“Put your seatbelt on, here we go!”
The transition to school for children identified as gifted

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Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge and belief, understand that it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis [or dissertation, as appropriate]. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

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Signature

Date
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Abstract

The start of primary schooling is one of the most important transitions in a child’s life and can be a major challenge of early childhood (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). Within the school learning environment, children from a range of family and cultural backgrounds, with diverse physical and intellectual abilities, and from varying economic circumstances, will have differing learning needs. For the gifted child, the transition to school may bring additional challenges. Children whose abilities are unrecognised and not nurtured in the early years may develop social-emotional or behavioural difficulties. The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of young children identified as gifted as they began primary school in regional New South Wales in 2013.

The research used a case study approach within a bioecological framework. The study therefore allowed for the in-depth analysis of the experiences and perspectives of a range of stakeholders across educational settings. Data were gathered from eleven children identified as gifted, their parents, their pre-school teachers and their Kindergarten teachers. Checklists, questionnaires and structured conversations were used to examine the gifted identification process, the special needs of the child identified as gifted, changes in expectations emerging from the use of the gifted label and the experiences of these children in their transition to school. Conversations were transcribed, and along with questionnaires and checklists, were analysed using a three level model of analysis. Initial analysis used content analysis, the second level considered the context of the data: A bioecological lens. Exploring each of these elements separately laid the foundation for the subsequent, or third level of analysis. Using constant comparison analysis (Glaser, 1965), data from level two were able to be analysed according to each content theme and the level of influence of the PPCT elements. Such analysis allowed the researcher to compare and evaluate each
theme across the four PPCT elements of bioecological theory and determine the level of influence of each PPCT element upon individual themes. These three levels of data analysis ultimately built an understanding of the transition to school for the child identified as gifted. Such a multi-level process of analysis considers the influences of the child and their prior experiences as well as the influences of family, pre-school and primary school contexts.

Findings highlighted variations in the ways in which pre-school and Kindergarten teachers attempted to address the needs of children identified as gifted. In particular, difficulties were exposed during the first few weeks of school. For some children, practices designed to provide continuity between pre-school and primary school became an obstacle to their learning. For other children, provision of appropriate opportunities to show their advanced abilities was found to be significant, with the use of appropriate early assessment crucial. Emerging from such assessment was the need for effective curriculum differentiation, offering an inclusive approach to education.

Overarching themes were the teachers’ approaches to the children’s social-emotional, attention related and intellectual development. For some children, the educational opportunities provided in pre-school and Kindergarten may not provide the intellectual stimulation they desired. In preparation for school, both pre-school and Kindergarten teachers prioritised the child’s social-emotional skills and behaviour and their attention related skills, for example the child’s task persistence and self-regulation. The findings from this study reinforce the need for teachers in both contexts to find a balance between the child’s social-emotional, attention related and intellectual development within the transition to school, implementing a ‘holistic’ approach.
Glossary of Terms

The following terms are used in the thesis and defined in this section:

- Australian Government Department of Education and Communities
- Australian curriculum
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Children who may be gifted
- Co-located pre-school
- Count Me In Too [CMIT]
- Curriculum
- DEEWR
- Early childhood education
- Early Years Learning Framework
- Families
- Intersetting communication
- Kindergarten
- Language, Learning and Literacy [L3]
- NSW Best Start Assessment
- NSW DEC
- NSW DET
- Out of School Hours Care [OOSH]
- Parents
- Pedagogy
- Pre-prep class
- Pre-school context
- Pre-school teachers
- Starting school in New South Wales
- TEN program
- Transition to school
- VIC DEECD
Australian Government Department of Education and Communities

The Australian Government Department of Education and Communities is responsible for national policies and programs that help Australians access quality and affordable child care; early childhood education, school education, post-school, higher education, international education and academic research.

Australian school curriculum

Australia has recently moved from using separate curriculum frameworks developed and implemented in each of Australia’s states and territories to the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2010; Blaise & Nuttall, 2011). In 2012, some New South Wales [NSW] schools began trialing the Australian curriculum in the areas of English, Mathematics, Science and History. Additional curriculum documents to support the introduction of the curriculum are currently being developed for NSW by the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards.

The Australian Curriculum sets consistent national standards to improve learning outcomes for all young Australians. It sets out, through content descriptions and achievement standards, what students should be taught and achieve, as they progress through school (ACARA, 2010).

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD]

Children with behaviour and learning problems may exhibit signs of hyperactivity and/or inattention. Severe problems may result in a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD]. The disorder impairs social and academic functioning and is often noticed in children who are failing to learn at school (Australian Psychological Association, 2014).
Two main criteria may lead to a diagnosis of ADHD:

1. attention symptoms; and
2. hyperactivity symptoms

To fulfill a diagnosis of ADHD, each symptom must persist for six-months or more (Autism Spectrum Australia, 2014).

**Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Autism Spectrum Australia defines ‘Autism spectrum disorder’ [ASD] as a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way an individual relates to their environment and interacts with other people. 'Spectrum' describes the range of difficulties that people with ASD may experience and the degree to which they may be affected. Some people may be able to live relatively normal lives, while others may have an accompanying learning disability and require continued specialist support (Autism Spectrum Australia, 2014).

Autism Spectrum Australia advises that the main areas of difficulty are in social communication, social interaction and restricted or repetitive behaviours and interests (Autism Spectrum Australia, 2014).

**Children who may be gifted**

Within this study gifted children are referred to in two different ways. When referring to the literature, the term 'gifted' is used. When child participants in the study are considered, they are referred to as 'children identified as gifted'. This distinction is made as this study does not confirm (or deny) that the child participants are gifted. The children have been included in the study based upon their identification by their pre-school teacher or their parents. No formal identification occurred, nor was proof required of the child’s ability, for inclusion in the study.
Co-located pre-school
Several child participants in this study attended co-located pre-schools. This term refers to a pre-school on the same grounds as a primary school. Some co-located pre-schools and schools are managed by one leader (the school principal), others have separate administration structures.

Count Me In Too
*Count Me In Too* [CMIT] is a professional development program developed to support the effective teaching of mathematics in years K-6. The program combines findings from research about how children learn mathematics, with research on effective professional development. It has three major components:

- A theory of number development based on research from around the world and described in a learning framework;
- An individualised *Schedule for Early Number Assessment* used by teachers to place each child at a point within this framework; and,
- A professional development program designed to assist teachers better understand how children learn arithmetic (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2009).

Curriculum
Throughout this thesis, I adopt the following definition of curriculum, drawn from the New Zealand *Te Whariki*, “The sum total of the experiences, activities and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development” (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 10).

DEEWR
The federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. This former government department was disbanded in 2013 when the separate departments, the Department of Education and the Department of Employment were created.
Early childhood education
The internationally accepted definition of ‘early childhood’ is the period of a child’s life from birth to age 8 years (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2006). Hence, ‘early childhood education’ as used in this thesis, encompasses education in both the prior-to-school years and the early years of school. Early childhood education includes services and provision for children in the home and in more formal settings such as childcare, pre-school and the early years of primary school.

Early Years Learning Framework
The document *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* [EYLF] (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009a), is the national curriculum framework for Australian children aged 0-5 years. The EYLF:

> describes the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children’s learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. The framework has a strong emphasis on play-based learning, as play is the best vehicle for young children’s learning, providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development. The framework also recognises the importance of communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) and social-emotional development (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [VDEECD], 2009, p. 16)


Families
This is an inclusive term used to describe children’s significant others, including, but not limited to, their parents.
Intersetting communication
Communication between prior-to-school and school settings, for example between pre-school and Kindergarten teachers, regarding the transition to school is termed ‘intersetting communication’ (Hopps, 2014).

Kindergarten
The first year of school has many different names in Australia. In Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania, this first year is termed ‘Preparatory’ or ‘Prep.’ The Northern Territory uses ‘Transition’ and in Western Australia the name is Pre-Primary’. In South Australia, the term ‘Reception’ is used, NSW and the ACT use ‘Kindergarten’.

As this study took place in NSW, the term ‘Kindergarten’ is used throughout this thesis, to refer to the first year of school. The term ‘Kindergarten teacher’ refers to any teacher who is teaching children in the first year of formal schooling.

Language, learning and literacy [L3]
Implemented in NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC) primary schools, the L3 Literacy program is a research-based, cost effective Kindergarten classroom intervention, targeting text reading and writing. This program “complements the daily literacy program for Kindergarten students who do not bring a rich literacy background to their first year of school” (NSW DEC, 2014a).

NSW Best Start Assessment
The NSW DEC has devised and implemented the Best Start Kindergarten Assessment. This assessment is designed to be completed within the first five weeks of the Kindergarten year. The assessment aims to help teachers identify the literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills that each child brings to school (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2008).
The literacy assessment tasks are designed to identify whether students can:

- recognise familiar print in the environment;
- recall details about a picture story book that has been read to them;
- write their name;
- understand how books work; and,
- recognise and use sounds and letters.

The numeracy component of the assessment is related to early number concepts and is designed to identify:

- How well students can count;
- Which numbers they can recognise;
- Whether they can correctly collect a small number of objects;
- Whether they can add and subtract small numbers of objects; and,
- Whether they can recognise simple repeating patterns.

The Best Start interview is designed to provide teachers with information on each child’s abilities so they can plan effective learning programs during the early years of school (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2008).

**NSW DEC**

New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (formerly the NSW Department of Education and Training and the NSW Department of Education) provides services for children and young people that span early childhood through to youth advocacy and support. It connects all stages of education, from early childhood through to tertiary education. It also incorporates agencies, facilities and programs that provide support to targeted groups in the community.
NSW DET
The NSW Department of Education and Training. Now known as NSW DEC.

Out of school hours care [OOSH]
Many schools provide out of school hours child care, termed OOSH in this study. In OOSH, children may attend before school care, after school care and vacation care.

Parent
In this thesis the term ‘parent’ is used to refer to the ‘principle carer’ of the child involved. This may or may not be the biological parent of the child.

Pedagogy
‘Pedagogy’ is a term that has many definitions, all related to particular practices of teaching and learning. Throughout this thesis, I adopt the definition of pedagogy used by Teaching Australia (2008) that pedagogy “is defined as the art and science of educating children, the strategies for using teacher professional knowledge, skills and abilities in order to foster good learning outcomes” (p. 3). However, I also draw upon the work of Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden and Bell (2002), for whom,

Pedagogy refers to that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive processes between teacher and learner and to the learning environment (which includes the concrete learning environment, the family and community) (p. 28).

For the purposes of this study these definitions have been integrated to create a broad definition that encompasses interactions between the child and the teacher, the school learning environment and engagement with the child’s family and community in relation to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions.
Pre-prep class
In this thesis the term ‘Pre-Prep’ is used as one of the child participants attended a pre-prep class in the year prior to starting school in NSW. Depending upon the state in which the class is situated, numerous terms exist for such classes. In NSW and the ACT, the classes may be termed ‘Pre-Kinder’. States in which the first year of school is termed Preparatory, may use the term ‘Pre-Prep.’ or ‘Transition-Prep’.

Such classes provide a full-time, yet flexible, program for four-year-old children. The teacher usually has primary education qualifications and the class has full use of the co-located school’s facilities. Such programs are not a pre-school program but are an extension of a school, allowing for learning as the children approach their first year of schooling. In this environment the children may wear school uniform and attend specialist classes such as music, art and library.

Pre-school
The term ‘pre-school’ is used in this thesis to refer to educational services accessed by children and families in the two years before the children commence full-time schooling (NSW DET, Dockett & Perry, 2007b; 2011). In NSW, many childcare centres and services such as long day care, mobile children’s services and family day care services fit this definition. Pre-schools provide educational and social opportunities for many children between three and five years of age. In Australia, these educational programs are guided by the *Early Years Learning Framework*.

Attendance at pre-school is not compulsory. Children may begin school with no pre-school experience. All child participants in this study attended pre-school in the year prior to starting school.
**Pre-school teachers**
The term ‘pre-school teacher’ refers to any early childhood educator working in a pre-school or running the pre-school program in a long day care facility. All pre-school educators who participated in this study had graduate level Early Childhood qualifications. In some cases the pre-school teacher participant was also the Director of the pre-school.

**Starting school in New South Wales**
The age at which children start formal schooling varies across Australia. In NSW children may start Kindergarten at the beginning of the school year (the end of January) if they turn five on or before 31 July in that year. By law, all children must be enrolled in school by their sixth birthday (NSW DET, 2011b).

The first year of school is often seen to provide a ‘bridge’ connecting children’s learning before school to the more formal learning context in schools. There is usually a move from a play-based learning pre-school program to a structured teacher-led curriculum that is stage related and outcomes or standards based (Fabian, 2010; Kearns, 2010; Morrison, 2009).

**Targeted Early Numeracy program [TEN]**
Implemented in NSW DEC primary schools, the TEN program complements the classrooms’ regular numeracy programs, *Count Me In Too* [CMIT] and the Kindergarten *Best Start Numeracy Assessment*. This program acknowledges a small percentage of students are at risk of numeracy failure, even with a high quality whole class early numeracy program (NSW DET, 2011a).

**Transition to school**
Transition to school can be conceptualised in many different ways. In some definitions, the transition is related to time: transition describes the period of time before, during and after a child starts primary school (Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani, & Merali, 2007). It is a period when
children’s roles, identities, and expectations change (Rogoff, 2003). It is also a time for changes in the expectations of others and the patterns of interaction and relationships around and including children (Dockett et al., 2007; Fabian, 2010).

VIC DEECD
The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This is the Victorian equivalent of the NSW DEC.
1. Introduction

Organisation of the chapter
This chapter is organised around the following sections:

1.1 An introduction to the study

1.2 Problem to be addressed

1.3 Significance of the research

1.1 An introduction to the study
In recent years, reports and studies from across the world have recognised the pre-school and early years of primary schooling as critical periods in terms of both cognitive and psychosocial development (Dockett et al., 2007; Goodhew, 2009; Pfeiffer & Petscher, 2008). Children’s transition and initial adjustment to primary school are crucial for their development, wellbeing and progress (OECD, 2006). A positive start to school, including initial success across social and academic areas is a key factor in setting up cycles of achievement (Burrell & Bubb, 2000) and is “a valuable contributor to children’s sense of confidence in the school setting” (Petriwskyj & Greishaber, 2011, p. 75).

Transition into the first year of school – Kindergarten in NSW – is an important time for children, families, communities and educators (Dockett et al., 2007). For a child it marks a significant change in the ways they participate in the family and community (Dockett & Perry, 2007b). Dockett and Perry advise, “As children start school, their roles, identities and expectations change. So do the expectations of others, the patterns of interaction and the relationships around and including children” (Dockett & Perry, 2007b, p. 5). Families and educators involved in the transition to school also experience changes. Consequently an effective transition to school program
involves helping children – and their families and communities – feel comfortable, valued and successful in school (Dockett et al., 2007).

It is during the transition period that different contexts, systems, curricula, philosophies and approaches interact and children find themselves within a new learning context (Educational Transitions and Change Research Group [ETC], 2011). They generally move from a play-based curriculum which flows with the child’s agenda and helps to develop independence, to one in which the teacher directs the learning through a set curriculum (Fabian, 2010). While children may have built expectations about school from relationships with friends, older siblings and other family members, for some children, friendships, routines, rules, the physical size of the school and adapting to a more formal way of working may be sources of anxiety (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Morrison, 2009). Individual pre-schools and schools attempt to allay some of these fears through the transition process.

1.2 Problem to be addressed

The NSW Kindergarten environment includes a range of students differing in age, family backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences. Within this varied group of students there will be some with special needs, and of those, some may be considered gifted,

The potential for giftedness, or high levels of intellectual development, begins very early in a child’s life. Such development relies on a rich and appropriate interaction between the child’s genetic endowment and the environment in which the child grows. No child is born gifted; only with the potential for giftedness. Although all children have amazing potential, only those who are fortunate enough to have opportunities to develop their uniqueness in an environment that responds to their particular patterns and needs will be able to actualise abilities to high levels (Clark, 1998, p. 8).
While the educational needs of all children must be considered, the intellectual and social-emotional needs of gifted children in their schooling necessitate particular consideration (Clark, 2002; Folsom, 2005; Robertson, Pfeiffer, & Taylor, 2011). However, Bates and Munday (2005) have argued that gifted children’s educational needs may be ignored. Compounding this issue is the complex and contentious nature of the identification process, particularly in relation to the young gifted child (Chamberlin, Buchanan, & Vercimak, 2007; Cukierkorn, Karnes, & Manning, 2008; Goodhew, 2009; Sutherland, 2008). Children whose abilities are unrecognised and not nurtured in the early years may fail to realise their potential and may begin to underachieve (Bates & Munday, 2005; Koshy & Robinson, 2006; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2004). This underachievement can begin as early as the pre-school years (Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2011; Goodhew, 2009).

This study broadens and deepens knowledge of the transition experiences of children identified as gifted in regional and rural NSW. Significantly, it explores several unanswered questions, identifies and examines the educational provisions in place for young children identified as gifted as they begin their formal education. Specifically, the study asks the question: ‘What happens in the transition to primary school for children who are identified as gifted?’

1.3 Significance of the research

Theories and pedagogical practices that foster complex learning are core to gifted education (Folsom, 2006; Tomlinson et al., 1999). Curriculum and teaching strategies that promote complex learning involve high-level content knowledge and higher-order thinking, including critical thinking and metacognition, self-regulation, and creativity (Folsom, 2005, 2006). These practices, grounded in the intellectual needs of gifted students, may now be found in many K-12 educational standards and standards that govern teacher education programs (New South Wales Department of Education, 2011b;
Pfeiffer, 2003; Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate (PSCD), 2003). Educational innovations that incorporate the conceptual foundations demonstrated in gifted education over the last century are now influencing teaching in general education classrooms (Folsom, 2006; Pfeiffer, 2003; Renzulli, 2005b). Classrooms rich in choice, driven by inquiry and centered on projects, match the characteristics of ideal classrooms now described by general education reformers. Such classrooms provide an environment in which gifted children thrive (Professional Learning Directorate, 2004; PSCD, 2003; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009a, 2009b).

There are, however, inadequacies in the implementation of educational practices designed to meet the needs of gifted children in general education classrooms (Folsom, 2006). These inadequacies have significance for the gifted child in their transition to school, who without early identification and appropriate education, may experience “years of unsatisfactory education and deteriorating attitudes” (Hodge & Kemp, 2006, p. 169).

This research study is significant in that it is the first Australian study to focus on the transition from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders of pre-schoolers identified as gifted from pre-school to the first months of school. By drawing on data from children, parents and teachers, the study provides a variety of perspectives on the experiences of young children who are identified as gifted prior to starting school.
2. Literature Review

Organisation of the chapter
The literature review is organised around the following sections:

2.1 Introduction
2.2 Being gifted
2.3 Recognition of being gifted
2.4 Giftedness in early childhood
2.5 Gifted children with additional needs
2.6 Teaching and learning of the gifted child
2.7 Transition to school
2.8 Transition for the gifted child
2.9 Chapter summary
2.10 Research questions

This literature review begins by surveying how the term ‘gifted’ is defined within early childhood educational contexts. The literature review then moves to identifying the special needs of gifted children and explores how these children are identified within the early years. The learning and teaching experiences that have been recognised as positively contributing to a young gifted child’s educational experience are considered, as is the child’s transition to primary school. The chapter concludes by introducing the research questions of the study.

In many cases the references used in the literature review are dated. However, due to the paucity of the available materials in the last 10 years, analysis of literature from the 70s and 80s is warranted.
2.1 Introduction

Educational practice in Western countries has moved towards inclusion of all primary school aged children within the ‘mainstream’ learning environment (Ellis & Tod, 2010; Hyde, 2010; Moltzen, 2005). Within this learning environment, children from a range of family and cultural backgrounds, with diverse physical and intellectual abilities and from varying economic circumstances, will have differing learning needs. This paradigm of inclusion reflects a belief that all children have the right to participate actively in a general education setting (Carrington, 2007). An inclusive education system is designed so that all children’s needs are recognised and met through an appropriate learning environment (Goodhew, 2009). However, within this inclusive environment the educational needs of gifted children may be overlooked (Morris, 2013; Petriwskyj & Greishaber, 2011; Porter, 2005a, 2005b).

Gifted children have particular learning needs in terms of their social-emotional and intellectual development (Chamberlin et al., 2007; Cooper, 2009; Davis et al., 2011; Fonseca, 2010; Morgan, 2007). Delivering an inclusive curriculum to gifted children can be problematic due to the complexities of the identification process, inadequate teacher training and support in this area, ad hoc policy implementation in schools, and sometimes the perception that the needs of gifted children are a low priority (Cukierkorn, Karnes, Manning, Houston, & Besnoy, 2007; Goodhew, 2009; Moon, 2009; Piirto, 2007). Emotional, social or behavioural difficulties may result when such children are left without appropriate support (Bates & Munday, 2005; Chamberlin et al., 2007; Goodhew, 2009; Koshy & Robinson, 2006; Moon, 2009; Morgan, 2007; Porter, 2005a, 2005b). The gifted child may choose to withdraw, to isolate themselves from the group, to become the class clown or seek conformity by hiding their abilities (Clark, 2002). There is also the potential for the development of an unhealthy attitude to learning, which can produce
general dissatisfaction, inhibiting ambition and even damaging personal relationships and mental health (Clark, 2002; Fonseca, 2010; Goodhew, 2009; Moon, 2009).

2.2 Being gifted

2.2.1 A definition
Defining the term ‘gifted’ is both an important and complicated matter (Balchin, Hymer, & Matthews, 2009; Davis et al., 2011; Koshy & Robinson, 2006; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Firstly, the definition adopted will guide the identification process (Davis et al., 2011; Pfeiffer, 2003). Secondly, there is a risk that the chosen definition and subsequent identification methods may discriminate against groups such as low socio-economic, minority, disabled, underachieving and female children (Davis et al., 2011; Joseph & Ford, 2006; Porter, 2005a; Worrell, 2009; Worrell & Erwin, 2011). Finally, the chosen definition is tied to educational provisions, determining who may be selected for the provisions, including programs and resources (Cross, 2010; Davis et al., 2011; Eyre, 2010; Renzulli, 2005b).

2.2.2. What is giftedness?
How giftedness is conceptualised is critically important, ensuring sound research is translated into best practice, and that limited resources are applied in the most equitable manner (Pfeiffer, 2003). Yet, it is difficult to have experts agree. For almost a century, educators and psychologists have endeavoured to understand, measure, and explain giftedness (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011, 2012), resulting in various definitions. These include Renzulli’s Three-Ring Model (1986; Renzulli & Reis, 1997), Marland’s US Federal Definitions (1972, 1978, 1988), Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences (1983, 1993), Taylor's Multiple-Talent Totem Poles (1978, 1986, 1988), Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory (1988, 1997)
and Piirto’s Pyramid Model (1994). The number of overlapping definitions of giftedness proposed in educational research underlies the complexity of defining who is and who is not gifted (Clark, 2002; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). The definitions listed also suggest quite different approaches to identifying and promoting gifts (Pfeiffer, 2003).

Further complicating the search for a single definition is the notion that the gifted field is comprised of numerous groups of stakeholders, from a range of disciplines, such as educational psychologists, teachers, school counsellors, and parents (Ambrose, Van Tassel-Baska, & Coleman, 2010). These stakeholders deal with, and are affected by, gifted education in very different ways, resulting in a field that is “fractured, pluralized, and internally contested in its fundamental conceptual foundation” (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 463). The lack of a single, unified definition of what it means to be gifted can give rise to confusion (Balchin et al., 2009; Bracken & Brown, 2008; Walsh, Hodge, Bowes, & Kemp, 2010).

**Conceptualising giftedness.**

Historically, being gifted has been linked to having a high IQ. Terman (1926, p. 43) defined giftedness as “The top 1% level in general intellectual ability, as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale or comparable instrument”. As a result, intelligence testing and identification of the gifted were linked for much of the 20th century (Callahan, 2009). From this perspective, giftedness is seen as a generic, innate quality that needs to be recognised and revealed through a cognitive assessment or IQ test (Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000). This perspective is based upon an absolute or static view of giftedness – a person is either considered gifted or not gifted (Renzulli, 2012). The individual is presumed to possess reasoning abilities that allow them to be successful across all academic domains and are presumed to remain gifted throughout their lives (Subotnik et al., 2011).
Individuals identified using this definition tend to be successful and motivated (Gross, 1999). While an IQ based definition of giftedness provides an uncomplicated means of identification, it is exclusive, only allowing for the inclusion of students who are academically able (Renzulli, 2002), overlooking those with potential for superior performance in creativity, the arts, psychomotor skills, or leadership (Dweck, 2012; Pfeiffer, 2012; Renzulli, 2002; Subotnik & Jarvin, 2005; Worrell, 2010).

Over the last few decades the conceptualisation and definition of giftedness has undergone significant change, particularly within the professional literature (Horowitz, Subotnik, & Matthews, 2009; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). Ideological, political, economic, and cultural shifts have led to changes in the conceptualisation of giftedness (Pfeiffer, 2003). Contemporary thinking acknowledges that giftedness is not seen as something only to be inherited, natural, or given, but that the learning and development process is also important (Laine, 2010; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). This perspective challenges the view that giftedness and high IQ are synonymous (Foley Nicpon & Pfeiffer, 2011; Pfeiffer, 2012) and argues that an IQ score alone is not regarded as a sufficient basis for identifying giftedness (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012).

Giftedness is currently conceptualised as a broad, complex and dynamic concept (Laine, 2010; Renzulli, 2012; Thomson & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2013). Renzulli (2012) conceptualises giftedness to be both a relative concept – varying kinds and degrees of gifted behaviours may be displayed in certain people, at certain times, and under certain circumstances; and a dynamic concept – giftedness varies both within persons and within learning-performance situations. This conceptualisation combines multi-dimensional, non-intellectual qualities such as motivation, self-concept, and creativity with cognitive and intellectual factors (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005; Thomson & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2013; Tzuriel, Efrat, & Kashy-Rosenbaum, 2011). It also
recognises that characteristics of the individual (traits such as temperament) and the environment (influences such as the family and school) all interact with the individual’s demonstrated potential, determining whether or not that potential eventually develops into demonstrated talents (Gagné, 2003; Laine, 2010; Sternberg, 2007, 2010; Sternberg, Jarvin, & Grigorenko, 2011; Tan et al., 2009).

Within this conceptualisation it is acknowledged that the future gifts of children may not always be able to be identified (Freeman, 2013b). For example: “Winston Churchill is a prime example of a school failure who rose to brilliance. Entrepreneurs are particularly notable, such as Richard Branson who left school at 15 and founded the airline, Virgin, and Bill Gates who dropped out of university” (Freeman, 2013b, p. 7).

Also recognised in this conceptualisation of giftedness, is the interaction of the listed characteristics with the child’s culture and values (Neihart et al., 2002; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). From this perspective, giftedness is conceptualised in the context of the society in which the child lives (Foley Nicpon & Pfeiffer, 2011; Sternberg, 2005, 2007; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2005; Subotnik et al., 2011). For example,

> What is considered ‘gifted’ in one culture may not be in another, and access to opportunities to foster talent in specific domains varies depending on how much social or political emphasis is placed on that particular domain at a particular point in history. Thus, *gifted* is not something you are or are not, but rather a descriptive term to indicate high ability in one or more specific domains (Foley Nicpon & Pfeiffer, 2011, p. 294).

Intelligence, or the child’s potential, is only one element in the complex dynamics of exceptionally high-level performance, which includes factors such as self-esteem, support and opportunity (Dweck, 2006; Freeman, 2006a). The following equation indicates the complexity involved as parents and teachers attempt to support the young gifted child,
Potential + opportunities/support + personal drive = giftedness

(Eyre, 2010)

As suggested in this equation, giftedness is seen as a complex intermeshing of cognitive ability, motivation, academic opportunity and environmental influences (Barab & Plucker, 2002; Thomson & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2013). Several factors contribute to the gifted child’s success. Firstly, potential is necessary for giftedness (Gobet & Campitelli, 2007; Simonton & Song, 2009) but not sufficient for the development of talent (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005; Tannenbaum, 2003). Secondly, the opportunities and support the child receives are influential. The environment in which the gifted child lives and learns may impact greatly upon the child’s development (Cross, 2010). Thirdly, the gifted child’s personality and personal drive are significant. The child’s interest in, and commitment to, a domain (for example, intellectual, creative, socio-emotional and physical), are essential to becoming a gifted achiever and, ultimately, to realising their potential (Renzulli, 1978).

Such a dynamic conceptualisation not only expands the boundaries of giftedness (Neihart et al., 2002; Renzulli, 2002, 2012) but allows for more flexibility in the issue of promise/potential vs. already existing, demonstrated performance/productivity (Pfeiffer, 2002). Gifted learners are identified in specific areas or by their abilities, rather than levels of achievement (Litster & Roberts, 2011).

