends offers a gifted [French] program starting in Grade 5, so we knew that was an option in the future, if we wanted to go that route." Sandra recounted a similar decision making strategy for her eldest son, who was identified as gifted while in a Grade 4 EFI class. She recalled, "We were fortunate to have the Grade 5/6 gifted French immersion option in his school, so we kept him

[22] At one point in the interview Sonia remarked, "I don't want to be rude about the IEP process, but it isn't worth the paper it's written on."
[23] At the time of the final interview Sonia and her family were about to embark on a month-long family road trip.

where he was."[24] On the other hand, one participant was willing to cut ties with the community school in order to access a congregated gifted FI class elsewhere. Svetlana justified her decision with this response: ". . . it seems so unfair that [gifted students] have to be dislocated from their community to have their needs met, but clearly our eldest was floundering in the regular stream and is flourishing now."

Child specific considerations. As illustrated in Svetlana's quote above, participants' perceptions of their children's needs factored into the decision making process. Sonia explained that she did not feel that her six year son Matthew would be a good candidate for the primary congregated gifted class as "he did not yet read in English." Later, when Matthew was diagnosed with significant hearing loss (necessitating the use of hearing aids and an FM transmitter in the classroom), Sonia decided that it would be best to keep him in his regular EFI class where his teachers and friends were supportive and understanding of his needs. She admitted that she will always second guess her decision to maintain her son's original placement, but reasoned

". . . at the end of the day, it's that filter, right? And having that social network and those peers is so critical to their development." At the time of the final interview, Sonia was in the process of applying for gifted FI placement and was hopeful that Matthew would be offered a spot in the congregated class located in his community school for the following school year.

Three other mothers identified child specific considerations that influenced their decision to keep their children in the EFI program. After weighing all of the possible placement options, Daphne reported that "we ended up leaving [him] where he was because he was happy and doing well in his current environment." Ronna stated that her son "really likes his friends at school and is very hesitant to leave them." Finally, Daria noted that she considered her daughter's "happiness" in her current environment when considering alternative placement options.

Colleen explained that her decision to explore the regular FI option was prompted in large part by her daughter's keen interest in languages and subsequent request to switch from regular English to the French immersion program.

Practical considerations. Practical considerations were mentioned less often by mothers of children enrolled in the EFI program, likely because most students remained in community

[24] Sandra was offered, and accepted a congregated gifted FI placement in her son's community school the following year.

schools close to home. Julie noted, "right now [my daughter] walks to school with her dad every day. It's pretty hard to give that up", while Colleen stated that she was willing to move her daughter from a regular English class to an EFI class because "the French Immersion option seemed to present the challenge my daughter required where she could remain in the same school."

Attainability. Of the 13 children placed in a regular EFI class at the time of the survey, almost half (6, or 46%) were on the waiting list for placement in a congregated gifted class. This would suggest that French immersion was not the preferred placement option for all participants. One mother expressed her frustration with her son's wait listed status in this survey response: "There doesn't seem to be much hope of getting him into a congregated gifted program in the public system as he is not gifted enough[25] and there is a long waiting list." One participant (Colleen) pursued a placement in a regular French immersion class because she was unable to obtain a placement in the congregated gifted program ("a conveniently located gifted class was unavailable and there was a waiting list for enrolment"). In this instance, the French immersion program was considered a preferable alternative to remaining in the regular English stream.

For some, the public school board's lack of congregated gifted programming for EFI students at the primary level was a barrier to obtaining an ideal placement. Given participants' high regard for French immersion, and the fact that at least five of the 13 students[26] enrolled in the regular EFI program had met the board's elevated criteria for profound giftedness, it is likely that participants might have considered placement in a primary congregated French class had it been available.

Gifted French immersion. Eleven of 39 participants (28.2%) indicated that they had considered the congregated gifted program for junior-aged EFI students. At the time of the survey, a total of 10 students (15.2%) were enrolled in a junior congregated gifted FI class (Grades 5 through 8). As might be expected, the vast majority came from in the board's Early French Immersion stream (9 of 10 children). The remaining student transferred into the public board's gifted French immersion program from a private French school.

[25] I.e., *gifted* rather than *profoundly gifted*. As gifted placements are offered based primarily on test scores, profoundly gifted students generally receive precedence.
[26] In two cases, participants were unsure as to which gifted criteria had been met.

Maternal perceptions. The most significant factor to emerge from the data with regard to maternal perceptions was the desire of mothers to maintain their children's French immersion learning.

Desire to continue in French immersion stream. As was noted in the regular French immersion subsection on page 109, participants' strong desire for their children to continue in the French immersion stream was a significant factor in their decision making. Svetlana's survey response illustrates her thinking:

> [My eldest son was] already in French immersion and had adapted well to it, so we wanted to continue in an immersion stream if we could, but not necessarily at all costs. The earliest class in the gifted French immersion stream is Grade 5, and it was mid-year in Grade 4 before we were successful in having our eldest [identified] as gifted, so we waited for the Grade 5 gifted [French] immersion intake.

Linda identified a number of similar factors in her decision to "wait out" a placement in the gifted French immersion program versus moving her son to the Catholic school board:

> Our child was already attending the regular French immersion program when assessed. We took into consideration the number of years until Junior Gifted French (2 years); the current teachers; the friendships in place and decided to wait until Grade 5 before moving [him] out of the regular programme.

In both cases, the participants opted to defer their children's placement in a congregated gifted class in order to maintain their French immersion learning.

Child specific considerations. Child specific considerations were evident in a number of survey responses. For example, Anne decided to postpone her son's entry into the congregated gifted program by two years because she perceived that he did not adapt easily to change. Conversely, Guylaine stated that it was her daughter who initiated the move to a junior gifted French immersion class, noting "there was no particular need driving our decision . . . she wanted to try the program and since she was eligible, we agreed."

Sarah's decision to move her eldest son to a congregated gifted FI class at a nearby school was made easier when three of his classmates were also offered placements in the same class. As Sarah perceived her son's social needs to be "the most important deciding factor", she accepted the offer of placement in large part to maintain these established friendships. Later, Sarah decided to move her younger son to the same program as "he had already gotten to know

the school that his brother was attending, and . . . was comfortable switching schools himself." While Sarah reported that she was generally pleased with the outcomes of her placement decisions, she acknowledged that the congregated gifted model did present certain social challenges. She explained, "There is a change in friends; it is difficult to maintain new friendships as the children are from different areas of the city [and] there are few 'friend choices' as the [split grade] class really is small."

For Heidi, the decision to accept a placement in the gifted FI program for her eldest daughter meant that Bailey would have to move away from her community school and her two younger sisters. Despite these drawbacks, Heidi asserted that "it was a relatively easy decision as she was so unhappy at her current school." In a follow-up interview Heidi explained that Bailey had always been "a little different" and that she had often felt misunderstood by her peers. Heidi decided to try the gifted French immersion program in the hope that Bailey would "fit in" better with other gifted children. She also hoped that the move "would be the answer to helping her to develop good work habits and to foster a love for learning."

Practical considerations. For Svetlana, proximity to home was an important consideration. She noted that her decision was made easier when her son "was offered a spot in the class closest to us right off the bat"[27]. Margaret, whose daughter was enrolled in a private French school at the time of her assessment, declared (somewhat light heartedly) that her decision to move her daughter to the congregated FI program "saved $10,000 a year, so that's quite a plus too! [laughs]." Practical considerations did not appear to be at the forefront for this group of mothers; possibly because their children were older at the time of placement, or because they had been waiting out a placement at the Grade 5 entry point and had ample time to consider and accept any practical consequences associated with a gifted French immersion placement.

Attainability. As discussed in a previous subsection, the attainability of gifted placements was a significant factor in mothers' decision making. It bears noting that most of the children in this grouping met the board's criteria for giftedness (7 students) rather than profound giftedness (1 student)[28], and as such, would were not eligible for gifted classes at the primary level. Hence, the junior congregated FI classes represented the first opportunity for most participants to obtain gifted programming for their children. Guylaine recalled, "there was only one only option

[27] Svetlana noted that her son "has been much happier and much more motivated at school ever since."
[28] In two cases, participants were unsure which criteria had been met.

presented – immersion gifted – as she [met the gifted criteria and] was already in an immersion program." Participants who were offered placements in the congregated gifted FI program tended to accept them.

Private school. Survey data indicated that 11 children (17%) were enrolled in private schools prior at the time of their assessment. At the time of the survey, six children were enrolled in private school.[29]

Maternal perceptions. Participants who chose private schooling for their children identified two perceived benefits: trained teachers who understand gifted children, and greater flexibility of programming, particularly with regard to grade and subject acceleration.

Trained teachers. Ella reported that she had chosen private school largely because she felt that the teachers would "get" her daughter and would contribute positively to her emotional well-being. In another survey response, Joanne explained that she decided to pursue a private school placement for her child primarily out of frustration with the public board, which she believed had "failed to meet even my limited expectations of providing either a place in a congregated gifted class[30] or teachers that are knowledgeable in how to work with gifted children." In contrast, Grace noted that she had rejected private schooling because she believed "it didn't offer the specialized teachers."

Flexibility of programming. Flexibility of programming was perceived to be a benefit of private schooling for some mothers. Joanne recalled that shortly after moving her daughter to a bilingual private school she was promoted a grade level, which Joanne believed "would never have been entertained in the public school system." Two other participants recounted similar experiences in relation to grade and subject acceleration. Dawn reported that she chose to enrol her young daughter in a private school (at a cost of $10,000 a year) after the public school board refused to allow her to start JK a year early. She continued, "the [school board] doesn't offer any programs for gifted kindergarten students, so we had to find our own way for [her]." Dawn subsequently moved her daughter to the congregated gifted program in the public board for Grade 1, as was her plan. In the second instance, Margaret explained that the principal at her daughter's private school had supported an acceleration of Alanna's math program even before

[29] Four had remained in their original placement, one transferred in from a regular French immersion class, and in one instance insufficient information was provided. One mother reported that her daughter was on a waiting list for placement in a congregated gifted class in the public school board.
[30] Joanne's daughter had been on a waiting list for more than two years.

her private assessment was completed in Grade 3. When her daughter was offered a spot in a congregated gifted French immersion class in the public board for Grade 5, Margaret decided that she would not accept the placement unless the public school board agreed to continue the trajectory of subject acceleration that had been initiated at the private school. After considerable negotiation, the public board honoured Margaret's request and she decided to accept an offer of placement in a congregated gifted French immersion class[31]. While Margaret reported that her daughter was happy and doing well in the congregated placement, she asserted that she would not hesitate to move Alanna back to the private school (where her younger sister is now a student) if the public board withdrew their support of the acceleration plan, or if she forecasted a "poor teacher" on the horizon.

Not all participants perceived that a private school placement was worthy of consideration. For example, Colleen and Megan filtered out this placement option because neither was convinced that a private school education was "superior to a public school education".[32] Another mother rejected this option because in her opinion, private schooling "didn't seem to offer the chance to be with other like minded children" (Grace).

Practical considerations. Two practical considerations were noted by mothers who considered private school; financial, and proximity of the school to home.

Financial. Not surprisingly, 10 participants indicated that cost had been a factor when considering a private school placement for their children. Eight participants cited that were unable to afford private school or could not justify the added expense.

Proximity to home. One mother noted that she was unable to find a private school that was convenient to home or work, and another perceived that the additional time required to "transport to and from" would be problematic. Allie, however, chose to keep her children in their Montessori school rather than to accept congregated gifted placements for primarily practical reasons:

> [I] thought congregated might work well . . . but [my] children were offered placement at a school VERY far away from our home, with a one hour bus ride each way. I didn't think 2 hours on the bus each day was good for them at all, and they have asthma, [so it would be] hard to get them to doctor appointments.

[31] Although Margaret remarked that most of the organization/administration of her daughter's accelerated math program has fallen to her.

Allie perceived that her son in particular might have benefited from being with other gifted learners; however, she noted that her decision to keep her children in their local private school had "worked out wonderfully."

Regular English. Nine children were enrolled in the regular English program at the time of their assessment, and four were registered in the program at the time of the survey. Three of four remained in their original placement. Unfortunately, very little information was provided in relation to these children. In the case of the fourth student, Violet explained that she had moved her daughter from the Catholic school board to the public board two years after her assessment in the hopes of securing a placement in the congregated gifted program as preference is given to students registered within the public board. Violet reported that her daughter, who has a second learning exceptionality (Communication - LD), had been on waiting list for two years and was currently a middle school student.

As all four students enrolled in the regular English program at the time of the survey met the "gifted" rather than "profoundly gifted" criteria, it is possible that participants experienced difficulty in accessing placements for their children in the junior congregated English program as these classes tend to be filled with profoundly gifted students who enter the program as primary students and turnover in these classes is typically low. Interestingly, all four of these students were identified as having dual exceptionalities (Gifted/Communication – most commonly associated with learning disabilities), hence another possibility is that mothers may have perceived that a congregated gifted placement would not be a good fit for their child's diverse needs.

Out of board. Six of the students who met the criteria for giftedness in the public school board were registered in other local school boards at the time of their assessment. In the interim, four of the six students had transferred to the public board, with three enrolling in congregated gifted classes (the fourth was on a waiting list). Two students continued to attend schools in other school boards. In addition, one student who had been assessed while attending an overseas private school registered in the Catholic school board upon his return.

Practical considerations. As the public school board was the only one in the area to offer full-time programming for gifted learners, participants who desired the congregated gifted option had to be willing and able to transfer their children. Data indicated that 4 of 7 mothers did move to the public board in order to access gifted programming for their children. The

remaining three students were enrolled in other boards at the time of the survey. Iliana, whose kindergarten-aged son was enrolled in the French board was hopeful that he would be offered a Gr. 1 placement in the public board's primary congregated program for the following school year. Louise explained that while she believed that the congregated gifted program would be beneficial for her profoundly gifted son (who attended school in a rural township), she had decided not to "raise hell" to get him into the program because of the sacrifices her other three children would have to make, including "before and after school daycare and 4 hours in the car each day."

Home schooling. Although five of 38 participants (13%) indicated that they had considered home schooling as an educational placement option following their child's assessment, none were home schooling their children at the time of the survey. However, two participants (Heather and Joanne) revealed that they had home schooled their gifted children at some point since the assessment; not because it was their preferred option, but because they had exhausted all other options within the school board.

Maternal perceptions. Heather explained that she chose to home school her daughter after a succession of disappointments with the placement options offered by the public board:

> After our daughter's assessment we were told about the congregated gifted program that was available to her. We were distressed, however, to learn that the program was only offered at a school that was an hour away from her local school. Due to her young age and the distance involved and that her regular school did not offer any enrichment programming, we opted to not accept the place offered in the gifted program and placed her in a French immersion program at her local school the following year. It became clear, however, after a couple of months into the school year that [she] was extremely bored. . . ("so bored it hurts, Mommy") and that the teacher was completely unwilling to carry out the IEP that was in place for her. We were told by the Learning Support Teacher and the principal that there was nothing they could offer our daughter. This prompted our decision to home school [her] for the next two years.

Heather went on to describe her experience with home schooling as "daunting, and in the end, unsuccessful." She lamented that "on the one hand we were so proud of her and wanted to offer her the best possible education, but we unable to give it to her without huge sacrifice and

consequences." Eventually, a spot opened up in a congregated gifted class much closer to home which Heather willingly accepted.

In the second case, Joanne (who has a doctoral degree) decided to home school her daughter because "the public school she was attending and the teacher she had failed to implement ANY of the things specified and outlined in the IEP." Moreover, Joanne noted that her daughter "continued to languish" on the waiting list for placement in the gifted French immersion program. Of her decision to home school, Joanne stated; "I refuse to let the school stand in the way of a good education." After what Joanne characterised as a "wonderful year of learning together", she decided to move her daughter to a bilingual private school.

In both cases the mothers viewed home schooling as an interim measure rather than a long term educational placement.

Child specific considerations. As stated previously, home schooling was considered but ruled out by the vast majority of participants. The most common reason given for filtering out the home schooling option was that participants believed it to be a poor fit for their child's social needs.

Practical considerations. Three participants indicated that they had rejected home schooling for practical reasons. Interview participant Margaret conceded that although she believed an individualized program would be the ideal learning situation for her daughter, she knew that it was "not really practical." She admitted that she had never considered home schooling her daughter, mostly because she believed it would create a strain on their relationship, remarking that "she would drive me bonkers, actually. I quite freely admit it!" Sonia did not feel that "the supports were in place" for home schooling to be a viable alternative in her household. Finally, Ronna asserted that she "would dearly love" to home school her son, but she was afraid of the commitment it would entail given that she had two other young children at home.

Summary. Participants' often poignant descriptions of their decision making experiences with regard to educational placement served to illustrate the complexities and challenges associated with this task, and provided insight into why so many mothers perceived it was the most difficult decision they had made in their journey thus far.

When mothers were asked how they decided among the various educational placement options, many participants described a similar approach to their decision making. Generally speaking, mothers engaged in a two stage filtering process (theoretical and concrete) to assess

the compatibility of known placement options with: (a) their perceptions of the potential benefits and drawbacks of each placement option; (b) the perceived "fit" of each placement option with their child's social, emotional, and learning needs; and (c) practical considerations. In the first stage of filtering, educational options that were deemed to be incompatible with these criteria were eliminated, and a *theoretical*, or "ideal" placement was selected from the surviving options. Once participants knew which options were *attainable* (i.e., an offer of placement was extended by the public school board), and the specifics of those placement options were *concrete* (i.e., proximity to home, transportation arrangements, cost), a second round of filtering ensued and the best surviving option was selected. When mothers were unable to secure their preferred placement they would often construct a back-up plan (such as home schooling, private school, home enrichment), and/or devise a longer term strategy to achieve their perceived "ideal" placement.

As reflected in the participants' quotes, decision making was a highly individual process. Some mothers appeared fixated on a single placement regardless of the practical consequences, while others were more flexible and pragmatic in their thinking. Although the weighting of the various criteria varied from participant to participant, it seems clear that child specific considerations were central to mothers' decision making with regard to educational placement.

Finding 6 – Perceived Facilitators

Survey data. To determine what (or whom) had assisted mothers in their journey, survey participants were asked to identify what sources they had consulted when making educational decisions for their gifted child(ren). Participants were presented with a wide range of possible options via a drop-down menu, and were asked to select as many as applied to their experience. Mothers were also encouraged to identify additional sources in an open ended follow-up question. Although it is cannot be presumed that the sources indicated by participants were uniformly helpful, the survey data are useful in that they illustrate patterns of consultation among mothers of gifted children. Data pertaining to this question are presented in the table on the following page.

Table 14

Sources Consulted by Participants when Making Educational Placement Decisions

Source	n (%)
Partner/spouse	38 (100)
Other parents of gifted children	34 (89.5)
Private psychologist	28 (73.7)
Gifted child	27 (71.1)
Local parent advocacy group for bright/gifted children	26 (68.4)
Internet websites specific to giftedness	24 (63.2)
School special education teacher	19 (50.0)
School principal	17 (44.7)
School board administrator (e.g., gifted consultant)	14 (36.8)
Other family members (e.g., aunts, uncles, grandparents)	13 (34.2)
Friends	13 (34.2)
Internet discussion groups for parents of gifted children	11 (28.9)
Sibling(s) of gifted child	8 (21.1)
Educational advocate	3 (7.9)
Child's biological father	1 (2.6)

Notes: 38 participants responded
Multiple sources could be selected

All participants who answered the survey question reported that they consulted their spouse or partner (and in one case, the child's biological father) when making educational decisions for their gifted child(ren). Other parents of gifted children were cited second most often (34/38, or 89.5%). Further resources included private psychologists (28/38, or 73.7%), the gifted child (27/38, or 71.1%), a local parent advocacy group for parents of bright and gifted children[33] (26/28, or 68.4%), and internet websites related to giftedness (24/38, or 63.2%). An interesting and somewhat unexpected result was the comparatively low percentage of participants who reported that they had consulted with a school special education teacher (19/38, or 50.0%), principal (17/38, or 44.7%), or school board administrator (14/38, or 36.8%) when making educational decisions. Sources consulted less frequently included extended family members (13/38, or 34.2%), friends (13/38, or 34.2%), internet-based discussion groups for parents of gifted children (11/38, or 28.9%), siblings of the gifted child (8/38, or 21.1%), and educational advocates (3/38, or 7.9%).

With regard to "other" facilitators identified by participants, two mothers indicated that they had consulted books and academic literature, and one noted that she had sought the advice

[33] It must be noted that the recruitment for the study was done in cooperation with the local parent advocacy group; hence, the vast majority of survey participants had an existing relationship with the organization.

of an occupational therapist. In addition, three mothers mentioned over the course of the survey that the opportunity to attend a gifted centre open house or to observe a gifted class had been helpful.

Interview data. To further illuminate the influence of these and other facilitators on the maternal experience, the five interview participants were asked, "*What would you say has enhanced, or helped you in your experience of parenting a gifted child?"* This question was deliberately broader in scope than the survey item; nevertheless, the facilitators identified most frequently by interview participants were generally consistent with the survey responses and usually related to educational decision making. The facilitators identified most often by interview participants included the local parent advocacy group for bright and gifted children (4/5), other parents of gifted children (3/5), internet websites and print resources (3/5). Two interview participants indicated that a particular school staff member had been helpful. One mother stated that the psychologist's psycho-educational assessment had facilitated her experience.

Interestingly, while 100% of the survey participants indicated that they had consulted their partner or spouse when making educational placement decisions, none of the interview participants volunteered that their partner or spouse had enhanced or facilitated their experience of parenting a gifted child. That said, participants often used the word "we" rather than "I" in their responses, suggesting at least some degree of support or collaboration. Moreover, none of the participants identified their partners as "barriers" in a subsequent question (see Finding 7).