### 2.2.3 Confusion of the terms gifted and talented

Adding to the difficulty of achieving an agreed research-based definition to describe the diversity of the gifted population, is the use of the terms ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ (Davis et al., 2011; Harrison, 2004; Neihart et al., 2002; Pfeiffer, 2002; Piirto, 2007). The ambiguity of these concepts reflects an ongoing debate in the literature (Brown, Renzulli, Gubbins, Zhang, & Chen, 2005; Harrison, 2004; Taylor,
Some scholars suggest that the terms ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ be clearly separated, while others argue that the terms are synonymous.

Scholars such as Davis et al. (2011), Gallagher (2008) and Koshy and Robinson (2006) continue to use the terms interchangeably. They claim a gifted or talented child shows significantly advanced abilities and skills in any domain (Koshy & Robinson, 2006).

In contrast, other scholars separate the terms ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’. Bates and Munday (2005), Macintyre (2008), Manning (2006), Morgan (2007) and Piirto (2007) all claim gifted children to be those who exhibit high ability across one or more academic areas; and talented children as those who excel in more practical or creative domains: socially – in terms of leadership – or in sport, the performing arts or design and technology.

2.2.4 For the purposes of this study

To frame this discussion, I propose a definition of giftedness that acknowledges current conceptualisations, is comprehensive, flexible, and recognises the cultural and social interests of Australian schools and the communities related to these schools.

According to Gagné (2003), whose model of giftedness and talent is widely used by Australian state and territory government education departments (NSW DEC, 2012a; NSW DEC, 2012b; VDEECD, 2013), giftedness is a natural ability requiring the appropriate environment and supporting conditions to develop fully into a talent. Gagné argues that the terms giftedness and talent should not be used synonymously as they identify two separate stages in a gifted child’s journey from high potential to high performance. Gifts are considered natural abilities or aptitudes in one or more domains, whereas talent is the outward manifestation, or expression, of these natural abilities.
Gagné (2003) applies the term ‘gifted’ to individuals who possess ability or exhibit achievement that places them in the top 10% of their peer group. This figure is used because research shows that individuals with ability or skill at this level tend to require particular provisions if their learning is to be optimised (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Gross, 1993; NSW DEC, 2012a; Rogers, 2002).

In Gagné’s (2003) definition (Figure 2.1), the development of giftedness into a talent is dependent on several factors. The gifted individual’s natural abilities (intellect) interact with their environmental (people, provisions and events) and intrapersonal catalysts (physical elements, motivation, self-management and personality) along with chance in the developmental process to result in systematically developed skills. As such, a child’s learning will not progress optimally unless they have the ongoing support of their significant others and educational systems. Thus, the development of talent requires a substantial investment of time (Subotnik et al., 2011).

Gagné’s definition also recognises the potential for underachievement of the gifted. His definition acknowledges the further learning needs of children who are already talented achievers but, importantly, he draws attention to the needs of gifted underachievers – children who have high ability but who, for some reason, have not yet been able to translate their potential into performance. Chaffey (2009) reports that “Most conceptions of giftedness and talent do not give sufficient emphasis to the gifted underachiever, one exception being Gagné’s (1995) differentiated model of giftedness and talent” (p. 106).

Finally, Gagné’s definition acknowledges that giftedness cuts across all demographics including ethnicity, gender, geography and socio-economic background, and questions the influence different cultures and educational systems have in promoting the development and performance of talents. An advantage of this definition is that it allows the inclusion of children who have identified potential, but perhaps not the means to demonstrate that potential. These might
include gifted children who may also have a disability; live in poverty; have English as an additional language; are very young; or boys or girls who, due to their gender, are held back from demonstrating their skills (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Porter, 2005a; Worrell, 2009).

For the purposes of this study, Gagné’s (2003) differentiated model of giftedness is adopted because it offers the most inclusive and comprehensive definition of giftedness for the Australian context. Firstly, this model encompasses the recognition that giftedness is multi-dimensional. Secondly, it recognises that giftedness develops over the lifespan. Thirdly, this definition recognises that the gifted individual’s performance is influenced by biological and environmental factors such as hereditary traits or socio-economic situation. Finally, it recognises giftedness as socially and culturally defined. That is, it recognises that different groups value different qualities. For example, Indigenous families in Australia may value ‘self-awareness’ and ‘social ability’ as highly desirable qualities of giftedness (Bevan-Brown, 1996) while other families may place different value upon these qualities.

Figure 2.1 shows Gagné’s (2003) differentiated model of giftedness and talent.
Figure 2.1: Gagné’s differentiated model of giftedness and talent (2003)
2.2.5 Implications of being gifted

The gifted child’s social-emotional and intellectual needs in the school environment have been found by some to be qualitatively different from the average child’s (Coleman, 2005; Cross, 2004; Eddles-Hirsch, Vialle, Rogers, & McCormick, 2010; Gross, 2004). However, in most school environments, gifted children spend the majority of their time each day with a large group of children who have diverse strengths and needs. The type of social context created in such traditional school environments has been reported in some research as not conducive to the acceptance of difference (Coleman, 2005; Cross, 2004). Gifted children, with their often atypical academic development, may remain “out of sync” (Robinson, 2002, p. xv) with their school and social groups, and in other contexts designed for mainstream children of their age. Therefore, gifted children may be at a distinct disadvantage in traditional school environments (Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2010; Gross, 2004).

**Academic implications.**

One modification that some scholars suggest needs to be made to accommodate the unique learning needs of the gifted learner is with the curriculum (Renzulli, 1978; Renzulli & Reis, 1994; Sternberg, 1999). However, other scholars subscribe to the view that a quality, inclusive curriculum is appropriate for the gifted child (Goodhew, 2009; Pfeiffer, 2003; Piirto, 2007; Senate Employment Workplace Relations Small Business and Education Reference Committee (SEWRSBERC), 2001; Winebrenner, 2001).

An inclusive, quality learning environment for a gifted child is considered by some to be the same for gifted children as the quality learning environment for all children (Goodhew, 2009; Pfeiffer, 2003; Piirto, 2007; SEWRSMERCC, 2001; Winebrenner, 2001). Bates and Munday (2005) concur, suggesting that to achieve a truly inclusive curriculum – which motivates and stimulates gifted children, isn’t
about creating a separate curriculum. It is about ensuring the normal
curriculum meets the needs of all children, including the gifted.

This perspective is reinforced by Bailey et al. (2008) who suggest
that there is a move towards providing all pupils with challenge and
high expectations within their everyday learning, rather than
providing specific programs aimed at a small minority of pupils. Such
an innovative, inclusive curriculum could use strategies such as
compacting the curriculum, differentiating and extending what is
taught to accommodate varied pacing and levels of development
(Robinson, 2002). Practices including individualised programming,
mentorships, portfolio assessment, leadership training, greater
attention to creative learning, and promoting a climate of excellence
and high levels of academic rigour (Pfeiffer, 2003), are now found in
many mainstream classrooms.

To ensure the appropriate inclusion of the gifted child in mainstream
educational environments, Bates and Munday (2005) have identified
three key principles,

- “set suitable learning challenges for all pupils;
- actively engage in overcoming any potential barriers to learning;
  and,
- respond to all pupils’ diverse needs” (p. 40).

Yet, others argue that delivering an inclusive curriculum to gifted
children may be problematic (Cukierkorn et al., 2007; Goodhew,
and implementation of such a quality curriculum remains a challenge
for regular educators and resource teachers of the gifted” (p. 168).
Pfeiffer also argues that teachers may find it difficult to know how
best to individualise the curriculum to optimise the learning
experience of the gifted child without adversely impacting upon the
regular curriculum.
Without identification of the gifted child in the early years of school and curriculum adjustment “years of unsatisfactory education and deteriorating attitudes may occur” (Hodge & Kemp, 2006, p. 169). Dockett, Perry, Howard, Whitton and Cusack (2002), for example, found that some precocious readers stopped reading in the first weeks of school, having realised that other children were not able to read, nor were they expected to read. When such children are left without appropriate support, emotional, social or behavioral difficulties may result (Bates & Munday, 2005; Chamberlin et al., 2007; Goodhew, 2009; Koshy & Robinson, 2006; Moon, 2009; Morgan, 2007).

**Socio-emotional implications of being gifted.**

Researchers, psychologists, and educators have, for many years, tried to untangle the complicated dynamics between the abilities, families, specific culture, and school experiences of children to build models of the social-emotional development of gifted children (Cross, 2010; Jones, 2013; Prieto & Ferrando, 2009). The relationship between being gifted and the psychological well-being of children is still contested (Mueller, 2009). Evidence currently supports three contrasting views: firstly, that giftedness increases vulnerability; secondly, that giftedness enhances resilience in individuals; and thirdly, that influences (such as personality, environment, school, home and level of giftedness) may be either sources of risk or support to the social-emotional development of the gifted child (Cross, 2010; Moon, 2009; Neihart, 1999; Porter, 2005a; Reis & Renzulli, 2004).

From the first perspective, gifted children are acknowledged as different from their peers in their social-emotional development (Berry, Darling-Hammond, Hirsch, Robinson, & Wise, 2006; Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000; Tippey & Burnham, 2009). This perspective acknowledges that some of the traits associated with giftedness may
be problematic and may interact with other factors, increasing the chances for negative outcomes for some children (Neihart et al., 2002; Pfeiffer & Blei, 2008; Piirto, 2007; Van Tassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2008). From this perspective, the gifted child presents with a set of unique vulnerabilities that put them at particular risk for social-emotional problems (Coleman & Cross, 2014; Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000). Since these vulnerabilities are viewed as inherent to their giftedness, some argue that gifted children need special programming, ongoing socio-emotional support, and understanding (Callard-Szulgit, 2003; Fonseca, 2011; Sisk, 2009).

Giftedness is often accompanied by emotional sensitivity and intensity (Silverman, 1993). For example, Dabrowski and Piechowski (1977) used the term ‘overexcitability’ to describe a greater intensity among gifted children than for children overall. Such overexcitability may exist within the emotional, imaginative, psychomotor, sensual and intellectual domains. As Silverman (1993) asserts, “the uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable” (p. 3). However, not all gifted students have their gifts accompanied by emotional sensitivity and intensity. Many gifted students are well adjusted and socially and emotionally mature, yet they may still demonstrate a discrepancy between their social-emotional and cognitive development typical of the asynchronous pattern of development in gifted children (Robinson & Noble, 1991).

The extent of the child’s giftedness may also contribute to this discrepancy between the child’s social-emotional and cognitive development. For example, Terman’s (1947) landmark study distinguished between levels of intellectual giftedness, finding children with IQ’s higher than 170 (considered exceptionally or profoundly gifted) tended to have considerably more difficulty making social adjustments than the moderately gifted. More recently, Gross’ (1993, 1998) study of 60 Australian children with IQ’s over 160 in inclusive classrooms found that many of the children experienced significant and ongoing difficulties with peer relationships. Eighty
percent of the students in Gross' study experienced intense social isolation in a regular classroom and continuously monitored their social behaviour to conform to the expectations of their peer group (Gross, 1993). This mismatch between the gifted child’s emotional development, their actual and their intellectual age may cause frustration for the child (Ely, 2010; Piirto, 2007; Porter, 2005a). The gifted child’s intellectual abilities may set them apart from their peers (Litster & Roberts, 2011) as being different from peers is often perceived negatively by the child (Gross, 2002a, 2004).

In contrast, the second perspective regarding the relationship between being gifted and the psychological well-being of children disputes the notion that gifted children are any more prone to emotional difficulties than any other children (Porter, 2005a). Some literature even considers that gifted children are emotionally adjusted to a greater extent than the average child (Clark, 2002; Moon, Kelly, & Feldhusen, 1997). This greater level of adjustment may be the result of the gifted child’s internal skills – sophisticated cognitive skills – for solving problems they face, meaning they can make satisfactory adjustments to being gifted (Webb, 1993). That is, the ability that creates the problem may also supply the solution (Clark, 2002). While stereotypes have contributed to social or emotional difficulties for some gifted students, many students exhibit healthy, stable social-emotional lives. When challenged, encouraged, and supported, gifted children may respond as any other child; they develop a strong self concept and take pride in their work (Berlin, 2009).

Freeman (2013a) disputes the notion that gifted children are any more prone to emotional difficulties than any other children and cautions that this notion is,

an unjustifiable and dangerous stereotype with two major possible outcomes: it not only raises teachers’ and parents’ expectations of emotional disturbance in gifted children, young children may even adapt to this expectation; and it encourages
subjective assessment by teachers and parents to use emotion as a criterion for the identification of children as gifted (p. 12). In an attempt to confirm this perspective, Coleman and Cross (2014) studied gifted adolescents selected for a special school to study science. They believe sufficient evidence was found in their study of adolescents to support the perspective that many – but not all – gifted students experience giftedness as a ‘social handicap’. More specifically, they concluded that some gifted adolescents in this sample did experience being gifted as a social handicap. However, not all of them felt this way (Coleman & Cross, 2014).

In a more recent meta-analysis of the results of 40 studies, Litster and Roberts (2011) found that gifted students scored significantly higher than non-gifted students on measures of academic and behavioural perceived competence, as well as global self-concept. Yet, on measures of appearance and athletic perceived competence, gifted students scored significantly lower than non-gifted students. Jones (2013) confirms, “Whilst there appears to be a generally positive association between being a gifted and talented learner and ‘better’ scores on indicators of mental health and well-being, this is certainly not clear-cut” (p. 61). Coleman and Cross (2014) acknowledge there is insufficient evidence to claim indisputably that gifted children have social-emotional needs that are qualitatively different from those of their non-gifted peers. Consequently, whether giftedness improves resilience or increases vulnerability is still to be determined.

Although theoretical and empirical evidence support contrasting views concerning giftedness and vulnerability, perhaps the best way to reconcile these differences is to accept that the social-emotional needs of gifted children may not be static (Neihart, 1999; Robinson, 2002). Individual outcomes depend on the individual and their specific situation (Prieto & Ferrando, 2009). Personality, environment, school, home, and chance factors all interact with the gifted child’s demonstrated potential over considerable time to determine whether or not that potential eventually develops into
demonstrated talents (Cross, 2010; Foley Nicpon & Pfeiffer, 2011; Reis & Renzulli, 2004; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). The social-emotional differences gifted children experience are likely to be a result of the relationship between that individual child’s gifts and their social interactions within their world, such as family and school (Cross, 2010; Reis & Renzulli, 2004; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005).

This final perspective recognises that the situations faced by gifted children and the environment in which they live and learn may be either sources of risk and/or support to their social-emotional development (Cross, 2010; Reis & Renzulli, 2004). Some of these issues may emerge because of a mismatch with educational environments that are not responsive to the pace and level of gifted students’ learning and thinking. Others may occur because of unsupportive social, school, or home environments (Renzulli, 2004). This perspective acknowledges that while the gifted child’s biological makeup does not generate emotional maladjustment, a lack of suitable educational provisions may (Moon, 2009; Neihart, 1999; Porter, 2005a). Consequently, some of the characteristics and behaviours of gifted children may create challenges within educational settings (NSW DEC, 2012a). The relationship between students’ social-emotional needs and their academic needs is crucial. Each affects the other (Cross, 2010). For example, whether a gifted student is being challenged in class or able to work at a stimulating pace can affect their emotional well-being. Further, Robinson (2002) suggests the social context in which gifted children grow is as significant for their social-emotional health as is the educational context in which they learn.

The social-emotional adjustment of gifted children can be examined in relation to a number of different factors (Gross, 2002b; Neihart, 1999; Rimm, 2002),

- the type and level of giftedness (i.e. intellectual, creative, socioaffective or sensimotor, for example);
• educational fit (or lack of) within a developmentally appropriate learning environment; and,

• personal characteristics such as self-perceptions, temperament, age and life circumstances.

It is when these factors do not align that social-emotional difficulties may occur. This mismatch with the child’s environments may isolate and discourage the child’s efforts to relate to others (Gross, 2002b). If gifted children experience an educational environment that provides developmentally appropriate challenges and encourages them to develop their academic talents fully, the likelihood of problems and challenges related to their gift during the primary school years is lessened (Moon, 2009).

2.2.6 Social interactions of the gifted child

Social acceptance for the gifted child may be a particular concern between the ages of 4 and 9, when the differences between the gifted child and their age peers appear particularly acute (Gross, 2002b; Hollingworth, 1942). These differences may cause conflict with the early childhood emphasis on the development of social skills (Sankar-DeLeeuw, 1999) and learning through social play (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2012). In particular, these differences may be problematic for young gifted children who do not interact with their same-age peers because of a lack of intellectual connection, or because their characteristics are sometimes at odds with their peers (Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000).

The young gifted child’s challenges in finding a peer group may be complicated by a number of factors:
• A lack of common interests with their chronological age peer group: Friendship requires the initiation of common activities, and gifted children with unusual interests may appear socially isolated if they can find no like-minded peer with whom to share their passions (Shechtman & Silektor, 2012). The number of possible friends who share their interests is also limited and this may tend to isolate gifted children further;

• Their advanced cognitive skills may make the play of children of average ability seem to them crude and unsophisticated: Young gifted children often gravitate more towards interaction with the teacher or older children than interaction with same-age peers (Clark, 2002; Dalzell, 1998; Gross, 2004; Harrison & Tegel, 1999). This means they may withdraw from socialising with children of their chronological age (Harrison, 2003a), resulting in intense loneliness, isolation and under-achievement in their mainstream classroom. As such, the gifted child may not have sufficient opportunities to practice social skills, such as conflict resolution, self-disclosure, and tolerance, all of which are important components of friendship (Harrison, 2003a, 2005);

• They often have play interests that are more like those of older children and begin to enjoy structured, ‘rules-based’ games at earlier ages than their same age peers (Gross, 1999): Gifted children may see rules more clearly and may have little tolerance for anyone else who cannot see it their way. This frustration may be interpreted as ‘bossy’ or anti-social, but it may be due to the gifted child having difficulty relating to their age-peers (Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, & Rosenkoetter, 1989). The gifted child may also have an unusually well-developed sense of justice and fairness, resulting in their becoming very upset if they feel that one child has been unfair to another, or a teacher has unfairly treated another student (Porter, 2005a, 2005b);
The highly inquisitive attitude and curiosity of the gifted child often leads them to ask embarrassing and socially inappropriate questions: Gifted children’s passion for critical thinking is also frequently seen by peers as intolerance toward others, and their advanced vocabulary can be viewed as a ‘know it all’ arrogance (Porter, 2005a, 2005b); and,

Gifted children may have rather different conceptions and expectations of friendships from those of their same age peers (Currie, 2001; Gross, 2002a): Studies have found that highly gifted children demonstrate advanced conceptions of friendship typical of children many years older (Hollingworth, 1926), and that substantial gender differences are noticed – with girls significantly further along the developmental scale of friendship conception than boys (Gross, 2002a). This placement of the developmental scale may explain the tendency for exceptionally gifted boys to sometimes prefer the company of girls.

Difficulties with the peer group, either in terms of having trouble finding an appropriate peer group or being accepted within the desired group, may mean the gifted child is particularly vulnerable to social-emotional problems (Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000). An understanding of the characteristics of gifted children can, however, place a different perspective on their behaviour. Porter (2005a) explains that, although gifted children are often described as being ‘social misfits’, most of their social problems occur when there is an absence of ‘true peers’ rather than an absence of social skills.

When in classes with their intellectual peers, gifted children may have better social adjustment, accompanied by improved social self-concept, but in regular classroom environments their social self-concept can be lower (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003). In such an educational context the friendship of at least one true peer, regardless of the child’s age, is crucial. Gifted children may prefer the close and regular contact of one good friend, or a few select friends.
Finding an intellectual peer means the child may feel less pressure to conform and more freedom to pursue academic goals (Robinson, 2002). Robinson cautions, “in the absence of peer support, however, the pressures on gifted students may be intense and stressful” (2002, p. xvi).

Early childhood provisions that encourage social development, that is, the development of the individual as an accepted member of a social group, are appropriate for gifted children (Harrison, 2003a). This is in contrast to socialisation requiring the child to conform to norms which may result in gifted children hiding their abilities to fit in with the peer group (Roedell, 1989). For example, a gifted child’s need for friendship is often coupled with a strong motivation to achieve and, for many, these two areas conflict (Gross, 2002a; Porter, 2005a). Gross (1998) suggested that children who are forced to modify their behaviour to conform to a peer group of lesser ability are at risk of experiencing frustration both intellectually and emotionally. Consequently, many gifted children are faced with the ‘forced-choice’ dilemma – the choice that some intellectually gifted students feel that they must make between the needs for acceptance by peers and the pursuit of intellectual achievement (Gross, 1989, 1998; Wesley & Buysse, 2003).

2.3 Recognition of being gifted

This section considers the identification process and the subsequent labelling of the child as gifted.

2.3.1 The identification process

In spite of many generalities used to describe the ‘gifted’ it is important to recognise that gifted children do not form a homogeneous group (Davis et al., 2011; Robinson, 2002),
Gifted children differ from one another not only in size, shape, and colour, but also in cognitive and language abilities; interests; learning styles; motivation and energy levels; personalities; mental health and self-concepts; habits and behaviour; background and experience; and any other mental, physical, or experiential characteristic that one cares to look for (Davis et al., 2011, p. 32).

This complicates the identification process. There is no single reliable method of identifying gifted children (Frydenburg & O'Mullane, 2000; Gross, 1993; Harrison, 2003a; Porter, 1999, 2005a). Identification is fraught with difficulty and can be contentious and unreliable (Bates & Munday, 2005; Brown et al., 2005; Chamberlin et al., 2007). A survey of experts on giftedness highlighted the identification process as the second most frequently cited issue facing the field (Pfeiffer, 2003) with 41% percent of 64 international authorities in the gifted field agreeing that identification of the gifted remains problematic.

**Multiple measures and multiple sources of evidence.**

Within the gifted field there is a growing consensus regarding the use of multiple and alternative approaches for identifying gifted students (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier & Passow, 1994; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). Given the current developmental model of giftedness, basing identification policies on analysis of data from a single point in time is not appropriate (Foley Nicpon & Pfeiffer, 2011; Lohman & Korb, 2006; Makel, 2009; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). Data are needed from a variety of sources within cultural contexts (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Lohman & Korb, 2006): from parents; educators; school psychologists; and the students themselves (Bates & Munday, 2005; Davis et al., 2011; Goodhew, 2009; Gross, 1999; Piirto, 2007; Porter, 2005a). Gathering data in different settings and using different media allows children to show what they can do, leading to a more complete picture of a child’s abilities (Smutny & von Fremd, 2011). Using multiple sources of data also ensures children aren’t “labelled by means of a single score on a single test on a certain day” (Piirto,
2007, p. 119) as some students who are not identified as gifted at an early age later develop gifts and talents, and some young children identified at an early age as gifted, for any number of reasons, may underachieve (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012).

Attempting to facilitate improvement in the identification process is the Gifted and Talented Policy of the NSW DET (2004a). This current policy states that school communities have a responsibility to develop effective and equitable identification procedures and developmentally appropriate programs for gifted and talented students. The policy directs identification of gifted children to:

- be school wide;
- use multiple criteria;
- be inclusive;
- be dynamic and continuous;
- be culturally fair;
- ensure that all domains of giftedness and fields of talent are identified;
- recognise degrees of giftedness;
- be organised and linked to differentiation;
- allow for early identification and identification at all stages; and,
- enable input from the full range of stakeholders (NSW DET, 2004b, p. 8).

This policy indicates that schools should develop identification processes that use multiple sources of information and enable input from students, parents, teachers, school psychologists, and other support staff. School communities therefore have a responsibility to foster collaborative home-school partnerships to support the identification of gifted children. This may require particular sensitivity to parents/caregivers from culturally diverse groups (NSW DEC, 2012a; 2004a). In order to improve the identification of gifted children, data are needed from a variety of sources and individuals
within cultural contexts so that assessment is multifaceted, multidisciplinary, and culturally sensitive (Joseph & Ford, 2006).

**Teacher nominations.**

One source of data commonly used in Australia is teachers. Teachers observe students in a variety of situations and under a variety of conditions. This gives them valuable insight and means they often play a significant role in the identification process (Davis & Rimm, 2004; Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009; Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010; Siegle & Powell, 2004). It also means, however, that teacher judgments and recommendations of whom to include for formal assessment often become the first step in the identification process, essentially rendering teachers ‘gatekeepers’. Consequently children’s access to the identification process and provisions is often dependent on teachers’ perceptions (Bianco, Harris, Garrison-Wade, & Leech, 2011) and this may be a “potential source of unfairness in the entrance process” (McBee, 2006, p. 103).

Teachers’ ability to accurately identify gifted students has been widely debated over the last few decades (Gagné, 1994; Hoge & Cudmore, 1986; Siegle et al., 2010). In 1959, Pegnato and Birch challenged the long established idea that teachers could reliably identify gifted students. Although Pegnato and Birch are often cited to support the notion that teachers are unreliable in identifying gifted students in their classrooms, their study has been criticised for the research methodology employed (Bianco et al., 2011). In 1994, Gagne re-examined Pegnato and Birch’s (1959) data and disputed their findings. The results from this new analysis showed that teachers were not less effective in their prediction of identifying children for gifted services than any other sources of information (Bianco et al., 2011; Speirs Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007). However, other literature (GERRIG, 2001; Porter, 2005a; Siegle & Powell, 2004) illustrates that teachers’ biases exist when nominating students for gifted services. Teachers typically
have been found to nominate students who conform to their expectations of what gifted students look like, how they perform on various measures of achievement, and how they behave in the classroom (Davis & Rimm, 2004).

Teachers may also base their identifications on dominant cultural assumptions to guide their judgments of giftedness (Bianco et al., 2011; Peterson & Margolin, 1997). Even experienced teachers often hold a narrow understanding of giftedness (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007), resulting in gifted children identified by teacher nomination alone restricted to children from middle class families within the dominant culture (Geake & Gross, 2008; GERRIC, 2001). Recent research has demonstrated that teachers’ biases and stereotyped expectations of gifted students have contributed to the under-representation of culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students (Bianco & Leech, 2010; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Joseph & Ford, 2006; McBee, 2006; Merrotsy, 2011). These findings are particularly disturbing considering recent research indicating that classroom teachers “feel the most important determinant in whether or not a child receives gifted services should be teacher nominations” (Schroth & Helfer, 2008, p. 169).

Some have suggested that teachers are better equipped to identify gifted characteristics and make more informed referral decisions when they are provided with professional development on the nature and needs of gifted learners (Robinson, Shore, & Enerson, 2007). For example, in an early study by Gear (1978), teachers became twice as effective in making accurate referrals for gifted services with as little as ten hours of professional learning in recognising the characteristics of gifted learners. This is supported by a submission to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia from GERRIC (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia (PCA), 2001) which argues that teachers’ judgements are considerably more accurate after professional learning. The submission suggested that teachers’ professional learning relating to understanding how to
identify gifted children was essential to enable teachers to recognise gifted children more readily. Even so, teacher identification, when used in isolation, is positioned by some in the literature as an “imperfect tool” (Goodhew, 2009, p. 25) prone to class, culture and gender bias.

However, others argue that structured observations by teachers can help gather data to aid in identification of young gifted children (Porter, 2005a, 2005b; Shaklee, 1992; Sutherland, 2008). These observations involve describing in specific terms what children do, either in spontaneous situations or in activities planned by teachers so that children have the opportunity to display specific skills. In particular, instigating and observing activities that require children to use and report on their metacognitive skills appear to be beneficial in the identification process (Porter, 2005b; Sutherland, 2008). This method of gathering data may also be particularly helpful in identifying those children whose abilities are more mixed – those who may have advanced knowledge but are unable to demonstrate it because of how they approach tasks (Porter, 2005a, 2005b; Sutherland, 2008). One example is those children who may rarely complete the assigned task but who have a solid understanding of the concepts involved. In NSW, the Board of Studies (2005) encourages teachers to combine observation with a continual gathering of information resulting in a portfolio of products for evaluation.

**Child portfolios.**

Child portfolios may take the form of typical, notable and/or child-selected examples of their work, drawings, records of notable moments, photos of constructions and observational notes about language and behaviour, and other artifacts, which highlight the child’s interests and thinking. Such a collection of children’s work, activities and interests – including photographs and transcriptions of
dialogue – may provide valuable information about the gifted child’s characteristics and abilities (Grubb, 2008).

Pfeiffer and Blei (2008), Smutny (2003), Porter (2005a, 2005b) and Harrison (2003a) recognise student portfolios as a beneficial tool that both parents and teachers can use when constructing a record of a child’s intellectual and social-emotional development. Harrison (2003a) advocates that an awareness of both the product and process can provide evidence of skills and understandings significantly different to those of the gifted child’s same-age peers. Samples of work and drawings may reflect advanced physical development; children’s intense concentration and task commitment; their intensity of purpose; highlight their perfectionism; show heightened perceptual awareness; creativity; humour; emotional sensitivity; and the ability to think abstractly (Harrison, 2003a). Harrison advises that drawing allows young gifted children to express and communicate their ideas, feelings and abilities in an age appropriate manner, and may provide an insightful method of exploring and identifying the characteristics of young gifted children. However, there is conflicting evidence regarding the use of portfolios as a demonstration of achievement.