Drawing on participants' quotes, each of the identified facilitators is further explored in the following sub sections.

Local parent advocacy group. Four of the five interview participants maintained that the local parent advocacy group for bright and gifted children had been helpful in their experience. Four interview participants noted that they had taken advantage of the services and resources offered by the organization. For example, Sonia reported that she had received personalized advice and guidance from executive board members, including the president. Two mothers (Sonia and Heidi) indicated that their children had participated in the Saturday morning enrichment program offered by the advocacy group. A parent resource guide about how to

develop IEPs for gifted students [34] was appreciated by Colleen, who asserted that the advocacy group's guide enabled her to understand "the various parts of the document [and] what it all meant." She continued, "That's where I learned, 'What are our rights? What is the school board's obligation to us?' Because none of that was explained to me."

Julie recalled that her attendance at a professional development seminar for educators sponsored by the local parent advocacy group had been pivotal in terms of understanding and accepting her daughter's giftedness. She explained,

> It was a speaker on teaching and working with bright and gifted children, and I found that really helped me get that information that I was looking for. It was a woman from the [United] States who had done a lot of writing on giftedness and for me that really brought it all together in terms of, "Wow, you know what, yeah, that *is* Charlotte, and she really does do that, and oh wow, that does makes sense!" Because I think up until that point I had been fighting the label and almost not believing myself that it was accurate while [at the same time] sort of going with it.

In addition to the services and resources offered by the parent advocacy group, Sonia noted that the opportunity to meet other gifted children and their parents had been beneficial.

Other parents of gifted children. The majority of interview participants (4/5) indicated that other parents of gifted children had enhanced, or facilitated their parenting experience. For example, Sonia reported that one of the parents she had met through the local advocacy group had been "really helpful just in terms of sharing information." In a similar vein, Heidi maintained that other parents of gifted children were the most helpful resource she had encountered thus far, "especially parents who have older children that I've been able to talk to about their experiences." Julie explained that she had benefitted from the decision making experiences of people in her social network who were also parenting gifted children:

> [what I find helpful is] talking it over with them, and talking to them about the decisions they had made. It's that continual process of just talking to people and listening to their experiences and their thinking . . . looking at how they make decisions and what they are thinking in terms of placing their kids.

[34] This web-based resource, *Developing Individual Education Plans for Gifted Students*, was written by the provincial branch of the local advocacy group.

Colleen, however, reported she had not found other parents of gifted children to be particularly helpful. She recalled that when she shared the news of her daughter's giftedness with a work colleague whom she knew to be the parent of a gifted young adult, she was discouraged by his reaction:

> . . . when I told him that Savannah had been formally identified as gifted, he said, *"Congratulations!"* I was a bit disappointed because he should have known better. Of anyone, he should have known that (a) it's not my accomplishment, so don't congratulate me, and (b), it's fraught with all sorts of unfortunate [pause] side effects that you *don't* want.

In light of their differing perspectives on giftedness, Colleen decided not to engage in any further conversation with her work colleague. And while she knew of a few students at her daughter's school who (like Savannah) had also been diagnosed with ADHD, she was not aware of any other children identified as gifted. Colleen stated, "There are a number of [parents] I can talk to about [ADHD], but not the giftedness."

Internet websites and books. Three of the five interview participants (Heidi, Margaret, and Colleen) asserted that internet websites and books had been helpful in their journey of mothering gifted children. Heidi indicated that general parenting books "that help . . . with parenting and can be applied maybe to any kid" had been useful resources. When asked what had facilitated her parenting experience thus far, Margaret replied:

> "The web. And books. I read to try to understand . . . *her*. So I've done a lot of reading . . . I've learned a lot and I find the web is an excellent resource."

In addition to gifted-specific websites, Colleen noted that she had found a number of books that had been helpful in explaining "technical things", and "to find the language that I don't have to express how I feel." One book that held particular meaning for her was entitled *Bitch: In Praise of Difficult Women* (Wurtzel, 1999). Colleen explained that she had read Wurtzel's book in her twenties — prior to having children — and that a particular chapter about "famous women who had mental breakdowns, mental disorders and how they're extraordinary" had stayed with her. At the end of the first in-depth interview she read this passage aloud:

> . . . no matter how many people want so badly to have wunderkind children that they send their 3 year olds to preschool enrichment programs or get their high school juniors tutored for the SATs, not one of these poor beknighted parents has any idea how

> undesirable a truly talented child is, none of them can see that everything about brilliance and beauty and excellence and genius leaves us awestruck until we realize that the personality disorders and maladjustments and mental diseases that tend to accompany these gifts are not optional features (p. 186).

Colleen concluded by saying, "I remember [re] reading this and thinking, *this is how I feel*."

School board staff. Two interview participants indicated that a particular teacher or school staff member had enhanced or facilitated their experience of mothering a gifted child. Margaret praised two school administrators for their efforts. First, she described the principal at her daughter's private school as "really good". Next, she paid tribute to the vice-principal who helped Alanna to transition into the congregated gifted program:

> She's just wonderful. She has just . . . scooped Alanna up and [has been] amazing. You know what? You need a champion. When you have a child who is different, you need a champion within the system, and she has been that for Alanna.

The second interview participant (Colleen) stated that "there have been one or two very good teachers who have been very patient with Savannah, and have seemed to make an effort to understand her and that has been really helpful." Colleen appreciated that these teachers focused on the "positive aspects" of Savannah's giftedness (i.e., her creativity and advanced vocabulary) rather than on her more challenging behaviours.

Sonia reported contradictory experiences when advocating for her son's multiple learning needs (gifted/LD/hard of hearing) in the regular classroom. She recalled, "I can't say to you that there was this learning support teacher who was incredibly helpful. I can tell you that the teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing was *fabulous*." Sonia went on to describe the efforts made by the LST to mitigate her son's hearing deficit through the use of FM technology and other classroom accommodations.

Psycho-educational report. One participant (Sonia) mentioned that she had sought out the advice of a private psychologist, and that the resulting psycho-educational report had been "really helpful".

Maternal intuition. After citing a list of professionals and resources that had facilitated her experience of parenting a gifted child (psychologist's report, local parent advocacy group, other parents of gifted children, a particular special education teacher), Sonia took a moment to reflect on her response. Following a thoughtful pause, she offered this emergent theme:

> . . . I think the thing that I have relied upon most is my own belief as a parent. It doesn't matter what all the experts tell me, I have to rely on what my gut tells me is right. I have to believe in my ability to parent my own children. I can read all the books I want, and they will provide helpful information that I can use or not use. But I have to filter all that and it has to fit me as parent, so my own sense of confidence or belief in my abilities as a parent has been the biggest thing in all of this.

Sonia frequently referred to the idea of "filtering" in her interview responses, which is consistent with the decision making process illustrated in Figure 4 on page 100.

Summary. Finding 6 explored the factors that participants perceived were helpful in their experience of parenting of gifted children in general, and in making educational decisions in particular. Most survey participants reported that they had consulted a variety of sources when making educational placement decisions. The sources identified most often were: partner/spouse, other parents of gifted children, private psychologist, the child affected by the decision, the local parent advocacy group, and internet websites specific to giftedness. Survey data indicated that participants were less likely to consult the school special education teacher, principal, and school board administrators when making school placement decisions. The facilitators described most often by interview participants included the local parent advocacy group for bright and gifted children, other parents of gifted children, and internet/print resources. In two instances, interview participants identified a "champion" teacher or administrator who had been particularly helpful.

Finding 7- Perceived Barriers

The counterpart to Finding 6, Finding 7 presents the impediments or barriers participants encountered in their experience of parenting gifted children. While survey participants were not specifically asked to itemize the barriers they had experienced, several impediments emerged over the course of the survey. Barriers were identified most often as survey participants recounted their educational decision making experiences or when describing their most difficult decision.

To further substantiate the themes which emerged from the survey data, interview participants were asked, "*What would you say has hindered you in your experience of parenting gifted children?"* Interview and survey data were found to be consistent. The vast majority of

impediments identified by survey and interview participants were encountered in the educational decision making process, and as such, were associated with the public school board.

Barriers were coded and then grouped into two main categories: school board related barriers and other barriers. The emergent themes associated with each category follow below.

School board related barriers

- Perceived lack of information and support from public school board staff, including poor communication of public school board policy and procedures
- Short time lines for decision making
- Lack of availability of desired placement
- School system not equipped to meet the needs of exceptional learners

Other barriers

- Child specific characteristics
- Societal conceptions of giftedness

Each of these themes is presented in the following subsection, using survey and interview data to convey the maternal experience.

School board related barriers. The five school board related barriers identified by participants are discussed in turn below.

Perceived lack of information and support from staff.

Survey data. Over the course of the survey, several mothers described what they perceived to be a lack of information and support from teachers, special education staff, and public school board administrators. Some recalled that they had experienced resistance from school board staff when advocating for their children's needs in the regular classroom. For example, Heather noted that despite her advocacy efforts, her daughter's teacher was "completely unwilling to carry out the IEP that was in place." When Francine requested differentiated programming for her son in the French language board, she found it "very frustrating as the principal, teacher, [and] school psychologist were adamant that gifted children should not be treated differently." Other mothers maintained that school board staff had dissuaded them from pursuing a placement in the board's congregated gifted program. Megan recalled that when she and her husband asked the school special education teacher about the program — after hearing about it from someone else — "he put tremendous pressure on us to keep our child in the regular class" (which they did for almost another year). In Megan's

opinion, her son's special education teacher "didn't believe in congregated gifted education", therefore he did not present it as an option. Svetlana described a similar experience:

> . . . not only were we actively discouraged by the principal against pursuing gifted education in the first place and made to feel that by even considering congregated classes we were doing our son an injustice, but I was told by the principal that by applying for a spot in the congregated class we would have no recourse but to accept whatever placement we would be offered regardless of its location, and that our son would not be welcome back in the home school if things didn't work [out].

While Svetlana was grateful that her son's placement had a "happy ending", she admitted that she still hadn't forgiven the principal for her handling of the situation.

Interview data. When asked what had hindered their experience of parenting a gifted child, three of the five interview participants cited a lack of information or support from school board staff. In reflecting on her experience thus far, Sonia lamented that "it has never been a school resource that has been helpful; it has been a person who I've stumbled on through a random search for information or support." Colleen noted that while one or two teachers had been supportive, a few had been "less than helpful." She provided this example as evidence: "Savannah had a homeroom teacher one year who told us right from the outset not to expect any help. [She said], 'We don't have the resources. There are no resources; you're on your own.'" In another instance, Julie described her interactions with school board staff when trying to make an educational placement decision for her daughter:

> Quite honestly, I think sadly to say, I think the school staff certainly at the first school and the board staff . . . were a barrier to making a [placement] decision because they made us feel uncomfortable. And it made us feel like we were the ones with the problem because we weren't able to make the decision.

Julie perceived that the message she and her husband were left with was, "Well, you should know how to make this decision as parents."

Poor communication of public school board policy and procedures.

Survey data. Dealing with the bureaucracy of the school board was identified as a barrier by some participants. Svetlana's response was typical: "[Gifted] kids can be exhausting, intense, stubborn, and hard to motivate, but honestly, the toughest part has been navigating the school system."

Interview data. In-depth interviews yielded further insight into the issues mothers faced in liaising with the public school board. Specific difficulties included a lack of information about policies and procedures relating to the identification and placement of gifted learners. Colleen remarked, "I think my main beef is not having been given by the school system the information that I needed to make decisions, or to know my . . . our options." After being told by the principal that she should keep a record of her daughter's documents, Colleen recalled thinking, "I don't need you to tell me how to run my filing system. I need you to tell me what all this *means*. Because you're the educator, you need to concern yourself with making sure that I understand what to do next for my kid." Heidi also experienced difficulties when gathering information from the school board: ". . . [there's a] lack of transparency. You know, you can't find anything out. It's not on their website. It's not clear. Right from the get go."

Julie stated that her repeated requests for information about the congregated gifted program were all but ignored by school board staff. She recalled, ". . . we kept asking questions and we felt that we were a bother for asking those questions." She maintained that minimal information was provided, and that her phone calls to the gifted program co-ordinator were not returned. As an administrator in the public school board, Julie's experience is particularly revealing. While it might be presumed that an "insider" would have increased access to information and support, this was not the case for Julie[35]. When she approached a Learning Support Teacher in her network for advice ("Listen, I've had this offer of placement, can you walk me through it?"), she discovered that her colleague had "little to offer in terms of supporting gifted students." Julie considered the LST to be "really knowledgeable" in other aspects of special education, thus she proposed that her colleague's relative lack of expertise with regard to giftedness was a reflection of the public school board's lack of professional development in this area. When reflecting on her decision to delay her daughter's entry into the congregated gifted program, Julie wondered if she might have made a different choice if she had received more support and information from the school board.

> . . . I still don't know if we made the right decision for her . . . You think out there, there's some expert in the board who can tell you which direction to go, or who can really talk through it with you and I still haven't met that expert or that consultant who can walk me through what the avenues are and what the pros and cons are.

[35] She did, however, manage to arrange a visit to a congregated gifted classroom through a contact.

Since her experience, Julie has been working with her own staff to improve the information and support available to parents about giftedness and the board's programming options. She remarked, "I can only imagine how someone who was not part of the system would have felt, because it was

. . . not a good feeling for us, *at all.*"

Sonia expressed her annoyance that the nuances of the placement process were not explained to her. She explained that she had devised a plan to move her son to the gifted French immersion class located in his community school for Grade 5. What she didn't understand was that students aren't *necessarily* offered a placement in the congregated gifted class located closest to home. Sonia had discovered this only a few days before the interview, and the frustration was evident in her voice as she spoke:

> . . . you think you're making progress, you think you're making a plan, but you never get all of the information. No one ever said to me, "Well don't count on getting him into that program. Yes, it's in your school, but don't bank on (a) it being there[36], and (b) don't bank on him getting into it." No one ever explained that to me.

The idea of moving her son from the school community he had known for six years to access a program that existed *in his own school* was incomprehensible to Sonia. Moreover, as the placement decision "resides within the school system", Sonia perceived that there was little she could do to affect the outcome; "It's a bureaucracy and I can't influence the bureaucracy."

Like Sonia, Heidi referred to the uncertain future of the gifted program as a stumbling block to her decision making. Heidi — who had been through the placement process with all three of her daughters, and had witnessed a number of changes to the gifted program over the years — recalled that just as her older daughter was making the transition to a congregated gifted placement, the board recommended that her gifted class be closed. In the end, the parents lobbied successfully to keep the class open; however, Heidi believed that the gifted program remains vulnerable to closure. Moreover, she feels that parental uncertainty about the future of the program is a factor in their decision making: "You know, do you move the kid and then worry that the program is going to be cut?" Heidi explained that while she decided to place her three children in congregated classes, she remains "on guard" for any proposed changes or cuts to the program.

[36] For example, the class could be moved to another school, or the program could be cut altogether.

Short time lines for decision making. Survey and interview data indicated that participants were typically given short time lines with which to make educational placement decisions. In most cases, mothers reported that they had 24 to 48 hours to accept an offer of placement in a congregated gifted class, leaving them with little time to gather information, consult with school board staff, arrange a classroom visit, or to discuss the potential move with their family members. Participants tended to characterize this as both an unreasonable expectation and an impediment to their decision making.

Survey data. Daria, whose daughter had recently been offered a placement in a congregated gifted class, shared her experience:

> I felt pressure to make the decision quickly as we had been given just over a weekend to think about it and we were actually going away that weekend. It really dominated my thoughts that weekend and I felt quite worried that we wouldn't do the right thing. I hadn't been prepared for the decision with research ahead of time. We'd been on the waiting list for a spot for a couple of years and it wasn't on my radar anymore.

After requesting an extension to research her options, Daria decided to turn down the primary placement offer in favour of applying to the junior gifted French immersion program for the subsequent school year.

Interview data. Two interview participants also asserted that their educational decision making was hindered by the short time lines imposed by the school board. Heidi recalled that her daughter Isabella was offered a placement in a congregated gifted class "at 4 pm on the Friday eve of March break", with a proposed start date of the first Monday back at school. Somewhat reluctantly, Heidi accepted the placement with the provision that Isabella start on the following Tuesday to allow her daughter to be able to say goodbye to her community school classmates. In Julie's case, she was given one day to accept or decline an offer of placement in the primary gifted program for her daughter. Despite negotiating a 24 hour extension, Julie reported that she still didn't feel comfortable moving her daughter (mostly due to a lack of information), and therefore declined the offer of placement.

Lack of availability of desired placement. A few participants reported that their inability to secure their preferred educational placement option was a barrier to their decision making experience. As nine students were on a waiting list at the time of the survey, some mothers were still waiting for an offer of placement.

Survey data. Carolyn questioned why it had taken so long for her son to be offered a spot in a congregated gifted class, noting that she "walked a sad child to school and back for eight months while waiting for his assessment and a placement into a gifted class, feeling helpless and defeated by the system."

In some cases, participants desired an educational placement option that was not offered by the public board (i.e., primary gifted French immersion), or was located too far from home. Proximity was problematic for Louise, whose son attended school in a rural township outside of the city. She stated, "it is very upsetting and frustrating to know that there is a program out there that fits with your profoundly gifted child and you are unable to access it."

Interview data. Proximity was also a factor in Julie's decision making. In the final reflective interview she said:

> . . . I think a gifted placement would have been better for Charlotte. It was the availability of the programs in terms of proximity to home because when we did get offered the placement that was our factor. And French immersion; I mean, those were the two big ones. Had the placement been closer to home? [pause] In French? We might have . . . we *might have* made a different decision.

School system not equipped to meet the needs of exceptional learners. Several mothers asserted that the public school system's mainstream approach to education had been an impediment to their experience.

Survey data. Heather characterized her multiply exceptional children as "square pegs in round holes; different learners in a standardized educational system." In Ronna's opinion, the "public system" had done little to cultivate her son's giftedness[37]:

> I know he needs a smaller classroom and one where the teacher respects his need to learn from subjects that interest him. In the public system, he is expected to do as he is told because that's just the way life is, and he'll just have to accept that.

Joanne was less willing to accept this line of thinking, declaring that public school system's "sardine can approach to education is wrong." Moreover, she questioned whether the identification of gifted learners served any useful purpose, asking, "If the education system can't capitalize on a child's 'gifts', then what is the assessment for?" Joanne's continued frustration with the public school system eventually prompted her to enrol her child in a private school.

[37] Ronna's son was placed in a regular French Immersion class at the time of the survey.

Interview data. Sonia discussed how the school system had been an unexpected and ultimately disappointing "stumbling block" in her experience of mothering gifted children:

> A place that I felt was designed to educate all children according to their needs and their abilities has really turned out to be designed to educate a very narrow, small box of people. And if you don't fit in the box, it is a very, very hard and frustrating and difficult place to navigate. That has been a *really* big eye opener . . . and a disappointment.

She concluded by stating, "that's not to say that I think the school system is failing because I don't think it is; I just expected *more* or *different*."

Other barriers. Two of the barriers identified by participants were not school board related: societal conceptions of giftedness, and child specific traits. These perceived impediments are presented below.

Societal conceptions of giftedness. Three survey participants reported that social conceptions of giftedness (and related myths and stereotypes) had hindered their experience to some extent. For example, Gwynne believed that "living with the 'gifted' label" had been a challenge:

> The label implies so much, yet gifted children are all individuals, and I don't find either of my children fit the label all the time. I dislike all of the sweeping generalizations about gifted children and parenting advice targeted at their parents. I feel self-conscious about having gifted children as there are many negative perceptions about gifted classes being elitist, and it makes my family appear different from the norm.

Societal misconceptions about the meaning and identification of "giftedness" had been the biggest barrier Colleen had encountered thus far. She wrote,

> Some people have told me they believe there's no such thing as a gifted child unless he or she can, say, play Chopin the first time they encounter a piano, or can earn a University degree by the time they're 10 years old. There's an opinion that the term "gifted" is over or misused.

She proposed that such misconceptions could be "isolating for the parent."

An interesting cross-cultural perspective was provided by Svetlana, who was raised in Eastern Europe. She asserted that she was "amazed at the bias in Canadian society against supporting gifted kids within the education system." Svetlana remarked that she and her

husband had "never experienced discrimination like this before", and that it seemed counter intuitive to her not to "celebrate, embrace and support these kids."

Interestingly, Gwynne and Colleen were careful to enclose the word *gifted* in quotation marks in their survey responses and interview transcripts.

Child specific characteristics. One interview participant stated that her middle school-aged daughter's "stubbornness and independent thinking" had impeded her ability to parent. Margaret explained:

> I think I *could* say that she hinders my experience, but, you know, maybe that's a little bit unfair. You know, she's not the perfect child as no child is. And sometimes I feel that . . . I know what's right for her, but she won't take it on board. So her independence and her sense of self probably hinders me from doing some things that I would like to do. Her stubbornness and independent thinking sometimes I think takes away from what I could offer her as a parent.

Summary. The vast majority of impediments identified by participants were encountered in the educational decision making process, and as such were school board related. The barriers identified most often by mothers included a perceived lack of information and assistance from school board staff, poor communication of school board policy and procedures, and short time lines for decision making. The lack of primary gifted programming for French Immersion students was considered a hindrance by some, as was the inability to access congregated gifted placements (in general, and in schools located close to home). In addition to these barriers, a number of participants believed that the public school system was not adequately equipped to meet the needs of gifted and multiply exceptional learners. Child specific characteristics and societal conceptions of giftedness and were also identified as potential barriers to the parenting experience.