Some research suggests that a focus on individual student progress allows the gifted child to demonstrate their actual level of achievement and their own unique abilities, indicating advanced development (Clark, 2002; Harrison, 1999, 2003a). However, other scholars are concerned with the lack of opportunity within the curriculum provided to reveal achievement beyond grade expectations (Braggett, 1997; Shaklee, 1992). They suggest that while portfolios can offer evidence of advanced development, particularly in non-traditional domains, in order to recognise significantly advanced development, comparisons may still need to be made between a children’s achievements and age norms (Braggett, 1997; Coleman, 1994; Shaklee, 1992; Wright & Borland, 1993).
It is important that portfolios are not merely a collection of children’s products, but are a systematic compilation that documents their progress in all developmental domains, particularly in complex mental skills (Hadaway & Marek-Schroer, 1992). Portfolios may provide insights into the gifted child’s abilities and achievements and may draw the teacher’s attention to the type of tasks that the child particularly enjoys or finds interesting. This, in turn, may allow the teacher to program better educational provisions for the child.

**Parental nominations.**

Parents and other primary caregivers are significant observers of the child’s early development, behaviour and learning and they may observe many of the characteristics of giftedness listed in the literature (Clark, 2002; Harrison, 2003a, 2005). Parents may be the most informed sources of information about their child’s early play, development and learning (NSW DEC, 2012b). The research evidence challenges the common assumption that parents are poor identifiers of giftedness (Harrison, 2005; Rogers, 2002). It has been shown consistently that parents are significantly more successful than teachers in identifying giftedness in the primary years of schooling. For example, in a study by Louis and Lewis (1992), 61% of parents correctly identified their pre-schoolers’ giftedness, and the remaining 39% correctly identified that their children were advanced but not to the extent of being gifted.

However, despite the accuracy of parents’ reports of their child's developmental milestones (Gross, 1993), parents’ impressions are often dismissed as biased, suggesting they typically exaggerate their child’s accomplishments (Porter, 2005a, 2005b). Other research suggests that a parent’s thorough knowledge of their child, including knowledge of their milestones, motivation and personality, makes them skilled reporters of their child's abilities (Davis et al., 2011; Gross, 1999; Piirto, 2007). Parents observe a wide range of cognitive and affective behaviours at a time when cognitive development
proceeds most swiftly, in a setting where the child has no need to moderate their behaviour for peer or teacher acceptance (Gross, 1999). Gross suggests that by the time the child begins pre-school, developmental changes have slowed and identification has perhaps become more complex. As well, sharing stories of their child’s giftedness may be difficult for parents who are often hesitant to discuss their children’s abilities (Macintyre, 2008; NSW DEC, 2012b; Porter, 2005b).

**Peer Nomination.**

Another form of identification of gifted children is peer nomination. The effectiveness of this method is dependent upon students’ decisions to (or not to) nominate their peers. There may be reluctance to identify talent or a tendency to nominate friends (Grubb, 2008). However, peer nomination may form part of multiple measures and multiple sources of evidence. The Gifted Children Task Force in Victoria (PCA, 2001) asked children questions such as:

- Whom would you go to for help if the teacher were not present?
- Who in the class is the most curious about things?
- Who should thank a guest speaker? and,
- If you cannot do something that you planned, who in your class is likely to come up with another plan or idea?

While these questions in isolation do not establish giftedness, they do provide supplementary pieces of information which may help form a balanced identification of gifted students (Grubb, 2008).
Standardised tests.

Standardised, or norm-referenced tests, measure differences among individuals so that comparisons with children of the same age can be made. The use of standardised tests to identify gifted children is controversial (PCA, 2001). Porter (1999, 2005a) summarises the many strengths of standardised tests. The strengths include predicting academic performance, identifying underachievers and those with learning disabilities, highlighting educational disadvantage or minority groups and profiling developmental strengths and needs. Porter advises that standardised tests can also provide valuable information regarding children’s approaches to tasks. Finally, standardised tests can be used to make comparisons between children in order to design educational programs. Gross (1993, 1998) states that standardised testing is critical when understanding the significant differences in mental processing between moderately and highly gifted children, and therefore, an important tool when matching the appropriate curriculum to the specific needs of differing levels of giftedness. Gross states that IQ and achievement testing can identify whether a child is gifted as well as the degree of giftedness. Therefore, appropriate standardised testing procedures with gifted children can assist greatly, leading to more accurate identification.

In contrast, standardised tests are often criticised for being too narrow in focus or culturally biased (GERRIC, 2001). As well, the field of gifted education has too few technically sound screening instruments, especially tests, designed for the young, gifted child (Pfeiffer, Petscher, & Jarosewich, 2007). However, recent research in gifted education has resulted in the development of several standardised assessment instruments claimed to be appropriate for young children. For example, The Gifted Rating Scales measure intellectual ability, academic ability, creativity, artistic talent, leadership ability and motivation for young children (Pfeiffer & Blei, 2008).
The use of standardised tests with young children is still acknowledged as a controversial area. Some researchers are concerned that formal testing of young children does not necessarily result in a true picture of the child, who may have been tired, bored or disinterested at the time of the assessment (Kearns, 2010). Others suggest that the form of testing typically used in standardised instruments is inappropriate for young children (Clarke, 2015; Wager, Graue, & Harrigan, 2015). However, others acknowledge that while this may be the case, standardised tests may be more objective than methods such as teacher nomination (SEWRSMERC, 2001). Therefore standardised tests hold an important place in the multidimensional identification process (Porter, 1999, 2005a).

Standardised tests commonly forming part of the multidimensional identification process include,

- Raven’s Coloured Progressive Matrices [RCPM] (Raven, 1998). This test can be used to assess the degree to which an individual can think clearly and is able to be used with children aged from five years; and,

- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth edition [PPVT- 4] (Dunn & Dunn, 2007). This standardized test is used to assess vocabulary and is able to be used with children aged from 2 years and 6 months old.

The reliability of these tests in assessing general intellectual functioning is well accepted. These tests may be administered by teachers with special education qualifications. In contrast, IQ tests such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Fourth Edition Australian Standardised Edition [WISC-IV Australian] (Wechsler, 2005) or Wechsler Preschool & Primary Scale of Intelligence - Third Edition Australian Standardised Edition [WPPSI-III Australian] (Pearson Clinical Assessment, 2004) must be administered by a psychologist.
**IQ tests.**

For more than 100 years, gifted students have been identified by scores obtained on IQ tests (Nisbett, 2009; Pfeiffer, 2002; Robinson, 2005). A student is typically labelled as gifted upon obtaining a score of 120, 125, or 130 on the Stanford-Binet or Wechsler Intelligence Scales. A student referred for gifted identification who does not obtain a pre-established cut score on an IQ test is often deemed 'not gifted' or ineligible for gifted programming and services (Brown et al., 2005; Pfeiffer, 2008). Current thinking acknowledges that IQ accounts for a substantial amount, but not all, of the variation in a student’s academic performance or real-world success (Nisbett, 2009; Pfeiffer, 2012; Worrell, 2009). An IQ score alone may partially explain a student's long-term academic and real-world success; other factors such as domain-specific skills, high motivation, a passion for subject matter, task commitment and persistence, self-confidence, and opportunity are other important contributing factors (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). The place of IQ tests within the identification process is contested.

Some scholars position the use of IQ tests to identify a gifted child as problematic (GERRIC, 2001; Piirto, 2007; Talay-Ongan & Ap, 2005). Others criticise the tests for being too narrow or culturally biased, suggesting that such tests contribute to an underrepresentation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Strong Scott & Delgado, 2005). However, extensive research supports the validity of IQ scores predicting academic achievement, as well as job performance, socio-economic status, and other important life outcomes (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Neisser et al., 1996; Rushton & Jensen, 2010). Consequently, many educators, psychologists, and policymakers believe that an IQ score provides the metric to define giftedness (Borland, 2009; Cramond, 2004). Others suggest IQ tests have a legitimate place in the identification process (Piirto, 2007; Porter, 2005a). Piirto (2007) even proposes that using an individual intelligence test score is often the most reliable way of identifying
young, potentially gifted children from the middle and higher socio-economic classes. Clark (2002) also acknowledges the value of IQ tests, suggesting that IQ tests may be good predictors of success within the school environment and their subtests may provide valuable insights into the relative strengths of the individual. However, Clark also provides reason for caution,

> Intelligence tests generally measure only a sample of the linear, rational ability of a person, and because intelligence can be expressed in many other ways, such a small sample cannot be viewed as an adequate measure of the universe of intelligence or the potential of a person (2002, p. 22).

IQ tests should be used cautiously in the identification process, forming part of a ‘battery’ of methods rather than being used in isolation. Instruments must also be carefully selected to be culturally sensitive, ensuring data gathered is fair (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Strong Scott & Delgado, 2005). According to Newman (2008), “When used with care and consideration, in the context of an assessment that includes multiple sources of information, measures of intelligence or cognitive ability have the potential to provide valuable information in the gifted identification process” (p. 174).

**Checklists.**

The reliability of teacher and parent nomination can be significantly increased through training in the use of checklists, designed by researchers in gifted education. Checklists may contain descriptions of traits and characteristics of gifted children (Gross, 1999; Porter, 2005b). Checklists can also be a useful way to sensitise parents, caregivers and teachers to typical gifted behaviours (Porter, 2005a). However, Porter cautions that while such checklists appear to be straightforward, most have a number of deficiencies and their reliability or validity may not have been established. The literature highlights complexities in their use (Hadaway & Marek-Schroer, 1992; Porter, 2005b; Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007).
Firstly, using checklists as an identification tool sometimes requires the user to know how much of each characteristic a child has to show in order to be defined as gifted: it can be difficult for the user to judge what ‘learning quickly’ means, or what qualifies as ‘most of the time’ or ‘often’ (Roedell, Jackson, & Robinson, 1980). Secondly, according to some checklists, almost anyone could appear to be gifted, yet on others no child would meet all or most of the criteria (Hadaway & Marek-Schroer, 1992). Checklists may also give a false impression that all gifted children are the same (Porter, 2005a), when in fact they can display any combination of the attributes described. Checklists, with very few exceptions, also tend to ignore the negative behaviours often displayed by gifted children whose schools have failed to make appropriate provision for them, instead concentrating on the positive behaviours (GERRIC, 2001). A fourth issue is that checklists rely on children’s demonstrated performances to identify giftedness, despite patterns of underachievement being frequently found in many gifted children (Allan, 2002; Clark, 2002; Porter, 2005a; Reis & McCoach, 2002).

2.3.2 Labelling a child as gifted

Gates (2010) recognises that when a child is labelled, it is usually with good intentions – an attempt to understand the child better, and explain the child’s strengths and needs. Gates suggests that if a behaviour or personality trait can be defined, then it can be addressed more easily. However, both historic and current literature highlights the advantages and disadvantages of being labelled gifted and talented. The perceptions of peers, family members, and teachers toward gifted children portrays gifted students as living in a world that sends them mixed messages, many of which suggest negative associations regarding the meaning of being gifted (Berlin, 2009; Cross, 1999). For example, labelling a child as gifted may have both positive and negative effects: raising self-esteem and self-expectations on one hand but sometimes alienating peers and siblings on the other (Davis et al., 2011). Current literature
challenges the value of labelling a child as gifted and acknowledges implications for all involved (Davis et al., 2011; Macintyre, 2008; Porter, 2005a, 2005b).

Research suggests that labelling children as gifted may be harmful to their social-emotional well-being (O’Connor, 2012). For example, in a US study, gifted adolescents complained of being given negative labels such as ‘nerd’ and ‘teacher’s pet’, being taken advantage of by other students and being subjected to undue pressure and expectation from parents and teachers (Moulton, Moulton, Housewright, & Bailey, 1998). More recently, Hewitt (2005) who researched the views of 21 students at an English summer school for mathematically gifted children found many children were concerned about their label. Hewitt warns, “Those responsible for identifying ‘gifted and talented’ students need to be acutely aware of the potential consequences and ensure there is adequate provision to deal with them” (2005, p. 3).

In the UK, Freeman (1991, 2001, 2005) conducted a 30-year longitudinal study of children labelled as gifted and found “It was the labelled gifted who had more emotional problems than the identically able but unlabelled gifted” (Freeman, 1991, p. 10). Freeman came to this conclusion over the practice of publically categorising children as gifted,

Because of that power of the image behind that word, when a child is labelled gifted it not only has an effect on his or her self-concept, but alters the attitudes and behaviours of others towards the child. It is a label to be used sparingly and with great care (1991, p. 3).

Even more concerning are the findings of Geake and Gross (2008) that not only was there social hostility to high levels of intelligence in children, but also a “consistent negative affect of teachers towards academically gifted children” (Geake & Gross, 2008, p. 219). Similarly, Carrington and Bailey (2000) found that, in general, pre-service teachers in Australia considered the average child to be more
desirable to teacher than the gifted one. While being singled out and labelled as exceptional may be a challenge for children, it is the academically gifted who are most subject to negative responses and stereotypes from others (Colangelo, 2002; O’Connor, 2012). Colangelo (2002) notes that a “similar cultural discomfort with precocity is not evident with regard to exceptional performance in sport or music” (p. 218).

Various reasons for this inconsistency of attitudes towards children gifted in different areas have been put forward. For example, from a social identity perspective, Geake and Gross (2008) argue, “where outstanding ability in sport or performing arts is seen as a form of ‘social compliance’ . . . development of high intellectual ability is seen as a selfish endeavour” (p. 218).

**Self-perceptions of the gifted child.**

According to Davis and Rimm (2011), being labelled as gifted may cause children to perceive themselves differently, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. For example: “one student could burst with pride upon being nominated for a gifted program, whereas others could feel immense pressure” (Makel, 2009, p. 127).

For some students, being labelled as gifted may be positive as many young gifted children wish their status to be recognised (Porter, 2005a). Many gifted children may be aware they are different, so explaining the real reason for their differences may be beneficial, even if this entails a label (Porter, 2005b). Knowing exactly why they are different may help children better understand the difficulties they may experience (Macintyre, 2008).

For other children, being labelled as gifted may be harmful to their social-emotional well-being (Dweck, 2009; Gates, 2010; O’Connor, 2012). While the majority of children report positive or neutral comfort levels with the label of gifted, approximately one in six gifted students
indicates extreme discomfort (Robinson, 1990). For these children the label may cause them to be less well adjusted, less socially accepted by classmates and more anxious about meeting high expectations (Clark, 2002; Macintyre, 2008; Porter, 2005a, 2005b).

Dweck (2009) reports that students who have been led to think of themselves as bright or gifted can become very conservative learners, afraid to accept new challenges where their chances of success are uncertain, in case their status is put in jeopardy. Such students may also come to expect to be treated as special, and become upset if they are not (Claxton & Meadows, 2009). There is also apprehension that the label may convey a fixed mindset,

We are, in essence, telling them that they have been given a ‘gift’, a fixed ability that sets them apart from others and makes them more special than others. I worry that some children will become so focused on showing they deserve the label that they will stop challenging themselves, avoiding any situation that might reveal any inadequacy and show that they do not have the gift. I also worry that the word ‘gift’ itself implies that no effort is involved in the attainment of intellectual excellence. It is just something that is bestowed upon the lucky few, who because of it are destined to be successful. Indeed if children believe they simply have to sit there with their gift and success will come, this is a recipe for disappointment (Dweck, 2009, p. 310).

**Parent–sibling perceptions of the gifted child.**

For the gifted child’s parents and siblings, labelling may also have significant implications. On one hand, parents may feel inadequate in their ability to guide their gifted child’s development: the term itself implies that children are so extraordinary that some parents feel they must do something equally extraordinary to ensure their child’s potential is not wasted (Porter, 2005b). This can lead to family life being organised around the gifted child’s ‘specialness’ – to the disadvantage of other aspects of family functioning (Porter, 2005b).
On the other hand, some parents speak of the relief of having a label because they can be assured that ‘bad parenting’ is not the cause of their child’s difficulties (Porter, 2005a, 2005b). Armed with a label, they can seek out information about strategies that can reduce their child’s difficulties and share these with the teachers at school. Another possible advantage of labelling is that the term ‘gifted’ is a label used worldwide to alert teachers to the needs these children have and to the possibilities for making their learning experiences more meaningful (Clark, 2002).

**Peer perceptions of the gifted child.**

Labelling a child as gifted may have significant social advantages and disadvantages for children. Tannenbaum’s (1962) seminal study evaluated adolescent attitudes toward academic brilliance and found that, although the personal attribute of giftedness was not considered a stigma in and of itself, it became an unacceptable attribute when combined with other traits such as lack of interest in sports or greater-than-average time commitment to schoolwork. More recently, O’Connor (2012) conducted an analysis of British newspaper stories about gifted children, exploring the socially constructed nature of the concept of the ‘gifted child’. O’Connor found children labelled as academically gifted may be subjected to negative attitudes from others and that this impacts on their self-esteem and motivation to succeed.

In contrast, there are fewer disadvantages when primary school children are labelled as gifted. Rimm (2002) advised that no studies showed particular biases against gifted primary school children by their peers. Gifted primary aged children were generally well liked and sometimes considered even more popular than their peers. However, according to Rimm, by the age of 13, that popularity advantage may disappear.
Teacher perceptions of the gifted child.

Teachers have the potential to influence the performance of students based on what they perceive about them,

These perceptions are apparent in the invisible curriculum and the interactions that students and teachers engage in. If a teacher perceives a child to be academically capable, he is more likely to expect high achievement. The converse is also true (Gates, 2010, p. 201).

When children are labelled as gifted, teachers' perceptions of the child are often related to the level of teacher training in gifted education or teachers' understanding of diversity. For example, the research of Copenhaver and McIntyre (1992) showed that teachers' perceptions of gifted students differed significantly and could be positively correlated with two factors: whether teachers had undertaken professional development on gifted education and the grade level that teachers taught. This is supported by the findings of Hansen and Feldhusen (1994) and Hanninen (1988) who found measurable differences between experts and novices, teachers trained and those not trained in the area of gifted education. Yet, for early childhood teachers, professional development does little to change perceptions (Harrison, 2003a; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2008; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 1999; Sutherland, 2005). Research shows that teachers of this age group appear to be uncomfortable with any type of labelling of children, especially that based on formalised testing (Harrison, 2003a; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2008; Sutherland, 2005).

A resolution.

Essentially it is not the label itself that is positive or negative; what is important is how those involved respond to the label (Renzulli, 2005b). It is what we understand about that label and how we offer support to those involved that will impact on whether the label has a
positive or negative effect on a child’s view of themselves as a learner (Sutherland, 2008).

Increasingly, accepted practice in education and psychology is moving away from labelling some children as ‘gifted’ (with all others considered ‘not gifted’) and toward a focus on individual differences in developmental trajectories, recognising that pathways to high-level achievement are diverse (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Dweck, 2009; Matthews & Folsom, 2009; Renzulli, 2012). Such an approach aids in neutralising negative connotations with the gifted label. Documenting specific strengths and using these strengths for making decisions about educational provisions is crucial (Renzulli, 2005b, 2012). For example, education for the gifted should be viewed as providing opportunities to develop gifted behaviours rather than merely finding and certifying them,

In this regard, we should judiciously avoid saying that a young person is either gifted or not gifted. It is difficult to gain support for talent development when our rationale includes such statements, as ‘Elaine is a gifted third grader’. These kinds of statements offend many people and raise the accusations of elitism that have plagued special programs. But, note the difference in orientation when we focus on the behavioural characteristics that brought this student to our attention in the first place: ‘Elaine is a third grader who reads at the adult level and who has a fascination for biographies about women of scientific accomplishment’. And, note the logical and justifiable services provided for Elaine. Under the guidance of her classroom teacher, Elaine is allowed to select more challenging books in her interest area; she leaves the school two afternoons a month to meet with her mentor, a local journalist specializing in gender issues; and during time made available through curriculum compacting in her strength areas (i.e., reading, language arts, and spelling) (Renzulli, 2005b, p. 5).

Renzulli advises that when programs focus on developing the behavioural potentials of individuals the usual controversies that have caused so many people to develop anti-gifted attitudes can be avoided. By labelling the provisions rather than the children, the same goals are achieved for children, but the logic of defensible educational practices is applied (Renzulli, 2005b).
2.4 Giftedness in early childhood

According to Walsh et al. (2010), misunderstandings exist between teachers and researchers in early childhood education and gifted education in a number of areas. These misunderstandings concern:

- the identification of young gifted children;
- the labelling of young gifted children;
- appropriate educational strategies in the early childhood context; and,
- the socialisation of young potentially gifted children in the educational setting.

These misunderstandings are addressed in the following sections of this literature review.

2.4.1 Identification

Whether gifted children in the early childhood years have special needs is contested. Some scholars claim these children have no special learning needs, and that it is too early to think about their gifts (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ide, 2009; Koshy, 2009). Others acknowledge that while young children can be identified as gifted and they do have special needs, accurate assessments may be difficult (Goodhew, 2009; Harrison, 2003a; Koshy & Robinson, 2006). Advocates of this latter perspective acknowledge that as giftedness results from both genetic and environmental influence, it can be evident from infancy and throughout early childhood (Clark, 2002; Harrison, 2003b, 2005; Laine, 2010).

Supporting this perspective, a longitudinal study by Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst, and Guerin (1994) found advanced development could be identified in children as early as 18 months of age. Pfeiffer (2009) argues that most would agree that the child who is reading at
age 3 or playing competitive chess at age 6 is gifted. Mathematical ability and musical ability tend to appear quite early, given the right circumstances, however, other gifts require life experiences (Goodhew, 2009). For example, potential playwrights, historians, philosophers, entrepreneurs and economists may not show their abilities until the later stages of schooling or beyond. Other students do not show their abilities in the early years because of emotional immaturity or limited pre-school learning experiences (Goodhew, 2009).

Yet accurate assessment and identification of giftedness is difficult in very young children (Porter, 2005a). One variable to be considered is the range of a child's prior-to-school learning experiences (Davis et al., 2011). For example, while some children will have attended formal prior-to-school settings such as pre-school and childcare, others may have been solely in the care of their mother, father or extended family. Some children,

will have had a rich and exciting range of learning experiences in the home and in nursery. They may have travelled widely and met people from other cultures. They may have bedrooms full of books and a computer. Others will have had no pre-school education and, in some cases, will have spent most of their lives in homes with a single carer, few books and limited conversation (Goodhew, 2009, p. 15).

The range of a child's learning experiences prior to school impacts upon how the gifted child presents in the early childhood environment. Young children’s behaviour may also vary in different environments (Piirto, 2007), further complicating the identification process. For example, a gifted child may present very differently at home and school (NSW DEC, 2012b), modifying their behaviours to fit in with their same-age peers or classmates (Harrison, 2003a). Consequently, teachers may not be aware of the aspects of giftedness that have become more familiar to parents and other caregivers. For example: “The child who reads at home, watches complex documentaries and studies encyclopaedias may behave very differently when his or her classmates at school do not talk
about any of these things” (NSW DEC, 2012b, p. 19). It is particularly important for teachers, parents and families to share their different understandings of the gifted child (NSW DEC, 2012b).

A further complexity in the identification of the young gifted child is that some domains of giftedness are more obvious than others. For example, a verbally talented child may stand out to a pre-school teacher more than a child with advanced mathematical or creative abilities (Porter, 2005b). Without an effective understanding of giftedness, adults may not expect children who are gifted in one domain (such as verbal skills) to be gifted in another domain (the arts) as well, and so may miss identifying multiple gifts (Porter, 2005b). As well, some young children lack the opportunity to direct their own learning. This may mean that they do not know how to show their advanced skills or to concentrate for long enough to display them (White, 1985).

Despite the many barriers to the identification of the young gifted child, these children can be identified. However, it must be recognised that a gifted young child may not yet have had the opportunity or experience required to translate potential into performance. In this respect, giftedness at this age, may be determined by the ‘general ability factor’, rather than by specific talents (Cukierkorn et al., 2008; Harrison, 2004). In other words, due to a lack of exposure or training in specific talent areas, gifted preschoolers may be recognised by above-average or accelerated growth through the typical milestones of early childhood development (Cukierkorn et al., 2008).

Table 2.1 presents a synthesis of the main characteristics and behaviours noted in young gifted children (Bates & Munday, 2005; Davis et al., 2011; Harrison, 2005; Porter, 1999, 2005a; Rogers, 2002; Smutney, Walker, & Meckstroth, 1997). It is important to note that a young child does not have to show all of these to be gifted, and may exhibit some or all of them to varying degrees.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative And creative</td>
<td>Comes up with lots of original ideas and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offers detailed ideas and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tells detailed stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humour</td>
<td>Understands and creates puns and analogies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understands ‘adult’ humour</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoys jokes, funny stories</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Loves playing with language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional sensitivity</td>
<td>Intense reactions to frustrations or injustices, news, events or experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Well-developed ability to empathise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Picks up on the emotions of other children and adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced levels of judgement</td>
<td>Keen sense of justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognises that there are multiple perspectives or different ways of seeing things</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has an intense commitment to own belief or point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concern for world events or important issues on the news - environmental sustainability, war etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement with thinking and learning</td>
<td>Keen concentration and focus</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High level of curiosity/inquisitiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abstract thinking - makes comparisons, notes similarities and differences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher-order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, application and evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility in thinking - ability to consider and synthesise many sources of information; seeks to integrate knowledge to reveal a deeper picture</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big picture learning - appreciates systems of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accurate and exceptional long-term memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highly competitive; perfectionist (sets high goals for self)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analytical - critical thinking and problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asks probing questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May learn at a fast pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicality</td>
<td>High energy level - constantly moving, dancing, touching and playing with objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decreased need for sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses whole body expressively when playing and communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intense and rhythmic response to music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intense need to explore the environment/seek new experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heightened perceptual awareness</td>
<td>Attention to and awareness of visual detail (possibly photographic memory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attention to and awareness of auditory detail in voices, music, and environmental sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness of and responsiveness to textural qualities of objects (may refuse to wear clothes made from particular materials)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Superior vocabulary and grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in word meanings and derivations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in different scripts and fonts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in deciphering codes; making up their own codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in graphics, symbols and icons as a form of visual communication and diverse ways to communicate e.g. Morse code, sign language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elaborate and complex storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy and literacy</td>
<td>Early reading ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May read widely - possibly from a range of text types such as fiction, non-fiction, newspapers, magazines, internet, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, environmental print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early awareness and application of mathematical concepts (addition, subtraction, shapes including 3D, patterns, measurement and time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong memory for number, timetables, maps, visual cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to nature</td>
<td>A sense of awe and wonder in nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest and connectedness to animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and responsibility</td>
<td>Needs to feel autonomous and independent - wants to take responsibility e.g. cooking, walking to park on own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May take responsibility for group learning and play, ensuring that everyone gets a turn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Understanding these behaviours and characteristics that may be evident in early childhood may assist parents and teachers with identification of their child.
2.5 Gifted children with additional needs

Children in ethnic, racial, and linguistic minorities, or who are economically disadvantaged, female, underachievers or even those from rural communities, may go unrecognised as gifted because of limitations with traditional approaches to the measurement of giftedness (Ceci & Williams, 1997; Ford & Whiting, 2008; Frasier & Passow, 1994; Sternberg, 2004; Worrell, 2009). While a gift has no respect for such boundaries, students in these groups are less likely to be identified as gifted (Merrotsy, 2011; Reis & Renzulli, 2010; Robertson et al., 2011).

Children differing from the academic norm are also at risk of being overlooked (GERRIC, 2001). Petriwskyj (2010) noted that, across the early years classes, teachers consider diversity as children with limited English, learning difficulties or a disability. When teachers are untrained in gifted education, as many in Australia are, they tend to miss gifted children who are underachievers, divergent thinkers, visual-spatial learners, and children who mask their ability (GERRIC, 2001).

2.5.1 Twice-exceptional students

Also at risk of being excluded from identification as gifted are children referred to as having ‘dual-exceptionality’ (Fetzer, 2000; Renzulli, 1977), as being ‘twice-exceptional’ [2E] (Gallagher, 1975), ‘gifted handicapped’ (Maker, 1977), having ‘special talents and defects’ (Hollingworth, 1923), or as ‘gifted and learning disabled’ [GLD]. These are gifted children who have exceptional gifts (creative, academic, intellectual, or physical abilities) in addition to a learning or developmental disability such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD] or an autism spectrum disorder [ASD] (Amend, Schuler, & Beaver-Gavin, 2009; Foley Nicpon, Assouline, & Colangelo, 2013; Kennedy, Banks, & Grandin, 2011). For example, a student who is potentially very able may also have both visual impairment and behavioural problems (Goodhew, 2009). According
to Rogers (2010), 14% of the gifted population demonstrates some form of dual exceptionality. Of this 14%, Rogers noted, “3% of gifted students demonstrated specific learning disabilities, 7% ADHD characteristics, 3% emotional behavioural disorders and 1% Autism Spectrum Disorders” (2010, p. v).