Finding 8 – Effect on Relationships and Information Sharing

A central objective of the research was to better understand participants' personal experiences of the assessment, identification, and educational placement process. In analyzing the data pertaining to this process it became apparent that many mothers perceived that having a gifted child had impacted their personal relationships in some way. Moreover, a majority of mothers remarked that they were careful about what information they shared about their children

and with whom. Hence, Finding 8 is the amalgamation of the data relating to mothers' relationship and information sharing experiences.

Relationships. Survey participants were asked if they perceived that having a gifted child had affected their relationship, either positively or negatively, with their partner/spouse, the child's biological father (if applicable), family members, friends, school staff, work colleagues, or others. Table 15 illustrates that a majority of participants indicated that at least one of their relationships had been affected in some way.

Table 15

Relationships Perceived to be Affected by Having a Gifted Child

Relationship affected	n (%)
School staff (e.g., teachers, principal)	34 (91.9)
Spouse/partner	28 (75.7)
Family	27 (73.0)
Close friends	24 (64.9)
Work colleagues	18 (48.6)
Child's biological father	11 (29.7)
Other	8 (21.6)

Notes: 37 participants responded
Multiple relationships could be selected

The vast majority of participants (34/37, or 91.9%) reported that their relationships with school staff (e.g., teachers, principal, school board administrators) had changed since their child(ren)'s identification. Three-quarters (28/37, or 75.7%) perceived that having a gifted child had affected their relationship with their spouse or partner, and 73.0% (27/37) reported that close friendships had been altered. Relationships with work colleagues were affected less often (18/37, or 48.6%). Eleven participants perceived that their relationship with the gifted child(ren)'s biological father had changed, and eight mothers stated that "other" relationships had been affected. After identifying the relationships they believed had been affected, survey participants were given the opportunity to explain *how* each of those relationships had changed. Participants' responses to the open ended survey question are summarized below, grouped around the various relationships. Responses of interview participants have also been included where appropriate to provide additional insight.

School staff. Of those who elaborated on their relationships, 10 participants noted that their relationships with school staff had been positively affected since their children were

identified as gifted. Several participants believed that their child(ren)'s identification had given them greater "visibility" with school staff, increased interaction with classroom teachers, and "additional leverage" to negotiate differentiated learning experiences through the IEP process. This leverage was particularly important if the child remained in the regular classroom. Laura, whose daughter was placed in a regular French immersion class noted, "the label means that I can force a discussion about how to challenge our daughter and that I'm not just a parent whining about his or her child." Participants whose children made the switch to the congregated gifted program often reported an improvement in their relationship with teachers. For example, Heather recalled,

> "[I had] difficulty with the Early French Immersion teacher in implementing [my daughter's] IEP, but have had nothing but a wonderful rapport and relationship with the staff at her current [congregated gifted] school."

Michelle reported that she felt a "closeness" to the teachers in the congregated program, who seemed to "understand the quirks" often associated with gifted learners.

A few participants noted that their relationships with school staff had been adversely affected by their child(ren)'s identification of giftedness. This response was most common among mothers whose children remained in their community schools. For example, Carolyn believed that some teachers and the principal in her son's original school were "dismissive of the whole concept of giftedness." Francine reported that her relationship with staff in her son's community school "deteriorated somewhat" following his identification, though she did not elaborate. Some participants, including Colleen, perceived that staff members in her daughter's community school were resentful of the additional time and effort required to enrich the learning environment for gifted students. Others perceived that classroom teachers were not providing adequate enrichment for their child(ren), which had prompted increased interaction — and in some cases, tensions — with school board staff. In one of the more extreme responses, Svetlana reported that she "had no time" for the principal and special education teacher at her eldest son's community school as she viewed them "obstacles who have inflicted damage and should be removed from the system" (Svetlana later transferred her son to a congregated class). In another poignant survey response, Linda described her disappointment with the bureaucratic nature of her relationships with school board staff:

> After a few questionable experiences with a principal and a teacher, mostly middling to good experiences with most teachers and one great year with an excellent teacher, we have been left feeling that there is no specific interest in my child; only processes and ensuring that i's are dotted, t's are crossed, and bases and behinds are covered.

Some participants believed that their child(ren)'s identification of giftedness had changed the way they were perceived as parents by school board staff. For example, Grace reported that she and her husband were treated differently by the staff at the community school once their daughter was "labelled". She continued, "We became 'the problem parents', regardless of how much we had asked for help before the [identification]." Dawn also perceived a certain shift in her relationships with school staff, stating "I have to be wary all the time, so they don't think I'm trying to take advantage of them or the system." Similarly, Sonia asserted in an interview that she was careful to "pick her battles" with school board staff so as not to be perceived as an overbearing parent.

Several mothers reported that having a gifted child had variously affected their relationships with school board staff, as evidenced by the following survey responses:

> "I have had both great support from one principal and opposition from another." (Margaret)
>
> "[It] depends on [the] teacher whether it is positive or not. Some people don't get her and some do." (Ella)

Spouse/partner. More than three-quarters of survey participants reported that having a gifted child had affected their relationship with their spouse or partner (28/37, or 75.7%). Of those who elaborated on their response, nine mothers reported that having a gifted child had positively affected their relationship. These participants indicated that their partners offered emotional support (e.g., "we talk a lot"), practical "hands on" assistance with enrichment activities, as well as their personal experiences with giftedness and/or other learning issues. (interestingly, three participants volunteered that their husbands were likely gifted). Typically, these participants viewed their child(ren)'s giftedness as a shared parental responsibility, as illustrated in Daphne's survey response: "We seem to be on the same page and [giftedness] . . . is something we are both interested in." Conversely, Colleen noted that her current partner and step-father of her gifted child "did not put a lot of stock in the gifted label" and as a result, is not always supportive.

Two survey participants noted that their marital relationships had been affected by the personality traits of their gifted children. Louise explained that "having a very intense and emotional person in our life who needs a lot of attention and guidance" had been challenging, and Grace perceived that her daughter's temperament had "put a strain on the [spousal] relationship at times."

A few participants clarified that having a gifted child had changed the *nature* of their spousal/partner relationship. Most often, this change related to the parental division of labour. Interestingly, all five interview participants noted that they had assumed the role of primary advocate after their child(ren)'s identification. Passages from four of the interview participants follow below:

> I am the advocate for the children's education; my partner does not get involved. I think he is unaware of what it involves and the time it takes, but I try to keep it in perspective. I am better at this kind of stuff than he is, so it works out. It hasn't negatively affected our relationship. (Sonia)
>
> We want the same things for Alanna and when there's an issue we tend to agree as to what the potential solution is. A lot of the time, though, he leaves it to me because he's working and he knows we're on the same page. (Margaret)
>
> I was a stay-at-home mom for six years . . . so just due to that I was more involved. . . Part of that was that terrible division of labour that becomes more carved in stone when one's at home and one's at work. . . But I think he has become more involved over the years. (Heidi)
>
> I'm the parent who researches education options, responds to the IEP, communicates with the teachers, nags the child to complete homework each night, commiserates with/comforts the child when no one wants to play with her, etc. (Colleen)

Family. Twenty-seven survey participants (73.0%) reported that having a gifted child had affected their relationships with family members. In the open ended follow-up question, five participants stated that they had not detected any significant changes in their relationships with family members since their child(ren) were identified as gifted (though one conceded that her extended family members were unaware of her child's giftedness). Two survey participants reported that their relationships with family members had been positively affected. Dawn wrote, "we were expected to have gifted children, and we didn't disappoint ☺." In the second instance,

Chris perceived that her relationships with family members were "slightly more positive" as they now understood that her children were "not just LD." One interview participant (Heidi) indicated that her two siblings and sister-in-law were able to offer support and guidance as each of their children (six in total) had been identified as gifted in various school boards across the province.

Participants were more apt to describe how their relationships with family members had been negatively affected by having a gifted child. Sarah provided some insight into her experience in this survey response:

> There are strains on relationships, as there is a poor understanding, and great generalization about giftedness in my extended family. Sometimes I feel there is an unspoken and uncomfortable competition between the gifted and non-gifted cousins.

Ella reported that she had detected negativity from some family members (which she attributed to feelings of jealousy) and Heather indicated that her sister and brother-in-law had not been supportive. Interestingly, Heather was the only mother to report that a sibling relationship within the immediate family had been affected. She elaborated: "There are some self-esteem issues with our youngest daughter as she feels 'stupid' when she compares herself to her sister."

Parental relationships posed a particular challenge for two interview participants. Heidi explained that her parents — who grew up in Germany during the Second World War and were unable to finish high school — were "kind of clueless" about giftedness. Sonia reported that her eighty-year old mother tended to focus on her son's LD diagnosis rather than his intellectual capabilities. She wrote, "While she knows the kids are gifted, I don't think she gets what that means." In a follow-up interview, Sonia proposed that her mother's comments about giftedness were reflective of a "stereotypical" viewpoint; i.e., that gifted children bring home straight A's and have an easy time of school. As for her husband's parents, Sonia reported that she "doesn't say much" because in her opinion, "they don't get smart kids." Fortunately, Sonia feels able to discuss her children's giftedness with a sister-in-law who "gets it" and is very supportive. Of the five interview participants, only one (Julie) provided an example of how the grandparent-grandchild relationship had been affected:

> In terms of my parents [the gifted identification] almost makes them more hyper-focused on what they can do for Charlotte . . . My mom will go out and say, "Oh, I saw this book and I really thought it would help her."

Julie noted that she has always considered her parents "part of the team" in raising her two children, and that her daughter's identification of giftedness has intensified her parents' contribution to some extent.

Most survey participants reported a range of experiences with regard to their relationships with extended family members. For example, Daphne reported that:

> . . . some [family members] aren't supportive either because they don't 'believe' that he is gifted, or they don't feel he needs special treatment . . . [while] others also have gifted children and I can go to them as a source for some information.

Svetlana wrote that while her close family members have been "absolutely positive" with regard to her children's giftedness, she perceived that some extended family members "don't understand gifted[ness] and view it as competitive one-upmanship." Ruth explained that her relationship with her sister had undergone a transformation of sorts. Initially Ruth perceived that having gifted children had negatively affected her sibling relationship; however, she feels that "things have been better" since the testing of her sister's kids "uncovered their exceptionalities."

Close friends. In the survey 24 of 37 participants (64.9%) indicated that having a gifted child had affected their relationships with close friends. Of those who provided further information, 10 mothers indicated that their friendships had been positively affected. For Chris, having a gifted child had enhanced her friendships in two ways: one, she perceived that her friends were better able to understand where she was coming from in terms of her child's needs, and two, she found it easier to empathize with other parents of children with learning differences or "issues".

Seven participants noted that they had sought out friendships with other mothers of gifted children, or that their existing friendships with mothers of gifted learners had strengthened since the identification of their own children. The comments of four of these mothers are included below:

> "Several of my friends are the parents of gifted kids. This has been a great support." (Natalya)
>
> "I've met some great people and we support each other through some of the challenges." (Ella)
>
> "I seem to hang out more with parents of gifted kids than I did previously." (Ruth)
>
> "It has brought me closer with friends who also have gifted children." (Gwynne)

On the flipside, six participants reported that having a gifted child had negatively affected their relationships with close friends. Violet maintained that her friends "don't understand what [giftedness] is . . . they think that all kids are bright." Carolyn believed that some of her friends felt "uneasy and threatened" by the concept of giftedness, while Sandra was aware that a few of her friends resented the "benefits given to gifted kids, like the smaller classes" (something Sandra says she "totally understands"). Dawn perceived that some of her friends thought that it was "snobby" to put your child in a gifted class, and that they didn't appreciate hearing about "the problems of gifted children." In another example, Margaret described how a friendship with another adoptive mom had "withered" over time, in part because of Alanna's identification of giftedness. During an interview Margaret explained that when her friend's same-aged daughter started "really struggling" in school, she found that they had less and less in common, and the friendship ran its course. Margaret noted that her current friends are either other parents of gifted kids ("we're all part of the same mini community"), or people who really like her daughter and her "quirky behaviour". As for the "small minority" of friends who do not seem to understand giftedness or the associated challenges, Margaret observed, "You . . . just tend to shed those friends, you know? [pause]. Not necessarily in an organized, sort of, 'Okay, you're out'. But it happens. It evolves over time."

Work Colleagues. Eighteen participants (48.6%) perceived that having a gifted child had affected their relationships with co-workers. In the follow-up question, two participants remarked that their relationships with colleagues had been positively affected. Lisa reported that her co-workers had been "positive, understanding, and interested" with regard to her children's giftedness, and Ruth noted that she has "become a bit of a resource for others on the gifted/LD/ADHD diagnoses." On the other hand, two mothers had sensed resentment from colleagues. Sonia (who left her full-time job to better advocate for her son's multiple learning needs) stated that "people don't get why a kid needs advocacy if he is smart", adding that many don't seem to understand that a child can be both gifted *and* learning disabled. In the second instance, Svetlana reported that even though most of her co-workers don't know that her children have been identified as gifted, she believed that some "unofficially" resented that her children took priority over her career.

To summarize, participants perceived that their child(ren)'s giftedness had affected — or had the capacity to affect — their relationships with others. Thus, it is plausible that this

awareness influenced what mothers were willing to say about their child(ren)'s giftedness and to whom. In the subsequent section, mothers' experiences of information sharing are explored.

Information sharing. Survey participants were asked: *What, if anything, do you say to others with regard to your child(ren)'s "diagnosis" of giftedness?* Participants' responses to this open ended question were coded and grouped together by theme, as illustrated in Table 16.

Table 16

What Participants Say to Others with Regard to Child(ren)'s Giftedness

Participants' approach to information sharing	n (%)
Have said little or nothing	17 (40.5)
Have shared selective or vague information with some people	16 (38.1)
Have shared gifted "diagnosis" with others as a way of explaining child's learning needs, behaviours, and/or educational placement	10 (23.8)
Have discussed it with other parents of gifted and/or multiply exceptional children	7 (16.7)
Have told close family and friends	6 (14.3)
Have told teachers/school staff	3 (7.1)

Note: 42 participants responded

While some survey participants indicated that they had discussed their child(ren)'s giftedness with other parents of gifted children (7/42, or 16.7%), close family and friends (6/42, or 14.3%), and with school board staff (3/42, or 7.1%), the most frequent responses would suggest that participants preferred to say as little as possible about their child(ren)'s giftedness (17/42, or 40.5%). When mothers did choose to share information with others, they tended to be selective about what they divulged and to whom (16/42, or 38.1%). Ten mothers (23.8%) stated that they had shared information about their child's giftedness, often as a way of explaining their learning needs, behaviours, and/or educational placement. The three predominant maternal experiences are explored in greater detail below.

Have said little or nothing. When survey participants were asked what they say to others with regard to their child(ren)'s giftedness, 40.5% of mothers reported that they do not share this information willingly and prefer to say as little as possible if asked. The following responses illustrate participants' tendency to sidestep the issue:

"[We say] very little. It's not something we openly discuss." (Laura)

"We don't draw attention to it." (Guylaine)

"We chose not to tell the child or our family in general . . . But people often comment on how smart he is. We generally agree, but offer no other information." (Barb)

"I say nothing. My child's abilities are self-evident in conversations/interactions with adults: the ease of manner, topics of conversation, sense of humour. To speak of it compounds it and makes me a braggart." (Linda)

"Not much. I do not to mention [it], unless we go into 'deeper' conversation." (Natalya)

Like Natalya, three other mothers noted that they only speak of their child(ren)'s giftedness if asked direct questions. Two of those responses follow:

"We say as little as possible and only when the conversation forces the issue." (Heather)

"I don't talk too much to others about my children's giftedness. I don't hide it; [I] just don't talk about it unless asked specifically." (Sheila)

"I try hard not to say anything about it. If I am pushed about it, I make it clear that the diagnosis of giftedness is complicated and has more ramifications than just 'super smart.'" (Grace)

A few mothers noted that their decision to refrain from discussing their child(ren)'s giftedness had been informed by previous experiences. Carolyn reported that she now avoids mentioning the "gifted" label because she has found that "most people find it very threatening." Similarly, Colleen stated that she doesn't generally raise the topic as "giftedness is largely misunderstood by most people I speak with." Two mothers (Karina and Hannah) noted that after experiencing resistance from others, they became less inclined to share information about their child(ren)'s giftedness. Karina summed up her experience in this response:

I find that other people don't want to hear about my child's "giftedness", or [they] like to debate my decision to enrol him in the primary gifted program, or [they] view my son like a "freak show." I prefer not to mention it anymore.

Hannah decided to stop discussing her child's giftedness with other parents after experiencing what she called "a bit of backlash against the gifted label." She says that she grew tired of responses like, *All children are gifted*, or *I'm happy my kid's not gifted*, and believed that it was "not worth the hassle or explanation required" to challenge such assertions.

An interesting finding related to the sharing of information was that six participants chose not to inform their child(ren) that they had met the school board's criteria for giftedness following the assessment. Julie recalled, "We did not explicitly tell our child that she had been

identified as gifted; although she is 'gifted enough' to know that she learns differently than others." In contrast, Ruth decided to tell her son that he had met the criteria on the advice of the educational psychologist, who perceived that the information that he was gifted (and not just learning disabled) would serve to raise his self-esteem.

Have shared selective or vague information with some people. Some survey participants were more willing to share information with others; however, they specified that they were selective about what they divulged and to whom (16/42, or 38.1%). Data indicated that many mothers were guarded, or purposefully vague when discussing their child(ren)'s giftedness, and tended to "play it down" as much as possible. Participants' motivations were threefold: 1) to minimize possible labeling effects for the child; 2) to avoid being perceived as a "braggart" or overzealous parent; and 3) to avoid awkward social situations in which children might be compared. These three themes are illustrated below via participants' quotes.

With regard to labeling effects, Heather explained, "while [having our daughter identified] was extremely helpful in educating [her], it does label her and we believe that people are so much more than a label." Similarly, Julie stated that she is careful with whom she shares information as she does not want her daughter to be labelled by others.

Concerns about being perceived as a "braggart" were prevalent in several survey responses. Deanne recalled her experience: "It is very frustrating to have a gifted child and not be able to express just how different they are (especially with the first) [because] people think you are bragging." Another mother explained that she considered her audience before sharing information: "If I think they would just take it as bragging . . . I don't say much at all." Heidi was also aware that discussing her children's giftedness could be misconstrued as boastfulness. She elaborated on this thought in an interview:

> You know, it's a touchy thing. And it *shouldn't* be. Because if your child were a gifted musician, or artist, or athlete — especially an athlete, I think — . . . if your kid were one of the top people in the school for long distance running or whatever, you'd be talking about it, you know? But with [giftedness], it's almost like there's this unspoken rule that you don't talk about it because then you're *bragging*.

Another interview participant described her reasons for keeping quiet about her daughter's giftedness when conversing with other parents. Julie remarked, ". . . I don't want to be judged as

that parent who thinks their child is *all that*. Yeah, I don't ever want to feel — or have my friends feel — that I compare my child against their child."

Several survey participants noted that they generally avoided discussing their child(ren)'s giftedness with parents of typically developing children so as to avoid the discomfort and hurt feelings that can result when children are compared. Michelle recalled her awkward interactions with parents following the board-wide CCAT assessment in Grade 3:

> It rarely comes up in conversation now compared to when the testing was initially done, [when] everyone was talking about who was and was not gifted; who "passed the test". It was uncomfortable when the other parents would get a little annoyed that mine was [gifted] and their child wasn't.

Megan reported that she usually "plays down" her daughter's giftedness "so as not to antagonize anyone", or make other parents feel uncomfortable. She continued, "Somehow I feel they would feel bad that their child isn't as smart as mine? I don't know." Similarly, Carolyn conceded that she is sensitive to the reaction of other parents, stating "if I have to disclose that my son is in a gifted program I think I become quite apologetic."

A strategy employed by some survey participants was to avoid the use of the term "gifted" when in discussion with other parents. One such example was provided by Margot who explained, "We usually say 'they attend an enriched program' since not all [people] understand the definition of 'gifted' and it sounds a bit exaggerated, I think." Noting that conversations with other parents can "certainly be awkward", Sandra stated that she tends to focus on her son's "different learning style." If asked about her daughter's school placement (which differs from that of her other two children), Guylaine reported that she is purposefully vague: "I simply reply 'She attends an alternate program she was eligible for.'"

Given the degree of discomfort participants often experienced when interacting with parents of typically developing children, it is not surprising that some mothers preferred to discuss their child(ren)'s giftedness with other parents of gifted learners (7/42, or 16.7%). Ruth's survey response reflected this tendency: "Our announcement [that our two children were gifted] may have been construed by some as us having won the 'parent-lottery'. It was much easier to discuss the 'news' with parents of other gifted children." In a similar response, Francine reported that while she does not willingly let on that her children are gifted with parents

of "non-gifted kids", she does share information and experiences with other parents of gifted learners.

Conversely, not all participants were comfortable sharing information with other parents of gifted children. Joanne elaborated: "It's been my observation that some parents [of gifted children] like to flaunt the diagnosis and compare scores, and I find this not only troubling, but completely misguided." In an interview, Heidi also eluded to a "feeling of competitiveness" that exists among some parents of gifted children.

Have shared information as an explanation. Almost one-quarter of participants (10/42, or 23.8%) indicated that they had shared information about their child's giftedness as a means of explaining or clarifying their child's learning needs, behaviours, and/or educational placement. Several mothers of children who attended the congregated gifted program reported that they had felt obliged to provide an explanation when asked (usually by other parents) why their children did not attend the same school as their siblings or neighbourhood friends. This was the case for Margaret, who wrote: "Where relevant I say she is in a gifted program. Often this will come up as my other daughter is in a private school and people ask why they aren't both in private."