Giftedness and disability were previously seen as distinct, discrete diagnoses, with special education and gifted education separate (Prior, 2013; Reis & McCoach, 2000). However, with the broadening conceptualisations of disability and giftedness since the 1970s (Ashman & Elkins, 2011), many researchers now agree that gifted students with learning disabilities manifest a complex array of abilities, learning challenges, and needs (Baum, Owen, & Dixon, 1991; Davis & Rimm, 2004). For many of these students, their learning disabilities often mask their abilities, thus causing both exceptionalities to appear less extreme and sometimes resulting in average or below average performance (Baum et al., 1991).

Table 2.2 (Crepeau-Hobson & Bianco, 2013, p. 143) highlights some common characteristics of gifted students with learning disabilities.

### Table 2.2: Common characteristics of gifted students with learning disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Manifestation of characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior verbal skills</td>
<td>Demonstrates inconsistent or uneven academic skills and/or academic decline over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to master complex concepts quickly</td>
<td>Makes seemingly simple and careless spelling and/or calculation errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High levels of creative and thinking and/or curiosity</td>
<td>Exhibits disruptive classroom behaviour and/or struggles with peer relations and interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep insights into complex issues and topics</td>
<td>Has difficulties with writing and other fine motor tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Manifestation of characteristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarkable spatial skills</td>
<td>Struggles to express ideas on paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates a solid work ethic in areas of interest</td>
<td>Resists simple, rote academic tasks and is easily frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of reasoning and problem-solving abilities</td>
<td>Is distractible and struggles to sustain attention and/or lacks organisational and study skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a sophisticated sense of humour</td>
<td>Is stubborn, argumentative, and opinionated yet highly sensitive to criticism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within this unique subset of the gifted population, three subgroups of twice-exceptional students have been identified (Goodhew, 2009):

1. **Students identified as gifted who have subtle learning disabilities**, which become apparent as the level of schoolwork increases in difficulty. This group is often placed in gifted programs, but creates frustration for the teacher and the students as they fail to reach expected outcomes the more difficult the work becomes. Some students in this group may mask their disability, with the result that they don’t receive the interventions or special education services that could help them manage, and possibly overcome, their disability;

2. **Students not identified as gifted or having a learning disability** because they are achieving at grade level. These students will fail to achieve their potential, as they will be working very hard to maintain grades; and,

3. **Students who are identified for their learning disability**. These students are often placed in remedial programs. The possibility that they may also be gifted is not considered. In such cases, the child’s disability masks their giftedness (Kennedy et al., 2011), causing parents, teachers, and other adults in the child’s life to focus on the child’s weaknesses, their perceived needs,
rather than on developing their talents, essentially adopting a medical approach (Goodhew, 2009).

The confusing mix of strengths and needs that a twice-exceptional child may present may baffle parents, teachers and peers (Assouline, Foley Nicpon, & Doobay, 2009). These children may ‘fall through the cracks’, both academically and socially (Goodhew, 2009). Programming for such children is difficult as their abilities “often straddle both ends of the bell-shaped curve, with strengths and weaknesses needing to be addressed in order for interventions to be successful” (Amend et al., 2009, p. 58). Yet, a greater understanding and awareness of twice-exceptional children is necessary both for their identification and in order for teachers to be able to meet the unique educational needs of these children (Prior, 2013; Wormald, 2011). It is therefore crucial that parents and teachers of twice-exceptional children can identify and support giftedness in these children in the face of the obvious difficulties of living with disabilities (Kennedy et al., 2011). By considering the whole child, parents and teachers can address both exceptionalities – the gift and the disability. By focusing on both, rather than on one exceptionality, parents and teachers can strengthen and develop a child’s innate giftedness while also intervening to support the disability. With the whole child approach adults can help twice- exceptional children recognise, develop and realise their unique potential (Kennedy et al., 2011; Rouse, 2012).
2.6 Teaching and learning of the gifted child

Prior to school settings, including the home learning environment, pre-school or childcare “have an important role in providing a nurturing and enriching environment” where the potential of the young gifted child can begin to develop (Walsh et al., 2010, p. 52). The responsibility for a gifted child’s development and learning is shared by children, parents, families, early childhood professionals, communities, states, and the nation (Blaise & Nuttall, 2011; Morrison, 2009; New South Wales Department of Education, 2011a; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004a). What happens throughout a child’s schooling is significant. However, school is only one contributor to a well-rounded and holistic education (Walker, 2011).

2.6.1 The home learning environment

Families play a large part in the intellectual development of young children with what happens in the home having a profound effect upon a child’s learning and developmental trajectory (Eyre, 2010; Morrison, 2009; Sylva et al., 2004a; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004b). Significantly, the family and the home climate have more to do with the kind of person a child will eventually become than any other factors (Freeman, 2006a, 2006b; Lapidot-Berman & Oshrat, 2009; Perry, 1998; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). For example, the results of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project (EPPE) (Sylva et al., 2004b) clearly indicate the importance of different aspects of parental activities that contribute to the quality of children’s home learning environments.

The quality of the learning environment at home (where parents are actively engaged in activities with children) promoted intellectual and social development in all children. Although parents’ social class and levels of education were related to child outcomes the quality of the home learning environment was more important and only moderately associated with social
class or mothers’ qualification levels. What parents do is more important than who they are. For this reason pre-school and school settings that do not include parent support and education are missing an important element in raising achievement and enhancing social and behavioural development (Sylva et al., 2004b, p. 57).

Engaging with activities such as reading to their child, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, playing with letters and numbers, visiting the library, painting and drawing and emphasising the alphabet, for example, remain significant positive influences which account for differences in attainment and also influence young children’s cognitive progress over the pre-school period (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2003; Sylva et al., 2004a, 2004b). Yet, as Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst and Guerin (2003) point out, the parent-child relationship is bidirectional. Children help shape their environment by way of requesting and reacting to parent actions (Makel, 2009).

In particular, parents play a significant role in developing children’s academic motivation (Garn, Matthews, & Jolly, 2012). They are also the main source of encouragement for children to do their best and to be themselves (Freeman, 2006b). Freeman advises that parents have very powerful effects on the developing child, and impact attitudes, beliefs, opportunities, habits and personality traits. For a gifted child, the family’s influence may determine whether the gift is developed to a high level or not (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008). Yet raising a gifted child may bring difficulties. Garn et al. (2012) recognises that parents of gifted children “may face additional parenting challenges that are less commonly faced by parents of average-ability learners whose needs are more readily met in the school setting” (p. 656). Parents often report a wide range of issues and difficulties in relation to providing positive personal and educational experiences for their gifted child (Grubb, 2008; Halle, Zaff, Calkins, & Margie, 2000; Piotrkowski, Botso, & Matthews, 2000).
2.6.2 Prior-to-school settings

Prior to starting school children will experience a diverse range of learning experiences. The different philosophies and approaches to children, childhood and learning are reflected in the many different forms of early childhood services and programs available for children and families (Dockett et al., 2007). Some children may spend significant periods of time being cared for by their extended family, and may begin school without attending pre-school. Other children will attend childcare from a young age and may even attend two or more pre-schools before they start school.

One constant in pre-school is the emphasis upon care, a healthy environment, and play (Einarsdóttir, 2006). The pre-school teacher plans an educational program that nurtures each child's self esteem, wellbeing and development. The pre-school program is designed to stimulate children's thinking, communicating, investigating, exploring and problem solving skills with children encouraged to join in physical activities and to develop good health and safety habits (NSW DEC, 2014b). Results from the EPPE study (Sylva et al., 2004b) highlight the benefits of attending pre-school. Sylva et al. found that “pre-school attendance improves all children’s development. Children with no pre-school experience (the 'home group') had poorer cognitive attainment, sociability and concentration when they started primary school" (p. 3).

Central to early childhood education and care is the role of play as a primary learning tool through which children learn (Einarsdóttir, 2006; Kearns, 2010; Morrison, 2009). Play is “the key pedagogy used by early childhood practitioners to support and enhance development” (Kearns, 2010, p. 3). This central role for play has been confirmed in the Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF] (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009a).
While play is seen as central, there is also emphasis on the following: Intentional teaching, where teachers "promote learning through worthwhile and challenging experiences and interactions that promote high-level thinking skills" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009b, p. 15); and assessment for learning towards specified learning outcomes, including reflection on whether learning opportunities “build on what children already know” and “whether there are sufficiently challenging experiences for all children” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009b, pp. 17-18).

The National Quality Standard (NQS) used for accreditation of early childhood services in Australia also recognises the needs of children who have been identified as gifted. In their definition of children with additional needs who “require or will benefit from specific considerations or adaptations”, the NQS includes “children who are gifted or have special abilities” (Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, 2011, p. 202).

2.6.3 The early years of school

Like all children, gifted children have a right to a curriculum that caters for their individual needs and that allows them to develop their strengths in an environment where diversity is recognised and celebrated (Bates & Munday, 2005; Cooper, 2009). ACARA (2015) acknowledges that gifted children are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning opportunities which are aligned with their individual learning needs, strengths, interests and goals. However, Freeman (2006a) has found that in a busy mainstream classroom, promoting the needs of children who are likely to be ultimately successful is not often seen as a priority.

Recent educational innovations, however, have resulted in connections between quality general education and quality education for the gifted (Folsom, 2006; Pfeiffer, 2003; Robinson et al., 2000; Van Tassel-Baska, 2009). In Australia, the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2010) is based on the assumptions that students in
Australian classrooms have multiple, diverse and changing needs that are shaped by individual learning histories and abilities as well as cultural and language backgrounds and socio-economic factors (ACARA, 2010). Schools and teachers have the flexibility to assist children to progress at different rates through the ‘learning map’ provided by the curriculum (ACARA, 2010).

Practices that have been a mainstay of many special programs for the gifted are gradually being absorbed into general education by reform models designed to upgrade the performance of all students (Matthews & Folsom, 2009; Renzulli, 2005a). Quality early childhood education for gifted children looks like quality early childhood education for all children (Bates & Munday, 2005; Eyre, 2010; Van Tassel-Baska, 2009).

Examples of such practices can be found in the work of Bloom (1985), Folsom (2006), Gardner (1983), Maker (1982), Renzulli (1978) and Sternberg (1984, 2000). Strategies include curriculum differentiation, inquiry, interdisciplinary explorations, and problem-based learning (Subotnik et al., 2011). Curriculum and teaching strategies that promote complex learning including high-level content knowledge and higher-order thinking, along with critical thinking and metacognition, self-regulation, and creativity, have long been staples of gifted education (Bates & Munday, 2005; Davis et al., 2011; Goodhew, 2009; McCoach & Siegle, 2007; Piirto, 2007; Van Tassel-Baska & Little, 2003). These concepts and practices provide an environment in which gifted children thrive. They now also match the characteristics of ideal classrooms described by general education reformers (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Professional Learning Directorate, 2004; PSCD, 2003; Siraj-Blatchford, 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Sylva et al., 2004a). They are now found in state K-12 educational standards (PSCD, 2003) as well as standards that govern teacher education programs (New South Wales Department of Education, 2011a, 2011b; Pfeiffer, 2003; PSCD, 2003; Winebrenner, 2001). Hockett (2009) advises,
The curriculum promoted by general education curriculum experts for all learners and the curriculum promoted by experts in gifted education curriculum for highly able learners have more in common than they do at odds. There are no attributes of curriculum emphasised by either field that are in direct conflict with one another. Broadly, both agree that high-quality curriculum is authentic, outcome driven, flexible for individual differences, and challenging. Distinctions are primarily differences in rationales and emphases. In general education, curriculum experts and professional organisations tend to base their recommendations on research; whereas, gifted education grounds its curricular guidance on presumed characteristics and needs of gifted learners as a whole (Hockett, 2009, p. 412).

Meeting the social-emotional needs of children, an important consideration in gifted education (Goodhew, 2009; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Morgan, 2007; Neihart et al., 2002; Piirto, 2007; Porter, 2005a, 2005b), is also receiving more intense attention in general education classrooms (Charney, 2002; Cooper, 2009; Marsh, 2010).

Advocacy for gifted education becomes advocacy for inclusive and individualised education for all children, not for better treatment of the gifted (Goodhew, 2009; Porter, 2005a), reflecting a democratic ideal that accommodates the full range of individual differences in the mainstream student population (Renzulli, 2005a). Consequently, priority must be placed on assisting teachers to deliver high quality pedagogy and provide all children with quality learning experiences (Gore, Ladwig, Griffiths, & Amosa, 2007; Ladwig, 2009).

### 2.6.4 Aspirations and Expectations

Teacher and parent expectations of children’s capacities can be a powerful predictor of the children’s achievements. If children are not presented with challenging materials, they may not be able to demonstrate their advanced development (Whitmore, 1982). In some cases, gifted children have modified their behaviour and abilities to meet the expectations of a prior-to-school setting by producing, for example, ‘age-appropriate’ drawings at pre-school while drawing with
more skill and detail at home (Harrison, 2005). When children have been identified as gifted, expectations of achievement change – for parents, teachers, and the children themselves (Clark, 2002).

**The expectations of parents.**
Current literature acknowledges that parents’ attitudes, values, and expectations of their young gifted child have significant influence on their child’s behaviour and aspirations (Dweck, 2009; Fonseca, 2010; Morris, 2013; Piirto, 2007; Porter, 2005a). Most parents simply want their children to be happy and well-adjusted (Freeman, 2006b). Some parents even deny their children’s special abilities in an attempt to keep them ‘normal’ and ‘well-adjusted’ (Davis et al., 2011). Other parents seem to magnify their child’s abilities and place excessive pressure on them for high achievement (Freeman, 2006b; Piirto, 2007). Either of these extremes, denying or magnifying giftedness, may cause problems for gifted children (Davis et al., 2011).

Parental provision of both *support* and *challenge* is crucial. In his study of 210 exceptionally gifted children, Csikszentmihalyi (cited in Piirto, 2007) discovered that the most motivated children came from families who provided both support and challenge. In comparison with children whose families provided challenge, but not support; or support, but not challenge; and neither challenge nor support, the children from families that provided both support and challenge were more intrinsically motivated to learn. However, finding a successful balance of both the expectations of others and the gifted child’s expectations may be difficult (Arthur & Cremin, 2010; Clark, 2002). When parents agree on values such as the importance of study, learning and school; respect for individuality; and recognition of the need for reasonable amounts of recreation and fun, this may result in a positive, achievement-oriented atmosphere (Dweck, 2009). In order to strike the most appropriate balance it is essential that gifted children are assisted to be successful at worthwhile tasks, to
appreciate their achievements, and to set realistic expectations for themselves (Porter, 2005a).

Within general society it is often assumed that raising a gifted child is an easy task – something parents should be happy about all of the time. Many believe such children do not fall prey to many of the problems that other children encounter, including poor academic achievement, bullying, or risky behaviours (Fonseca, 2010). However, being the principal carer of a gifted child can present special obstacles, risks, errors, challenges and joys (Porter, 2005a). This may cause concern and confusion for parents as they attempt to support their young children’s learning and emotional adjustment and determine an appropriate response to the gift (Porter, 2005a). Some parents may feel the weight of the responsibility of ensuring their child realises their potential. At the same time, parents may look for permission not to focus exclusively on their gifted child and attend equally to other aspects of family life, such as looking after themselves as individuals, their marital relationship and any other children (Porter, 2005a).

Parental over-involvement with a gifted child is considered another risk factor (Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000). Pfeiffer and Stocking caution that some parents may attempt to live their lives through their highly gifted children, creating excessive pressure and parental intrusiveness. This may result in the gifted child rebelling with oppositional-defiant, disobedient, attention-seeking, and even aggressive behaviours. Other children may respond by lying and stealing, experiencing somatic complaints, anxious/depressed mood, and eating disorders (Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000).

**Expectations of teachers.**

The expectations from those outside the family may also be problematic. Teacher responses to the gifted child may be less than positive, causing such children to lower their view of themselves.
Statements such as, “‘Of course you don’t need any help, you know everything’ and, ‘You’re capable of better work than that’ are unlikely to support a positive self-view” (Clark, 2002, p. 146). Even the most gifted children are better at some things than others and they often suffer from people expecting them to be able to do everything equally well (Arthur & Cremin, 2010). Given that teachers have one of the most significant influences on the educational development of gifted students, reports of negative teacher attitudes about giftedness are cause for concern (Lassig, 2009).

**Expectations of the gifted themselves.**

The expectations gifted children set for themselves may be unrealistic. Davis and Rimm (2004) acknowledge that gifted children often have generally higher levels of internal control and personal responsibility than ‘mainstream’ children. This may lead them to set unrealistic goals for themselves. Failure to reach such goals may result in frustration and feelings of incompetence and inadequacy. This frustration occurs not because children have produced an inferior product, rather that they expected their performance to match their vision. They may believe they have failed, but in fact their efforts may be perfectly reasonable given their age (Porter, 2005a). Such perfectionism is a common trait of the gifted (Clark, 2002).

Gifted children need to understand that their current ability is just a starting point. Challenge, effort and learning are needed to fulfill their potential (Dweck, 2009). Providing examples of highly accomplished people and the effort required for them to make their contributions can be beneficial, “In short, gifted students need the same motivational lessons that all children need, but maybe more so, since many of them may have been coasting along and receiving accolades” (Dweck, 2009, p. 311). Matthews and Folsom (2009) concur,

Teachers who understand how to challenge all their students intellectually and encourage their social/emotional learning – and who are given the time, support, and resources they need
to do that – are much better prepared to recognise individual development differences, plan appropriately differentiated learning experiences and recommend other settings or options on an as-needed basis. The needs of all students – including the intellectually advanced – will be much better met if all teachers have the training and support they need to provide high-quality learning experiences, and when a range of learning options is available to address individual development differences, by subject area (Matthews & Folsom, 2009, p. 25).

When children are identified as gifted, expectations of achievement change – for parents, teachers, and the children themselves (Clark, 2002).

**2.6.5 The approach to learning and development**

Every child has an individual base of potential abilities that require cognitive, social, emotional, motor, and other types of stimulation by the environment to develop adequately (Mooij, 2013). However, research shows that, by the age of four, the level of social-emotional and intellectual development among children may differ by five to six years (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Mooij, 2013).

For parents, pre-school and Kindergarten teachers, the approach to the learning and development of the gifted child is important. Both pre-school and Kindergarten teachers must understand that child development theory is based upon the typical – not atypical – child (McGee, 2012). McGee acknowledges that most teachers quickly realise when a child is developing at slower pace and begin implementing strategies to assist the child in ‘catching up’ to his or school. The practitioner may not understand that advanced children must be provided with activities that challenge them to continue to grow in the area(s) in which their gifts lie, or they may realise that a child is advanced but do not have the teaching tools or
strategies to appropriately meet his or her needs (McGee, 2012, p. 27).

The research of the US National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009) established 12 core principles of child development and learning that inform practice. They are:

1. All areas of development and learning are important;
2. Learning and development follows sequences;
3. Development and learning proceed at varying rates;
4. Development and learning result from an interaction of maturation and experience;
5. Early experiences have profound effects on development and learning;
6. Development proceeds towards greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities;
7. Children develop best when they have secure relationships;
8. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts;
9. Children learn in a variety of ways;
10. Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation and promoting language, cognition, and social competence;
11. Development and learning advance when children are challenged; and,
12. Children’s experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning (pp. 10-16).

These principles highlight the need for a holistic approach and for quality educational provisions for all children. NAEYC (2009) adds, “All the domains of development and learning – physical, social-emotional, and cognitive – are important, and they are closely interrelated. Children's development and learning in one domain influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains” (p. 11). Without implementation of such principles, the gifted child may encounter “educationally enforced underachievement” in preschool or primary school (Mooij, 2013, p. 608).
Research shows that gifted children require specific intellectual, social-emotional and motivational stimulation – consideration of not only their potential, but also their actual abilities, including self-regulation abilities in play and learning (Bates & Munday, 2005; Mooij, 2013; Robertson et al., 2011). Consequently, the gifted child needs to be identified and supported during both pre-school and primary school.

**2.6.6 Early Intervention**

Extensive evidence in the research literature shows that early learning experiences have a critical influence on later learning, employment opportunities, health and wellbeing, and on general life trajectories (Davis et al., 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Dockett et al., 2007; Goodhew, 2009; Pfeiffer & Petscher, 2008; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The period between the ages of 4 and 9, in particular, is significant for the development of self-identity and attitudes to learning in gifted children (Harrison, 2003a, 2005; Hollingworth, 1931). In this period “early identification is essential for the well-being and development of the potential of young gifted children” (Morrissey, 2014, p. 14). Yet many examples can be found of individuals demonstrating great potential as children, who failed to develop this potential into high achievement as adults (Hernández Finch, Speirs Neumeister, Burney, & Cook, 2014).

Few programs exist for gifted pre-schoolers, and even fewer pre-school teachers understand the characteristics, identification and required provisions for gifted pre-schoolers (Piirto, 2007). A study of the issues and concerns of the parents of gifted pre-schoolers and pre-school teachers in relation to early identification and programming for giftedness showed that 74% of parents compared to 50% of teachers believed that giftedness should be identified in pre-school, and 76% of parents compared to only 32% of teachers believed that gifted pre-school children require a different curriculum (Piirto, 2007; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007). Therefore, although research
strongly supports the practice of early identification and programming for giftedness, significant discrepancies exist between the views of parents in comparison to teachers (Grubb, 2008). Research recognises this discrepancy has implications for the education of young gifted children:

- they are unlikely to be identified, and if identified, unlikely to be individually catered for; and,

- late identification and intervention may result in schools failing to meet children’s needs during their transition to school, discouraging them from the very beginning of their formal education (Claxton & Meadows, 2009; Grubb, 2008; Koshy & Robinson, 2006).

In this respect, early intervention makes a significant difference to both a young gifted child’s social-emotional and intellectual development (Chamberlin et al., 2007; Clark, 2002; Goodhew, 2009; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Neihart et al., 2002; Porter, 2005b; Silverman, 2000). Piirto (2007) confirms,

> When these children enter school, they are enthusiastic and capable, but soon find themselves forced to conform and hide their academic talent. By the time they do get into even the minimal programs being provided to academically talented children, which usually begin at third or fourth grade, they are often confirmed underachievers (p. 224).

There has been little research addressing the types of educational interventions that are most successful with young gifted children (Jolly & Kettler, 2008; Robinson, 2000, 2008). What has been conducted has focused mainly on their identification rather than on the teaching techniques that are most effective to develop and nurture their talents (Robinson, 2000).
Walsh, Kemp, Hodge and Bowes (2012) suggest educational interventions in early childhood gifted education with young gifted children:

- enrichment, the process of broadening the curriculum options offered to these children;
- acceleration, including the presentation of intellectually demanding material at an earlier age and/or early entry to formal school; and,
- ability grouping, that is, placing children of similar intellectual ability together for both instructional and socio-affective purposes (Walsh et al., 2012, p. 104).

The analysis above heightens the need for Kindergarten teachers to consider gifted children’s transition to school. In essence, ‘catching’ the gifted child as they start school, which may prevent the development of social-emotional and behavioural difficulties later.

2.7 Transition to school

Transition to school is something that almost every child will experience. It can be exciting, scary, amazing and nerve-wracking, all at the same time. Young children labelled as gifted may feel heightened social-emotional challenges during the transition to school process. What transition to school involves and how the children labelled as gifted may react is now considered.

The transition to primary school includes the period before, during and after a child’s move into primary school, either from home or from both an early childhood program and home (Arnold et al., 2007). It is a period when children’s roles, identities, and expectations change (Rogoff, 2003). It is also a time of changes in the expectations of others and the patterns of interaction and relationships around and including children (Dockett et al., 2007;
Fabian, 2010). Also occurring during the transition to school are changes for others:

- changes for parents as they become the parents of a school child;
- changes for teachers as they begin building relationships with new children and families; and,
- changes for communities as children, families and schools seek access to resources and support (Dockett & Perry, 2007b).

Transitions to school are understood as multilayered processes that involve multiple discontinuities (Petriwskyj, Thorpe, & Tayler, 2005). Transition is an ongoing ‘process’; a culmination of children’s present experiences, shaped by previous experiences in the home and child care settings. Transition is not just about the challenges faced as the child changes context from pre-school or home to participate in the school context. There is also an emphasis on future goals and what is yet to be accomplished in the school context (Rogoff, 1995). The transition process includes the hopes and aspirations of the child and their family as they start their formal learning journey (ETC, 2011).

Strong relationships between stakeholders (between children, children and teachers, families and teachers, teachers in different settings) offer a secure base for effective transition of children (Niesel & Griebel, 2007). Within the transition period, opportunities are provided to establish and maintain positive, respectful collaboration between home and school contexts that sets a pattern for ongoing interaction (ETC, 2011; Gallagher, 2005). Families are able to build links for their children and themselves between prior-to-school and school experiences and to collaborate with educators and other professionals in ways that strengthen and support each child’s ongoing learning and development. Families are also able to reflect on children’s attainments and to share responsibilities for future achievements (ETC, 2011).
2.7.1 The importance of a positive transition

A range of research indicates the significance of a positive transition to school. For example:

- A positive start to school is linked to positive school trajectories, in both academic achievement and social competence (Alexander & Entwistle, 1998; Ramey & Campbell, 1991; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000); and,

- Children’s images of themselves as learners are influenced greatly by their transition to school experiences (Hadley, Wilcox, & Rice, 1994). Their experiences of success, or otherwise, have a direct impact on their future success at school and on their own sense of self (Alexander & Entwistle, 1998; Petriwskyj & Greishaber, 2011).

Successful adaptation to school is influenced by many factors, including the academic, social, emotional, behavioural, and cognitive competencies of the child (McIntyre, Blacher, & Baker, 2006) as well as family and community factors (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Some researchers have conceptualised the Kindergarten transition as a “sensitive period” (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) necessary to establish positive, academic, and social trajectories in a child’s educational experience (Eckert et al., 2007; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). A positive start to school, including initial success across social and academic areas is a key factor in setting up cycles of achievement which are important for all children (Burrell & Bubb, 2000). Children’s transition and initial adjustment is critical for their development, wellbeing and progress through school (Burrell & Bubb, 2000; Oliver, 2008). Children who have a positive start to school are likely to regard school as an important place and to have positive expectations of their ability to learn and they will succeed at school (Margetts, 2007, 2009).
2.7.2 What happens in the transition to school?

There are no common transition to school policies across Australian states and territories. Essentially, school systems in each state determine priorities, but it is left to individual schools, or sometimes regions, to determine the actual form of transition programs implemented. Decisions about the nature of transition programs are often based on the availability of human, physical and financial resources (Dockett et al., 2007). Inclusive transition processes should take into account a range of variations within a group of children. They need to provide support to individual children and families in negotiating their changing circumstances and roles (Petriwskyj & Greishaber, 2011, p. 81).

2.7.3 Transition practices

In NSW, the Starting School Research Project developed a set of guidelines for transition to school which have been used as the basis to develop transition programs in schools and pre-schools (Dockett & Perry, 2007b). Drawing upon these guidelines, practices that have become common within Australian schools are:

- orientation sessions;
- intersetting communication;
- continuity of pedagogy; and,
- early assessment.

These practices are commonly implemented by Kindergarten teachers, schools and pre-schools to support the child and their family during the transition to school.
Orientation sessions.

These sessions generally focus on children finding out what school looks like, what children do at school, and meeting some key adults and children in the school (Einarsdóttir, Perry, & Dockett, 2008). Transition research suggests orientation sessions are good practice (Einarsdóttir et al., 2008; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). These sessions are often planned by the pre-schools in cooperation with the primary schools (Einarsdóttir et al., 2008) and pre-school teachers may attend the orientation sessions. Such sessions provide invaluable opportunities for children to become familiar and comfortable with the school, their teachers and their peers. The sessions also provide Kindergarten teachers with opportunities to observe the children socialising, working and playing.

Activities undertaken during orientation sessions usually reflect the Kindergarten teacher’s beliefs about what is important as children start school and what makes a successful transition (Einarsdóttir et al., 2008). For some children, the activities completed during this time may form part of the child’s first impression of what happens in the Kindergarten classroom, and this is significant. According to Murray (2014), “First impressions seem to matter for children” (p. 55). Research by Harrison and Murray (Harrison & Murray, 2014; Murray, 2008; Murray & Harrison, 2005) found that children’s feelings about school do not change significantly over the school year and “this has implications for what educators do to orient children to the formal school environment prior to the start of school, to encourage the development of strong, positive and supportive relationships between children and significant others” (p. 55).

Orientation sessions also give children opportunities to become familiar and comfortable with the school and their teacher. Children may begin to feel that school is a place they belong. According to Broström (2007),
A fundamental goal of a school-start transition is that children feel *suitable* in school, that is to have a feeling of well being and belonging. Children feel ‘suitable’ when they successfully negotiate the daily challenges of Kindergarten life, including both social (peer related) and academic (content related) challenges. Feeling suitable is crucial to the child’s learning and development, as well as to a fundamental and continuous sense of well being (p. 52).

Supporting children to feel ‘suitable’ in school is a general goal of orientation sessions during the transition to school.

**Intersetting communication.**

Communication between pre-school and primary school teachers is important in the transition to school (Hopps, 2014). Such communication has been promoted as a way of gathering authentic information about children’s prior knowledge to assist school educators in constructing teaching and learning programs, with the consequence that children will become confident and capable learners in the new school setting (Dockett & Perry, 2006; Niesel & Griebel, 2007).

Margetts (2002a, 2002b) and Dockett and Perry (2009) have not only emphasised the transfer of children’s learning and development records but have also promoted teachers:

- visiting each other’s programs;
- developing shared expectations of children;
- planning transition activities collaboratively;
- developing complementary curriculum;
- sharing resources; and
- developing family transition networks.

Margetts (2002b) argues that ongoing communication between pre-school and Kindergarten teachers is a critical component of successful transition programs. She has outlined particular communication strategies, including the transfer of children’s records
from pre-school to school, and educators visiting each other’s settings to discuss children.

Intersetting communication provides a crucial connection between pre-school and primary school that can build relationships between children’s teachers. These relationships have the potential to impact on the experiences of children as they start school, as well as their educational outcomes (Hopps, 2014).

**Continuity of pedagogy.**
Continuity is defined as “coherence of children’s experience in curriculum, pedagogy and culture” (Petriwskyj et al., 2005, p. 57). Continuity between home, pre-school and primary school is appropriate to both inclusion and transition, reducing the alienation children from culturally and socially diverse backgrounds may feel in school (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Sheets, 2005).

Continuity between educational programs is seen as an important element of transition to school (Einarsdóttir et al., 2008). Aiming to provide pedagogical continuity between pre-school and school, Kindergarten teachers often provide free-play activities for the children, for part of each day, for the first few weeks of school. The Kindergarten teachers attempt to avoid ‘culture shock’ (Broström, 2002), with its potentially detrimental effect on children when pre-school and school hold different expectations of academic learning.

**Early assessment.**
Dockett et al. (2007) recognise that only a few school systems use pre-enrolment screening of children to determine school entry. However, many do incorporate assessment of children within the first year of school. Some states use developmental checklists (for example, Tasmania has used the Revised Kindergarten Development Check) (Neihart, 2007) and other states use assessment schedules tied to curriculum areas such as the NSW
Best Start Literacy and Numeracy assessments (NSW DEC, 2011). However, during the transition to school, standardised testing is often reserved for children and their families seeking special placement such as early intervention or specialist school placement, and for children who are thought to be gifted (Dockett et al., 2007).

An equitable educational beginning for all children should start with obtaining a range of information about their competencies as they commence schooling (Wellisch & Brown, 2012). Appropriate assessment is essential to assist in programming linked to children’s competencies (Thomson & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2013). However, assessment of young children is a contentious matter, with accurate assessment difficult in young children (Davis et al., 2011; Hertberg-Davis, 2009; Porter, 2005a).

In an attempt to address the assessment and teaching of young children starting school, the NSW DEC has devised and implemented the Best Start Assessment (NSW DEC, 2011). This assessment is designed to be completed within the first five weeks of the Kindergarten year. The assessment aims to help teachers identify the literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills that each child brings to school. The NSW DEC reports that each child’s Best Start Assessment results will be used to develop quality teaching and learning programs. Emerging from this assessment is the NSW Gifted and Talented Kindergarten program (NSW DEC, 2011), which provides a document to support teachers in their identification of gifted children in NSW (Wellisch & Brown, 2012).

2.7.4 Readiness for School

There has been a lot of research about children’s readiness for school. Definitions of readiness can be given in terms of age, or stage of development, a demonstrated set of skills, or relationships and interactions (Dockett et al., 2007). Such definitions focus on children (National Education Goals Panel (NEGP), 1998, 2000) and
the importance of continuity in both curriculum and context (Sanders et al., 2005). Recently, there have been reconceptualisations of school readiness to incorporate other people as well as children. The working definition of readiness published by US NEGP (1997) identified three components of school readiness:

i. children’s readiness for school (enabling them to participate in classroom and learning experiences);

ii. schools’ readiness for children (schools responding to the children enrolled); and,

iii. family and community supports and services that contribute to children’s readiness (promoting family and community environments that support learning).

i. **Children’s readiness for school**

Studies show that a range of belief systems exist among teachers about what children need to be ready for school (Lee & Ginsburg, 2007; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Beliefs vary among preschool and Kindergarten teachers, both about what children need to get ready for school, and how to teach children those skills (Foulks & Morrow, 1989; Piotrkowski et al., 2000). However, both groups of teachers consistently place academic skills at or near the bottom of their readiness priorities (Currie, 2001; Lin et al., 2003; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Kagan, Moore, and Bredkamp (1995) reinforced this with their five dimensions of children’s readiness:

- physical wellbeing and motor development;
- social-emotional development;
- approaches to learning;
- language development; and,
- cognition and general knowledge.
In another example, Duncan and colleagues (Duncan et al., 2007) identified key dimensions of children’s readiness to learn as:

- general cognitive ability (oral language, basic literacy and numeracy skills);
- attention related skills (task persistence, self-regulation and impulsivity); and,
- social-emotional skills and behaviour (internalising and externalising behaviours).

A great deal of research attention has been devoted to investigating these areas (Emig, Moore, & Scarupa, 2001; Halle et al., 2000), sometimes with the aim of developing a list of desirable or essential skills. Defining the skills that all children require to be ready for school remains a challenge, often because different people have different views about what is required (Dockett & Perry, 2007b). Three other issues also confuse discussions of children’s readiness: assessment of readiness; age of readiness; and social-emotional readiness. These issues are now discussed.

**Assessing children's readiness.**

In a climate of increasing calls for schools to be accountable for educational outcomes, it is not surprising that there is an accompanying focus on assessment (Dockett et al., 2007). In some instances, this extends to assessment for school readiness. Measures of readiness typically assess the skills of individual children (Neimeyer & Scott-Little, 2001). Criticisms of these measures include their assessment of isolated skills and a lack of data related to the validity of the tests (Snow, 2006). In their meta-analysis of readiness assessments and their predictive power for school outcomes, La Paro and Pianta (2000) reported that readiness assessments provide limited information about academic and social success in the first three years of school. Other factors – including
what happens at school – account for the majority of variance after two to three years at school.

**Age and readiness.**

In Australia there is much variation among children starting school, and some of this can be attributed to age (Dockett et al., 2007). However, with recent moves away from stage theory and maturation theory in early childhood education, there is greater awareness that children’s development is influenced by more than their age (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). With such moves comes the accompanying realisation that children’s experiences have a major influence on their development, including their perceived readiness for school (Dockett et al., 2007).

Some parents choose not to send their children to school when eligible, preferring instead to ‘hold them out’ of school until they are a year older than most of their peers and are perceived to have an educational and social advantage (Graue & DiPerna, 2000). In the US, delayed entry is more common for boys than girls (Graue & DiPerna, 2000; Marshall, 2003), and among families of higher socio-economic backgrounds (Bellisimo, Sacks, & Mergendoller, 1995). In Australia, anecdotal reports show similar results (Dockett & Perry, 2001b).

Delaying the entry of some children widens the gap in age in any class and has educational implications for the first year of school (Dockett et al., 2007). These implications include:

1. **escalation of the first year of school curriculum,** “the older children will tend to set the pace and establish the norms, whereas those who entered when eligible may appear to be behind” (Zill, Loomis, & West, 1997, p. 4); and

2. **increasing emphasis on children being ‘ready’ for school raises questions of the role of early childhood services in preparing**
children for school (Dockett & Perry, 2001b), “The emphasis on school readiness has also led many parents and school administrators to expect that children possess basic academic skills (e.g. identifying sound-letter relationships and shapes) prior to Kindergarten entrance” (Stipek, 2002, p. 8).

**Social-emotional readiness.**

There are calls to define and assess readiness in terms other than children’s academic skills and abilities (Dockett et al., 2007). One response has been to focus upon children’s social-emotional readiness. Positive social-emotional development is often based upon relationships, with children’s ability to engage in positive and supportive interactions underpinned by their ability to regulate their own behaviour and to understand the feelings and views of others (Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006; Thompson, 2002). Wellisch (2004) identifies attachment to parents and social competence as important indicators of social-emotional readiness.

In addition to these social-emotional indicators of school readiness, teachers identify attention related skills (Duncan et al., 2007) such as a child’s ability to understand and follow instructions, express their needs and ideas, play cooperatively, be physically well, be able to concentrate and complete tasks, and hold a pencil correctly (Wellisch, 2004). Such skills have enormous impact upon the child’s school day.

**ii. Schools’ readiness for children**

Piotrkowski et al. (2000) emphasise the interactive responsibility of the school and the community, with readiness including the “social, political, organisational, educational, and personal resources that support children’s success at school entry” (p. 554). The focus is not only on the child, but also on what supports are available for the child.
Based on the notion that schools should be ready for children, as much as children are ready for school (Freeman & Powers-Costello, 2011), the NEGP (1997) outlined three sets of characteristics of ready schools:

- these schools provide necessary supports for children. For example, they focus on transition programs, make links between prior-to-school services and schools, and adjust their educational approaches to respond to individual children. They have professional staff and environments conducive to learning and staff have positive expectations for all children;

- the teaching and learning programs at ready schools support the professional development of teachers, recognise the importance of adjusting teaching styles to respond to children, and facilitate parent involvement; and

- ready schools are flexible and do not aim to have programs where ‘one size fits all’. Instead, they adapt to find what works in individual circumstances, taking responsibility for each child’s success. Leadership in ready schools is strong and articulate, with leaders able to determine and access appropriate resources. Ready schools also recognise that support from outside the school, such as adequate health care and nutrition, is also beneficial for children. As a consequence, these schools promote collaborations among services and partnerships for learning.

- **Family and community supports**

The third area identified by the NEGP (1997) as contributing to readiness relates to family and community supports.

**Family supports**

Many family factors have been linked to children’s readiness for school (Dockett et al., 2007). These include families’ socio-economic
status, maternal education, care-giving practices, and parenting attitudes (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002). Similarly, Melhuish et al. (2001) and Sylva et al. (2004b) found the social class characteristics of parents, for example their level of education, occupational status and family income, were associated with both cognitive and social-emotional outcomes for children. It is often proposed that where children are advantaged in these characteristics, parents are able to offer services, goods, parental actions, and social connections that greatly benefit their children (Melhuish, 2010). In contrast, limited access to such resources and experiences may put children at risk of developmental problems (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

The presence of family stressors such as marital difficulties or financial stress has also been negatively linked to children’s readiness for school (Zill & West, 2001). Consequently, children experiencing some of these family factors may be perceived as not being ready for school.

Community supports

The ETC Research Group’s (2011, pp. 1-4) Transition to school: Position statement recognises community supports and involvement in terms of opportunities, aspirations, expectations and entitlements:

Opportunities:

Community recognition and support for transition to school marks this transition as an important life event. Transition to school affords opportunities for communities to celebrate children and families and to demonstrate the value of early education as well as respect for those involved in this endeavour. The transition to school is an opportunity to strengthen the community identity of schools and prior-to-school settings and the place of these institutions within communities (ETC, 2011, p. 1).
Aspirations:
Communities aspire to provide ongoing support and resources to promote children’s positive engagement in school and to reap the social, cultural, educational and economic benefits of education that are regarded as valuable, relevant and attainable. Communities also aspire to provide the support, resources, services and living conditions that promote the wellbeing of children and families. Communities with strong social networks and access to resources that can be mobilised to support children and families are well positioned to promote positive transitions to school (ETC, 2011, p. 2).

Expectations:
“Communities expect schools to be sites where children are regarded as competent and capable learners, experience a sense of belonging, and enact the rights and responsibilities of citizenship” (ETC, 2011, p. 3).

Entitlements:
“Communities are entitled to be regarded as essential contributors to children’s education, and to have a major role and place within education institutions” (ETC, 2011, p. 4).

Within these opportunities, aspirations, expectations and entitlements, communities can provide a wide range of resources and supports to families. These include the physical resources located within the community, such as schools, childcare and health services, as well as a network of relationships that both safeguard and support families (Fegan & Bowes, 2004; Kirk-Downey & Perry, 2006).
2.8 Transition for the gifted child

2.8.1 Introduction

In contrast with ‘mainstream’ children, the gifted child may have different perceptions and expectations about starting school (Whitton, 2005; Whitton, Dockett, & Perry, 2003). In The Starting School Research Project, Whitton (2005) gathered data from 20 gifted children and their parents prior to the children beginning school. When compared with data from more than 300 other children who participated in the Starting School Research Project (Dockett & Perry, 2001a), Whitton found that gifted children ranked knowledge most highly as a concern about starting school, emphasising learning, working and developing more knowledge. This focus on knowledge is in contrast to the concerns identified by ‘mainstream children’ starting school (2005, p. 29) who nominated rules, dispositions and social adjustment before knowledge.

The concerns of the parents of gifted children also differ from those of mainstream children’s parents. Whitton’s (2005) study found that parents of gifted children had two primary concerns, both of which related to schoolwork. Firstly, the school’s ability to stimulate and challenge their children was highlighted. Secondly, parents of gifted children were concerned with their children’s social adjustment to school life. However, they were more concerned with ways in which their child would work with the teacher in order to learn, rather than about working and playing with other children in the class. In contrast, social adjustment with peers was the primary concern of ‘mainstream’ parents (Whitton, 2005). The parents of ‘mainstream children’ ranked knowledge eighth (Dockett & Perry, 2001a).

Gallagher (2005) also highlighted the need for a focus on academic challenge in the gifted child’s adjustment to their role as a school student. While teacher disposition, lack of knowledge of giftedness and the use of a limited range of measures in the identification process were considered significant factors impacting upon the
transition process, the main focus for both parents and children was academic challenge. Similarly, a study by Solow (2003) reported the responses of parents when asked what issues related to the education of their gifted children were of greatest priority. Solow's findings highlighted three main areas of concern for parents:

- provision of professional co-advocacy to aid their efforts to attain appropriate educational programs for their children;
- promotion of understanding about their experiences through regular and open communication with professionals and support services; and,
- assistance in understanding and working with school systems allowing individual needs to be identified and improved.

The results of the studies by Solow (2003), Whitton (2005) and Gallagher (2005) acknowledge the particular expectations of gifted children and their families about the purpose and function of school for their children. The particular concerns of gifted children and their parents could be addressed in transition programs specific to them.

### 2.8.2 Readiness of the school for the gifted child

A child entering school with ability or achievement levels above syllabus expectations will need a more conscious and focused intervention if his or her learning and development are to proceed well (NSW DEC, 2012a; Rogers, 2002). The NSW DEC (2012a) acknowledges that children starting school may have already achieved Early Stage 1 learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy as set out in NSW Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards syllabus documents, even though they have only just entered school. Each year, data collected from the Best Start Kindergarten assessment (NSW DEC, 2011; 2008) indicates that
many children are achieving beyond expectations on entry to school. It is likely that some of these children can be identified as being gifted (Gould, 2012).

There may be a mismatch between what gifted children may know and can do and what the Early Stage 1 curriculum offers in the early years of school. Such a mismatch may have negative consequences for the gifted child. For example, when children are required to sit through lessons aimed at learning outcomes that they have already achieved, they may begin to underachieve, misbehave, become anxious or even disengage with school (Porter, 1999; Reis & McCoach, 2000). When these children are provided with learning experiences that are challenging, they tend to make good progress with their learning, are much more likely to engage at school, are better adjusted and tend to be happier (Colangelo, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). Therefore, some deliberate strategies are needed for teachers to identify and plan appropriately for children with ability or achievement levels above syllabus expectations (NSW DEC, 2012a).

**Early entrance to school.**

The question of when a child should start school is further complicated when a child’s development is ahead of their peers. A child with advanced development may be academically ready to start school at an age younger than usual. While all children have unique developmental pathways that need to be considered upon school entry in order to facilitate their optimal development, “schools tend to think of classrooms as homogeneous – by virtue of chronological age when, in fact, classrooms reflect the diversity of human development and culture, including the reality of children who are more than ready for school” (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 119). When advanced development is part of a child’s learning profile, and early attendance is an option, the developmental pathway is more complex (Porath, 2011).
One of the suggested strategies to support young gifted children is to facilitate their early entrance to school. However, their complex developmental profiles can challenge accepted notions of school readiness (Porath, 2011). In the policies for the education of gifted children for most states and territories, there is at least some provision for allowing gifted children to start school early (Gallagher, Smith, & Merrotsy, 2010). In NSW, for example, ‘strict guidelines’ refer to a “comprehensive, culturally fair psychological evaluation of the child’s intellectual functioning, academic readiness and social-emotional maturity”, along with collaboration between the principal, parents, pre-school teacher, school counselor and classroom teacher (NSW DET, 2004a, p. 6).

Wellisch (2004) argues that not all gifted children demonstrate recognised readiness characteristics and are often very different to non-gifted peers both socially and emotionally. Consequently, early entry to school, although well supported by research (Diezmann, Watters, & Fox, 2001) is unlikely to be considered as an appropriate educational option for many gifted pre-schoolers whilst many misunderstandings and misconceptions of this strategy continue to exist (Grubb, 2008).

There is little research on the effects of early school entrance for the gifted child (Robinson et al., 2000). Early research shows generally positive results for both academic and social outcomes (Hobson, 1963). Research conducted in the 80s confirms these findings while recognising that decisions need to be made on an individual basis (Neihart, 2007) and that school and family support and sensitivity to the needs of the young gifted child are important in ensuring success (Janos & Robinson, 1985). More recent research indicates the academic effects of acceleration are strongest; social-emotional effects are weaker (Neihart, 2007). On the other hand, failure to accelerate can have negative effects such as behavioural difficulties and lack of interest in learning (Neihart, 2007). While it has been argued that children should be carefully screened before early
entrance to school (Colangelo et al., 2004), the question of what should be screened for is critical. Social readiness, emotional maturity, motivation for acceleration (Neihart, 2007), and physical readiness (stamina and fine motor control) (Colangelo et al., 2004) are all seen as important.

2.9 Chapter summary

Defining the term gifted is both an important and complicated matter (Balchin et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2011; Koshy & Robinson, 2006; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Firstly, the definition adopted will guide the identification process, determining who may be selected for the provisions of a gifted program (Davis et al., 2011; Pfeiffer, 2003). Secondly, there is a risk that the chosen definition and subsequent identification methods may discriminate against groups such as low socio-economic, minority, disabled, underachieving and female students (Davis et al., 2011; Joseph & Ford, 2006; Porter, 2005a; Worrell, 2009; Worrell & Erwin, 2011). Thirdly, the chosen definition is tied to educational provisions, including programs and resources (Cross, 2010; Davis et al., 2011; Eyre, 2010; Renzulli, 2005b). Finally, labelling a student as gifted can have both positive and negative effects, raising self-esteem and self-expectations on one hand but sometimes alienating peers and siblings on the other (Davis et al., 2011; Dweck, 2009; Harrison, 2003a).

According to Gagné (2003), whose definition of giftedness and talent is widely used by Australian state and territory government education departments (NSW DEC, 2012a; NSW DEC, 2012b; VDEECD, 2013) giftedness is a natural ability requiring the appropriate environment and supporting conditions to develop fully into a talent. Gifts are considered natural abilities or aptitudes in one or more domains (for example, intellectual, creative, socio-emotional and physical), whereas talent is the outward manifestation, or expression, of these natural abilities. Gagné argues that the terms giftedness and talent should not be used synonymously as they identify two separate
Yet the identification of gifted children in early childhood remains contested. Some scholars claim these children have no special learning needs, and that it is too early to think about their gifts (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ide, 2009; Koshy, 2009). Others acknowledge that although it can be difficult to make accurate assessments, gifted young children can be identified (Goodhew, 2009; Harrison, 2003a; Koshy & Robinson, 2006).

Within the gifted field there is a growing consensus regarding the use of multiple and alternative approaches for identifying gifted students (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier & Passow, 1994; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). Given the current conceptualisation of giftedness, basing identification policies on analysis of data from a single point in time is not appropriate (Foley Nicpon & Pfeiffer, 2011; Lohman & Korb, 2006; Makel, 2009; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). Data need to come from a variety of sources within cultural contexts (Joseph & Ford, 2006; Lohman & Korb, 2006) from parents, educators, school counsellors, and the students themselves (Bates & Munday, 2005; Davis et al., 2011; Goodhew, 2009; Gross, 1999; Piirto, 2007; Porter, 2005a).

Gifted children have particular learning needs in terms of their social-emotional and intellectual development (Chamberlin et al., 2007; Cooper, 2009; Davis et al., 2011; Fonseca, 2010; Morgan, 2007). Delivering an inclusive curriculum to gifted children can be problematic due to the complexities of the identification process, inadequate teacher training and support in this area, ad hoc policy implementation in schools, and sometimes the perception that the needs of gifted children are a low priority (Cukierkorn et al., 2007; Goodhew, 2009; Moon, 2009; Piirto, 2007). However, emotional-social or behavioural difficulties may result when such children are left without appropriate support (Bates & Munday, 2005; Chamberlin
et al., 2007; Goodhew, 2009; Koshy & Robinson, 2006; Moon, 2009; Morgan, 2007; Porter, 2005a, 2005b). In contrast with ‘mainstream’ children, the gifted child may have different perceptions and expectations in relation to starting school (Whitton, 2005; Whitton et al., 2003).

Transitions to school are understood as multilayered processes that involve multiple discontinuities (Petriwskyj et al., 2005). Transition is an ongoing and continuous ‘process’; a culmination of children’s present experiences, shaped by previous experiences in the home and child care settings. Transition is not just about the challenges faced as the child changes context from pre-school or home context. There is also an emphasis on future goals and what is yet to be accomplished in the school context (Rogoff, 1995). The transition process includes the hopes and aspirations of the child and their family as they start their formal learning journey.

In recent years reports and studies from across the world have recognised the pre-school and early years of primary schooling as critical periods in terms of both cognitive and psychosocial development (Davis et al., 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Dockett et al., 2007; Goodhew, 2009; Pfeiffer & Petscher, 2008). Children’s transition and initial adjustment to primary school are crucial for their development, wellbeing and progress (OECD, 2006). A positive start to school, including initial success across social and academic areas is a key factor in setting up cycles of achievement (Burrell & Bubb, 2000) and is “a valuable contributor to children’s sense of confidence in the school setting” (Petriwskyj & Greishaber, 2011, p. 75).

Determining the educational experiences of gifted children beginning school in the Australian context may assist in providing greater understanding of both the social-emotional development and intellectual requirements of the young gifted student. In turn, it may identify the necessary supports for these children to experience a more successful transitional experience.
2.10 Research questions

A review of the literature, in combination with the theoretical framework of the study – discussed in chapter 3 – has resulted in the following research questions. These questions have guided the study:

Central question:
How is what happens in the transition to primary school different for children who have been identified as gifted?

Guiding Questions:

1. How are pre-school children identified as gifted?

2. How is the identification of a pre-school child as gifted communicated among those involved?

3. How does the labelling of a child as gifted change the expectations for those involved?

4. What are the experiences of the child identified as gifted beginning school?

5. What are considered the special needs of children identified as gifted in their transition to primary schooling in NSW?

6. Does the identification of a pre-school child as gifted impact upon the child’s transition to school?
3. Theoretical Framework

Organisation of the chapter
This chapter is organised in the following sections:

3.1 Introduction

3.2 A bioecological perspective

3.3 Critique of the bioecological perspective

3.4 Bioecological foundations of the study

3.5 Summary

3.1 Introduction

Theory is considered an important element of educational research, and is described as “a map or lens, framing and shaping what the researcher sees and examines” (Einarsdóttir, 2014, p. 21). Einarsdóttir considers theory an instrument helping researchers to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied. Theory also provides a framework allowing researchers to think differently, to see familiar phenomenon in fresh and interesting ways and to explain their developing understanding (Dunlop, 2014; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Mertz & Anfara, 2006; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009).

Theory is a necessary tool in research and without the use of theory – either consciously or unconsciously – research cannot be conducted (Einarsdóttir, 2014). Mertz and Anfara argue that theoretical frameworks,

- help to focus a study;
- reveal and conceal meaning and understanding;
• situate the research in a scholarly conversation; and,
• reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the study (2006)

Mertz and Anfara (2006) suggest that “it is impossible to observe and describe what happens in natural settings without some theory that guides the researcher in what is relevant to observe and what name to attach to what is happening” (p. 195).

Others highlight limitations in the use of theory. Thomas (2002) argues that educational researchers’ weight on theory may lead qualitative research into “sterile terrain” (p. 419). Others emphasise that just as theory can allow us to see familiar phenomena in fresh ways, it may also work as a set of blinkers, restricting what we see and how we see it (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Mertz & Anfara, 2006). When a research project is planned with a “specific theoretical perspective to guide the study, there is a danger that confirmation of the theory will become the main issue and topics and themes that do not fit the theory will be omitted” (Einarsdóttir, 2014, p. 22).

In this study, theory has been used to focus the research (Mertz & Anfara, 2006) and as a lens to shape what the researcher sees and examines (Einarsdóttir, 2014).

3.2 A bioecological perspective

This study is based upon the belief that children's lives cannot be separated from their environment. Children are part of their environment, are influenced by it, and also influence their environment. Children and their environments influence each other (Einarsdóttir, 2014). With this in mind, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci’s (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) bioecological interpretation of ecological systems theory of the mid-1900s and beyond (Tudge et al., 2009) has been employed in this study, selected for its relevance to both the development of the gifted child
and their transition to school. While Bronfenbrenner’s early conceptualisations of ecological theory have been influential in transitions research (Dockett, Petriwskyj, & Perry, 2014), it is his later refinements of this theory which inform this study.

The bioecological model of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006) considers human development within the context of interacting environments. According to Harrison (2014), the model views the contexts or environments of development as a series of concentric structures. The innermost structures, or microsystems, include the child’s actual experiences within the home, family, childcare and community. The next structure, the exosystem, includes indirect influences on children’s development such as parental employment, socio-economic status and government policies and practices. More broadly, the components of the macrosystem influence children’s development through the subculture or dominant beliefs and ideologies of the society in which the child lives. This would include such factors as limiting the choice of childcare or opportunities for comprehensive transition to school programs. Furthermore, children’s development is strongly influenced by the relationships between the settings or contexts – the mesosystem – in which the child actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). The fifth structure is the chronosystem – the cumulative history associated with the timing and duration of events and changes in the lives of children and families (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model is demonstrated by Figure 3.1.
The Process-Person-Context-Time model (PPCT) is the latest form of the Bronfenbrenner theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2001/2005; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), sometimes known as the ‘mature’ form of bioecological theory (Tudge et al., 2009), The four elements of the PPCT model are now examined.

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3.2.1 Process

Process plays a crucial role in Bronfenbrenner's theory (Tudge et al., 2009). Within the process element, interactions are an integral component. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) state,

human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes (p. 196, italics in the original).

Playing with a young child, child-child activities, group or solitary play, reading, and learning new skills are examples cited by Bronfenbrenner as interactions that regularly go on in the lives of developing individuals. Such activities are considered engines of development because it is through engaging in these activities and interactions that individuals come to make sense of their world, understand their place in it, and play their part in challenging the prevailing order while fitting into the existing one (Tudge et al., 2009).

Proximal processes are fundamental to the bioecological theory. However, the nature of proximal processes varies according to the individual and context (Tudge et al., 2009),

The form, power, content and the direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person; of the environment – both immediate and more remote – in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration; and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through life course and the historical period during which the person has lived (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996, italics in the original).

Proximal processes are highlighted, for example, in Birch and Ladd’s (1996) early model of school adjustment. This model illustrates the interplay between child characteristics (psychological, organismic,
behavioural) and interpersonal relationships – their type (school and non-school) and contribution (emotionally supportive or stressful) – in explaining children’s perceptions (e.g. school liking), affect (e.g. anxiety), involvement (e.g. engagement, school avoidance) and performance (e.g. achievement).