Participants seemed more willing to divulge information about their child's giftedness when other — perhaps more observable — learning exceptionalities or social challenges were present. Chris provided this rationale for sharing information about her children's giftedness: "A lot of people who know my kids know of the LD part of their personality as that shows more. I would like people to realize that the LD is not the whole story." Iliana explained that in order to explain why her son "doesn't fit in sometimes", she has, on occasion, volunteered that that her son is "exceptional" (as she prefers that to "gifted", or "special"). Finally, Ella perceived that sharing information with teachers about giftedness had helped them to better understand what she described as her daughter's "depth and sensitivity."

It was clear from the survey data that most participants were cautious when sharing information about their child(ren)'s giftedness. Many participants perceived that the term "gifted" was misunderstood, misconstrued, or misinterpreted by others. Moreover, several mothers recalled that sharing information with others had resulted in unintended or unexpected social outcomes, hence their tendency to control the amount of information they shared and with whom.

Summary. When asked if any of their relationships had been affected by having a gifted child, an overwhelming majority of participants perceived that at least one of their relationships had changed. Participants were most likely to report that having a gifted child had affected their relationships with school staff, their partner or spouse, and family members. Many participants perceived that discussing their child(ren)'s giftedness might negatively impact their personal interactions and relationships. Hence, most participants reported that they generally did not share information about their child(ren)'s giftedness with others, or were guarded about what information they shared and with whom. Mothers of children with multiple exceptionalities sometimes chose to share information about their child's giftedness either as a way to offset other learning issues, or as a means of explaining their child's behavioural differences. Several participants reported that were more comfortable discussing their children's giftedness with other parents of gifted learners.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the eight findings uncovered by this study were presented. Data from 45 surveys and 15 in-depth interviews were used to illustrate the experiences of mothers of gifted children in a number of areas. Of specific interest were mothers' conceptualizations of giftedness and their experiences of the assessment, identification, and placement process. Consistent with qualitative research methods, participants' own words were used to accurately represent the multiple realities of the persons studied. It was hoped that the generous inclusion of participants' quotations would engage the reader with both the individual experiences and the phenomenon under study.

The overarching theme that emerged from the eight findings was that most participants found the experience of mothering a gifted child or children to be challenging and in many ways, transformative. As illustrated in Finding 1, mothers' conceptualizations of giftedness shifted following their child's assessment. A comparative analysis of participants' pre- and post-assessment data revealed a shift from viewing giftedness as a static trait or set of traits to a more complex, multifaceted and developmental state. In addition, mothers were keenly aware that the term "gifted" had multiple meanings and connotations and was thus variously interpreted by others.

The second finding was that most mothers had pursued an assessment for their child(ren) because they were aware that something was "different" or unusual about their child, or because

their child was experiencing social, emotional, or academic difficulties. The desire to know if a child was eligible for specialized gifted programming was identified less often as a motivation for assessment.

After receiving their child's assessment results, many mothers reported that they were fraught with conflicting emotions. Data presented in Finding 3 indicated that the emotions recalled most often were happiness, surprise, and relief. One quarter of mothers reported that they were overwhelmed or confused by the results, particularly if the assessment was school-based. A range of other emotions were expressed including confirmation, worry, anxiety, and vindication. Many mothers indicated that their initial feelings of happiness were tempered with concerns about how to best support their child(ren)'s needs.

The fourth finding was that a majority of mothers not only considered alternative educational placement options, but decided to move their children; usually to a congregated gifted class offered by the local public school board. More than three-quarters of the participants indicated that the most difficult decision they have had to make since their child's assessment related to their educational placement.

Finding 5 identified and described the steps mothers tended to use in their decision making. The three broad criteria or "filters" used to assess the various educational options were: mothers' perceptions related to each placement option, child specific considerations, and practical considerations. Participants generally arrived at a preferred option, the availability of which was often dictated by the public school board. Those who were unable to attain their preferred option tended to reconsider their options or develop a longer term strategy to secure their desired educational placement in the future.

Findings 6 and 7 provided insight into the facilitators and barriers experienced by mothers. With regard to facilitators, participants identified the local parent advocacy group, other parents of gifted children, and internet and print resources as supportive. Two interview participants identified a teacher or administrator who had been a "champion" for their children. The vast majority of the barriers identified by participants were encountered in the educational decision making process and were therefore school board related. A perceived lack of information and support, poor communication of the relevant school board policies and procedures, short time lines for decision making, a lack of gifted programming for primary aged French immersion students and the location of gifted centres were identified most often.

In the final finding (Finding 8), survey and interview data illustrated that most mothers perceived that having a gifted child had impacted their relationships. Mothers were most likely to report that having a gifted child had affected their relationships with school staff, their partner/spouse, family members, and close friends; often in a negative way. A majority of mothers stated that they did not willingly share information about their child(rens)'s giftedness, and/or were careful about what information they shared and with whom. Mothers were less likely to be guarded about their child(ren)'s giftedness with other parents of gifted children whom they generally perceived to be more supportive and understanding.

Chapter 5 - Analysis, Interpretation, and Synthesis of Findings

This study sought to investigate how mothers of children assessed as intellectually gifted made sense of the gifted construct, and how they perceived that they made educational placement decisions. The experiences of a group of mothers of young gifted children were explored. It was hoped that the knowledge generated by this research would afford new insights into the maternal experience of the assessment, identification, and placement process and thus inform special education policy, procedures, and practice. From a theoretical perspective, the use of Beach and Mitchell's (1990) image theory as a framework for understanding mothers' "real life" decision making was thought to be a novel application of the decision making model. Perhaps most importantly, it was believed that this research would give voice to the experience of mothering gifted children; a phenomenon that is currently lacking in the literature.

The research was framed by a postpositivist orientation and employed rigorous qualitative research methods. Participants in the group included 45 mothers of elementary school-aged children who met the criteria for intellectual giftedness in an urban public school board in Ontario. All 45 mothers completed a comprehensive survey, and five were purposefully selected to participate in a series of three in-depth interviews.

The study was guided by the following five research questions:

1. What meaning did the participants ascribe to the concept of giftedness?
2. How did participants describe their experience of the assessment, identification, and placement process?
3. What factors did participants perceive were important in their decision making?
4. What, or whom did participants perceive as facilitators in their decision making?
5. What, or whom did participants perceive as barriers in their decision making?

It is believed that the eight findings presented in Chapter 4 satisfied the five research questions.

To create a readable narrative of the phenomenon under study from a variety of participant perspectives, the data presented in the previous chapter were organized by finding. The purpose of the current chapter is to provide further insight into those findings through an analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the data. To "make sense" of the large volumes of survey and interview data collected, the researcher engaged in a systematic reduction of the data, followed by the identification of recurring patterns and themes. Unexpected or unanticipated experiences, as well as outlying or negative cases were taken into account. Next, connective

threads within and among the experiences of the research participants — as well as ways in which participants rationalized, understood, or explained these connections and experiences — were explored. Study findings were then considered in the context of the theoretical framework (as described in Chapter 2) and extant research. The outcomes of the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the eight findings are presented below as they relate to each of the five research questions.

Research Question 1 – Conceptualizations of Giftedness

The first research question sought to explore and describe the meaning participants ascribed to the concept of giftedness. This was deemed important for two reasons. First, it was believed that "coming to grips" with the concept of giftedness was an essential element of the phenomenon of mothering a gifted child. Second, it was presumed that mothers' conceptualizations of giftedness would guide and inform their parenting and decision making. As Solow (1999) noted in her doctoral research, "How parents raise their gifted child has a lot to do with how they perceive them" (p. 15). Similarly, Beach and Connolly (2005) maintained that knowing how an individual frames and understands a situation is useful in predicting and understanding the decisions he or she makes. Hence, a central objective of the study was to gain insight into how mothers conceptualized intellectual giftedness, and how those conceptions might inform their decision making. This objective was satisfied by the data presented in Finding 1, as summarized below.

Prior to their child's assessment, most participants recalled they had equated giftedness with notions of intelligence (e.g., "Gifted to me meant extraordinarily intelligent – genius."). Following their child's assessment, participants were most likely to state that giftedness was a "different" or "special" capacity for learning (e.g., "gifted children learn differently; typically faster and with deeper comprehension"). A comparative analysis of participants' pre- and post-assessment data revealed a shift from viewing giftedness as a static trait or set of traits, to a more complex and developmental state. Post-assessment, participants were more likely to frame giftedness as an integrated array of social, emotional, and cognitive needs. The notion of giftedness as a learning difference was mentioned by mothers three times as often in the post-assessment responses. The post-assessment data also revealed three emergent conceptualizations: giftedness as uneven development; giftedness as potential; and giftedness as

a multiplicitous and potentially ambiguous concept. Generally speaking, study participants ascribed meaning to the term "gifted" in the context of their own child or children.

Maternal conceptualizations and the theoretical framework. The study findings will now be considered in the context of ecological systems theory and image theory.

Ecological systems theory. A comparison of pre- and post- data showed that mothers' conceptualizations of giftedness shifted following their child's assessment. This developmental shift is illustrative of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *ecological transition*. Bronfenbrenner argued that these transitions occur "whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered as the result of a change in role, setting, or both" (1979, p. 26). It is conceivable that mothers perceived a change in their ecological environment after receiving the news of their child's giftedness which then prompted them to revisit their previous conceptualization of giftedness or to establish one if necessary. A powerful example of ecological transition was provided by Margaret in an interview:

> Before Alanna [was identified], I would have thought, "Why do these kids need any effort?", and "Oh, isn't it a dreadful thing to push these kids; they should allow them to have a normal childhood, etc., etc." And now I've moved to the other side of the fence and I'm trying to counteract those views. And it's amazing to me how I would have just gone along with that. [I used to think], "Why would you want your kid to rush through school?" . . . it didn't occur to me that it was a child's choice and that not to pursue knowledge would have made them unhappy.

Margaret's comments reflect a common theme in the data; that mothers tended to reconsider their previous (abstract, and perhaps stereotypical) concepts of giftedness when the term became relevant in the context of their own child.

Image theory. A central component of Beach and Mitchell's image theory (1990) is the notion of *framing*, described as the foundation for understanding a situation and what — if anything — to do about it. Data obtained through survey and interviews provided a greater understanding of how participants viewed giftedness, and afforded insight into how these frames might influence educational decision making. Table 17 on page 156 presents the three emergent conceptualizations discussed by mothers in the post-assessment data, along with the predominant maternal meanings associated with each concept.

Table 17

Conceptualizations of Giftedness, Maternal Meanings, and Potential Implications for Decision Making

Frame	Maternal meaning
Giftedness as a developmental difference	Gifted learners have unique needs that might not be best served in a "regular" classroom setting
Giftedness as potential	Giftedness requires identification and nurturing in order to fully develop
Giftedness as uneven or asynchronous development	Gifted learners may exhibit disparities in their intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development that may require support and intervention
Giftedness as a multiplicitous/ambiguous concept	Giftedness is a social construct with multiple meanings. From an educational perspective, individual school boards determine who is "gifted" and what (if any) specialized programming will be offered.

As noted in Finding 4, almost two-thirds of the children represented in the survey were placed in a congregated gifted class at the time of the survey. An audit of the decision making choices of participants who framed giftedness either as potential or as a different way of learning illustrated that these mothers were slightly more likely to pursue congregated gifted placements for their children. Six of the eight children of mothers who framed giftedness as potential were placed in a congregated gifted class. In addition, 14 of 20 children of participants who framed giftedness as a different capacity for learning were placed in the gifted program, with another three children on the waiting list. This trend did not extend to those participants who viewed giftedness as uneven or asynchronous development, however, as only one-quarter of the offspring of mothers who framed giftedness in this way were placed in a gifted class (with one student on the waiting list). It must be noted that three of these students were enrolled in the Early French immersion stream at the time of the survey and were not yet old enough to access the junior congregated gifted FI class. Another possible explanation for the comparatively low uptake is that six of the eight children of mothers who viewed giftedness as uneven or asynchronous development were dually or multiply exceptional; hence, mothers may not have viewed a congregated gifted placement as the best fit for their child's diverse developmental needs.

Mothers' personal experience of giftedness also appeared to influence educational decision making as eight of the nine women who reported that they were considered gifted as children had at least one child in a congregated gifted setting. The remaining mother, Daria, had a complex set of issues to consider for her daughter (gifted/LD/ADHD) and decided to delay her daughter's entry into the gifted program until Grade 5.

The relationships between maternal conceptions of giftedness and educational placement explored above lend support to Beach and Connolly's (2005) supposition that knowing how a decision maker frames a situation can help to predict and understand the decisions he or she makes. Other influential factors related to decision making are discussed later in the chapter.

Maternal conceptualizations and extant literature. The three emergent maternal conceptualizations or frames of giftedness will now be explored in the context of extant literature.

Giftedness as a developmental difference. The sentiment expressed most often by mothers in the post-assessment data was that giftedness was a developmental learning difference. Participants tended to describe these learning differences in terms of divergent thinking and reasoning skills, depth and breadth of comprehension, memory, creativity, and processing speed. These observations are consistent with Porath's (2009) assertion that when compared to their peer group, gifted children "have greater capacity for learning, learn faster, reason in a more complex and abstract way, and are developmentally advanced" (p. 342).

Participants' perceptions were also similar to those reported by Razel Solow (1999), who conducted in-depth case studies with four parents of gifted children in the southern US to explore their conceptions of giftedness. Solow found that none of the parents equated giftedness with intelligence, nor did they believe that giftedness could be measured by an IQ test. As was found in the current study, Solow's parents conceptualized giftedness in the context of their own child's diverse talents and qualities (what she termed a "whole child" approach). Solow also found that some parents refused to think of their children as "gifted", even if they had been formally identified as such. This finding was corroborated in the current study as three of the five interview participants explained that they preferred to think of their children as "different" rather than "gifted".

Interestingly, participants who had more than one child identified as gifted were often astounded by the vast differences in the development, behaviours, and learning profiles of their

offspring. Many mothers seemed surprised that in addition to being different from their peer group, gifted learners (and siblings) were often quite different from each other. Several authors have highlighted the diversity found among gifted learners in terms of their abilities (Lubinski & Benbow, 2000; Robinson, 1987; Rotigel, 2003), motivation (Winner, 1996) and learning trajectories (Porath, 1993).

Most of the study participants framed their children's differences in positive terms; however, a few were less enthusiastic (one mother declared that "[giftedness is] not a blessing"). As Matthews and Foster (2009) stated in their guidebook for parents and educators, "Like a beautiful rose with surprisingly sharp thorns, the gifted label can be accompanied by unexpected difficulties" (p. 95). A similar sentiment was noted in an article by gifted educator Jim Delisle (2001), who proposed that parents of profoundly gifted children in particular may view their child's extreme intellect as a handicap; "as personally disabling as a profound mental or physical challenge." Moreover, Delisle stated that some parents perceive profound giftedness as more of a burden than a blessing, particularly when others demonstrate animosity toward their child's intelligence. Indeed, several study participants reported that they had experienced such animosity.

Giftedness as potential. Six study participants characterized giftedness as *potential* in the post-assessment data. The belief that intelligence is malleable rather than fixed is consistent with the work of psychologist Carol Dweck (2006). In *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success,* Dweck proposed that individuals adopt one of two belief systems with regard to the relationship between intelligence and success; *fixed*, and *growth*. Individuals with a *fixed* theory of intelligence link success with innate ability (either you have *it*, or you don't), while individuals who subscribe to a *growth* theory of intelligence associate success with hard work and incremental development. Within the context of the research project, it would appear that participants' initial conceptualizations of giftedness were more reminiscent of Dweck's *fixed* theory of intelligence (as evidenced by participants' discussion of IQ scores, percentiles, and MENSA entrance requirements). Following their child's assessment, however, participants' conceptualizations seemed more aligned with Dweck's *growth* mindset in that they were more likely to associate their child's giftedness with intellectual potential that required support to fully develop. A logical extension of Dweck's growth mindset is that mothers might feel a responsibility to find and provide opportunities to develop their children's potential. The study

findings indicated that many mothers felt a burden of responsibility to "grow" their children's potential through in-school advocacy, alternative placements, and/or extra-curricular activities.

Giftedness as uneven development. Six mothers indicated that they now associated giftedness with uneven patterns of development. Four of the six mothers who framed giftedness in this way had children who had been identified with at least one other exceptionality[38]. As almost one third of the gifted learners represented in the study were identified as dually or multiply exceptional, many participants would have been familiar with the concept of disparate learning profiles. Uneven development among gifted learners is not uncommon; Linda Silverman (2009), Director of the Gifted Development Centre in Denver, Colorado reported that approximately one sixth of the 5,600 children tested at the centre were found to have some form of learning disability (described as auditory processing disorder (CAPD), difficulties with visual processing, sensory processing disorder, spatial disorientation, dyslexia, and attention deficits).

An interesting study finding was that while four participants reported that they had previously associated giftedness with social difficulties (e.g., "nerdy", "very low social skills"), none of these mothers maintained this perception following their child(ren)'s assessment. Instead, mothers were inclined to attribute any perceived social deficits to their child(ren)'s uneven development. Sonia used the phrase *asynchronous development*; a term used in the literature to describe the discontinuity of social, emotional, and cognitive development often found in gifted learners. This concept has received considerable research attention (e.g., Kearney, 1992; Leyden, 1985; Lovecky, 1991; Morelock, 2000; Roeper, 1982; Silverman, 1994, 1997a; Tolan, 1989) and has been identified as a potential risk factor for the development of behavioural and emotional problems among gifted individuals (Roedell, 1986; Webb, 1993). It has been argued that asynchronous development "is at the very heart of giftedness" (Morelock, 2000). Similarly, James Webb and his colleagues (2007) stated that "because it is prominent in so many gifted children, some professionals believe that asynchronous development, rather than potential or ability, is the defining characteristic of giftedness" (p. 7). As asynchrony is purported to increase with higher learning capacity (The Columbus Group, 1991, as cited in Morelock, 1992), it is plausible that mothers of profoundly gifted children in this study had

[38] Sonia: LD/Hard of hearing, Jessica: gifted/LD, Colleen: gifted/ADHD, and Miranda: 2 children with multiple exceptionalities, not disclosed.

observed asynchronous development in their own children and thus had incorporated this characteristic into their own conceptualizations of giftedness.

Giftedness as a multiplicitous and/or ambiguous concept. As expected, participants tended to view giftedness not as an objective, measurable "reality" but as a socially created construct (Borland, 2005; Brantlinger, 2004; Gallagher, 2000; Oakes, 2005; Sapon-Shevin, 1994).

Participants' awareness that the term "gifted" was associated with multiple meanings and therefore subject to interpretation was the most prevalent theme to emerge from the post-assessment data. The tendency for some participants to enclose the word *gifted* in quotation marks in their survey responses would seem to suggest that mothers were conscious of the ambiguity of the term, or perhaps were uncomfortable with it.

Daria noted that giftedness "could mean so many different things" and in her opinion, was an "essentially meaningless" term unless connected to specific school board criteria. Inherent in this response is the notion that giftedness is an operational term used by school boards to identify students who may be eligible for differentiated learning opportunities. Most school boards — including the local public school board in this study — continue to rely on standardized test scores to determine who is (and by default, who is not) considered "gifted" (C. N. Brown, 1997; S. W. Brown, et al., 2005). Cut off scores used to identify giftedness in the US have been found to vary from state to state (E. F. Brown, Avery, VanTassel-Baska, Worley, & Stambaugh, 2006), and from school district to school district (Clarenbach, 2007). Therefore, a student may be identified as gifted in one school board or district but not in another, resulting in what Borland (2005) referred to as "geographical giftedness." Furthermore, the provision of programming for gifted learners may vary significantly depending on the setting (Rotigel, 2003). Many mothers in the current study were acutely aware that the criteria used to identify giftedness varied across the local school boards, as did the provision of specialized programming. These discrepancies were a source of frustration for some mothers, particularly those whose children had met the public board's criteria for giftedness but were enrolled elsewhere.

Participants also recognized that conceptions of giftedness were individually constructed and thus informed by societal norms and personal experience. Nine mothers indicated that they had been considered gifted as children, and therefore had some prior knowledge and experience of the construct. In contrast, two participants who had immigrated to Canada from Eastern

Europe stated that they were not aware of the concept of giftedness prior to their own children's assessment, highlighting the role of cultural mediation in the conception of giftedness (Peterson, 1999; Philipson & McCann, 2006; Plucker & Barab, 2005; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004).

The diversity of ideas expressed by participants may also be reflective of the current state of gifted education, recently described as "fractured, porous, and contested" (Ambrose, et al., 2010). Noting the "explosion" of different conceptualizations that have emerged in the field in recent years, the authors argue that virtually none of the popular conceptions of giftedness have been substantiated by empirical research, rendering the term "gifted" a theoretically nebulous concept. In addition, Ambrose and his colleagues contend that each group of stakeholders (e.g., researchers, teachers, administrators, counsellors, and parents), are likely to have a different perspective from which to consider what they call "the hypothetical perspective called giftedness." Ambrose et al.'s review proposes that a proliferation of unsupported conceptualizations of giftedness currently exist, which parents of gifted children may or may not identify with. This rationale may help to explain the range of disparate conceptualizations shared by participants.

Research Question 2 – Experience of Assessment, Identification, and Placement

Research Question 2 focused on the maternal experience of the assessment, identification, and educational placement process. Findings relating to the motivations for assessment (Finding 2), reactions to assessment (Finding 3), and the perceived effect of gifted identification on relationships and information sharing (Finding 8) were believed to satisfy Research Question 2 in that they provided rich insights into the maternal experiences from a variety of perspectives. Generally speaking, participants found the assessment and subsequent identification of their children as gifted to be a complex, confusing, and often emotional experience. Most participants reported that their child's identification of giftedness had impacted their relationships and that they were reluctant to share information about their child's giftedness with others.