3.2.2 Person

Bronfenbrenner (2001/2005; 2000) acknowledged the relevance of the biological and genetic aspects of the person as well as the personal characteristics that individuals bring with them into any social situation (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1995a; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). These aspects and characteristics are divided into three types, termed demand, resource and force characteristics:

- **Demand** characteristics are those which Bronfenbrenner referred to in his earlier writings as ‘personal stimulus’ characteristics: those that act as an immediate stimulus to another person, such as age, gender, skin colour, and physical appearance (Tudge et al., 2009). Due to the immediately formed expectations, these types of characteristics may influence initial interactions;

- **Resource** characteristics, in contrast, are not immediately apparent, though sometimes they are induced, with differing degrees of accuracy, from the demand characteristics that are seen (Tudge et al., 2009). These characteristics relate partly to mental and emotional resources (access to good food, housing, caring parents, and educational opportunities); and,

- **Force** characteristics are those that have to do with differences of temperament, motivation and persistence. According to Bronfenbrenner, two children may have equal resource characteristics, but their developmental trajectories will be quite different if one is motivated to succeed and persists in tasks and the other is not motivated and does not persist (Tudge et al., 2009).
These contextual influences on development vary and influence an individual’s roles in changing their context (Tudge et al., 2009),

For example, the change may be reasonably passive (a person changes the environment simply by being in it, to the extent that others react to him or her differently based on demand characteristics such as age, gender and skin colour) to more active (the ways in which the person changes the environment are linked to his or her resource characteristics, whether physical, mental or emotional), to most active (the extent to which the person changes the environment is linked, in part, to the desire and drive to do so, or force characteristics) (p. 201).

Such aspects, the biological and genetic aspects of the person as well as the personal characteristics, contribute to children’s development within the context of interacting environments.

### 3.2.3 Context

The child starting school is part of several microsystems including the family, the pre-school, the school and the wider community that are all imbedded in political and social systems undergoing change over time. Relationships create a fundamental network to build trust and rapport between child, teacher, home and school that influences the child, both directly and indirectly (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Relationships between significant people in the child's life are fundamental to forming important connections between systems. Bronfenbrenner emphasised the importance of the individual child’s participation in contexts and relationships,

Development is enhanced as a direct function of the number of structurally different settings in which the developing person participates in a variety of joint activities and primary dyads with others, particularly when these others are more mature and experienced (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 212).
Relation and interaction between the microsystems are seen as influential in successful transition to school (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Research indicates that a successful transition from pre-school to primary school is dependent on the cooperation among individuals in these systems (Dockett & Perry, 2007b).

### 3.2.4 Time

The final element of the PPCT model is time. As bioecological theory involves human development, time plays a crucial role in the theory (Tudge et al., 2009). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) wrote about time as comprising:

i. micro-time (what is occurring during the course of some specific activity or interaction);

ii. meso-time (the extent to which activities and interactions occur with some consistency in the developing person’s environment); and,

iii. macro-time (developmental processes are likely to vary according to the specific historical events that are occurring as the individuals are developing) (cited in Tudge et al., 2009, p. 201).

Time, as well as timing, is important because all aspects of the PPCT model can be considered in terms of relative constancy and change. This is appropriate whether thinking about developing individuals themselves, the types of activities and interactions in which they engage, or the various microsystems in which they are situated (Tudge et al., 2009).
3.3 Critique of the bioecological perspective

Application of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory can be problematic. In their article *Uses and Misuses of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development*, Tudge et al. (2009) reviewed 25 articles claiming to use the ‘mature’ version of Bronfenbrenner’s theory. They found that only 4 of the 25 articles used the mature form of the theory and appeared to have used it appropriately in their research. Most of the reviewed articles involved researchers who used Bronfenbrenner’s earlier work and/or failed to pay attention to the core of the mature theory – proximal processes (Tudge et al., 2009).

One reason for difficulties with the mature form of Bronfenbrenner’s theory may be that it is seen as simply too difficult to translate effectively into research (Tudge et al., 2009),

Bronfenbrenner himself did not make these connections as clear as he might have; in none of his writings did he provide a clear methodological guide to help in the application of the theory. Nor did he write about any of his own research as a way of showing how he applied an appropriate method, preferring instead to comment on others’ research, none of which was designed specifically as a test of the theory (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 207).

However, Tudge et al. (2009) cautions that if a study was designed to include each and every aspect of the theory, it would be large and complex. Indeed, Bronfenbrenner did not plan for every aspect to be included within any study. According to Tudge, Bronfenbrenner’s position was straightforward in that,

A study involving the PPCT model should focus on proximal processes, showing how they are influenced both by characteristics of the developing individual and by the context in which they occur and showing how they are implicated in relevant developmental outcomes (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 207).
Research based on the mature version of Bronfenbrenner’s theory should include each of the elements of the PPCT model if it is to qualify as a complete test of the model (Tudge et al., 2009). While partial tests are possible, they should be identified as such, “It is impossible, however, to treat a study as being based on the mature version if its design does not involve a focus on the critical element of Process (proximal processes)” (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 202).

Petriwskyj (2014) is also cautious about the use of bioecological theory as a basis for studying educational transitions. She advises that although transition models based upon bioecological systems theory take into account children within their family and community context, such models do not sufficiently allow for the diversity of children’s cultural background and social circumstances. Reliance on ecological theory has been criticised on the grounds that it may mask differences in individual and cultural experience and so oversimplify real complexities in the lives of children, families and communities (Vogler, Crivello, & Woodhead, 2008). Vogler et al. suggests the assumption that the central place of the individual child in ecological theory is universally appropriate is open to debate, as these assumptions may overlook the multiple priorities of families and communities in group-oriented cultures and divert attention from the role of culture in children’s learning.

This study considers the interrelated bioecological systems and interactions involved in the development of the potential of the child identified as gifted, in particular the resource and force characteristics. Considering these characteristics makes it possible to increase understanding of the child identified as gifted and their transition to school. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory conceptualises children’s growth and experiences as occurring within a dynamic environment consisting of nested interactive and interdependent systems that directly and indirectly influence the development course (Foster, Lambert, Abbott-Shim, McCarty, & Franze, 2005). In this respect the bioecological theory of human
development is a lens for the interpretation of data gathered in the study.

3.4 Bioecological foundations of the study

3.4.1 The development of the child identified as gifted

Bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 2001/2005) in part explains the complexity of the interactions between the systems involved in the development of the child identified as gifted. In this study the gifted child is recognised as part of several systems – the family, the pre-school, the school and the wider community, which all undergo change over time. In this respect, the role of the interrelated systems and the adjustments that children must make as they interact within these systems are considered (Tudge et al., 2009).

The members of each system are connected to the child and may be connected to each other. Therefore, from a bioecological perspective, the more connections among members, the greater the likelihood of substantial support for the optimal development of the child identified as gifted (Mueller, 2009).

Similarly, Gagné’s differentiated model of giftedness and talent (2003) – shown in Figure 2.1 – with its environmental and interpersonal catalysts for the development of giftedness, sees the child’s development, and their natural abilities, influenced by the context of interacting environments.

The extent to which the gifted child’s systems facilitate their development varies between children (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003). Like all children, the needs of the child identified as gifted are not static, but are greatly influenced by the environment in which they live and the culture in which they are immersed (Cross, 2009).

Consequently, the challenges children identified as gifted experience essentially depend upon the systems they experience (Neihart,
If they experience systems that provide appropriate challenges and encourage them to develop their academic talents fully, the likelihood of experiencing difficulties related to their gift is lessened (Moon, 2009). The support offered to the child identified as gifted within these bioecological systems can make a significant difference between optimal development and psychosocial well-being or problematic social-emotional development (Mueller, 2009).

The relevance of biological and genetic aspects of the person are also integral to the study. Such aspects are acknowledged by Bronfenbrenner (2001/2005), with particular attention devoted to the personal characteristics that individuals bring with them into any social situation (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1995b; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For example, children’s developmental trajectories will be quite different if one child persists in tasks and is motivated to succeed, and the other child is not (Tudge et al., 2009).

Several authors have suggested that the social-emotional development of the gifted child is best studied as an interaction between many personal and environmental factors (Mueller, 2009; Neihart, 1999; Versteynen, 2001). The resource characteristics (such as potential and the opportunities/environment provided) and the force characteristics (i.e. personal drive such as temperament, persistence and motivation) of the child identified as gifted also impact upon the interactions among systems (Tudge et al., 2009). For example, when a child is labelled gifted, the expectations of parents and teachers may change (Berlin, 2009). These expectations may then affect the child’s personal drive and motivation and consequently impact upon their achievement (Garn, Matthews, & Jolly, 2010).
3.4.2 The transition to school

The transition to school takes place in an environment that may be explained by bioecological theory. Over time, these various interactions, such as those between the child, home, school, their peers and community, form patterns and relationships that influence children's development. In this respect, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory help us to understand the network of children’s social and cultural contexts, and how children inhabit the settings of home, prior-to-school settings and school (Blaise & Nuttall, 2011). Bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 2001/2005) also helps us understand the interlocking set of systems that provide a bridge between experiences and form a basis for on-going social interactions. The systems consist of linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing child.

As children make the transition from pre-school to the first year of school, they interact with a new cultural system associated with formal schooling (Lam & Pollard, 2006; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Within this new system the links among the child, home, school, peers and community create a dynamic network of relationships that both directly and indirectly influence the child’s transition to school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Yet, time is also important. The bioecological view of school transition “emphasises how relationships among these contexts change over time. The relationships either support or impede children’s adjustment into Kindergarten” (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000, p. 492).

Considering the context of the transition to school through bioecological theory allows reflection upon the changes within contexts and systems over time and the implications of these changes. For example, as home and school contexts come together, the relationship between early childhood teachers and parents is highlighted. The bioecological theoretical framework provides a
powerful tool for analysing the complexity of the situation and is used in this study to do so. This theory provides a model of development in context over time that emphasise the interrelatedness, human agency and capacity to act that sits well with study of educational transitions (Dunlop, 2014).

### 3.5 Chapter summary

A child’s transition to school is influenced by a complexity of factors (Margetts, 2014). The variability in children’s development and early school success is influenced by interdependent factors including biological and developmental characteristics and social and cultural factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Broström, 2000). The settings or contexts in which children actively participate strongly influence their development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In this study, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci’s (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) bioecological interpretation of ecological systems theory is employed. Bioecological theory provides a model of development in context over time that emphasise the interrelatedness, human agency and capacity to act that sits well with study of educational transitions (Dunlop, 2014). This theory formed the lens through which data in this study were analysed and interpreted.
4. Research Design and Methodology

Organisation of the chapter:

This chapter is organised in the following sections:

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Rationale for research paradigm

4.3 Description of research methods

4.4 Recruitment of the sample

4.5 The sample

4.6 Organisation of the study

4.7 Data collection methods

4.8 Triangulation of data

4.9 Case studies

4.10 Ethical considerations

4.11 Data analysis

4.12 Chapter summary
4.1 Introduction

The literature review and theoretical framework presented in previous chapters have framed this study. To explore the research questions required the investigation of the perspectives of individual children identified as gifted, their parents, and their teachers – both pre-school and primary school – in relation to their experiences during the children's transition to school. The process used to identify the children as gifted is also explored as this can have educational implications and may impact the child’s transition experience.

4.2 Rationale for research paradigm

A research paradigm is a fundamental set of beliefs that guide action within research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Each paradigm may take a different approach to issues such as ethics and values, control, validity and voice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) argue that a paradigm includes three elements: a belief about the nature of knowledge, a methodology and criteria for validity. These three elements influence the way knowledge is studied and interpreted within the research, it is the choice of paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research. Without nominating a paradigm, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature or research design (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 194).

The selected paradigm has “implications for every decision made in the research process, including the choice of method” (Mertens, 2005, pp. 3-4).

4.2.1 Interpretivist/constructivist inquiry

Interpretivist/constructivist approaches to research seek to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants (Creswell, 2009). Research adopting such a paradigm is designed to
discover how the subjects themselves understand or make sense of a particular situation or event (Lambert, 2003) where individuals experience of social or physical reality may or may not be similar (Neuman, 2006).

Research within this interpretivist/constructivist paradigm is not only concerned with fact gathering but also with subjective elements of participants’ experiences, such as their feelings, fears and expectations as well as how they interpret or make sense of these experiences (Marlow, 2000).

According to Greene (2012) interpretivist/constructivist inquiry recognises the ‘embedded’ nature of the researcher, and the unique personal theoretical stances upon which each person bases their actions. The researcher is an active instrument to generate contextual insights and understandings (Greene, 2012). This means that underlying the researcher’s work is a belief that people are active and make sense of or interpret socio-cultural experiences and create new meanings from these experiences (Lambert, 2003). Thus the researcher is bound into the human situation being studied – facts and values cannot be separated. For example: “The researcher encounters a world already interpreted and his/her job is to reveal this according to the meanings created by humans rather than to discover universal laws. Therefore there can be more than one perspective and interpretation of a phenomenon” (Walliman, 2010, p. 22). Conducting research within an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm is associated with high levels of internal validity: it uncovers what it sets out to uncover with detailed examples; as well as researcher reflexivity: researchers recognise the socially constructed nature of their own accounts (Humphrey, 2013).

Denzin and Lincoln (2008b) suggest that all research is essentially interpretive/constructivist as any investigation is guided by the researcher’s beliefs and feelings about the world. Nonetheless, current qualitative research has at its essence a particular
understanding of the notion of ‘interpretive’. Denzin and Lincoln propose that world views differ between individuals so there are inevitably ‘multiple realities’. This perspective of many realities is not confined to any one method of qualitative inquiry but is present in the variety of approaches that all exist under the umbrella of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b).

For this study, the researcher has adopted an interpretivist/constructivist perspective with a view to finding meaning for each of the children through the personal perspectives of their parents, their teachers and themselves. These perspectives were described and interpreted through the use of parent and teacher questionnaires and work samples from children’s portfolios, as well as structured conversations with parents, teachers, and the children themselves.

4.3 Description of research methods

Common to both qualitative and quantitative research is the view that reality is complicated and socially constructed (Yin, 2011). However, these paradigms are guided by markedly different views about how knowledge is defined and discovered (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011). According to Yin (2011) for qualitative researchers, meaning is socially constructed, whereas quantitative researchers consider truth as more stable – although this may be influenced by contexts. Rather than using numbers to obtain meaning, qualitative research examines social settings from the perspectives of insiders and generates descriptions and analyses of contexts (Lapan et al., 2011).

4.3.1 Qualitative research

The term qualitative research serves as an umbrella for a wide variety of approaches and methods for the study of social life (Saldana, 2011). For example: “The breadth of what is called qualitative research embraces a mosaic of orientations as well as
methodological choices” (Yin, 2011, p. 11). This makes defining qualitative research complex, but it takes “advantage of the richness of the mosaic offers an opportunity to customize a qualitative study” (Yin, 2011, p. 11).

Within this mosaic, all qualitative research has two dimensions; an interpretive perspective, focusing upon uncovering participants’ views, and a critical perspective, building upon the interpretive perspective but also considering ways in which power is embedded in social settings (Lapan et al., 2011).

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. The world is turned into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Characteristics particular to qualitative research approaches include: (Yin, 2011)

- Studying the meaning of people’s lives, within natural, real-world conditions;

- Representing the views and perspectives of people. Qualitative research allows the views and perspectives of the participants in a study to be represented. Capturing their perspectives may be a major purpose of a qualitative study;

- Covering the contextual conditions within which people live. Qualitative research covers contextual conditions – the social,
institutional, and environmental conditions within which people’s lives take place. These contextual conditions may strongly influence all human events;

- Contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior. Qualitative research is not just a diary or chronicle of everyday life. Qualitative research is driven by a wish to explain these events, through existing or emerging concepts. Data is not collected to confirm a particular assumption or hypothesis of the researcher. Instead the data results in questions, interpretations, hypotheses and theories; and,

- Striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone. Qualitative research endeavours to collect, integrate, and present data from a variety of sources of evidence as part of any given study. Data are usually collected using a variety of strategies from different perspectives. The data collected and analysed are mainly (but not exclusively) non-quantitative, consisting of textual materials such as interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, and/or visual materials such as artifacts, photographs, video recordings, and internet sites, that document human experiences about others and/or one’s self in social action and reflexive states.

These characteristics have been considered in the methodological design for this study.
4.4 Recruitment of the sample

Child participants were central to this study. The sampling is based upon two requirements of the child participants:

- they had been identified as gifted, either through parent or pre-school nomination; and,

- they were starting primary school in 2013.

It should be noted that this study did not confirm or deny that any of the children in the study were gifted. No formal assessment took place.

4.4.1 Recruitment through pre-schools

The sample of pre-schools invited to participate in this study was drawn from a regional and rural area of NSW. Pre-school directors were sent information outlining the study. The pre-schools were then asked to identify children whom they felt met the two requirements of child participants. Parents of these children were asked by the pre-school director whether they consented to be contacted by the researcher. If consent was given, these parents were contacted by the researcher.

4.4.2 Recruitment through parents

Recruitment of participants through parents was facilitated by a media campaign requesting volunteers for the study. Under the direction of a Charles Sturt University Media Officer, television, newspaper and radio interviews were conducted. These interviews attracted parents who had either identified their child as gifted or whose child had been identified as gifted by their pre-school teacher.

Child participants were recruited and initial data were derived from a sample of 11 children who had been identified as gifted and who were starting school in the 2013 school year. These children, their
parents and their pre-school teachers, were invited to participate in the study.

4.5 The sample

A sample of 11 young children initially participated in the study. The characteristics of the individuals in the group are shown in Table 4.1. Table 4.2 refers to how the child was identified as gifted and Table 4.3 highlights similarities and differences between childrens’ educational contexts.

Table 4.1: Demographics of child participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Attendance at pre-school</th>
<th>Position in family</th>
<th>Attending school</th>
<th>Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advit</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Three days and 2 in care</td>
<td>Only child</td>
<td>Independent school</td>
<td>All 3 phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Three days per week</td>
<td>Second of four</td>
<td>Catholic school</td>
<td>All 3 phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew *</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Two days per week</td>
<td>Eldest of Two</td>
<td>Independent school</td>
<td>All 3 phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Two days per week</td>
<td>Youngest of two girls</td>
<td>State school</td>
<td>All 3 phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fergus</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Three days per week</td>
<td>Eldest child of three</td>
<td>Catholic school</td>
<td>All 3 phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabir **</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Three days per week</td>
<td>Youngest of two boys</td>
<td>State school</td>
<td>All 3 phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Two days per week</td>
<td>Eldest of Three</td>
<td>Catholic school</td>
<td>All 3 phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Two days per week Pre-prep</td>
<td>Eldest of two</td>
<td>State school</td>
<td>All 3 phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppy ***</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Three days per week</td>
<td>Youngest of two girls</td>
<td>State school</td>
<td>Phase I only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Three days per week</td>
<td>Only child</td>
<td>Independent school</td>
<td>All 3 phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Two days per week</td>
<td>Youngest of two girls</td>
<td>State school</td>
<td>All 3 phases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This child was not initially considered twice-exceptional, however was diagnosed as being on the Autism Spectrum once he started school.

** The Early intervention teacher was working with the child as he was considered twice-exceptional - as well as being identified as gifted, he had been diagnosed as being on the Autism Spectrum.

*** Participated in only Phase I of the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child participant</th>
<th>Identified due to</th>
<th>Identified by</th>
<th>In agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advis</td>
<td>Superior memory</td>
<td>Pre-school teacher</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem solving skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabel</td>
<td>Advanced vocabulary</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>DNP*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced organisational skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership abilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced interests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Superior memory</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced numeracy skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>Superior memory</td>
<td>Pre-school teacher</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced literacy skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Superior memory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thirst for knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exceptional general knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fergus</td>
<td>Superior memory</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thirst for knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exceptional general knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced literacy skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced numeracy skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabir</td>
<td>Superior memory</td>
<td>Pre-school Early Intervention teacher</td>
<td>DNP**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exceptional general knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced literacy skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced numeracy skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh</td>
<td>Superior memory</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thirst for knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exceptional general knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>Advanced literacy skills</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>DNP**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Superior memory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>Advanced literacy skills</td>
<td>Pre-school teacher</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Exceptional general knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thirst for knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Superior memory</td>
<td>Head of Junior School</td>
<td>DNP**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced literacy skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Exceptional general knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Superior memory</td>
<td>Pre-school teacher</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced literacy skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Identified child
** DNP refers to ‘did not participate’ in the study.
Table 4.3: Educational contexts of child participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Participant</th>
<th>Pre-school</th>
<th>Pre-school teacher</th>
<th>Primary school</th>
<th>Kindergarten teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advit</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabel</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>#4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fergus</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabir</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#6</td>
<td>#7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>#6</td>
<td>#6</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>#6</td>
<td>#6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#7</td>
<td>#7</td>
<td>#9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>#7</td>
<td>#8</td>
<td>#8</td>
<td>#10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 4.3 each pre-school, pre-school teacher, Primary School and Kindergarten teacher has been allocated a number from one to ten which highlights similarities and differences between childrens’ educational contexts. For example, Fergus and Annabel both attended Primary School #2, however, they were in different Kindergarten classes with Kindergarten teachers #2 and #5.

While demographics of child participants have been provided in Table 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, Tables 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6 provide demographic details of the parents, pre-school and Kindergarten teachers who participated in the study.
Table 4.4: Demographics of participating parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Participant</th>
<th>Mother's Age</th>
<th>Mother's education level</th>
<th>Father's Age</th>
<th>Father's education level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advit</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Post-grad. University</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabel</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Post-grad. University</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>TAFE Diploma</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>School Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>TAFE Diploma</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Post-grad. University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fergus</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Post-grad. University</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Post-grad. University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabir</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Post-grad. University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Post-grad. University</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>TAFE Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>HSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Post-grad. University</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Post-grad. University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Post-grad. University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5: Demographics of participating pre-school teachers (n=7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Pre-school enrolment</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Most recent qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advit</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>&gt;25</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fergus</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>&gt;25</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabir</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>&gt;25</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>&gt;25</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase I of the study included 11 child participants, 11 parent participants and 7 pre-school teachers. The pre-school teachers of four child participants did not engage with the study because they were philosophically against the labelling of young children.
Table 4.6: Demographics of Kindergarten teachers (n=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>School enrolment</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Most recent qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advit</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>&gt;25</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fergus</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabir</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>&gt;25</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn *</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppy **</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>&gt;25</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two Kindergarten teachers did not participate in the Phase III of the study.

* While not philosophically opposed to the study, Kaitlyn’s Kindergarten teacher preferred not to participate.

** As Poppy’s parents had withdrawn from the study her Kindergarten teacher was not invited to participate in the study.

4.6 Organisation of the study

As the transition to primary school is a process over a period of time, including before, during and after the child begins primary school, the study examined the children’s experiences over this extended period of time. Thus, pre-school and primary teachers could be included and the perhaps changing perspectives of the children and their parents could be tapped on numerous occasions.
Table 4.7 indicates the study timeline.

**Table 4.7 Study timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Phase</th>
<th>Time period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: Identification of the pre-school child as gifted</td>
<td>July – November 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II: Prior to school entry</td>
<td>December 2012 - January 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III: Post school entry</td>
<td>May – June 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the three phases of the study is now discussed.

### 4.6.1 Phase I: Identification of the pre-school child as gifted

Children in the study had been identified as gifted prior to Phase I. However, this phase explored the identification of pre-school children as gifted and checklists were used to gain insights into pre-school teachers and parents’ perceptions of the child’s personal characteristics (*demand, resource and force*) (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1995a; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). This information assisted in a more complete understanding of the intellectual and social-emotional needs of the child.

Table 4.8 outlines the data collection methods and research questions that were the focus of Phase I.
Table 4.8 Phase I research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I: Identification of the pre-school child as gifted</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Data source *</th>
<th>Questions answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: Identification of the pre-school child as gifted</td>
<td>Parent/s</td>
<td>Sayler’s checklist: <em>Things my young child has done</em> Questionnaire Follow-up conversation</td>
<td>How is what happens in the transition to primary school different for children who are considered gifted as opposed to those who are not considered gifted?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-school teacher</td>
<td>Sayler’s checklist: <em>Things this young child has done</em> Questionnaire Follow-up conversation Children’s portfolios</td>
<td>1. How are pre-school children identified as gifted?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. How is the identification of a pre-school child as gifted communicated among those involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. How does the labelling of a child as gifted change the expectations of those involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Does the identification of a pre-school child as gifted impact upon the child’s transition to school?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Each data source will be discussed later in the chapter.

**Information sessions and obtaining consent.**

Data collection for Phase I of the study involved the parents of each child participant and the child’s pre-school teacher. Running between July and November of 2012, individual information sessions provided opportunities to discuss potential participants’ conceptualisation of giftedness, and to addressed questions regarding a definition.

Sessions also outlined the study and addressed parents’, and the children’s potential involvement. In addition to parental consent (See Appendix A), each child’s assent to participate was sought through a discussion of their involvement and completion of a child-friendly assent form (See Appendix B).
Information sessions for pre-school teachers and Kindergarten also addressed their conceptualisation of the gifted term, outlined the study and addressed the teachers’ involvement, including obtaining their consent to be involved (See Appendix C and D). At this stage, four of the pre-school teachers withdrew from the study, in recognition of the challenges they found with labelling young children.

Data collection.

Once parental consent was obtained for the parent(s) and the children’s participation, the researcher arranged a suitable time to meet with the parent(s) and the child to collect Phase I data. After pre-school teachers consented to participate, suitable times were organised to meet with them.

4.6.2 Phase II: Prior to school entry

Phase II of the study occurred between December 2012 and January 2013 and involved the child participants and their parents. This phase focused upon the period when children had finished pre-school and were about to start school. By this point many children had participated in orientation programs conducted by the school. Ten children and their parents participated in Phase II of the study. This is a reduction from the 11 children in Phase I as the parents of one child identified as gifted decided not to continue with the study.

With parental and child consent already obtained, the researcher arranged a suitable time to meet with the parent(s) and the child for Phase II data collection to occur. Data in this phase were collected at each family’s home. During conversations with the child their parents were given the option of sitting with their child, or to stay close. Some parents chose to sit with their child and the researcher. This involvement may be reflected in the transcripts of child participants.
Table 4.9 provides a summary of how the data collection methods related to Phase II and the associated research questions of the study:

Table 4.9 Phase II research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase II: Prior to school entry</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Data source*</th>
<th>Questions answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/s</td>
<td>Questionnaire Follow-up conversation</td>
<td>How is what happens in the transition to primary school different for children who are considered gifted as opposed to those who are not considered gifted?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. How does the labelling of a child as gifted change the expectations for those involved?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. What are the experiences of the child identified as gifted beginning school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. What are considered the special needs of children identified as gifted in their transition to primary school in NSW?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Does the identification of a pre-school child as gifted impact upon the child’s transition to school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Each data source will be discussed later in the chapter.

4.6.3 Phase III: Post-school entry

Phase III, the final phase of the study, focused upon the first term of the children’s Kindergarten year. Data were collected in May and June 2013. At this point children had had time to settle into school.

Table 4.10 demonstrates how the data collection methods relate to Phase III and the associated research questions of the study:
Table 4.10 Phase III research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Data source*</th>
<th>Questions answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase III:</td>
<td>Parent/s</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>How is what happens in the transition to primary school different for children who are considered gifted as opposed to those who are not considered gifted?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-school entry</td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>conversation</td>
<td>3. How does the labelling of a child as gifted change the expectations for those involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>4. What are the experiences of the child identified as gifted beginning school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>5. What are considered the special needs of children identified as gifted in their transition to primary school in NSW?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>6. Does the identification of a pre-school child as gifted impact upon the child’s transition to school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>conversation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Portfolio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Each data source will be discussed later in the chapter.

**Information sessions and obtaining Kindergarten teachers’ consent.**

This final phase of the study included three groups of participants. The child identified as gifted and their parent/s were again involved. The child’s Kindergarten teacher was also engaged. As Kindergarten teachers were joining the study in this phase, individual information sessions were conducted for the teachers of the children identified as gifted. These sessions outlined the study and addressed the Kindergarten teacher’s potential involvement in the study. At this point teachers either gave their informed consent, or declined to participate in the study. Nine teachers acceded to their participation and one declined. Poppy’s Kindergarten teacher was not approached as her parents had decided not to participate in Phase II and III of the study.
In the next section a rationale for, and description of, the methods used in the three phases of the study, including data collection tools is provided.

4.7 Data collection methods

Several sources of data were used. This allowed the examination of the personal experiences of children identified as gifted, and their families, pre-school and Kindergarten teachers. These sources included:

- Checklists: *Sayler’s Things This Young Child Has Done* and *Sayler’s Things My Young Child Has Done*;
- Open-ended questionnaires;
- Structured conversations following up on answers from questionnaires; and,
- Student portfolios, including children’s drawings and work samples.

Each of these collection methods is expanded below.

4.7.1 Checklists

Two highly regarded checklists (Piirto, 2007) were completed by the parents and pre-school teachers of the participating children:

1. *Sayler’s Things My Young Child Has Done* (See Appendix E) was completed by parents; and,

2. *Sayler’s Things This Young Child Has Done* (See Appendix F) was completed by pre-school teachers.
Using the appropriate checklist, parents and pre-school teachers were asked to respond to questions on the cognitive and affective development of the child participants, including the development of speech, movement and reading (Piirto, 2007). The checklists provided frameworks through which parents and pre-school teachers could identify and describe characteristics of giftedness (Harrison, 2003a).

The developmental guidelines of language and motor ability included in these checklists assisted both parents and pre-school teachers to assess the degree of developmental precocity displayed by the young child identified as gifted. They were also helpful in focussing participants’ thoughts on particular children and their achievements.

In this study the open-ended checklist responses were used to gain insights into pre-school teachers and parents’ perceptions of the children’s personal characteristics (demand, resource and force) (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1995a; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). This information helped build a more comprehensive understanding of the intellectual and social-emotional needs of the child.

Completed by parents of the child identified as gifted, Things My Young Child Has Done checklist focuses primarily on the person element of the PPCT model. In each question respondents were asked to rate their child on a scale from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD) for statements. For example:

- has quick recall of information;
- knows a lot more about some topics than do other children that age;
- uses advanced vocabulary; and,
- began to read or write early.
Participants were then asked to give a personal example of each of their ratings.

Completed by pre-school teachers, the *Things this young child has done* checklist focussed upon the individual characteristics of the *developing person* (Bronfenbrenner, 2001/2005). For example:

- shows intense curiosity and deeper knowledge than other children;
- is empathetic, feels more deeply than do other children that age;
- may not always display their advanced understanding in everyday situations; and,
- uses advanced vocabulary.

Again, participants were asked to rate the child and then to give a personal example for each rating.

A completed *Sayler’s Things My Young Child Has Done* is shown in Appendix G.

### 4.7.2 Questionnaires

In this study questionnaires were completed by parents and teachers – both pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers.

**Parent Questionnaire.**

The development and administration of a parent questionnaire allowed the collection of demographic data and information concerning transition to school that helped shape conversation questions. In this study questionnaires were used to consider Bronfenbrenner’s *process-person-context-time* elements. The questionnaire consisted of two sections – identification of the child as
gifted and the educational experiences of the child identified as
gifted. Initial questions were concerned with demographics such as:

- age of child;
- sex of child;
- childcare arrangements;
- attendance at pre-school;
- position of child in the family;
- parent education level; and
- age starting school.

The questionnaire was then divided into sections focussing upon the
process-person-context-time elements (See Table 4.11):

**Table 4.11: Examples of questions in parent questionnaires**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Examples of questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong>&lt;br&gt;Questions probed the interactions between the child, their parents and their pre-school teacher</td>
<td>What does your child most enjoy about pre-school/school at present? Why? What does your child find most challenging about pre-school/school at present? Why? What areas of development and learning do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of your child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Person</strong>&lt;br&gt;Questions probed the demand, resource and force characteristics of the child, along with the child’s impact among systems</td>
<td>What characteristics has your child displayed that suggested to you they were ‘different’ from other children? What characteristics has your child displayed that suggested to you they may be gifted?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the complete parent questionnaires see Appendix H: Phase I, Appendix I: Phase II and Appendix J: Phase III.

**Teacher questionnaires.**

The development and administration of questionnaires for pre-school and Kindergarten teachers allowed the collection of data that shaped conversation questions for use in the interviews. Initial questions involved demographics, such as:

- sex of respondent;
- teaching qualifications;
- teaching experience; and,
- size of school.

Although pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers completed different questionnaires, both questionnaires included two sections – identification of the child as gifted and the child’s educational experiences. The questionnaires were also divided into sections
focussing upon the \textit{process-person-context-time} elements. Table 4.12 demonstrates these elements:
Table 4.12: Examples of questions in teacher questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Examples of questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>Questions probed the interactions between the child and their teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have you used any identification strategies or approaches to confirm that the focus child should be identified as a gifted child? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What areas of development and learning demonstrated by the focus child do you value as important indicator/s of giftedness?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Person</strong></td>
<td>Questions probed the personal characteristics that individuals bring with them into any social situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you aware of any changes in the behaviour of the focus child since they have entered school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What characteristics have the focus child displayed that suggested to you they were ‘different’ from other children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td>Questions in this section investigated the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please discuss your role or influence in the planning and programming of educational experiences for the focus child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have the family of the focus child been involved in any stage/s of the programming and planning of educational experiences. How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>Questions probed the experiences over time of the child identified as gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has the use of cross-age buddies during the transition period been beneficial? How? (for Kindergarten teachers only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At what age should a gifted child start school? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When should Kindergarten children start attending full days of school? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the complete teacher questionnaires see Appendix K: Phase I pre-school teacher questionnaire and Appendix L: Phase III Kindergarten teacher questionnaire.

### 4.7.4 Conversations (interviews)

Another method used to gather data was conversational interviews. These were held with children, parents and both pre-school and Kindergarten teachers.
Individual face-to-face conversations with the participating children, their parents and their pre-school and Kindergarten teacher were conducted in order to generate rich data regarding the child participants and their experiences in the transition to school. Guiding questions kept the conversations focussed but flexible enough to vary the questions in order to elicit rich responses from participants.

To ensure participants were at ease, conversations took place in familiar places, such as the child’s pre-school, Kindergarten classroom or the home environment.

Conversations were conducted at three different times within the study:

Phase I: Before the child began the formal transition to school process. At this stage conversations were conducted with the parents and pre-school teachers;

Phase II: As the child began the transition to school process. This stage involved conversations with the child, and their parents; and,

Phase III: After the child began school, conversations took place with the child’s Kindergarten teacher and the final conversations with parents occurred.

Conversations with parents.

Data collected from the parent questionnaires helped shape conversation questions. The conversation plan was then divided into sections focussing upon bioecological theory’s process-person-context-time elements.
Table 4.13: Examples of conversation questions for parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Examples of questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Would you describe how your child’s interests and needs are catered for in his/her current pre-school setting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are some of the things your child’s pre-school has done to prepare your child for school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>What does your child enjoy most about school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does your child find most challenging about school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>You mentioned that you have/haven’t communicated your child’s giftedness to their pre-school teacher? Can you tell me why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>You mentioned the characteristics your child displayed that suggest to you they are ‘different’ from other children? Can you tell me when you first began to think they were different?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the complete parent conversation questions see Appendix M: Phase I, Appendix N: Phase II and Appendix O: Phase III.

**Conversations with pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers.**

Conversation questions probed the identification process, the programming and planning for the child and teachers’ interactions with the child and their family. The conversation plan was then divided into sections focussing upon the *process-person-context-time* elements:
Table 4.14: Examples of conversation questions used with teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Examples of questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>During the focus child’s time at school, you mentioned you have/haven’t made any changes to planning and programming in order to improve the educational experiences? Do you plan to do so in the future?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>You mentioned the focus child has/hasn’t displayed characteristics that suggest to you they are ‘gifted’? Why do you think this is the case?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>In relation to the focus child’s identification as gifted, you mentioned that you have/haven’t sought assistance or utilised any resources from organisations or services specifically established to cater for the educational needs of children identified as gifted? Do you plan to do this in the future?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>The participants’ response to the survey question, “When should Kindergarten children start attending full days of school?” involved a discussion during the conversation regarding available options for starting full days of school i.e. half days for the first week and a half, Wednesdays off etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The participants’ answer to the survey question, “At what age should a child identified as gifted start school?” lead to a discussion on school readiness and the issues involved such as social-emotional maturity along with intellectual capacity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conversations with participating children.

In addition to questions for children involving the process, context and time elements, attention was paid to the person element, particularly the force characteristics such as temperament, motivation and persistence. Conversations with each child identified as gifted allowed the exploration of these characteristics (See Table 4.15).

These questions were asked at different time points during the study. Some were asked prior to the child starting school, others were asked towards the end of the Term One in the child’s first year of school.
Table 4.15: Examples of conversation questions for children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Examples of questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Do you do anything that is different from any of the other children in your class? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are you enjoying school? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What don’t you like doing at school? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>What part of pre-school did you enjoy the most? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What part of pre-school did you find the hardest? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>What do you think you will do at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What would you like to do at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there anything the teachers could do to make starting school easier for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there anything your parents could do to make starting school easier for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>What are some of the things you have done to get ready for school?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.7.4 Children’s portfolios

In this study portfolios were used to gather data regarding the pre-school and school environments, as well as data concerning each child’s interests and abilities. Portfolios were requested from both pre-school and Kindergarten teachers. These portfolios took the form of typical, notable or child-selected examples of their work, records of notable moments, photos of their constructions and observational notes about their language and behaviour, signifying their interests and thinking. A total of 5 artifacts were collected for each child during the transition period.

Children’s portfolios were not analysed in this study. However, they were used as another method of getting to know the child participants. Children’s portfolios provided an insight into the children’s development, interests and thinking at pre-school and Kindergarten.
4.8 Case studies

For four of the children, detailed case studies were written. Case study methodology involves in-depth exploration of a particular context using largely qualitative methods within interpretive enquiry (Stake, 1995). Hammond and Wellington (2012), advise, “Case study does not lend itself to straightforward definition, as it comes with different associations, ones which are very often held implicitly by researchers and assumed to be shared by readers” (p. 16). Case studies are positioned as methodologically eclectic, allowing flexibility (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Cousin, 2008; Donley, 2012b; Gerring, 2011). Case studies recognise and accept that there are many variables operating in a single case, and, hence, to catch the implications of these variables usually requires more than one tool for data collection and many sources of evidence (Cohen et al., 2011). Case studies can blend numerical and qualitative data, can be an example of mixed-methods research (Cohen et al., 2011).

Methods used in the case study can be tailored to what is appropriate (Hammond & Wellington, 2012). Such diverse data serves two functions, firstly providing evidence needed for the researcher to draw conclusions, and secondly providing the ‘chain of evidence’ that gives credibility, reliability and validity to the case study (Cousin, 2008; VanderStoep & Johnson, 2008; Yin, 2009). The combination of data from various sources allow a ‘picture’ to be built up of the case being studied (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). However, case studies are not trying to present the general picture but the particular case or cases to explain the ‘how and why’ (Hammond & Wellington, 2012; Yin, 2009). A thorough understanding of the object under study may be achieved (Donley, 2012a). Yin concurs, “They can explain, describe, illustrate and enlighten” (2009, p. 19). Cousin (2008) confirms, “Case study research has the potential to generate rich understandings; it offers flexible and creative ways of researching live settings; and it licences evocative write-ups that aim to describe, interpret and persuade the
reader” (p. 148). A case study may also help readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles can fit together (Yin, 2009).

Case study as an approach is suited to small-scale studies (Hammond & Wellington, 2012). It allows each case study to provide “a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 289). Stake (1985) describes a case as specific, complex, functioning thing – a bounded system. He continues,

> The case is an integrated system. The parts do not have to be working well, the purposes may be irrational, but it is a system. Thus people and programs clearly are prospective cases. Events and processes fit the definition less well (Stake, 1985, p. 2).

The main aim of the case study methodology is to offer readable detail and analysis, so that the reader can make a judgement about the case (Cousin, 2008, p. 135). Within case studies the role of the researcher’s voice and perspective are typically more prevalent than the voice and perspective of the informants (VanderStoep & Johnson, 2008). If well written, case studies can be illuminating and insightful; holding attention and exuding a strong sense of reality; being accessible and engaging for readers (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007).

The multiple-case design, where comparative case studies exist within an overall piece of research (Cohen et al., 2011; Cousin, 2008; VanderStoep & Johnson, 2008) was implemented in this study. Several related cases were compared. Drawing upon an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, four case studies were devised from the data collected to assist further in understanding the transition to school of children identified as gifted. ‘Boundedness’ provided a fitting description of the situation in this study. The parameters of the transition to school, the time frame of the first
academic term, children, teachers and parents as primary participants, all formed a discrete situation or case.

4.9 Ethical considerations

The study provided an opportunity to research with both adults and children, “giving value to different perspectives and an exchange of ideas which becomes reciprocal learning of great significance” (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011, p. 40). Careful consideration was given to all participants’ protection and participation rights (Smith, 2011).

With the relationship between participant, and the researcher considered, time was dedicated to establishing an ethical research relationship (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011) within the study. Smith (2011) acknowledges, “Relationships and interactions between children and other people are a key component that can enhance children’s capacity to express their feelings and articulate their experiences” (p. 15). The researcher was “aware that both children and adults need time to explore, reflect and understand what the complexities of working together are” (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011, p. 41).

Christensen and Proust’s notion of ethical symmetry (2002) was also applied where by the researcher assumes that “the ethical relationship between researcher and informant is the same whether she conducts research with adults or with children” (p. 482). However, this does not mean that children and adults were regarded as exactly the same. Instead, research was conducted in ways that reflected appropriate methods, emphasising the competency and agency of all participants (Dockett, Einarsdóttir, & Perry, 2011) – a rationale founded on the premise that children are similar to adults, but have different expertise and competencies (Punch, 2002). It is the child’s direct experiences that can inform adults of the implications and outcomes of these experiences for the child (Dockett & Perry, 2003).
4.9.1 The child as a participant

As this study explored the experiences of the transition to school for children identified as gifted, children's voices were significant. Children were positioned as “participating subjects, knowers and social actors, rather than objects of the researcher’s gaze” (Smith, 2011, p. 14). It was assumed the children were capable, confident and responsible people who were able to contribute ideas and knowledge of their own experiences to the researcher (Smith, 2007). Children’s ideas, perspectives, and feelings were accepted as genuine and valid data (Prout & James, 1997; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000).

An awareness of power differentials in research with children was also essential (Smith, 2011), “recognising children’s vulnerability, ‘evolving capacity’ and their need for guidance and direction at times” (p. 15). Also important was the establishment of trust and security. These are “important factors to consider when asking a person to agree to share their lived experiences, knowing that this sharing may then become part of a wider and more public discussion” (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011, p. 41). Smith (2011) acknowledges children are more likely to respond openly and honestly if they feel respected and safe.

4.9.2 Parents and teacher participants

Similar ethical considerations have guided the research process with adult participants, namely the parents and teachers of the children identified as gifted. In addition to building relationships with participating children, developing relationships with their parents, pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers was given careful consideration. In some cases, this study involved pre-school teachers, Kindergarten teachers and parents who were known to the researcher. This was not seen to create any ethical issues for participants. Rather, it was seen as an advantage in recruitment and implementation.
Participants were reminded throughout the project that they were free to participate or withdraw anytime with no negative consequences.

### 4.9.3 Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity

Privacy and confidentiality of all participants was maintained as part of the ethical considerations of the study. All information and data collected were stored safely and only made available to the researcher and her supervisors. All data were numerically coded. The numerical coding system was stored separately to the original documentation. Pseudonyms have been used for children, their parents and their teachers.

### 4.9.4 Gaining ethical approval

Prior to the commencement of the study, approval was granted by the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix P). The researcher adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined in Early Childhood Australia’s Code of Ethics (2006) and the ethical research guidelines published by the National Health and Medical Research Council (2007) when working with children, families and teachers.

At the time of recruitment it was unknown where the participating children would be attending school. This meant that children participated in Phases I and II before ethical approval for Phase III was sought through schools or school systems. Once the parents of the identified children had selected and/or enrolled their child in school, ethical approval from the relevant school system was sought, for example from the NSW DEC, the Catholic diocese or through the Principal of an independent school.
For the three children attending Catholic schools within the specified geographical area, ethics approval was gained through a Research Policy application to the relevant diocese (See Appendix Q). For the five children attending public schools within the specified geographical area, ethics approval was gained through the State Education Research Approval Process [SERAP] (See Appendix R). For the two children attending independent schools, ethics approval was gained through direct approaches to the school’s Principal or Head of Junior School.

4.9.5 Summary of ethical considerations

For this study, it was ensured that ethical principles and values governed the research. For the protection of the participants and the researcher, the principles of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and protection from harm were crucial.

4.10 Triangulation of data

Triangulation within research involves using more than one method, theory, or the use of multiple research teams (Donley, 2012b). The use of multiple methods reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, 2008a). Essentially, this means it is better to look at something from several angles than it is to look at it in only one way (Neuman, 2006), “The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a, p. 7).

The multiple methods used have complementary strengths and this results in a fuller or more comprehensive study (Neuman, 2006). One method should not ‘verify’ the other, but the methods should complement each other (Donley, 2012b).
This study utilised triangulation of data, with a number of data collection methods being applied. Once Sayler’s checklists and the questionnaires were completed, triangulation of data began. The researcher considered the consistencies, inconsistencies and contradictions, from data from parents, pre-school teachers and primary teachers. The final stage of data collection, the follow-up conversations with all participants, ‘added’ another layer of data to build a confirmatory structure (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000).

4.11 Data analysis

This section of the methodology chapter discusses how data produced using the described methods were analysed, and how these analyses informed answers to the research questions.

4.11.1 Introduction to data analysis

Data analysis requires a tight connection between the researcher’s selected theory and methods (Goldhaben, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Tudge, 2008; Winegar, 1997). In order to develop such a connection between these elements in this study, data analysis utilised a multilevel approach.

**Multilevel data analysis.**

According to Hox (2010),

Social research often involves problems that investigate the relationship between individuals and society. The general concept is that individuals interact with the social contexts to which they belong, that individual persons are influenced by the social groups or contexts to which they belong, and that those groups are in turn influenced by the individuals who make up that group. The individuals and the social groups are conceptualised as a hierarchical system of individuals nested within groups, with individuals and groups defined at separate levels of this hierarchical system. Naturally, such systems can be observed at different hierarchical levels, and variables may be defined at each level. This leads to research into the relationships between variables characterizing individuals and
variables characterizing groups, a kind of research that is generally referred to as multilevel research (p. 4).

Multilevel analysis recognises that there is not only one level at which data should be analysed. All levels present in the data are important in their own way (Hox, 2010). Hox continues to advise, “a multilevel problem concerns the relationships between variables that are measured at a number of different hierarchical levels. For example, a common question is how a number of individual and group variables influence one single individual outcome variable” (p. 4).

As this study utilises Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006), it considers human development within the context of interacting environments. This meant that data analysis required a hierarchical system (Hox, 2010). This hierarchy consisted of three levels of data analysis:

i. The first level of data analysis involved the exploration of data content; and,

ii. The second level considered the context of the data: a bioecological lens.

Exploring each of these elements separately laid the foundation for the subsequent, or third level of analysis:

iii. This level of analysis allowed the researcher to compare and evaluate each theme across the four PPCT elements of bioecological theory and determine the level of influence of each PPCT element upon individual themes.

These three levels of data analysis ultimately built towards an understanding of the transition to school for the child identified as gifted. Such a multi-level process of analysis considers the
influences of the child and their prior experiences as well as the influences of family, pre-school and primary school contexts. The three levels of the data analysis process are now described in greater detail.

4.11.2 Level one analysis: Content

4.11.2.1 Relevance of content analysis to the study

Content analysis is described as, “a research method that detects, records and analyses the presence of specified words or concepts in a sample of forms of communication” (Sproule, 2006, p. 115). According to Sproule, researchers using content analysis count and analyse the presence, meanings, and relationships to the text, including words, pictures, phrases, pictures, or photos. Inferences are then made by the researcher, “about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, the time and place” (Sproule, 2006, p. 115) and the, “wider cultural context of which they are a part” (Rose, 2001, p. 55).

Bergman (2010) acknowledges the importance of context and suggests all research is bounded by the contextualised researcher and the contextualised research theme or questions (see also Bergman & Coxon, 2005). He advises that all research activities, from contextualisation to interpretation of analytic results, are intertwined and, “must therefore be understood in relation to their cultural, historical, political, and social contexts” (Bergman, 2010, p. 389).

The following examples illustrate an interpretive approach to qualitative content analysis:

- Glaser’s later work on grounded theory (1978, 1992) emphasised interpretation, context, the emergence of theory,
and the influence of the researcher on research results. Bergman (2010) states that interpretation of meaning is based not only on the content of text, but also on the context within which text was produced and within which the researcher studied the text.

- Van Dijk (1988) reported, “Textural dimensions account for the structures of discourse at various levels of description. Contextual dimensions relate the structural descriptions to various properties of context, such as cognitive processes and representations or sociocultural factors” (p. 25). However, Bergman (2010) advises that in order to justify such an approach to analysis, these possible foci should be tied to a specific theoretical framework and research theme or question.

The Person, Place, Context and Time (PPCT) elements of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci’s (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) bioecological theory, combined with the nature of the transition to school, and the interactions between different contexts, systems, curricula, philosophies and approaches (Educational Transitions and Change Research Group [ETC], 2011) highlight the need for an interpretive approach to content analysis.

4.11.2.2 Coding

Essentially, content analysis involves coding, or breaking down, the text into manageable categories. This coding occurs on several levels. Text may be broken down “from a word or word sense perspective, or by a phrase, sentence or theme” (Sproule, 2006, p. 115). Coding is basically selective reduction. The researcher reduces the text to a set of categories consisting of a word, set of words or phrases. The content analysis can then concentrate on, and code for, specific words or patterns that are pertinent to the research questions (Sproule, 2006). It is this process that was applied to the study reported in this thesis.
Explicit and implicit coding.

Within content analysis, coding of text into categories occurs on two levels. Firstly, coding is explicit, or manifest; secondly it is implicit, or latent (Sproule, 2006).

Explicit coding is a reliable way of coding visible, easily identifiable, content. As the rules regarding how the content is categorised can be made clear, other researchers using the same coding rules would be able to code the data in the same way. In contrast, implicit coding may be problematic as coding the underlying and implicit meaning of the content of the text is far more subjective. However, such implicit coding allows for greater depth of analysis of content (Sproule, 2006).

Essentially, the process used to code text is dependent upon three elements; the text being examined, the theoretical framework of the researcher, and the questions the researcher is seeking to answer. However, within this complexity of elements, the basic guideline for establishing codes is that the codes must be:

- exhaustive – Every aspect of the data with which the researcher is concerned must be covered by at least one category;

- exclusive – Categories must not overlap, or ambiguities must at least be minimized; and,

- enlightening – Categories must produce a breakdown of content that will be analytically interesting and coherent (Sproule, 2006, p. 117).

Sproule advises that once coded, the text is then examined using one of two basic content analysis methods. Either conceptual (thematic) analysis or relational (semantic) analysis takes place. According to Sproule, these analysis categories are not exclusive (sub)categories, but can be understood as ‘variations on a theme’.
The role of the analysis is to quantify and tally the presence of the concept within the text. The focus of this analysis is to identify any occurrences of the concepts (both explicit and implicit) within the selected text or texts.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) state that, “There is no one single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data; how one does it should abide by the issue of fitness for purpose” (p. 537). In considering fitness for purpose, the researcher must be clear what the focus of the data analysis is, as this will determine the kind of analysis undertaken. The researcher may plan, for example:

- “to describe;
- to portray;
- to summarize;
- to interpret;
- to discover patterns;
- to generate themes;
- to understand individuals and idiographic features;
- to understand groups and nomothetic features (e.g. frequencies, norms, patterns, ‘laws’);
- to raise issues;
- to prove or demonstrate;
- to explain and seek causality;
- to explore;
- to test;
- to discover commonalities, differences and similarities; and,
- to examine the application and operation of the same issues in different contexts” (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 358).

Data from this study were coded using conceptual (or thematic) analysis using many of the foci listed above, particularly to generate themes, to understand individuals and idiographic features, to discover commonalities, differences and similarities; and to examine
the application and operation of the same issues in different contexts.
In determining the *fitness for purpose* (Cohen et al., 2013) of the interpretive content analysis in the study, the researcher considered the links to the theoretical framework – bioecological theory – as crucial. Consequently, detailed analysis of the context of data was also required. This contextual analysis of data is now discussed.

### 4.11.3 Level two analysis: Statements relating themes to the theoretical framework

#### 4.11.3.1 Introduction
Children’s development and early school success is influenced by a complexity of bioecological factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Broström, 2000; Crnic & Lamberty, 1994). According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), children’s development is strongly influenced by the settings or contexts in which they actively participate. Bioecological theory situates the child at the centre of the model, drawing attention to the contexts in which the child is located and the intersections of these contexts (Murray, 2014). Consequently, application of bioecological theory within the study necessitated analysis of not only the content of the data, but also the contexts. Exploration of the relationship between these contexts, in order to understand the systems as a whole, followed.

Contextual analysis of the data within the study assigns “significance to the active role of individuals as they influence, and are influenced by, the contexts in which they live” (Dockett et al., 2014, p. 5). Such analysis also identifies potential for change as different systems or contexts, and those located within them, interact. This combination of interactions, change and time creates a dynamic model in which the transition to school can be explored by focussing on the overlapping or intersecting contexts of the children’s experiences. The PPCT
elements of bioecological theory, in relation to the context analysis, are now considered.

**Process elements of transition.**
The proximal processes or ‘enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) include relationships children have with others (such as parents and teachers). The quality of such interactions can make a significant contribution to the success of transitions. While the ‘person’ characteristics of the child (such as temperament) may influence the quality of their relationships with others (Murray, 2014), the importance of positive and supportive teacher-child, child-peer, teacher-teacher and teacher-parent interactions during the transition to school is widely acknowledged (Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

**Person elements of transition.**
Viewing the child as an active agent (Dunlop, 2003) in their transition and situating children at the centre of the transition process requires understanding the unique contribution each child brings to the process (Murray, 2014). It also means understanding that children are individuals who operate within a number of contexts – they are not independent from external factors (Murray, 2014). The internal processes and characteristics children bring to their transitions play a major role in their success in adjusting to school (Rosier & McDonald, 2011).

**Context elements of transition.**
Analysis of the context elements of the bioecological model also necessitates consideration of the institutional aspects of the transition process, which often present major discontinuities for young children (Dockett & Perry, 2007a). Classroom and school organisational factors, including transition support, must be considered (Margetts, 2014). Investigating the school and the Kindergarten classroom environment, along with teaching approaches within the transition, provides important insights into
effective teaching and learning environments and strategies in the first year of school (Murray, 2014).
Family and community contexts may also play an important role within the child’s transition to school, so must be considered within data analysis applying a bioecological lens.

*Time elements of transition.*

Transition to school is often described as a process that takes time (Dockett et al., 2014). Within this process individual children and families may need different amounts of time to adjust to school or to feel a sense of belonging in the school environment (Dockett et al., 2014, p. 11). Analysis of children’s transition to school involves examining children’s engagement in different contexts at different times and in different ways (Murray, 2014).

The PPCT elements, as described above, were then used in level two analysis to create statements which explored the contextual elements of the data. These statements – shown in Appendix S - are now explained.

**4.11.3.2 Developing the statements**

Drawing upon the PPCT elements of bioecological theory, the second level of analysis again utilised data captured through Sayler’s checklists, questionnaires and follow-up conversations, previously explored in level one analysis. However, the level two analysis builds upon the results of the content analysis – the themes of the study – and utilises the theoretical framework – to consider data through a bioecological lens.

In this analysis, statements were written which considered the influences of the PPCT elements on the content of the data – the themes of the study. This analysis involved the researcher re-examining data through the PPCT lens, resulting in new meanings being drawn from the data (Glaser, 1965). The statements have
been used “to give the added dimension of authenticity, humanity, personality, emotions, views and values in a situation” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 553). At the same time the statements documented key events, themes, behaviours or actions, decisions, people and points in the chronology of the transition to school.

These statements – shown in Appendix S – were structured by themes and their relevance to each of the PPCT elements. Each theme was evaluated across the four PPCT elements. The researcher began to explore what made each theme different and/or similar to other themes, and the influence of the PPCT elements upon the individual theme. Questions were asked about the data that went beyond a surface level interpretation and included the exploration of questions such as, "What does this theme mean?", "Which PPCT elements are linked to this theme?", “How is this theme influenced by each PPCT element?” and “What do the different PPCT elements reveal about the theme?”. In asking these questions, a clearer understanding of each theme emerged that related to both the results of the content analysis and to the theoretical framework.

In this study, the re-examination of data through the PPCT lens and the creation of the statements exploring the contextual analysis of the data ensured that different interpretations of the text had been considered (Cohen, 2011). Such an approach adds “different interpretive dimensions to the understanding of the content, structure, context, and meaning within the research material” (Bergman, 2010, p. 393).

Drawing upon the work of Tyson (2011), Domingues and Gonçalves (2013) and Dorsch, Smith, and McDonough (2014), such a combination of data analysis methods – level one and two data analysis – also allowed for a cross validation of data. Bias is inherent to the analysis of qualitative data, and accordingly, internal validity was obtained through multiple forms of data collection and
triangulation, such as follow up conversations which further explored responses given during completion of Sayler’s checklists and questionnaires. In this way, the researcher attempted to provide a dense, accurate description of the reality under study through the lens of bioecological theory and the PPCT model. This analysis maximised the overall depth of analysis allowing the potential for new theory to emerge from data, and aligned findings with the theoretical framework, strengthening the themes of the study.