Maternal experiences and the theoretical framework. These three findings will now be explored in relation to the theoretical framework.

Ecological systems theory. As reported in Finding 8, mothers believed that having a gifted child had changed — or had the capacity to change — their relationships with others. Viewing the data through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, it is evident that most of

the relationships perceived to be affected were at the microsystem (i.e., immediate family members) and mesosystem (i.e., school staff, extended family, friends, work colleagues) levels. While mothers reported that relationships at the microsystem level were usually affected in a positive way, participants perceived that their relationships at the mesosystem level were more likely to be challenged by their child(ren)'s giftedness.

It is conceivable that at least some of the tension experienced by mothers at the mesosystem level stemmed from fundamental differences in perception with regard to giftedness. As stated earlier, mothers in the study experienced what Bronfenbrenner called an *ecological transition* in terms of their thinking about giftedness following the assessment of their child(ren). Individuals who had not experienced this personal transition were likely informed by prevailing cultural ideologies (a macrosystem influence), leading to disparate perceptions of giftedness and possible friction with mothers of gifted learners.

The finding related to information sharing can also be explored from a systems perspective. Most mothers reported that they were careful about what information they shared and with whom, often because they had experienced resistance from extended family, friends, or school personnel. The tensions exerted by individuals at the mesosystem level had two reciprocal effects on participants. First, mothers often avoided talking about their child(ren)'s giftedness in an attempt to shield their child(ren) from stigmatization, to protect the feelings of other parents whose children may not be gifted, to maintain friendships, and to avoid being perceived as a braggart. Second, participants often sought out new relationships (or strengthened existing relationships) with other mothers of gifted children. Mothers seemed aware, as Cornell (1983) pointed out in his study of the family effects of gifted labeling, that "all labels, positive and negative, function as symbols that mediate social perceptions, and thus shape their relationship between self and others" (p.323). Learning how to manage and share information — at the micro and mesosystem levels in particular — was an important aspect of mothers' development.

Maternal experiences and extant literature. In the subsequent section the findings relating to mothers' motivation for assessment, reaction to assessment, and information sharing are explored in relation to previous research.

Motivation to assess. Mothers' decisions to assess were often impelled by an external trigger[39], or the awareness that their child was "different" rather than the possibility of placement in the public school board's gifted program. Psychologists Silverman and Shires Golon (2008) are sympathetic to the plight of parents, stating that it takes more courage than most people realize for a parent to initiate testing of a child who may be gifted. To support this claim, the authors cite Seeley (1998), who contends that parents, fearing that they have overestimated their children's abilities and will be proven "foolish", tend to amass large amounts of evidence of precocity before they are willing to entertain the possibility of giftedness. Study data would suggest that mothers in the current study did not enter into the assessment process lightly.

Survey and interview data revealed a high degree of parental involvement in the nomination and assessment process; a pattern that has been noted in other research. A number of potential explanations for this involvement have been proposed. For example, it has been proposed that parents are most knowledgeable with regard to their children's strengths and weaknesses (Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006), and that most are reasonably accurate in evaluating their children's ability (McBee, 2006). It has also been suggested that parents are more adept at identifying giftedness because they often have information about their child's intellectual abilities that may not be recognized in the traditional classroom (Jolly & Matthews, 2011). Moreover, the literature suggests that teachers may have biases that preclude them from recognizing gifted learners (Siegle & Powell, 2004), particularly those with diverse learning needs (McBee, 2006, 2010). As almost one-third of the students represented in the study were either dually or multiply exceptional learners, mothers were perhaps best positioned to recognize the signs of giftedness in their children. Another factor that may have encouraged parental involvement in the nomination and assessment process was the public school board's decision to eliminate the systematic CCAT testing of all Grade 3 students in early 2007. Long waiting lists for in-school assessment with a school board psychologist —coupled with participants' considerable resources — might explain why more than half of the study participants opted to have their children assessed privately.

Maternal reaction to assessment results. Upon receiving the assessment results to indicate that their child had met the public school board's criteria for giftedness, the reactions recalled most often by participants were happiness and/or pride, relief, and surprise (especially

[39] I.e., the child was experiencing difficulties, teacher or health care professional recommended an assessment.

for the six mothers who were unaware that their child was being assessed). Almost one-quarter of mothers noted that they were overwhelmed or confused by the assessment results, particularly when the assessment was conducted by the school board. A range of other emotions were expressed by participants including validation, vindication, and anxiety. It was not unusual for mothers to recount a variety of conflicting emotions as they processed the assessment results. Participants' reactions were consistent with Dirks' (1979) observation that "the period following assessment and formal identification of a gifted and/or intellectually superior child is . . . just the beginning of a long drawn out period of psychological adjustment and reaction on the part of the parent" (p. 9).

The range of "negative" emotions experienced by participants is similar to those noted by other researchers (e.g., Alsop, 1997; Hackney, 1981; Keirouz, 1990; Leyden, 1985; Rotigel, 2003; Silverman & Shires Golon, 2008), who reported parental feelings of confusion, fear, concern, inadequacy, and guilt following the assessment and identification of a gifted child. Citing a number of sources, Alsop posited that confusion, "a feeling of threat", and anxiety relating to the parent's perceived capacity to provide for the child have been noted. Similarly, educational psychologists Silverman and Shires Golon (2008) asserted that it is not unusual for parents to feel inadequate or overwhelmed by the information that their child is gifted. In Rotigel's (2003) guidelines for parents, families, and educators of gifted children, she cautioned that parents may feel "overwhelmed by the responsibility of raising a child who seems to be so different from anyone that they know" (p. 210). Rotigel further proposed that some parents may become concerned about their child's future or worry that their offspring will be perceived as "weird" (this concern was noted by survey participant Michelle, who worried that her child would exhibit the social ineptitude of her "genius" grandfather). As was observed in Alsop's (1997) study of 42 Australian families of gifted learners, the identification of a child as intellectually gifted did not necessarily predict a positive response from mothers in this study.

Another possible explanation for the maternal anxiety observed in this study is that parents of newly diagnosed children often have a limited understanding of what giftedness is and the implications thereof (Rotigel, 2003; Winner, 1996). The experiences shared by mothers would suggest that the assessment and identification process motivated many participants to further their understanding of giftedness through formal and informal means (e.g., special education staff, parent advocacy groups, websites, print resources, etc.). This observation is

similar to that reported by Joanne Foster (2000), who studied the effects of gifted identification on six Ontario pre-adolescents and their families. Foster found that the labeling of children as gifted prompted parents to seek out information about the concept of giftedness and related emotional and educational issues. For mothers in the current study whose children were identified with dual or multiple learning exceptionalities, the learning curve was especially steep.

Once parents grasp a better understanding of giftedness, they must then determine what — if anything — to "do" with this information. Colangelo and Dettman (1983) observed that parents may face additional decisions with regard to formal identification and educational placement depending on the availability of specialized gifted programming in their local school district. Indeed, several study participants reported that they were confounded by the plethora of educational options available to them and the number of issues to take into account. Similar to the findings reported by Foster (2000), study participants' anxiety about educational decision making was exacerbated by a perceived lack of support from the school board. This perceived barrier to the maternal experience is discussed further on page 179.

Information sharing. As mentioned previously, survey and interview data clearly demonstrated that the vast majority of participants were guarded about their child's gifted identification, and were careful with whom they shared information and for what purpose. Most mothers preferred to say little or nothing about their child's giftedness. Ultimately, mothers tended to regard the identification of their child(ren) as a necessary step in securing differentiated programming rather than an opportunity to publically label their child's intellectual abilities. Labeling effects were a regrettable (and often unanticipated) outcome of the gifted identification and placement process. Participants seemed particularly concerned about the potential stigmatization of their child(ren) as "gifted" (Silverman, 2010). Interestingly, Todd and Shearn (1997) reported similar findings for parents of children diagnosed with an intellectual disability. The authors found that parents avoided discussions about their child's disability as a means of protecting them from its perceived stigma. A notable difference is that disability and giftedness are usually seen as occupying different end of a continuum, with little or no empathy afforded to the parents of gifted learners (Doyle, 2002).

Study participants were also concerned about being stigmatized themselves; either as braggarts, or as pushy "stage mothers" (Distin, 2006) who had somehow willed their children to be gifted. While participants generally reported that they were proud of their children's talents

and abilities, many were also humbled by them. Some mothers seemed almost embarrassed by their children's giftedness, as evidenced by Carolyn who stated that she was "quite apologetic" when discussing her son's educational placement. James Delisle (2001) observed that in his twenty-five years of nurturing and caring for gifted children, parents of profoundly gifted learners often said very little to anyone about their child's progress for fear that they would be stereotyped as "that type" of parent. Given the recent spate of books devoted to "over-parenting", participants may have been particularly careful lest they be accused of hot housing (Quart, 2006); hyper-parenting (Honoré, 2008), or tiger mothering (Chua, 2011) their gifted children.

Another common rationale for revealing as little as possible about their child's giftedness was rooted in study participants' desire to avoid awkward conversations, particularly with parents of typically developing children. Some mothers noted that they had refrained from discussing their children's giftedness so as to avoid being subjected to the myths and stereotypes often associated with giftedness such as "all children are gifted" (Winner, 1996), and "gifted kids don't need special attention" (Silverman, 2010). By and large, study participants were also sensitive to the feelings of other parents who might feel inadequate or upset by the inference that their child was *not* gifted.

Research conducted by Alsop (1997) in Australia found that parents of gifted children were surprised by the lack of support they received when disclosing their child's giftedness to family and friends. In contrast, participants in this study indicated that they expected — or perhaps had learned to expect — a degree of resistance from others and thus tended to avoid the topic altogether, particularly when in conversation with parents of typically developing children.

Research Question 3 – Experience of Educational Decision Making

Educational decision making was a common element of the maternal experience, as noted in Finding 4. The vast majority of participants considered at least one alternative educational placement option following their child's assessment, and almost three-quarters of the gifted students represented in the survey changed placement; usually to one of the congregated gifted classes offered by the public school board. Research Question 3 sought to identify the factors perceived to be important or influential in mothers' educational decision making. Three broad categories of factors were revealed in Finding 5: maternal perceptions relating to the various educational options, child specific considerations, and practical issues. Finding 5 went beyond

the mere identification of factors thought to be important to educational decision making, however. Survey and interview data clearly demonstrated that for most participants, educational decision making was the defining element of their mothering experience. Participants' responses were often lengthy and poignant, utilizing adjectives like "torturous", "agonizing", and "harrowing" to describe what many mothers considered to be the most difficult decision they had encountered thus far in relation to their gifted child(ren).

Maternal decision making and the theoretical framework. The research findings will now be considered in relation to the theoretical framework.

Ecological systems theory. Mothers were generally aware that choosing an alternative educational placement option for one child had the potential to affect the whole family (or microsystem). Participants often considered the possible effects on sibling relations if their children were to attend different schools. The practical consequences of rearranging daycare and work schedules to accommodate disparate school starting times, transportation arrangements, and multiple school commitments were also taken into account. When making educational placement decisions for their gifted child(ren), participants often weighed the potential repercussions of each option; not just for the gifted learner, but for individual family members and the family unit as a whole. While mothers recognized that the identification of giftedness might open up new opportunities for the child, they also understood that these opportunities would have reciprocal effects for the child as well as other family members. As Silverman noted, "Giftedness is a family affair . . . there is no escape from the impact of giftedness on the family system" (1997b, p. 394).

Image theory. Survey and interview data indicated that mothers' decision making experiences followed many of the tenets of Beach and Mitchell's image theory (Beach, 1990; Beach & Mitchell, 1990). For example, mothers usually engaged in a pre-choice screening of options (Beach, 1993); filtering out those educational options that were perceived to be incompatible with their principles and goals. Most study participants were able to narrow down their options to a short and manageable list through the pre-choice screening process (Beach, 1998). Consistent with image theory, mothers who were left with more than one option following the screening phase chose the placement option they perceived to be the "best" from the surviving candidates.

A wide variety of factors were identified by mothers as important in their decision making process. These factors were grouped into three broad categories: maternal perceptions related to each educational option; child specific considerations; and practical considerations. A comprehensive list of these categories and factors are found in Table 18 below.

Table 18

Factors Perceived to be Important by Mothers in the Decision Making Experience

Broad categories	Factors
Maternal perceptions related to each educational option	Perceived importance of: • attending community school with neighbours, siblings, friends • continuing in, or accessing French immersion programming • a challenging, stimulating learning environment • learning and socializing with like-minded peers • trained teachers who understand, appreciate gifted learners • program flexibility (i.e., acceleration) • small class sizes
Child specific considerations	Perceived social, emotional, and learning needs of child Presence of other learning exceptionalities (i.e., LD, ADHD) Current level of achievement Perceived happiness in current placement Existing friendships Perceived adaptability to change Age Language skills (English and French)

Practical considerations	Proximity to home
	Cost
	Transportation arrangements
	Day care/after care arrangements
	Possible implications for parents and family members, such as:
	• separation of siblings
	• management of multiple school cultures
	  ○ staggered school start times
	  ○ increased volunteer requests
	  ○ coordination of multiple forms, events

The maternal perceptions expressed in relation to each option are consistent with Beach's (1990) concept of *value image*, described as the decision maker's "prescriptive and proscriptive values, standards, ideals, precepts, beliefs, morals, and ethics which are collectively called *principles*." These maternal perceptions — in conjunction with child specific and practical considerations — informed participants' pre-choice screening and selection of their preferred educational placement option(s).

When mothers were unable to attain their preferred placement (or trajectory image), participants often devised a plan (or strategic image) to attain the desired placement at some point in the future (Beach & Connolly, 2005). In some cases, mothers devised a multi-year plan to achieve their goal. Over the course of three in-depth interviews, Sonia described the complex decision making process she employed for her son Matthew, who was first identified as gifted/LD while in Grade1 and then diagnosed with significant hearing loss shortly thereafter. Sonia's expressed principles (or value image), goals (trajectory image), and plans to achieve those goals (strategic image) are illustrated in Table 19 on page 170. Admittedly, Sonia's situation was unusually complex. Nonetheless, her decision making provides an illustration of how the tenets of Beach and Mitchell's (1990) are relevant to the findings of the current study.

Table 19

Sonia's Decision Making Approach Expressed as Image Theory

Components of image theory	Factors deemed important in educational decision making
Value image (decision maker's principles)	• Desire for son to attend neighbourhood school with sibling and friends • Perceived importance of learning in stimulating, enriching environment • Perceived value of learning a second language (French) for enrichment, as a valuable life skill
Trajectory image (decision maker's goals)	• To keep son in community school with sibling and friends, and where teachers are familiar with his multiple learning needs • To continue with regular French immersion program • To place son in the congregated gifted French immersion program in his community school at Gr. 5 entry point
Strategic image (decision maker's plans to achieve goals)	• To continue to advocate for differentiation in regular classroom as per his IEP • To continue to volunteer in son's class (in part to monitor son's progress) • To enrich learning at home via extra-curricular activities • When son is in Gr. 4, apply to gifted committee for placement in congregated gifted French immersion program, requesting a community school placement

Several weeks after the in-depth interviews were completed, Sonia contacted the researcher to share the news that her son had been offered a gifted FI placement in his community school for Grade 5. Sonia was both pleased and relieved that she had been able to successfully execute her plan to attain what she believed was the best educational placement for her son's diverse needs.

Image theory and "real life" decision making. On one hand, image theory proved to be a useful theoretical framework with which to interpret mothers' decision making experiences. On the other hand, some of the "real life" aspects of participants' decision making were more difficult to apprehend using image theory, likely because image theory was informed by laboratory data derived from hypothetical decision making scenarios. Two real life aspects of participants' decision making are explored below within the context of image theory: mothers'

lack of information about placement options, and mothers' inability to secure a desired placement option.

One factor that complicated participants' decision making was that mothers did not always have a good understanding of what their educational options were at the pre-screening phase, particularly in relation to congregated gifted classes. Mothers might have preferred a congregated gifted option in theory; however, a gifted placement was not *attainable* unless an offer was extended by the public school board. Furthermore, mothers could not anticipate the location and practical consequences of a gifted placement until it was formally offered by the public board's gifted committee, and thus could not make a "concrete" decision until this information was known[40]. Indeed, one of the main frustrations articulated by mothers was the lack of information they received from the public school board with regard to the various gifted placement options and availability thereof.

Potter and Beach (1994b) proposed that when a decision maker has incomplete or *imperfect* information about an option's attributes, each missing attribute is considered a *violation* and that violations caused by missing information are just as important as actual violations when deciding whether to screen out a particular option. In other words, a "paucity of information encourages rejection" (p. 327). The authors also contended that probability information is treated just like any other information about options; i.e., if a decision maker feels there is a low probability of attaining a particular option, this is considered in violation of the availability criterion, which is then summed up with other violations in evaluating the incompatibility of the option with the decision maker's criteria. In the context of the current study, Potter and Beach's findings would seem to suggest that mothers might be inclined to reject the congregated gifted option at the pre-screening phase based on a lack of information about the placement, and/or the belief that a congregated gifted placement was unlikely to be offered. While some mothers may have filtered out the congregated gifted option at the pre-screening phase for these reasons, most did not, as a majority of participants had at least one child enrolled in a congregated gifted class at the time of the survey. It is possible that mothers were so keen on the congregated gifted option that they were willing to accept the unknowns at the pre-screening phase.

[40] See Figure 4 on page 98 for more re theoretical vs. concrete decision making.

In the event that an offer of placement in a gifted class was not forthcoming — or was screened out based on perceived incompatibilities — mothers in the study tended to (a) revisit their options (including other school boards, private schools, home schooling), and/or (b) strategize toward a future placement, most often in a junior French immersion gifted class. At first glance this would appear to contradict Potter and Beach's (1994a) proposition that when a person's favoured option (i.e., job, vacation condo) is no longer available, there is a tendency for the decision maker to start over with a new set of options rather than to reconsider options that had previously been rejected. It can be argued, however, that job vacancies and vacation rentals are ever changing while the educational placement options available to mothers of gifted learners remain relatively fixed. Therefore, participants who were unable to attain their preferred placement had little recourse but to reconsider existing options or to strategize toward the future attainment of their desired option.

In reflecting on their decision making experiences, most study participants recalled that the process had been challenging (e.g., "there were so many issues to take into account, and they weren't all pointing the same way. I felt like I was dithering about it."). In contrast, Beach proposed that many, if not most decisions require little deliberation because the screening process "reveals that the potential goal or plan . . . fits so well with the clearly relevant principles, goals, and plans that there is no question about [what to do]." (1990, p. 5). Beach conceded that further deliberation may be necessary if the relevant criteria require clarification, when the relevant principles, goals, and plans of the participant are unclear, or when the consequences of the decisions cannot be envisioned. Evidently, most mothers in the current study engaged in what Beach (1990) described as "sustained, purposeful, and rational deliberation" (p. 6) as they attempted to clarify the factors that were most important to them, identify the relative merits of each educational option, and imagine the possible consequences of each placement. Consistent with Beach's (1990) observation of prolonged deliberation, this process often evoked strong feelings in study participants.

Maternal decision making and extant literature. In the next section, the factors identified by study participants as important in the decision making process will be compared and contrasted to previous studies; however, it bears repeating that research in this area is thin.

Maternal perceptions related to educational options. With regard to parental perceptions of the learning needs of gifted children, one study was found that yielded findings

similar to the current study. Hertzog and Bennett (2004) surveyed 280 mostly middle class parents in the Midwestern US to determine how they perceived and addressed the learning needs of their gifted children. The authors concluded that "parents' perceptions of what their children need [were] influenced by the availability of school and community resources, their values, and their notions of giftedness" (p. 103). Hertzog and Bennett found that the vast majority of parents believed that their gifted children needed to be challenged and stimulated both at home and at school. In addition, most parents perceived that their children required a structured, motivating environment and the opportunity to work with intellectual peers. These perceptions were shared by participants in the current study and were often cited as rationales for pursuing a congregated gifted placement.

Child specific considerations. Mothers' perceptions of their children's emotional, social, and learning needs often served as a catalyst to the decision making process. For example, if participants perceived a discrepancy between their child's capabilities (as indicated by the assessment report), and their academic achievement, they were often motivated to explore alternative placement options. Similarly, mothers who perceived their children to be bored, unhappy, or struggling socially were more likely to consider alternative placement options and to rationalize and accept any related practical inconveniences. Dangel and Walker (1991) posited that decisions about educational placement may be complicated when the social and emotional needs of the gifted child are factored into the decision making process. Certainly, many participants in the current study recalled the difficulties they had encountered when trying to weigh the relative importance of their child's academic, social, and emotional needs with other factors.

Another indication that child specific considerations were central to mothers' decision making is that participants with more than one identified gifted child did not necessarily choose the same educational placement option for all. In some cases this was because their children's assessment results varied (i.e., gifted vs. profoundly gifted), thus yielding different placement opportunities. In other cases, subsequent children were not offered the same educational placement as their sibling(s). Yet in many instances, mothers noted that their disparate placement decisions were based of the particular characteristics of each child. This individualized approach was also noted by Hertzog and Bennett (2004), who were struck by how attuned parents of gifted children were to the unique emotional, social and learning needs of each

child, suggesting that "parents see individuality as the prevailing theme and giftedness as secondary" (p. 102). The tendency for parents to consider educational placement on a case-by-case basis was also noted by Galotti and Tinkelenberg (2009) in their US study of the first-grade placement decisions of over 200 parents of typically developing kindergarten-aged students. The authors hypothesized that parents who had already made the decision for an older child would consider only one option (i.e. the same placement) for subsequent children; however, this supposition was not supported by their findings. The conclusion that can be drawn, then, is that child specific considerations are vital to the decision making process.

Practical considerations. The importance of practical or "convenience" factors in school choice was highlighted by Galotti and Tinkelenberg's (2009) study of parents' Grade 1 placement decisions. When parents were asked to list and rank the criteria they were using to evaluate the various school options six months prior to the registration deadline, parents reported that they were most concerned with curriculum structure, convenience (i.e., location), teacher characteristics, class size, climate or environment, and cost. As the registration deadline neared, however, parents reported that convenience became the most influential factor in their decision making.

With regard to the current study, the practical implications of some educational placement options — such as the cost of private school — were clear to participants. In contrast, the practical consequences of congregated gifted classes were not apparent until an offer of placement was extended by the public school board. Only then could mothers envision and weigh the practical implications of the placement offered (i.e., location, proximity to home, transportation arrangements, etc.). While some mothers seemed eager to accept a gifted placement regardless of the practical implications, others were less prepared to tolerate complex travel arrangements or radical changes to work and day care schedules. One might imagine that mothers who worked either full or part time would be less willing or able to accept such practical inconveniences, yet the data indicated that working mothers placed their children in gifted classes at about the same rate as mothers who were not engaged in paid work[41]. It appears that the weighing of practical considerations was a highly individual process.

[41] 57.8% of full time paid mothers had at least one child in a gifted class vs. 66.0% of part time paid and 60% of full time unpaid mothers.

Decision making and middle class values

The propensity for study participants to seek a congregated gifted placement for their child(ren) may speak to the perceived benefits of the gifted program; however, it may also be reflective of the values espoused by the participant demographic. Study participants were a homogeneous group, particularly with regard to educational attainment and household income. These two variables were compared to the most recent census data (Statistics Canada, 2007) to provide additional context. Comparative analysis revealed that study participants had unusually high levels of educational attainment when compared to local and national data, as illustrated in Table 20 below.

Table 20

Comparison of Participants' Educational Attainment to Local and National Average

	Location		
	Study participants	City of study	Canada
Number of women aged 25-64 who had attained a University certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor's level or above	40 (88.9%)*	91,120 (38.1%)	2,064,069 (23.3%)

Note: Source: Canada Census, 2006
* 15 had master's degrees, 3 had doctorates

A similar pattern was found with regard to household income. According to the most recent census data, the average Canadian income for two earner families with two children was $99,500 (Statistics Canada, 2007), while most study participants (53.3%) reported household incomes in excess of $125,000. Given that less than half (43.2%) of the participants reported that they were engaged in full-time work[42] it is clear that study participants were extremely well resourced with regard to household income and personal time.

These comparisons illustrate that the study population was both narrow and atypical. There are some potential explanations for this phenomenon. First, it is possible that the recruitment strategy for the study contributed to the homogeneous grouping. As mothers were recruited primarily through a local parent advocacy group for bright and gifted children, it may be that study participants reflected the group's membership rather than the wider parent

[42] 22.7% worked part-time, and 22.7% were stay-at-home mothers.

population (unfortunately, there are no data with which to confirm or deny this supposition). A second possibility is that the participant group may accurately reflect the population of mothers whose children are assessed and identified as gifted in this particular public school board. That is not to say that gifted learners don't exist in families with less educated or less resourced parents; rather that children from such families are perhaps less likely to be assessed and or/identified as intellectually gifted.

Previous research has proposed that middle and upper middle class parents are more likely to recognize the signs of giftedness (Makel, 2009) and are more apt to feel responsible for developing a child's "gifts" (Jolly & Matthews, 2011). The high degree of participant involvement in the assessment and identification process found in this study would seem to support these propositions. It also follows that well resourced parents would have the financial means to pursue private testing for their children. Again, this was consistent with the research data as more than half of the assessments conducted were completed by a clinical psychologist in private practice, often at a cost of $1500 or more (Dr. S. Nandi, personal communication, December 12, 2010).

There is also research evidence to suggest that middle class parents are better positioned to exercise school choice (for a global perspective, see Musset, 2012). In their study of the school placement decisions of 1500 parents in Western Canada, Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) found that parents who had higher levels of educational attainment and income were more likely to choose private school for their children (as was the case in the current study). In addition, Bosetti and Pyryt reported that middle class parents of gifted students who were unable to secure a GATE (Gifted and Talented) placement for their child utilized their social networks and economic resources to "find options to compensate for the initial disappointment of not qualifying for the program" (p. 103). Hence, Bosetti and Pyryt's participants — as well as mothers in the current study — were able to exercise their social capital (Bourdieu, 1977) to consider a wide range of educational options for their gifted children and to supplement their education with extra-curricular activities.

The parental desire for children to accrue "credentials" that enable them to get into good universities, pursue advanced degrees, and protect them from downward mobility has been characterised as a middle class phenomenon (Levey, 2010). Some study participants may have viewed congregated gifted programming as a credential, or perhaps as a means for their children

to distinguish themselves from the mainstream. Students enrolled in the congregated gifted French immersion program would have the added bonus of a learning a second language, a skill that was highly valued by participants. In essence, the congregated gifted program enabled participants to choose a "superior" placement alternative within a public education system that was often perceived as catering to struggling students rather than challenging its more able learners. Of course, it is also conceivable that participants pursued the congregated gifted program because it afforded a certain prestige as was noted by Lucey and Reay (2002) in their study of parents of gifted elementary school students in the UK. Perhaps not surprisingly, none of the participants mentioned this as an influential factor in their decision making.

Research Questions 4 and 5 – Facilitators and Barriers to Maternal Experience

The objective of Research Question 4 was to explore the facilitators mothers had experienced in their journey of mothering a gifted child, while Research Question 5 focused on the barriers encountered by participants. Particular attention was paid to the facilitators and barriers experienced by mothers in the course of their educational decision making. Research Questions 4 and 5 have been grouped together in this section so that the data pertaining to these questions may be compared and contrasted. First, the facilitators and barriers identified by mothers will be identified within the context of the theoretical framework. Next, research believed to be pertinent to the facilitators and barriers experienced by the parents of gifted learners will be presented and explored.

Maternal decision making and the theoretical framework. The research findings will now be explored in relation to ecological systems theory and image theory.

Ecological systems theory. The various barriers and facilitators identified by survey and interview participants are presented in Table 21 (see page 178) as they relate to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The presentation of barriers and facilitators by system (i.e., micro, meso, exo, and macro) is useful in that it illustrates where participants were most likely to find support and/or experience tension.

Table 21

Barriers and Facilitators Identified by Participants in Relation to Ecological Systems Theory

System	Facilitators	Barriers
Microsystem (e.g., family)	• Mothers' intuition • Spouse • Immediate family members	• Maternal fatigue • Child's personality
Mesosystem (e.g., peers, school community)	• Other parents of gifted children • Local parent advocacy group • "Champion" school staff member • Psychologist/assessment report	• Lack of information and support with regard to assessment, identification, and placement process • School staff who didn't "buy in" to concept of giftedness • Teachers who were unwilling and/or unable to differentiate instruction in regular classroom • Parents of typically developing children who were not supportive/understanding
Exosystem (e.g., school board, wider community)	• Opportunity to attend open house at gifted centre	• Lack of flexibility with regard to early admission, acceleration Specific to gifted program: • Lack of transparency re process • Short time lines for decision making • Location of congregated gifted centres • Congregated gifted class not offered in French at primary level • Lack of clarity about the future of the congregated gifted program
Macrosystem (Ministry legislation, cultural ideologies, media)		• Societal views with regard to giftedness and the provision of gifted education • Stereotypical portrayal of gifted children as "nerdy" or "socially inept" on television, in books

The table clearly illustrates that participants identified more barriers than facilitators, and that the majority of barriers encountered by mothers occurred at the mesosystem and exosystem levels. The facilitators and barriers reported most frequently by participants follow on page 179, arranged by system level. Extant literature has been incorporated where relevant.

Facilitators at the mesosystem level. The facilitators identified most often at the mesosystem level were other parents of gifted learners and the local parent advocacy group for parents of bright and gifted learners. Previous research has also highlighted the utility and importance of parent networks. For example, Windecker-Nelson, Melson, and Moon (1997) found that parents of gifted preschoolers who were part of parent networks expressed fewer concerns about parenting a gifted child. Similarly, Hertzog and Bennett (2004) reported that other parents of gifted children were often a helpful resource for parents. In a recent review of the literature pertaining to the parenting of gifted children, Jolly and Matthews (2011) concluded that "Parent support networks . . . appear to be important in the effective parenting of younger children" (p. 14).

Barriers at the mesosystem level. Study participants identified a number of barriers at the mesosystem level, mostly within the school environment. Participants were generally disappointed with the amount of information, assistance, and support they received with regard to the assessment, identification, and placement process. Some believed that school staff simply did not have a good grasp of the concept of giftedness, or perhaps had not received adequate professional development in this area. Other mothers reported that they had come into contact with teachers and administrators who did not appear to "buy in" to the concept giftedness, and in some cases, attempted to dissuade them from pursuing a congregated gifted placement altogether. Mothers of children enrolled in "regular" classes often expressed frustration that their children were not receiving differentiated instruction or meaningful enrichment in the classroom, despite having an IEP in place. Previous studies have highlighted the lack of professional development given to administrators and teachers with regard to gifted education (e.g., F. N. Matthews & Burns, 1992), and the existence of negative attitudes about gifted learners among special education teachers (McCoach & Siegle, 2007). Moreover, Alsop's (1997) study of parent experiences in three domains (family and friendship networks, the general community, and the educational community) demonstrated that parents of gifted learners are "largely discounted by educators, and . . . experience considerable difficulties in the educational context "(p. 33). These findings are consistent with the current study.

Another macrosystem level barrier was a perceived lack of understanding and/or support from other parents, most often parents of typically developing learners. As mentioned previously, awkward or unpleasant exchanges with other parents prompted some mothers to say

as little as possible about their child(ren)'s giftedness. Similar findings were reported by Alsop (1997), who found that parents of gifted children did not find their peer groups to be supportive. The current study findings provide additional insight into the breadth and depth of this experience.

Barriers at the exosystem level. Public school board policy and staff were perceived to be a significant barrier for many participants. As one mother wrote, "the school board has been the bane of my existence." Inflexible school policies with regard to early admission and acceleration were problematic for at least two mothers. For example, Dawn decided to enrol her young daughter in private school after the public school board refused to grant her early admission to kindergarten. In another case, Margaret delayed her daughter's transition from private school to the public board's gifted program out of concern that her accelerated math program would not be maintained. The frustrations experienced by Dawn and Margaret are not unique. While young gifted children may be ready to start school prior to the age traditionally considered appropriate (Porath, 2011), most school boards either do not support early school admission (as was the case in the current study), or do not have explicit policies in place (Colangelo, et al., 2004). Moreover, the prevailing practice of grouping gifted children with their same aged peers (Cross, 2002) means that opportunities for subject and/or grade acceleration are limited.

Several participants believed that there was a lack of transparency with regard to the criteria, policies, and practices used by the public school board to assess, identify, and place gifted learners. Additionally, the school board's practice of giving parents 24 - 48 hours to accept or refuse an offer of placement in a congregated gifted class was identified as a barrier to decision making. Many mothers perceived that they were powerless to affect the outcome of the educational placement process (e.g., "It's a bureaucracy and I can't influence the bureaucracy"). The public school board was viewed by many as a gatekeeper to the congregated gifted program, exerting a "top down" system influence on participants and their families. Consistent with ecological systems theory, mothers viewed themselves as inactive participants in the exosystem setting. Mothers' perceived inability to effect change at the exosystem level was a common frustration.

Other identified impediments specific to the congregated gifted program included the lack of gifted French immersion classes at the primary level, the location of congregated gifted

centres, and general uncertainty about the future of the congregated gifted program in the public school board. A handful of mothers hinted at their distrust of the public school board with regard to the administration of the gifted program. Some questioned whether the lack of information and support, location of gifted centres, and the unreasonable time frames for decision making were tactics used by the board to deter parents from pursuing an assessment and/or placement in a congregated gifted class. It is also plausible that the withdrawal of board-wide CCAT testing for Grade 3 students in 2007 was interpreted by some as an indication that the board intended to phase out the gifted program. If the gifted program were to be eliminated, there is evidence to suggest that parents might choose to leave the public school board altogether. A study by Purcell (1993) demonstrated that elimination of a gifted program in a New England school district resulted in such deep divides between parents and school board staff that more than half of the 19 parents interviewed reported that they considered alternative educational avenues for their children's remaining years in school.

The barriers to communication identified by mothers in this study have been noted in previous research. For example, a survey based study of over 200 parents of gifted learners in the Midwestern US found that parents were often confused about gifted education services and desired increased communication with schools (Hertzog & Bennett, 2004). Damiani's (1996) study of 86 US families in a federally funded enrichment and family support program for special populations of gifted learners[43] found that school districts did a poor job of communicating to parents the nature of their child's giftedness and what programming opportunities were available to them. Similarly, Huff and her colleagues (2005) found that a Los Angeles school board did little to familiarize parents of gifted African American students with the system and bureaucracy. The authors reported that parents of gifted children who worked in the school system or had close relationships with faculty or staff experienced more cooperative, advocacy-focused relationships. This finding was not reflected in the current study, however. Interview participant Julie —an experienced middle school administrator — maintained that despite her considerable networking efforts, she was unable to secure the information and support she needed to make an educational placement decision for her daughter within the allotted 48 hour time frame.

[43] The families in the Project Mandala program were from a variety of multicultural groups, many of whom were also economically disadvantaged.

The lack of school-based support offered to mothers in this study may be indicative of a wider issue in the field of special education as similar findings were reported by Murray et al. (2007) in their study of the educational decision making experiences of parents of young children with disabilities. Murray and her colleagues argued that while the professional practice of supporting family choice in educational placement "conveys the message that families are the primary decision-makers for their children", their research found that families were "not always adequately supported by professionals through the decision making process" (p. 111). The authors then state that participatory decision making facilitated by trained professionals has the capacity to empower families through informed choice. In the context of the current study, it would seem that most mothers would have welcomed a more collaborative decision making approach.

Barriers at the macrosystem level. Macrosystem level barriers were rarely mentioned by participants. One mother (Colleen) proposed that television media portrayal of gifted children as nerdy and socially inept (e.g., Urkel in the sitcom *Family Matters*) could perpetuate societal myths and stereotypes.

Although not mentioned specifically by participants, the provincial Ministry's commitment to move to an inclusive classroom model as outlined in *Education for All* (2005) may have contributed to participants' unease. In light of this mandate, many school boards in the province are moving away from specialized (or systems) classes for exceptional learners including congregated gifted classes. Indeed, two participants in this study indicated that a lack of clarity around the future of the gifted program in the public school board had hampered their decision making.

Image theory. Two barriers specific to the educational decision making process were identified by participants: a perceived lack of information from the school/school board, and short time lines. As the influence of imperfect information on decision making was previously explored on page 171, it will not be revisited here. Beach (1998) offered some insight into the effect of time restraints on decision making in laboratory settings. In a series of experiments, Beach found that time constraints interfere with the screening process, yielding a "significantly greater number of inconsistent rejection patterns" (p. 57). During the choice phase, Beach observed that short time lines forced decision makers to speed up the execution of their decision making strategy, to switch to different strategies, or both. It would seem that short timelines are

likely to impact the *quality* of a decision at both the pre-screening and choice phases; however, what is less evident from Beach's rationale is how short time lines might affect the decision maker's *experience* of the decision. The findings of the current study would suggest that the short timeline imposed by the public school board interfered with the ability of some mothers to make educational placement decisions for their children.

Contributions of the Research

The insights and understandings that emerged from this study serve to extend current empirical, theoretical, and practical knowledge. The implications for each area are discussed in the following subsections.

Empirical. Educational researchers have historically employed a quantitative approach to the study of giftedness (Borland, 1990; Coleman, et al., 1997). In contrast, this study utilized a postpositivist orientation and rigorous qualitative methods to systematically describe, explore, and analyze the perceptions and experiences of mothers of gifted children. The resultant findings deepen our understanding of the lived experience of parenting gifted children, thus responding to repeated calls for research in this area (Coleman, et al., 2007; Jolly & Matthews, 2011; Pomerantz, et al., 2005), and contributing a different perspective to the field of gifted education (Cross, Stewart, and Coleman, 2003).

Theoretical. Two theories guided this study: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), and Beach and Mitchell's image theory (1990). The contributions of the study findings in relation to the two theories are presented below.

Ecological systems theory. Ecological systems theory has been used extensively in the field of special education to describe the experiences of parents of children with a variety of learning issues; however, research pertaining to the experiences of parents of gifted children is limited. This study makes a valuable contribution in that it broadens current knowledge of the maternal experience of child giftedness from a systems perspective. Most notably, the study identifies the environments in which mothers of gifted children typically encountered facilitators and barriers, and offers important insights into how parent/school partnerships might be improved.

Image theory. The use of Beach and Mitchell's image theory (1990) in the educational domain has been limited (only one other study was found, conducted by Galotti and

Tinkelenberg, 2009). It is believed the present study is the first to employ image theory as a framework for exploring educational decision making in the context of gifted learners.

While the data reported in this study were generally consistent with the tenets of image theory, the study also extends Beach and Mitchell's theory in several ways. First and foremost, the study adds to a small but growing body of research that has employed image theory to explore "real life" — rather than hypothetical, laboratory-based — decision making. Perhaps not surprisingly, the research data demonstrated that real life decision making is decidedly more complex. For example, study findings indicated that mothers engaged in two phases of decision making: *theoretical* and *concrete*. Mothers often desired a particular educational placement in theory (i.e., congregated gifted class); however, their actual (or concrete) decision often hinged on what was offered by the public school board. Only when mothers knew for certain whether their child was offered a gifted placement, and if so, the specifics of that placement (e.g., proximity to home, transportation arrangements) were they able to arrive at a final decision. This finding illustrates the multi-faceted nature of real life decision making and highlights the influence of "gatekeepers" (i.e., the public school board) on parents' educational decision making. In particular, the study further illustrates the influence of short time lines (Beach, 1998), imperfect information (Potter & Beach, 1994b), and option availability (Potter & Beach, 1994a) on the decision making process.

Another contribution of the research findings to our understanding of image theory is that Beach's (1990) concept of *value image* [44] is depicted through real life examples. Mothers' educational placement decisions were undoubtedly influenced by moral and ethical factors (e.g., attending community school, learning with students "of all kinds"), values and beliefs (e.g., perceived importance of French immersion) and ideals (e.g., learning and socializing with like minded peers). Child specific and practical considerations also figured prominently in mothers' educational decision making, offering further insight into Beach's concept of principles.

Practical. It is believed that the rich descriptions of the maternal experiences presented herein will have practical benefits. For example, it is hoped that other mothers of gifted children will see themselves in the narratives presented herein, and that mothers of newly identified gifted children will gain valuable insights from the experiences of others. From a wider perspective, it

[44] Described as the decision maker's "prescriptive and proscriptive values, standards, ideals, precepts, beliefs, morals, and ethics which are collectively called *principles*."

is also hoped that a better understanding of the maternal experience will help to dispel persistent myths and stereotypes about gifted learners and their families (Winner, 1996), and facilitate a more constructive dialogue with regard to the challenges faced by mothers of gifted children.

Recommendations

The following recommendations flow directly from the findings of this study and are therefore most relevant to situations with similar contexts, i.e., in locations/school boards where specialized gifted programming options are available to eligible students.

Improved access to information about giftedness. The findings of this and other studies (e.g., Clelland, 2011; Makel, 2009) indicate that parents often do not receive adequate information about giftedness from their school communities. For this reason it is recommended that local school boards — ideally in collaboration with parent advocacy groups such as ABC — develop and disseminate information about how to recognize the signs of giftedness in children.

In addition, the findings of this study demonstrate mothers' desire for concise, transparent, and consistent information with regard to the assessment, identification, and placement process. Therefore it is recommended that all guidelines, policies, and procedures utilized by local school boards in the assessment, identification, and placement of gifted learners are readily available to parents. Given the high proportion of mothers who sought information through web-based resources, the school board website would seem a logical repository for such information.

Equitable access to assessment. In school boards where specialized gifted programming is available to students who meet specific criteria, it is strongly recommended that all students are given the opportunity to participate in the screening process to ensure equity of access (Makel, 2009). Moreover, assessment results should be sent home with supporting documentation to help parents make sense of the results, and where appropriate, to provide additional information about what educational options might be available, how to pursue them, and whom to contact for further assistance.

Increased support for parents around decision making. Previous studies have recommended the development and provision of counselling support for parents of gifted students (Alsop, 1997; Clelland, 2011; Foster, 2000; Whitton, 2005). The findings of this study would seem to support the provision of such support, particularly with regard educational decision making. Unfortunately, parent counselling resources are not generally available in

Canadian school boards (Clelland, 2011) and are unlikely to be prioritized. Given that other parents of gifted learners and the local parent advocacy group were frequently identified as facilitators to the decision making process, a more realistic recommendation might be to build on the capacity of these groups and encourage their collaboration with local school boards to share resources and knowledge.

Parent support groups could develop materials and training to describe the emotional aspect of parenting a gifted child (i.e., the range of emotions parents may experience when child is first identified or when making educational decisions). Such support could validate parents' feelings of frustration and help them to understand the emotional side of the decision making process.

Professional development for teachers and administrators. It is recommended that teachers and administrators engage in professional development to better understand what giftedness "is", what it "looks like", and how it is assessed in the local context. Staff should also be made aware of the learning opportunities available to gifted students, as well as the relevant policies and procedures for identifying and placing gifted learners.

A better understanding of what parents experience during the assessment, identification and placement process may also facilitate more effective parent-school relationships.

Limitations

The participant group was not as diverse as the researcher would have liked. As discussed, the 45 mothers who participated in this study were unusually well educated and resourced. Most participants were associated with the local parent advocacy group, inferring a degree of knowledge, networking, and language skills. Additionally, the percentage of students identified as gifted in the study setting was considerably higher than the provincial average (3.0% vs. 1.2%), suggesting that the experiences of participants in this study may be somewhat unique and geographically specific.

An inevitable limitation of qualitative inquiry is that it is a subjective undertaking. Although the researcher took great care to explore potential biases through an ongoing process of critical reflection, it is recognized that other researchers may have interpreted the data differently. Therefore, the analysis and interpretations presented in this dissertation ultimately reflect how *this* researcher understood and made meaning of the data.

Suggestions for Future Research

Given the narrow demographic of the participant group, a suggestion for future research would be to explore the experiences of parents of gifted children from more diverse backgrounds and settings, thereby facilitating the transferability of findings to a wider population.

From a systems standpoint, the exploration of child giftedness from other microsystem perspectives (i.e., fathers, gifted child, siblings), would yield a fuller picture of the phenomenon. In addition, as many of the barriers described by mothers were experienced at the school community (mesosystem) and school board (exosystem) levels, further exploration of the perceptions and experiences of individuals residing in those systems (e.g., classroom teachers, learning support teachers, and administrators) is believed to be warranted.

With regard to decision making, an investigation of the experiences of parents located in school boards with different (i.e., fewer) programming options for gifted learners may offer additional insight into what parents choose to do when their educational placement options are limited. Secondly, a longitudinal study (using a method similar to Galotti and Tinkelenberg, 2009) could track parental perceptions over multiple placement decisions (i.e., elementary, middle school, high school) to explore the influence of time and context on educational decision making.

Researcher Reflections

Qualitative methodology requires the researcher to continually reflect on their own experience in relation to the research. In many ways, the experiences shared by mothers in this dissertation are similar to my own. The finding that I identify with most strongly — and perhaps the one I find most confounding — is the tendency for parents to downplay or minimize their children's giftedness. I am certainly "guilty" of this as I prefer to say as little as possible about my daughters' identification when in conversation with others; in part because I consider it to be personal information, but also because I understand that giftedness is a controversial topic that can elicit harsh reactions. Macrosystem level influences such as societal myths and stereotypes about giftedness have affected both my parenting experience and my behaviour. Most notably, I have learned (as have many mothers in this study) that some things are better left unsaid.

In his article entitled *Profoundly Gifted Guilt,* James Delisle (2001) proposed that parents of highly gifted children "may choose to go underground, talking only with each other yet

feeling frustrated that the birthright of every parent — telling stories about your kid — is being denied because the child they have is more unique than common" (p. 18). This sentiment is consistent with the current research findings as well as my own experience as a mother and facilitator of a networking group for parents of gifted children. The suggestion that parents of identified gifted children often feel compelled to "hide their children's light under a bushel" evokes a sense of sadness in me. I can think of several instances over the years when I have held back in the sharing of child-related anecdotes. While I did not feel that I could be authentic in those situations, I was consoled in the knowledge that my stories could be shared with the mothers in my networking group. The support of other mothers of gifted children has been critical to my journey, and it would seem, to many of the mothers who participated in this study. It is my great hope that this research has shed some much needed light on the "underground" experience of mothering gifted children.

Interestingly, the completion of this dissertation coincided with a personal realization about the burden of the gifted stigma, prompted by my eldest daughter's transition to high school. Rather than continuing in the gifted stream or pursuing a placement in an International Baccalaureate (IB) program, my daughter decided to apply to the school board's high school for the arts. When neighbours and friends found out that she had been accepted into the school's literary arts program they said things like, "Good for her!", and "I've heard that's an amazing program!" After years of anticipating (and dodging) fallout with regard to my daughter's educational placement, these genuinely enthusiastic responses caught me completely off guard. In my mind, nothing had changed. My daughter was the same kid with the same talents, yet now that she had been sorted into a different (i.e., more palatable) box, the stigma surrounding her gifted identification had all but disappeared. The sense of relief I have experienced has been a welcome if not revealing surprise.

Despite spending more than four years immersed in the topic of parenting gifted children, it is clear that I still have much to learn and experience. I believe that the tensions that initially drew me to this research project will continue to propel my interest in the field.

Final Thoughts

The mothers who participated in this study were atypical in that they reported significantly higher than average levels of educational attainment and household income. One might presume that these mothers would be better equipped than most to navigate the public

school board's policies and practices in relation to the assessment, identification and placement of gifted learners. Yet despite these advantages, most mothers indicated that they had experienced considerable difficulty in this regard. Moreover, many participants did not feel well informed or supported by school board staff despite their best efforts to forge positive partnerships.

These findings raise an important question: *If highly educated women with skills, networking abilities, and ample financial resources experience these difficulties, what would the experience be like for mothers with fewer resources at their disposal?* It stands to reason that less resourced families — as well as those with cultural and linguistic differences — would be at a distinct disadvantage. For example, gifted learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds may go unidentified because their parents: (a) have no knowledge or experience of giftedness; (b) are not familiar with the signs of giftedness and are therefore not "looking" for it; (c) do not know how to arrange in-school testing; and/or (d) cannot afford private testing. As Sonia remarked in an interview, "It [would] take a very special kind of mother to balance navigating the [school] system, dealing with societal pressures, and meeting the unique needs of gifted kids . . . all without any additional resources . . . time, money or otherwise." Clearly, access to the congregated gifted program in this particular school board was inequitable. This inequity was exacerbated by the school board's discontinuation of the board wide CCAT testing for Grade 3 students. If school boards are going to establish eligibility criteria and offer gifted programming to students who meet those criteria, it is imperative that *all* students (and their parents) have the opportunity to participate in the screening process (Makel, 2009) or a two tiered education system results.

The decision making experiences shared by mothers in this study raise a second question important question: *Did participants in this study choose the congregated gifted program based on its perceived merits, or was the gifted option "seen as a 'refuge' from a poor quality educational program"?* (Callahan, 1996). This question seems relevant given that so many participants were motivated to have their child assessed, identified and placed in a gifted class because they were experiencing difficulties in their original placement. If mothers had perceived that their child *could* be happy, adequately challenged and successful in their original placement, they might have been able to avoid what many described as "the most difficult decision" thus far in their gifted parenting journey. In addition, mothers could have sidestepped the considerable

consequences associated with placing their child in a congregated gifted class (i.e., perceived labeling effects; disruptions to family; personal, social, and practical costs). Therefore, it is worth considering what educational policies and practices such as early admission, subject/grade acceleration, differentiated curricula and instruction, nurturing environments, mentoring, etc. might have made mainstream programming more appropriate to the needs of the gifted learners represented in this study, thereby reducing the need for gifted identification (Borland, 2005), segregated programs, and difficult decision making for parents.

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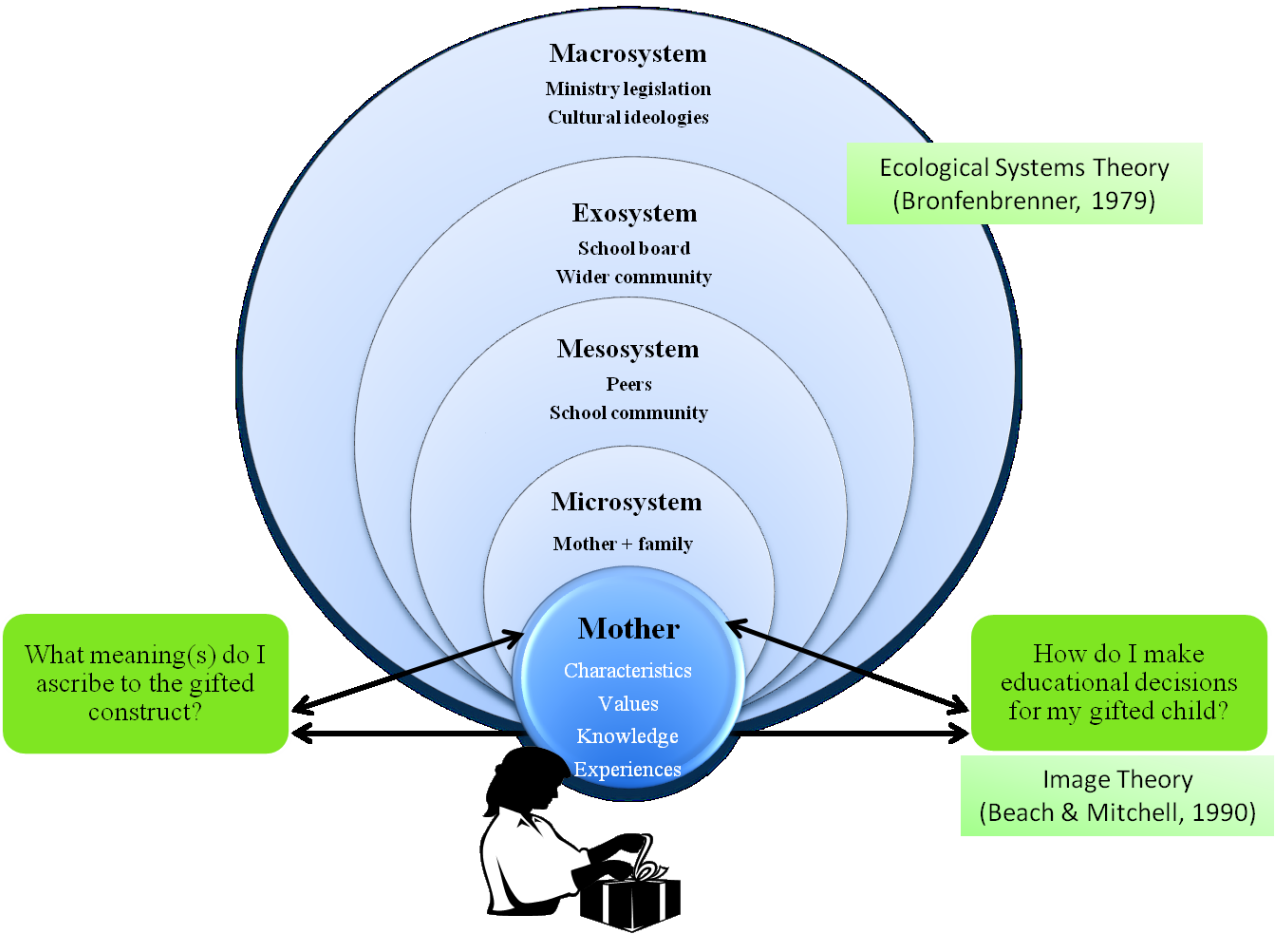
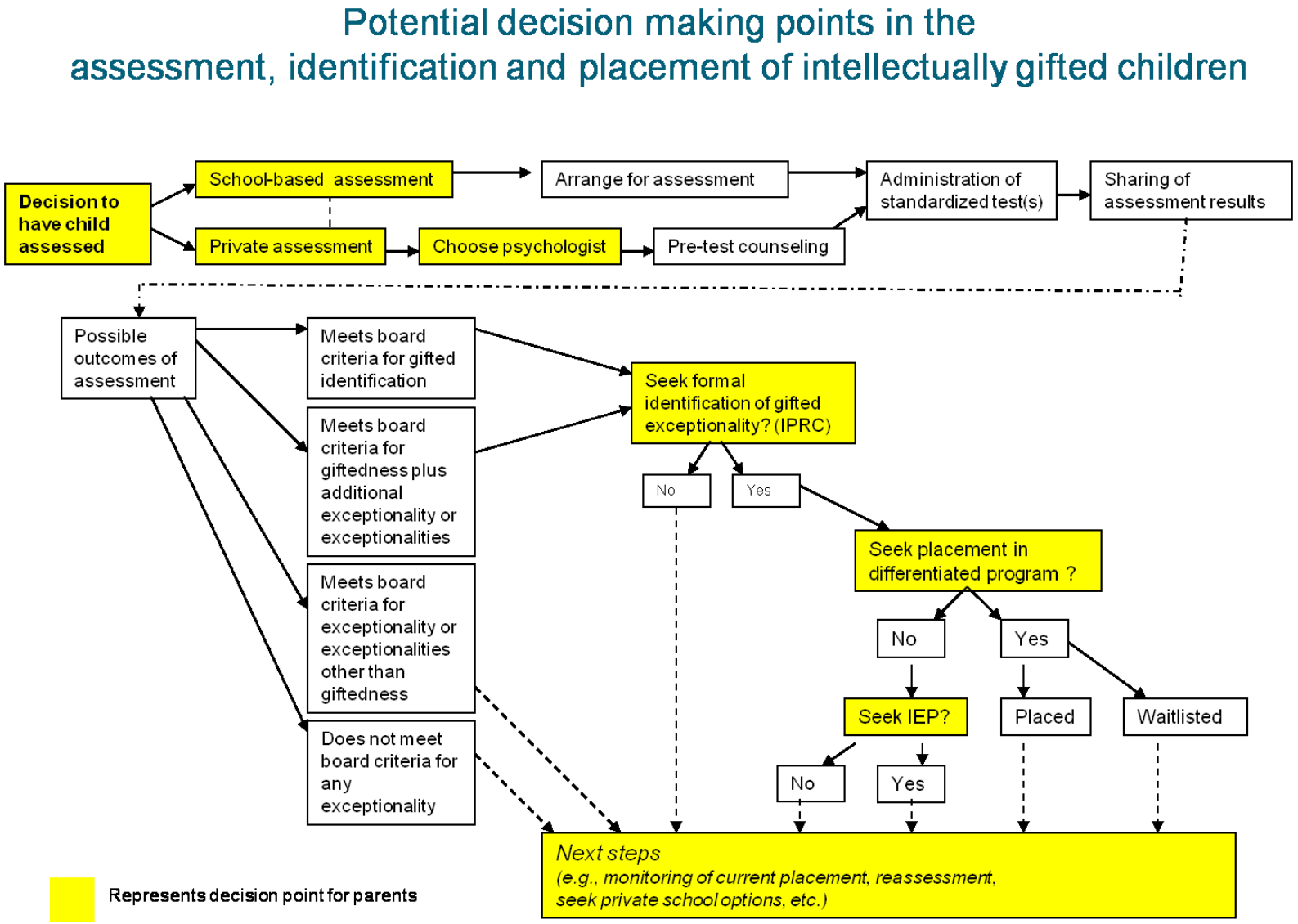
Appendices

Appendix A: Theoretical Framework



Appendix B: Decision Tree



Appendix C: Survey Instrument

Survey #	Question	Response options
Participant Criteria		
SQ1	Are you the mother of an elementary school-aged child who has been assessed as "gifted" according to public school board x's criteria?	Yes No* (does not advance to survey)
SQ2	Did your child's assessment take place within the last 5 years?	Yes No* (does not advance to survey)
Consent		
SQ3	If you agree to participate, please check the box below.	Yes No* (does not advance to survey)
Personal Information		
SQ4	What is your age?	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64
SQ5	Which of the following best describes your living situation?	Two partner family Single partner family Blended family Other (please specify)
SQ6	What language(s) do you speak? Select as many as apply.	English French Other (please specify)
SQ7	What is your gross (i.e. before tax) annual household income?	$0-$24,999 $25,000-$49,999 $50,000-$74,999 $75,000-$99,999 $100,000-$124,999 $125,000 or more
SQ8	What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Some high school High school diploma Some college College diploma Some university University degree Master's degree Doctoral degree
SQ9	Which of the following best describes your current employment situation?	Full-time paid work Part-time paid work Full-time unpaid work Student Unemployed Other (please specify)

Survey #	Question	Response options
SQ10	Were you considered "gifted" as a child?	Yes No Not sure
Information about your child(ren)		
SQ11	Starting with your oldest child, please fill in all that applies for every child in your family.	For each child: Age Current grade Assessed for giftedness? If yes, when? If yes, did child meet public school board criteria for giftedness?
SQ12a	Has child been formally identified as gifted through the public school board?	For each child: Yes No Not sure
SQ12b	If identified as gifted in public school board x, which criteria were met?	For each child: Gifted Profoundly gifted Not sure which
SQ12c	Has child been identified with any other exceptionalities?	For each child: Yes – Behaviour Yes – Communication Yes – Physical Yes – Multiple Currently being assessed No Not sure
SQ13a	What is child's current educational placement?	For each child: Regular class, English (JK – 8), public board Regular class, French immersion (SK – 8), public board Primary congregated gifted, English (Gr. 1– 4), public board Jr. congregated gifted, English (Gr. 5 – 8), public board Jr. congregated gifted, French (Gr. 5 – 8), public board High school – regular stream, public board High school – gifted stream, public board High school – specialized program, public board Other school board Private school Home school College/university Not currently in school Other (please specify)
SQ13b	Is child currently on a waiting list for public school board x's congregated gifted program?	For each child: Yes No Not sure

Survey #	Question	Response options
Conceptions of Giftedness		
SQ14	Prior to your child's first assessment/testing experience, what did the term "gifted" mean to you?	Open ended
SQ15a	Prior to your child's first assessment/testing experience, were you aware: • that public school board x offered congregated gifted classes for students identified as gifted?	For each child: Yes No Not sure
SQ15b	Prior to your child's first assessment/testing experience, were you aware: • of the criteria for gifted identification in public school board x?	For each child: Yes No Not sure
Experience of the Assessment Process		
SQ16	What motivated you to have your child(ren) assessed? Please check all that apply	For each child: Something about my child seemed "different"/unusual Child was experiencing difficulties at school Child's teacher recommended an assessment Urging of family/friends Desire to better understand child's learning profile To know if child was eligible for gifted programming Other (please specify)
SQ17	Were there any other factors that motivated you to have your child(ren) assessed for intellectual giftedness? If so, please describe below.	Open ended
SQ18	Who conducted the assessment(s)? If child was assessed more than once, please check all that apply.	For each child: Special education teacher School board psychologist Private psychologist Other
SQ19	How did you feel when you received the assessment report/test results? Please describe this experience.	Open ended
Alternative Educational Placement Options		
SQ20	After receiving the assessment results indicating that your child(ren) met the criteria for intellectual giftedness, did you consider changing your child(ren)'s educational placement? (i.e., switching to congregated gifted classes, French immersion, private school, homeschooling).	For each child: Yes No Not sure
SQ21	If you answered "yes" to the above question, which of the following alternative educational placement options did you consider for your gifted child(ren)? Please check all that apply.	For each child: Primary gifted class (Gr. 1-4) Jr. gifted class, English (Gr. 5 – 8) Jr. gifted class, French (Gr. 5 – 8) French immersion, public board Other school board Home schooling

Survey #	Question	Response options
		Private school
SQ22	How did you decide among the various placement options for your gifted child(ren)?	Open ended
Decision Making		
SQ23	What do you perceive as your gifted child(ren)'s greatest needs (i.e., educational, social, emotional)	Open ended
SQ24	Which of the following sources have you consulted when making educational decisions for your gifted child(ren)? Check all that apply.	Partner/spouse Gifted child's biological father Gifted child Sibling(s) of gifted child Other family members Internet websites Internet discussion groups for parents of gifted children Association for Bright Children School special education teacher School principal School board administrator Private psychologist Educational advocate Other parents of gifted children Friends Other (please specify)
SQ25	Please describe what you feel has been the most difficult decision you have had to make with regard to your gifted child(ren) and what this experience was like for you.	Open ended
Advocacy Activities		
SQ26	Have you ever participated in any of the following advocacy activities? If so, please check all that apply.	Attended school council meetings Attended Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) meetings Became a member of the Association for Bright Children Contacted public school board administration with regard to gifted ed. issues Contacted my local school board trustee with regard to gifted ed. issues Contacted my Member of Provincial Parliament with regard to gifted ed. issues Contacted the Ontario Ministry of Education with regard to gifted ed. issues Other (please specify)

Survey #	Question	Response options
Role and Responsibilities		
SQ27	Do you feel that having a gifted child has changed your role and/or responsibilities as a mother?	No Not sure Yes (please describe)
Personal Relationships		
SQ28	What, if anything, do you say to others with regard to your child(ren)'s "diagnosis" of giftedness?	Open ended
SQ29	Do you feel that having a gifted child has affected your relationship(s) – either positively or negatively – with any of the people listed below?	Spouse/partner (please describe) Child's biological father (please describe) School staff (please describe) Family (please describe) Close friends (please describe) Work colleagues (please describe) Other (please describe)
Reflections on Mothering a Gifted Child		
SQ30	What do you feel has been the most *challenging* aspect of mothering a gifted child?	Open ended
SQ31	What do you feel has been the most *rewarding* aspect of mothering a gifted child?	Open ended
SQ32	At this point in time, what does the term "gifted" mean to you?	Open ended
SQ33	What would you most like parents of typically developing children to understand about your experience of mothering a gifted child?	Open ended
SQ34	Is there anything else you would like to share with regard to your experiences of mothering and giftedness?	Open ended

Appendix D: Recruitment Text for Participants, Parents, and Community Representative

uOttawa

Are you the mother of a young gifted child?

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté d'éducation

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

I am looking for mothers of intellectually gifted children to participate in my Ph.D. research project, entitled: *'Unwrapping giftedness: How mothers of elementary school-aged children assessed as intellectually gifted make meaning of the gifted construct and participate in educational decision making."* **The purpose of the study is to explore how mothers make meaning of the gifted construct and participate in educational decision making for their gifted child(ren).**

This research project has been informed and inspired by my own experiences as the mother of two gifted children, as a former elementary school teacher, and the facilitator of an informal parent networking group for parents of gifted children. I am being supervised in this study by Dr. Cheryll Duquette, Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Ideally, participants will be English speaking mothers of elementary school-aged children who have been assessed in the last five years and were found to meet the criteria for intellectual giftedness according to the [redacted] guidelines. Children may have been assessed through the school board or by a private psychologist, and may or may not be currently enrolled [redacted].

Participants will be asked to share their experiences via an **online survey** (or paper-based survey if preferred) which should take approximately 30 – 45 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the survey, participants will be asked if they would be willing to participate in a series of 3 (three) face-to-face interviews, each lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes*. Selected participants will be contacted to arrange a convenient date, time, and location for the interviews.
**Please note that survey participants are not obligated to participate in the interview phase of the research, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time.*

Your responses will be confidential. Your name, as well as the names of your child(ren), and any other identifying information will be anonymized in the research results and in any publications resulting from this study.

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact me at [redacted] or by telephone [redacted]. I will be contacting interested participants by email starting in late September with a link to the online survey.

Thank you for your interest in this project,

Shari

Researcher: Shari Orders
Ph.D. candidate
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

Supervisor: Dr. Cheryll Duquette
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

Appendix E: In-depth Interview Guide

Interview 1 – Exploration of Past Experience

IV1-1 Intro question – Please describe to me when you first began thinking about giftedness.
Prompts - e.g., as a child, before having children, after having children?

IV1-2 If participant was considered gifted as a child (see survey): Tell me about your personal experience of giftedness.

IV1-3 Tell me about the decision to have your child(ren) assessed for intellectual giftedness.
Prompts – What prompted the assessment? (e.g., teacher recommendation, personal curiosity). Were you aware of the local public school board criteria for the congregated gifted programs prior to testing?(see survey)

IV1-4 Tell me about what it was like when you received the assessment results.
Prompts – Did anything surprise you about the results?

IV1-5 What did you do after receiving the assessment results?
Prompts – For example, did you read up on giftedness, share info with family/friends, get in touch with ABC, or contact school to share result?

IV1-6 How did you arrive at the alternative educational placement options mentioned in the survey? (refresh participant's memory re survey responses).

IV1-7 What factors did you consider when making decisions about educational placement options?
Prompts: e.g., child's happiness, staying with neighbourhood friends, exposure to "like minded peers", French immersion vs. English programming, transportation issues, perceived impact on siblings, perceived impact on family life

IV1-8 Did you discuss the educational placement options with your child?
Prompts - How involved was the child in the decision making?

IV1-9 Do you feel that the decision yielded the desired result(s)?
Prompts – If yes, how did you know? If not, what did you do next?

IV1-10 Are there any other past experiences that you would like to share?

Interview 2 – Exploration of Current Experience

IV2-1 Intro Q - How do you think giftedness is portrayed in the media?
Prompt – on television, in movies, in newspapers, magazines, etc.

IV2-2 How do you think giftedness is viewed by others in your life? (e.g., friends and extended family members)

IV2-3 What does the term "gifted" mean to you?

IV2-4 Do you think of any of your children as "gifted"?
Prompt – why or why not? What it is about your child(ren) that makes you think they are gifted?

IV2-5 Tell me about your relationships with:
Your gifted child(ren)
Other children in the family (if applicable)
Your partner, as it relates to giftedness
The child's school
The school board

IV2-6 How do you perceive your role in your gifted child(ren)'s schooling?

IV2-7 How do you perceive the role of the school in your gifted child(ren)'s schooling?

IV2-8 How would you describe your educational goals for your gifted child(ren)?

IV2-9 Tell me about how you go about achieving these educational goals.
Prompts – How do you know if these goals are being met? What do you do if you feel that the goals are not being met?

IV2-10 Would you say that you are pleased with your child(ren)'s current school situation?
Prompt – If not, are you considering making any changes? How will you go about making those changes?

IV2-11 Are there any other current experiences that you would like to share?

Interview 3 – Reflection of Past Experience

IV3-1 Intro Q - In reflecting on your experience of parenting a gifted child, what stands out for you?

IV3-2 Do you feel that societal and cultural beliefs about giftedness have affected your attitude about the identification and/or educational placement of your child?
Prompt - If so, how?

IV3-3 In the survey you discussed how your roles and responsibilities as a mother had changed (refresh participant's memory by reading passage). Do you have anything to add?

IV3-4 Do you feel that having a gifted child/gifted children has been challenging to your relationships?
Prompt – ask re specific relationships such as immediate family, partner, extended family, friends, school personnel

IV3-5 In the survey there was a question about the most difficult decision you have had to make in relation to your gifted child(ren). You said this (read passage). Tell me more about this.

IV3-6 What would you say has enhanced, or helped you in your experience of parenting a gifted child (gifted children)?

IV3-7 What would you say has hindered your experience of parenting a gifted child (gifted children)?

IV3-8 What would you say has been the most rewarding in your experience of parenting a gifted child (gifted children)?

IV3-9 What would you say has been most surprising about your journey as the mother of a gifted child?

IV3-10 Are there any experiences or concerns that we have not discussed that you would like to share?

Appendix F: Relationship Between Survey/Interview Questions and Research Questions

Research Question 1:
What meaning did the participants ascribe to the concept of giftedness?

Reference to survey/ interview guide	Question
SQ10	Were you considered "gifted" as a child?
SQ14	Prior to your child's first assessment/testing experience, what did the term "gifted' mean to you?
SQ32	At this point in time, what does the term "gifted" mean to you?
IV1-1	Please describe to me when you first started thinking about giftedness.
IV1-2	If participant was considered gifted as a child (see survey): Tell me about your personal experience of giftedness.
IV2-3	What does the term "gifted" mean to you?

Research Question 2:
How did participants describe their experience of the assessment, identification, and placement process?

Reference to survey/ interview guide	Question
SQ15	Prior to your child's first assessment/testing experience, were you aware: • that the public school board offered congregated gifted classes for students identified as gifted? • of the criteria for gifted identification in the public school board?
SQ16	What motivated you to have your child(ren) assessed?
SQ17	Were there any other factors that motivated you to have your child(ren) assessed for intellectual giftedness?
SQ19	How did you feel when you received the assessment report/test results?
SQ28	What, if anything, do you say to others with regard to your child(ren)'s "diagnosis" of giftedness?
SQ29	Do you feel that having a gifted child has affected your relationship(s) – either positively or negatively – with any of the people listed below? If so, please describe.
IV2-1	How do you think giftedness is portrayed in the media?
IV2-2	How do you think giftedness is viewed by others in your life? (e.g., friends and extended family members)
IV3-2	Do you feel that societal and cultural beliefs about giftedness have affected your attitude about the identification and/or educational placement of your child?
IV1-3	Tell me about the decision to have your child(ren) assessed for giftedness.

IV1-4	Tell me what it was like when you received the assessment results.
IV2-2	How do you think giftedness is viewed by your friends and extended family?
IV2-5	Tell me about your relationships with: • your gifted child(ren) • other children in the family (if applicable) • your partner, as it relates to giftedness • the child's school • the school board
IV3-4	Do you feel that having a gifted child has been challenging to your relationships?

Research Question 3:
What factors did participants perceive were important in their decision making?

Reference to survey/ interview guide	Question
SQ20	After receiving the assessment results indicating that your child(ren) met the criteria for intellectual giftedness, did you consider changing your children's educational placement?
SQ21	If you answered "yes" to SQ20, which of the following alternative educational placement options did you consider for your gifted child(ren)? Please check all that apply.
SQ22	How did you decide among the various placement options for your gifted child(ren)?
SQ25	Please describe what you feel has been the most difficult decision you have had to make with regard to your gifted child(ren) and what this experience was like for you.
SQ27	Do you feel that having a gifted child/gifted children has changed your role and responsibilities as a mother?
IV1-5	What did you do after receiving the assessment results?
IV1-6	How did you arrive at the alternative educational placement options mentioned in the survey (refresh participant's memory as to survey responses).
IV1-7	What factors did you consider when making decisions about educational placement options?
IV3-5	In the survey there was a question about the most difficult decision you have had to make in relation to your gifted child(ren). You said this (read passage). Tell me more about this.
Survey/IV	Scan all data for factors identified by participants.

Research Question 4:
What, or whom did participant perceive as facilitators in their decision making?

Reference to survey/ interview guide	Question
SQ24	Which of the following sources have you consulted when making educational decisions for your gifted child(ren)?
SQ25	Please describe what you feel has been the most difficult decision you have had to make with regard to your gifted child(ren) and what this experience was like for you.
IV3-6	What would you say has enhanced, or helped you in your experience of parenting a gifted child?
Survey/IV	Scan all data for facilitators identified by participants.

Research Question 5:
What, or whom did participants perceive as impediments in their decision making?

Reference to survey/ interview guide	Question
SQ22	How did you decide among the various placement options for your gifted child(ren)?
SQ25	Please describe what you feel has been the most difficult decision you have had to make with regard to your gifted child(ren) and what this experience was like for you. (scan for difficulties/impediments identified)
SQ30	What do you feel has been the most challenging aspect of mothering a gifted child?
IV3-5	In the survey there was a question about the most difficult decision you have had to make in relation to your gifted child(ren). You said this (read passage). Tell me more about this.
IV3-7	What would you say has hindered your experience of parenting a gifted child?
Survey/IV	Scan all data for impediments identified by participants.

Appendix G: Consent Form - Survey Participants

uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté d'éducation

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

Title of Study:

Unwrapping Giftedness: How mothers of elementary school-aged children assessed as intellectually gifted make meaning of the gifted construct and participate in educational decision making

Researcher: Shari Orders
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

Supervisor: Dr. Cheryll Duquette
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above mentioned research study conducted by Shari Orders, Ph.D. Candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of mothers of children identified as intellectually gifted. The study will focus on mothers' perceptions of giftedness as well as mothers' experiences of the assessment, and gifted identification process, with particular focus on parental decision making and educational placement.

Participation: My participation will include the completion of an online questionnaire (30 – 45 minutes). I understand that I will be asked to answer demographic questions about my family, and to share my thoughts and feelings about the assessment and identification process as it pertains to my intellectually gifted child(ren). In addition, I will be asked about my decision making experiences with regard to educational placement for my child(ren).

In addition to the survey, I understand that I may be asked to participate in a series of three face- to-face interviews, each lasting 1 – 1 ½ hours in length. I understand that I am under no obligation to participate in the interview phase of this research. If I do decide to participate, I understand that the interview sessions will take place at a time and in a location that is convenient for me.

Risks: My participation in this study will require/entail that I volunteer very personal information, and this may cause me to feel emotional discomfort. I have received assurances from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these occurrences.

Benefits: My participation in this study will advance current understanding of how mothers think about giftedness and make educational decisions for their children. This information may be used to assist parents of newly identified gifted children.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have received assurances from the researcher that the information I share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for a doctoral dissertation and related publications and that my confidentiality will be protected and that no information that can identify me will be published or made public. My anonymity (and that of my child/children) will be protected through the use of pseudonyms of names and places.

Conservation of Data: The data collected will include tape recordings of interviews, transcripts, questionnaires, and researcher notes. Data will be kept in a secure manner (i.e., locked filing cabinet, password protected electronic files, survey data) and will be stored and kept secure for five years after thesis is defended, and will be accessible to only the researcher and the supervisor for this research project.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I may withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions without experiencing any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered up until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Shari Orders of the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, and under the supervision of Dr. Cheryll Duquette.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research at the University of Ottawa.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name: Shari Orders

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H: Participant Consent Form – Interview Participants

Title of Study:

Unwrapping Giftedness: How mothers of elementary school-aged children assessed as intellectually gifted make meaning of the gifted construct and participate in educational decision making

Researcher: Shari Orders
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

Supervisor: Dr. Cheryll Duquette
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté d'éducation

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above mentioned research study conducted by Shari Orders, Ph.D. Candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of mothers of children identified as intellectually gifted. The study will focus on mothers' perceptions of giftedness as well as mothers' experiences of the assessment, and gifted identification process, with particular focus on parental decision making and educational placement.

Participation: My participation in this study will include three face-to-face interviews each lasting 1 – 1 ½ hours in length. I understand that I will be asked to answer demographic questions about my family, and to share my thoughts and feelings about the assessment, identification, and placement processes as they pertain to my intellectually gifted child(ren). In addition, I will be asked about my decision making experiences with regard to educational placement(s) for my gifted child(ren).

I understand that I am under no obligation to participate in this research project. If I do decide to participate, the interview sessions will take place at a time and in a location that is convenient for me. With regard to compensation, I understand that the researcher has offered a Chapters gift card (value $50) as a token of her appreciation for my participation in this study.

Risks: My participation in this study will require me to share personal information about my family, and about my parenting experiences. I understand that sharing of this information may be uncomfortable at times. I have received assurances from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these occurrences. I understand that all questions are optional.

Benefits: My participation in this study will advance current understanding of how mothers think about giftedness and make educational decisions for their children. The findings of this research may be used to assist parents of

newly identified gifted children, and to strengthen parent education and advocacy efforts. In addition, professional development opportunities for educators could be identified to facilitate more effective partnerships with parents of gifted learners.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have received assurances from the researcher that the information I share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for a doctoral dissertation and related publications and that my confidentiality will be protected. No information that could identify me or my family will be published or made public. My anonymity (and that of my child/children) will be protected through the use of pseudonyms for the names of individuals, schools, and locations.

Conservation of Data: The data collected will include digital recordings of interviews, transcripts, and researcher notes. Data will be kept in a secure manner (e.g., locked filing cabinet, password protected electronic files) and will be securely stored for five years after the thesis defense, and will be accessible to only the researcher and the supervisor of this research project.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I may withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions without experiencing any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered up until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Shari Orders of the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, and under the supervision of Dr. Cheryll Duquette.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher and/or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research at the University of Ottawa.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name: Shari Orders

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix I: Tracking of Educational Decision Making for Students Identified as Gifted

Survey	Participant	Gifted child(ren)	Gifted criteria met? (PG or G)	Other exceptionalities?	Original placement	Alternative placements considered	Current placement	Wait list for gifted?	Interim placements?	Notes
1	Joanne	C1	Not sure	Physical – anxiety issues also noted by mother	Reg. FI	Not sure	Private	Yes, for several years	Home schooled for 1 year prior to private	
2	Sonia (interview)	C1	G	Multiple (Hard of hearing, LD)	Reg. FI	Primary gifted Reg. FI Home schooling Private	Reg. FI			
		C2	G		Reg. FI	Reg. FI	Reg. FI			
3	Karina	C1	PG	Communication (not specified)	Reg. English	Primary gifted	Primary gifted			
4	Dawn*	C1			Private	Primary gifted	Junior gifted (English)			Placed in primary
5	Francine*	C1	G	Behaviour (attention issues mentioned)	Out of board (Reg. French)	Junior gifted (French) French board (gifted)	High school gifted		French board (gifted)	Not sure when placed
		C2	PG		Out of board (Reg. French)	Primary gifted	Junior gifted (English)			Placed in primary
6	Jen	C1	G		Private	Junior gifted (English) Junior gifted (French)	Private		Junior gifted (English)	
		C2	PG		Private	Primary gifted	Junior gifted (English)			Placed in primary
7	Margaret (interview)	C1	Not sure		Private	French immersion Junior gifted (French)	Junior gifted (French)			
8	Sarah*	C1	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted Junior gifted (French) Private	High school gifted			Placed Gr. 4
		C2	G		Reg. FI	Junior gifted (English) Junior gifted (French)	Junior gifted (French)			Social issues noted
9	Ronna	C1	Not sure	Behaviour (not specified)	Reg. FI	Primary gifted Homeschooling Private	Reg. FI	Yes		

Survey	Participant	Gifted child(ren)	Gifted criteria met? (PG or G)	Other exceptionalities?	Original placement	Alternative placements considered	Current placement	Wait list for gifted?	Interim placements?	Notes
10	Louise	C1	PG		Out of board (Reg. program)	Primary gifted Catholic board Homeschooling Private	Out of board (Reg.)	Yes		
11	Daphne	C1	Not sure		Reg. FI	Primary gifted	Reg. FI			
12	Julie (interview)	C1	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted Junior gifted (English) Private	Reg. FI			
13	Iliana	C1	PG	Not sure	Out of board (SK, French/Cath.)	Primary gifted	Out of board (SK French/Catholic)	Not sure		Hopes to enrol in primary gifted for Gr.1
14	Chris	C1	G	Communication (LD)	Reg. English	None	Reg. English			
		C2	G	Communication (LD)	Reg. English	None	Reg. English			
15	Guylaine	C1	G		Reg. FI	Junior gifted (French)	Junior gifted (French)			
16	Laura	C1	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted Private school	Reg. FI	Yes		
17	Jessica	C1	G	Communication (LD)	Reg. English	Not sure	Reg. English	Yes		
18	Anne	C2	PG		Reg. English	Primary gifted	Junior gifted (English)			Delayed entry to gifted
19	Miranda	C2	Not sure	Multiple (not specified)	Private	None	Junior gifted (English)			Came from overseas, was in private
		C3	Not sure	Multiple (not specified)	Private	None	Out of board (Catholic)			“
20	Heather	C1	PG		Reg. English	Primary gifted FI Homeschooling	Junior gifted (English)		Reg FI, then Home schooling for 2 years while	

Survey	Participant	Gifted child(ren)	Gifted criteria met? (PG or G)	Other exceptionalities?	Original placement	Alternative placements considered	Current placement	Wait list for gifted?	Interim placements?	Notes
									on waiting list	
21	Allie	C1	PG		Private	Primary gifted	Private school			
		C2	PG		Private	Primary gifted	Private school			
22	Violet	C1	G	Communication (LD)	Out of board (Catholic)	Junior gifted (English)	Reg. English	Yes		
		C2	PG	Communication (LD)	Out of board (Catholic)	Primary gifted	Junior gifted (English)			Placed in primary
23	Michelle	C1	Not sure		Reg. FI	Junior gifted (French)	Junior gifted (French)			
24	Heidi (interview)	C1	G		Reg. FI	Junior gifted (English) Junior gifted (French)	Junior gifted (French)			
		C2	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted	Primary gifted			
		C3	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted	Primary gifted			
25	Linda*	C1	G		Reg. FI	Junior gifted (French) Catholic board	Junior gifted (French)			Recently moved
26	Margot	C1	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted	High school (gifted)			Placed in primary
		C2	PG	Communication (not specified)	Reg. FI	Primary gifted	Junior gifted (English)			Placed in primary
27	Sandra	C1	G		Reg. FI	Junior gifted (French)	Junior gifted (French)		Reg. English @ gifted centre school	
		C2	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted Junior gifted (French)	Reg. FI			
28	Hannah	C1	PG		Private	Primary gifted	Private		Reg. FI, Junior gifted (French)	
		C2	PG		Private	Primary gifted Junior gifted (French) Private school	Junior gifted (English)		Reg. FI	Placed in primary
		C3	PG		Private	Primary gifted	Reg. FI	Yes		
29	Lisa	C1	G		Reg. FI	Junior gifted (French)	High school (gifted)			
		C2	G		Reg. FI	Junior gifted (French)	Junior gifted (French)			
30	Svetlana*	C1	PG		Reg. FI	Junior gifted (French)	Junior gifted (French)			
		C2	G		Reg. FI	Junior gifted (French)	Reg. FI			
31	Padmal*	C2	G		Reg. English	Primary gifted Junior gifted (English)	Junior gifted (English)			Delayed entry to

Survey	Participant	Gifted child(ren)	Gifted criteria met? (PG or G)	Other exceptionalities?	Original placement	Alternative placements considered	Current placement	Wait list for gifted?	Interim placements?	Notes
										gifted
32	Carolyn	C2	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted Private school	Primary gifted			
33	Zhen*	C1	G		Reg. FI		Junior gifted (French)			
		C2	PG		Reg. FI		Primary gifted	Not sure		
34	Daria*	C1	PG	Multiple (ADHD, LD)	Reg. FI	Primary gifted	Reg. FI			
35	Barb	Not included due to lack of information provided by survey participant								
36	Andrea	C1	PG	Communication (not specified)	Not clear	Primary gifted	Junior gifted (English)			
37	Grace	C2	PG	Communication (Attention and anxiety issues)	Reg. English	Primary gifted Home schooling Private school	Primary gifted			
38	Colleen (interview)	C1	Not sure	Behaviour (ADHD)	Reg. English	Primary gifted Reg. FI Private school	Reg. FI			
39	Megan*	C1	PG		Reg. English	Primary gifted	Junior gifted (English)			Placed in primary
		C2	PG		Reg. English (alternative prog.)	Primary gifted	Primary gifted			
40	Claire	C1	G		Reg. FI	None	Reg. FI	Yes		
41	Deanne	C1	PG		Reg. FI		Other (older, graduated)			
		C4	G		Reg. FI	Jr. gifted (French)	Reg. FI		Jr. gifted (French) for less than 1 mo.	
42	Ella	C1	PG	Communication – LD	Not clear	Primary gifted	Private school			
43	Ruth	C1	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted	High school (School for the Arts)			Placed in primary
		C2	PG	Multiple – ADHD, LD	Reg. FI	Primary gifted	Junior gifted (English)			Placed in primary
44	Sheila	C1	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted	Junior gifted (English)			Placed in primary
		C2	PG		Private	Primary gifted	Primary gifted			

Survey	Participant	Gifted child(ren)	Gifted criteria met? (PG or G)	Other exceptionalities?	Original placement	Alternative placements considered	Current placement	Wait list for gifted?	Interim placements?	Notes
45	Gwynne	C1	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted	Primary gifted			
		C2	PG		Reg. FI	Primary gifted	Primary gifted			

Notes:
*indicates that mother was considered gifted as a child
"C1" = numeral following "C" denotes birth order of child in family. Only those children in family identified as gifted are represented in decision matrix.
PG or G = Profoundly gifted or Gifted criteria met