4.11.3.3 Example of statements relating to a theme
As previously discussed, statements written for level two analysis are structured by theme and the relevance to each of the PPCT elements. The following section is an example of statements written for the teachers’ approaches to learning and development theme:

- "What does this theme mean?" The responses of parents, pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers highlighted the teachers’ approach to learning and development. Teachers in the study placed a high priority on children’s social-emotional skills and behaviours and attention related skills, wanting to ensure that children felt secure and established social connections. In the early part of the first year of school, for some of the Kindergarten teachers, the social-emotional priority seemed to overtake provisions for the children’s intellectual development.

- The following three questions, "Which PPCT elements are linked to this theme?", "How does each PPCT element influence this theme?", and “What do the different PPCT elements reveal about this theme?” are considered in the following section:
The *approach to learning and development* theme was determined to be influenced by all four PPCT elements. These influences are now discussed:

**Process:** The relationships children had with others (such as positive and supportive teacher-child, child-peer, teacher-teacher and teacher-parent interactions) were significant for many children in the study. For example, both Sophie and Claudia had elder sisters who both started school in the year before their younger sisters. This meant that Sophie and Claudia experienced their elder sisters completing Kindergarten homework, which consisted of reading, practicing sight words and counting. This sibling relationship gave the younger siblings an advantage. They were exposed to some aspects of the Kindergarten curriculum, in particular home readers, prior to starting school. They learned alongside their sisters and were able to demonstrate their advanced abilities during their transition to school.

In another example, Advit’s pre-school teacher’s understanding of giftedness and appropriate educational provisions, in part due to her experiences with her own gifted children, meant she developed a very positive relationship with Advit at pre-school. She provided activities and opportunities that stimulated him. In another example, Sam’s parents developed a strong parent-teacher relationship with Sam’s Kindergarten teacher. Their wish for a ‘well rounded’ education, focusing upon both Sam’s strengths and needs, sat well with the Kindergarten teacher’s philosophy, and resulted in a united approach to his learning and development.

**Person:** Fergus’ impulsivity meant that his Kindergarten teacher focused upon his social-emotional and attention related skills, rather than his intellectual development. In another example, Claudia’s quiet and shy nature meant she was
reluctant to stand out from her peers and made her susceptible to becoming ‘in invisible’ in both the pre-school and Kindergarten environment. However, in Kindergarten, this worked in her favour. Claudia’s teacher was aware that such a quiet and shy nature could influence the child’s development. The Kindergarten teacher chose to focus on Claudia’s intellectual development, as well as her social-emotional and attention related skills.

**Context:** For children in the study, the context of the classroom, in particular school organisational factors such as class size, influenced their transition to school. For example, Fergus and Annabel were two of one hundred and sixteen children starting Kindergarten at their school. There were four Kindergarten classes with almost thirty children in each. This may have limited the time their classroom teacher was able to spend with individual children. In contrast, Sam’s class, the only Kindergarten class in his co-located primary school, contained 12 children – eight boys and four girls. This context, while creating difficulties in some areas such as friendship choices, allowed Sam’s teacher to spend significant time with Sam. This small class size also meant Sam received significant support from the school’s *Challenge* teacher, providing him activities and interactions on a 1:1 basis.

Sophie, placed in a Kinder/Year One class, was provided with opportunities which suited her advanced development. She was not restricted to completing Kindergarten work. Her teacher recognised Sophie’s academic strengths and allowed Sophie to work at her individual level. This meant that Sophie regularly completed Year One work alongside her Year One peers.

In another example, Kabir’s anxiety about school, associated with his Autism Spectrum Disorder, meant that school was often stressful for him. However, his Kindergarten teacher put in
place strategies to support Kabir in the new environment. For example, for the first month of school Kabir’s Year Six buddy spent the beginning of each lunchtime with him, ensuring that he settled. While all Kindergarten children had buddies that they spent time with in the playground, Kabir’s buddy spent a lot of time with Kabir and enjoyed being given this extra responsibility.

**Time:** Time, in relation to children’s ages, was a factor for some children in the study. Annabel and Kaitlyn were almost six and very keen to learn when they started school. In another example, many teachers allowed time for children to settle into school, initially focusing upon children’s social-emotional skills and behaviours and their attention related development. The teacher’s approach to teaching and learning was dedicated to children’s social-emotional and attention related development for the first few weeks of school. Children’s intellectual development was initially not considered most important, yet for some children in the study, this approach was disappointing. The Kindergarten teachers at Fergus and Annabel’s school determined that the first term of school would be dedicated to provision of continuity between educational settings and in the development of routines. However, Sam, Kabir, Sophie and Claudia’s Kindergarten teachers focused upon on all three areas of development from the start of the Kindergarten year.

### 4.11.4. Level three analysis: Determining the ratings

#### 4.11.4.1 Structure of the matrix

Drawing upon the statements about themes organised through the PPCT elements (level two analysis), level three analysis enabled the construction of a matrix which further analysed the influences of the elements on the themes. In this matrix, one axis is defined by the themes established through the first level of analysis, while the other
axis is aligned with the second level of analysis, the PPCT elements of bioecological theory. The entries in the matrix represent the level of influence of each PPCT element on the themes as demonstrated through the statements constructed in the level 2 analysis.

4.11.4.2 Defining ‘influence’

Drawing upon the statements about themes organised through the PPCT elements (level two analysis), level three analysis determined the influences of the elements on the themes. For this to occur, the term ‘influence’ needed to be clearly defined. In this study, influence is defined as,

- “the power to have an effect on people or things, or a person or thing that is able to do this”; and,

- “to affect or change how someone or something develops, behaves, or thinks” (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2015).

4.11.4.3 Analysis presented in the matrix

In the matrix, the definition of influence was used to analyse the levels of influence of the elements upon the themes. Using constant comparison analysis (Glaser, 1965), data from level two statements were able to be analysed according to each content theme and the level of influence of the PPCT elements. Such analysis allowed the researcher to compare and evaluate each theme across the four PPCT elements of bioecological theory and determine the level of influence of each PPCT element upon individual themes. This process is now detailed:

1. The level one analysis resulted in the categorisation of the raw data from parents, preschool and school educators by identified themes. For each of these themes, the relevant data were revisited in order to tally the number of references to each of the PPCT elements in these data. These tallies were then converted to percentages of the total number of references for
each theme. These tallies and percentages are recorded in Table 7.1.

2. Comparisons were then made between the percentages for each element in each theme and the statements written in level two analysis. This approach tested the reasonableness of the results and the associated argumentation (van Eemeren, Garssen, & Meuffels, 2011). These percentages were then converted to a rating for each element, based upon the criteria shown in Table 7.2.

The results of these ratings were then shown in the matrix – Table 7.3. For example, using hypothetical numbers, suppose that the raw tally results of mentions of the PPCT elements for a given theme were Process 46; Person 73; Context 12; Time 5. Converted to percentages of the total number of mentions, these give Process 34%; Person 54%; Context 9%; Time 4%. Using Table 7.3, the final ratings on the influence of each of the elements on this theme are: Process B; Person A; Context C; Time C.

**4.11.5. Summary of data analysis**

Data analysis in this study employed a hierarchical, multi-level approach (Hox, 2010). The analysis was structured around three levels, along with a number of case studies of particular children.

- Level one analysis develops the overall the themes of the study.

- Level two analysis developed the statements which link the themes with the theoretical framework of the study in the form of the Process-Person-Context-Time elements. These
statements highlight the collective experiences of the eleven children in the study and consider both the content and contextual aspects of the data.

- Utilising results from level one and level two analysis, individual case studies highlight the experiences of four of the eleven child participants in their transition to school.

- Level three analysis develops the matrix which provides presents the ratings of the levels of influence of each of the PPCT elements on each of the themes.

- Chapter 8: Discussion presents a report and discussion of the three levels of analysis, while providing a concise, coherent, logical and non-repetitive account that identifies and integrates the themes of the study. This chapter moves beyond the descriptive to link the themes with the research questions of the study, makes connections with the literature outlined in chapter 2, and develops the discussion in relation to the research questions.

4.12 Chapter summary

This study involved the collection of data relating to the transition to school for children identified as gifted. This chapter has described how this study is positioned within a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. This chapter has also provided details of how this research project was designed and undertaken, as well as describing the attention paid to the particular ethical responsibilities of the researcher when working with children, their parents and their pre-school and Kindergarten teachers. Methods of data analysis and triangulation of data were also discussed.

The next four chapters present the findings of the study. The overall results, that is, raw data, are the focus of Chapter Five. Chapter Six
presents four case studies designed to extract individual children’s experiences of the transition to school. Chapter Seven details the data analysis, and the discussion of these results and analysis is the focus of Chapter Eight.

5. Results

Organisation of the chapter
This chapter is organised in the following way:

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Sayler’s checklists results

5.3 Open-ended questionnaires and structured conversations results

5.1 Introduction
This study explored the experiences of eleven children identified as gifted, as they transitioned into school. In particular, it examined the identification of children as gifted, how schools address these children’s special needs, the perspectives of the child identified as gifted, their parents and their teachers in the transitional experience. Data were gathered using a variety of methods across the three phases of the study:

Phase I: Identification of pre-school child as gifted:
July – November 2012

- Sayler’s Things My Young Child Has Done checklist completed by parents and Sayler’s Things This Young Child Has Done checklist completed by pre-school teachers;
- open-ended questionnaires for both parents and pre-school teachers; and,
• structured conversations with both parents and pre-school teachers.
Phase II: Prior to school entry:
December 2012 – January 2013

- open-ended questionnaires for parents; and
- structured conversations with parents and children.

Phase III: Post school entry:
May – June 2013

- open-ended questionnaires completed by both parents and Kindergarten; teachers; and
- structured conversations with parents, children and Kindergarten teachers.

5.2 Sayler’s checklists

Sayler’s checklists (Appendices A, B and C) were completed by parents and pre-school teachers during Phase I of the study. The results of the checklists were used to gain insights into pre-school teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of the children’s personal characteristics (demand, resource and force) (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1995a; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). This information enhanced the researcher’s understanding of the intellectual and social-emotional needs of children participating in the study.

The results of the checklists – shown in Table 5.1 and 5.2 – indicate child participants in Phase I were considered by their parents and pre-school teachers to be well above average in most areas of intellectual development. For example, responses to the statement: ‘Began to read or write early’, indicate parents strongly agreed. Parent scores were between 9 and 10. Pre-school teachers’ responses to a similar statement: ‘Reads, writes, or uses number in advanced ways’, also indicated agreement – scores ranged between 7 and 10. In another example, 11 parent participants’ scores
indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement: ‘Has quick recall of information’. Parent scores for this statement were between 7 and 10 – they either agreed or strongly agreed. Six out of seven pre-school teacher scores also indicated strong agreement, with scores between 8 and 10.

Responses to some statements highlighted the differences between the twice-exceptional (2E) children and the other children’s results. It seems the characteristics of autism resulted in lower scores for some statements. For example, for the statement, ‘Has an advanced sense of humour or sees incongruities as funny’ pre-school teachers gave the 2E children low scores, indicating they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Kabir scored 1 and Andrew scored 3. Yet for the other children in the study, pre-school teachers’ scores ranged between 5 and 10, indicating they agreed or strongly agreed. In another example, discrepancies between scores for children identified as 2E and those identified solely as gifted, were highlighted. Responses to the statement, ‘Is empathetic, feels more deeply than do other children that age’ varied. Pre-school teachers’ again gave the 2E children lower scores. Kabir scored 2 and Andrew scored 0. However, for the other children in the study, pre-school teachers’ scores ranged between 5 and 8. Given the diagnosis of autism for the 2E child participants, such discrepancies regarding these statements are to be expected.

Sayler’s checklist results are now reported in Table 5.1 and Table 5.2.
Table 5.1: Sayler’s checklist results: Parents (n=11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 = Strongly agree</th>
<th>0 = Strongly disagree</th>
<th>U=Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advit</strong></td>
<td><strong>Andrew</strong></td>
<td><strong>Annabel</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia *</td>
<td>Fergus</td>
<td>Hugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabir</td>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>Poppy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Has quick recall of information

2. Knows a lot more about topics than do other children that age

3. Uses advanced vocabulary

4. Began to read or write early

5. Shows unusually intense interest and enjoyment when learning about new things

6. Understands things well enough to teach others

7. Is comfortable around adults

8. Shows leadership abilities

9. Is resourceful and improvises well

10. Uses imaginative methods to accomplish tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 = Strongly agree</th>
<th>0 = Strongly disagree</th>
<th>U=Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Some of the responses of Claudia’s parents are low, however, she was included in the study as she was identified by her pre-school teacher as being gifted in reading. However, in many ways, she does not demonstrate typical characteristics of the young gifted child.

** U indicates ‘unsure’
Table 5.2: Sayler’s checklist results: Pre-school teachers (n=7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Adit</th>
<th>Andrew</th>
<th>Annabel</th>
<th>Claudia</th>
<th>Fergus</th>
<th>Hugh</th>
<th>Kabir</th>
<th>Kaitlyn</th>
<th>Poppy</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Sophie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Has quick recall of information</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Shows intense curiosity and deeper knowledge than other children</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is empathetic, feels more deeply than do other children that age</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. May not always display their advanced understanding in everyday situations</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Uses advanced vocabulary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Reads, writes, or uses number in advanced ways</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Advanced play interests and behaviours</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Shows unusually intense interest and enjoyment when learning about new things</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Has an advanced sense of humour or sees incongruities as funny</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Understands things well enough to teach others</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Is comfortable around older children and adults</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Shows leadership abilities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Is resourceful and improvises well</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Shows logical and metacognitive skills in managing own learning</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Uses imaginative methods to accomplish tasks</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Open-ended questionnaires and conversations

Data collected from the questionnaires helped shape conversation questions for each participant, used to triangulate the data. Consequently, the results from these data are reported together.

5.3.1 Phase I: Identification of pre-school child

*Pre-school Teachers (n=7).*

1. What characteristics has the focus child displayed that suggest to you they are ‘different’ from other children?

(Response Rate = 7 out of 7)

Some pre-school teachers included multiple responses to this question. Six highlighted engagement with thinking and learning including complex ways of thinking and making connections quickly and easily as characteristics of difference. Advanced literacy and numeracy skills were proffered by four pre-school teachers and advanced language by two. Figure 5.1: Extract of Hugh’s pre-school portfolio highlights his advanced literacy and numeracy skills.
2. What characteristics has the focus child displayed that suggest to you they are gifted? (RR=7/7)

Four pre-school teachers emphasised both engagement with thinking and learning, literacy and numeracy skills. Three of these emphasised high-level language as a characteristic displayed by the focus child that suggested they were gifted. Other pre-school teachers reported that they had not seen such characteristics in the child while at pre-school.
3. **What areas of development and learning demonstrated by the focus child have you valued as the most important indicator/s of giftedness?** (RR=7/7)

Some pre-school teachers included multiple responses to this question. Six valued engagement with thinking and learning as the most important indicator of giftedness demonstrated by the focus child. Four valued language and two valued literacy and numeracy skills.

4. **Have you been involved in the identification of the focus child as gifted?** (RR=7/7)

Five pre-school teachers were not involved in the identification of the focus child as gifted. In three of these cases the pre-school teacher agreed that the child was gifted. However, giftedness was not their focus for the child. Fergus’ pre-school teacher reported,

> No, as I do feel Fergus is gifted there are other issues to do with his behaviour and development that affect him (in negative ways). Recommended psychologist to support behaviour management at home and OT assessment to find out and develop strategies, if appropriate, for sensory issues.

In the cases of Fergus and Advit, although their pre-school teacher felt the children were gifted, they were reluctant to discuss this with parents. They were particularly reluctant to use the term ‘gifted’. Reasons cited for this reluctance included a hesitation to label young children and because no formal identification had occurred. In one case the child, Sam, was identified by the Head of the Junior School in a pre-Kinder assessment. In this case the child, “completed a pre-kinder questionnaire demonstrating a unique ability to read and comprehend the document”. Sam’s pre-school teacher did not participate in the study.

5. **Have the focus child’s parents been involved in the identification of the focus child as gifted?** (RR=5/7)

In five cases the focus child’s parents were involved in the identification process. In Sophie’s case the pre-school teacher
identified the child as gifted and raised this with the child’s parents and the Assistant Principal at the co-located primary school,

Yes, certainly straight back to Mum and Dad. Having those conversations helps us both go, ‘Yeah, this is pretty switched on’. And the AP, I’ve talked to the Assistant Principal, saying: ‘My God, what do I do about this one?’

6. Have any other specialists or teachers been involved in the identification of the focus child as gifted? (RR=6/7)

Five pre-school teachers reported that no other specialists or teachers had been involved in the identification of the focus child as gifted. However, in three of the five cases where the pre-school teacher identified the child as gifted, advice from other parties was sought from the Assistant Principal or other teaching staff.

7. Do you believe the identification of a pre-school child as gifted impacts upon their transition to school? (RR=7/7)

Four pre-school teachers responded, “Yes” to this question. For example, Sophie’s teacher suggested, “She may need to be challenged more at school as she could get bored in Kinder as she knows so much already”.

Advit’s pre-school teacher was equivocal in her answer, “Yes, I have mixed feelings about this – may help school support and provide opportunities for the child; may set up unrealistic expectations about what the child may be like”.

Two pre-school teachers responded “No” to the question. For example, Poppy’s pre-school teacher commented, “Transition is about all children becoming comfortable with the idea of school and developing an understanding of what school is about, so I believe each child will take their own meaning from this”.

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8. Do you believe the focus child has special needs regarding their education? (RR=7/7)

Two of the pre-school teachers responded that the focus child did not have special needs regarding their education, although Sophie’s teacher provided clarification, “Teachers just need to accommodate her and extend learning where appropriate – teaching will need to build on her current knowledge (not just having her colouring and stencils)”. 

Five pre-school teachers reported that the focus child did have special needs regarding their education. In some cases, catering for these needs was seen as straightforward. For example, Hugh’s pre-school teacher reported, “Special needs only in allowing him to stretch his mind and utilize his strengths in practical and extensive activities”. Yet in three other cases the pre-school teacher identified additional issues. For example, “Fergus is clever and thoughtful but needs to develop self-management strategies to enable him to learn and behave in acceptable ways and not impact negatively on the learning of other children”.

Andrew and Kabir were the other children identified as having special needs during their transition to school, however these needs related to their autism rather than their giftedness. For example, “Kabir has ASD as well so his educational needs are not straightforward” and “Andrew will need support to solve problems, especially in the playground. He may not seek help for himself”. At this stage of data collection Andrew had not been diagnosed with autism, this diagnosis occurred when he started school. However, Andrew’s pre-school teacher was confident he would have a diagnosis in the future. Her confidence that Andrew was autistic is evident in many of her responses.
9. Has the identification of the focus child as gifted changed your expectations for that child? (RR=7/7)
For five of the pre-school teachers, the identification of the focus child as gifted did not change their expectations for the child. Andrew’s teacher reported, “I aim to extend each child along their learning journey so I have consistently high but realistic expectations”.

For two pre-school teachers, the child’s identification as gifted did change their expectations, “Yes, once his unique set of skills is shown, allowance and consolidation needs to be given”.

Responses to this question did not seem based upon who identified the children as gifted.

10. In relation to the identification of the focus child as gifted, have you sought assistance or utilised any of the following resources from organisations or services specifically established to cater for the needs of gifted children and their families? Internet access or website, Telephone information, Pamphlets or brochures, Professional development, Newsletters, Checklists, Professionals (e.g. Psychologists or experts in the field of gifted education or other. (RR=6/7)
Two pre-school teachers responded that they had not sought any assistance or resources. Four pre-school teachers commented that they had sought assistance or utilised resources. Of these, two had attended professional development or utilised checklists. One of these four had used Internet access or a website and another had used GERRIC at the University of New South Wales.

11. In relation to the needs and experiences of the focus child, have you sought assistance or utilised any of the following resources from organisations or services specifically established to cater for the needs of gifted children and their families? Internet access or website, Telephone information,
Pamphlets or brochures, Professional development, Newsletters, Checklists, Professionals (e.g. Psychologists or experts in the field of gifted education or other. (RR=7/7)

Four pre-school teachers had read books or journals to assist them in meeting the needs of their focus children. Three had had discussions with teachers or professionals in the field of gifted education. Andrew’s and Fergus’ pre-school teacher had done nothing. However, she had a strong background in catering for individual differences and early intervention.

12. Have you been recommended any support services specifically catering for the needs of gifted children? (RR=7/7)

Five pre-school teachers had not been recommended any such support services. One pre-school teacher had been recommended GERRIC and one had used the CHIP (Children of High Intellectual Potential) foundation.

13. Does your pre-school have a gifted policy? (RR=7/7)

All seven of the pre-school teachers who responded to this question reported that their pre-school did not have a gifted and talented policy.

14. During the focus child’s time at pre-school, have any changes been made to planning and programming in order to improve the educational experiences planned of the focus child? (RR=7/7)

Six pre-school teachers had made changes to their planning and programming in order to improve the educational experiences of the focus child. For example, Sophie’s teacher reported, “All children are catered for at their varying levels, so change is continuous. Her needs are responded to, not by a specific change, but by adapting and extending her abilities each day”. However, Advit’s teacher responded that no changes needed to be made because “Our pre-school program is open-ended so we are able to extend Advit’s interests quite easily”.

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15. If any changes have been made, who has been involved in any stage/s of the planning and programming of educational experiences for the focus child? For example, the child, their parents or other specialists. (RR=7/7)

Four pre-school teachers had involved other specialists such as a speech therapist or occupational therapist in the planning and programming of educational experiences for the focus child. The pre-school teacher of both Andrew and Fergus commented that the children’s families were most commonly involved in the planning and programming for the child, “Conversations with family about their concerns and our aims and strategies”.

Only Hugh’s pre-school teacher reported that the focus child had been involved in planning.

16. What areas of development and learning do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of the focus child? (RR=7/7)

Fergus’ pre-school teacher reported social-emotional aspects such as self-control, willingness to take risks, and try unfamiliar experiences, as the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of the focus child. For three children, Sophie, Andrew and Kabir, the pre-school teacher focused upon social-emotional elements. For example, “Increasing social interest and supporting interaction and play with his peers”. For Sophie, Hugh and Advit, their pre-school teachers focused upon extending and challenging, “Offering open-ended, stimulating learning opportunities”. Figure 5.2 shows an extract from Hugh’s pre-school portfolio.
17. What does the focus child find most challenging about pre-school at present? (RR=7/7)

Four pre-school teachers identified social-emotional aspects as most challenging for the focus children. Fergus’ teacher reported, “Containing his behaviour/excitement”. Two pre-school teachers, the teachers of Advit and Hugh, were not able to identify anything as challenging for them. Kabir’s pre-school teacher identified following...
routines as a challenge for him, however she felt this was due to his diagnosis of autism rather than his giftedness.

18. **What does the focus child enjoy most about pre-school at present?** (RR=6/7)
The pre-school teachers of Fergus, Kaitlyn and Poppy reported that their focus children enjoyed social interactions. The pre-school teachers of Sophie, Hugh and Advit reported that the children enjoyed “Exploring, discovering and extending learning”.

19. **Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the educational experiences of the focus child?** (RR=2/7)
Hugh’s pre-school teacher would have liked to have been able to contact his school about him. Sophie’s pre-school teacher was concerned she should receive the ‘right’ experiences - not just colouring in.

**Note:** Data regarding transition practices was not collected during the study. However, some parents and pre-school teachers referred to the child’s transition practices during data collection. For example, in Andrew’s case, his mother reported that finding a school that both she and her ex-husband were happy with was difficult. This meant that by the time they decided which school Andrew would enrol in, orientation sessions had begun. Andrew was only able to attend the final of the three orientations organised by his school. For other children in the study such data were not forthcoming.
Parents (n=11).

1. You mentioned the characteristics your child displayed that suggest to you they are ‘different’ from other children? Can you tell me when you first began to think they were different? (RR=4/11)

Four parents all identified language, literacy and numeracy and engagement with thinking and learning as characteristics that suggested to them that the focus child was ‘different’ from other children.

Three parents first began to think their child was different between one and two years of age. For two parents, it was between six-months and one year, when their child first began talking, or talking well.

Sam’s parents, however, did not think their child was different from his peers. As an only child they did not had a reference point to compare difference, “We’ve got no frame of reference for Sam. We don’t know what ‘normal’ is, or what the standard is. It’s just like well he’s reading, that’s nice (laughs). That’s really good”.

2. Has your child been involved in any experiences that have identified your child as gifted? For example: formal testing by a psychologist, testing by a pre-school or Kindergarten teacher. (RR=11/11)

Eight parents reported that their children had not been involved in any testing to identify them as gifted. Three children had been involved in formal testing. Sam had been tested by the Head of the Junior School where he was to attend school. Advit had had an informal assessment done by a psychologist who was a friend of the family and Kabir had been assessed and found to be on the autism spectrum. While Andrew was identified as being twice-exceptional, his diagnosis as autistic did not occur until he began school, in Phase III of the study.
3. Have your child’s teachers identified him/her as gifted?
(RR=11/11)
Of the eleven parents participating in Phase I of the study, five reported that their child was identified as gifted by the child’s pre-school teacher. For three of these children, the parents reported conversations with their child’s teacher. Poppy’s mother commented, “I would say clever – not gifted. She can read all the name tags in her room”. Kaitlyn’s mother reported, “No, no, she did always say what a great student Kaitlyn was and what a pleasure . . . actually one thing she always used to say to me was, ‘I wish I had 21 Kaitlyn’s!’” Fergus’ pre-school teacher mentioned his giftedness to his parents.

4. Has your child’s pre-school teacher or any other specialists been involved in the identification of your child as gifted?
(RR=11/11)
Five parents reported their child’s pre-school teacher or another specialist had not been involved in the child’s identification as gifted. Five parents reported their child’s teacher had been involved in their child’s identification. One parent reported that their child had been identified by the co-located school’s Head of Junior School, during a pre-Kindergarten interview.

5. What areas of development and learning demonstrated by your child do you value as the most important indicator/s of giftedness? (RR=11/11)
Some parents reported numerous responses to this question. For seven parents, literacy and numeracy skills were valued as the most important indicators of giftedness. Five parents also valued their child’s memory as the most important indicator of giftedness demonstrated by their child. Kabir’s parents reported, “Exceptional memory and understanding of how things work e.g. troubleshooting laptop, Telstra touch panel etc”. “A thirst for knowledge” was also valued by Fergus and Hugh’s parents as an important indicator of giftedness. Hugh’s parents commented, “Seeking a deeper
knowledge of things in general – Hugh cares about how different things in the world relate to each other and the effect it has on him and his family”.

6. What experiences related to the identification of your child as gifted would you consider were the most positive? (RR=4/11)

For two parents, the most positive element of their child’s identification as gifted related to understanding their child better. Fergus’ mother reported,

I think it’s been most helpful to explain to us why he is as intense as he is. I think we thought maybe before it was more of a deliberate, well not a deliberate behaviour, but when we sit down and think about it now, it’s his thirst for knowledge that drives us insane really!

Annabel’s parents reported that the recognition of the child’s skills was the most positive element. For Sophie’s parents, the potential for a bright future was reported as a positive.

**Figure 5.3 shows Annabel’s pre-school efforts**

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7. What experiences related to the identification of your child as gifted would you consider were the most negative? (RR=11/11)

Three parents acknowledged the term gifted was the most negative experience within the identification process. Sophie, Hugh and Sam’s parents were uncomfortable with the gifted term. Sam’s father commented, “I really don’t like the term gifted, it sounds to me like it’s something that’s been given to you – you don’t need to work at it”.
Two other parents were concerned about the changes in expectations once the child was labelled, for example Sophie’s father worried,

I know how difficult it can be when people think you’re the smart kid and they can pick on you. If people think she’s gifted – not just the smart kid, if people think she’s gifted and word gets out that she’s doing advanced programs or whatever it is that’s happening, I’m just worried that, you know, she’ll get treated the same.

Hugh’s father was also concerned,

Our desire for him not to be singled out, or set aside, or put on some sort of pedestal that the expectations are so much higher. I think the expectations will be higher, because . . . only because we recognise his potential or his capacity but I don’t . . . you can have that increased expectation without expecting the world . . . without that pressure.

Three other parents considered certain characteristics of giftedness a negative, characteristics which were highlighted by the identification process. Fergus’ mother found her son’s exceptional memory caused some difficulties, “He can remember things way back to when he was 2 ½ years. Can ask for items from back then!”
Hugh’s parents found their child’s need for constant stimulation tiring.

Advit’s father had not yet identified any negatives.
8. If you identified your child as gifted, have you communicated this to your child’s pre-school teacher? Please comment. 
(RR=6/11)
Five parents suggested that this question was not applicable to them, as the pre-school teacher had identified the child as gifted. Three parents responded that they had identified their child as gifted and they had communicated this to the pre-school teacher.

Two parents had not communicated their identification of their child to the pre-school teacher. Annabel’s mother reported, “It’s hard to negotiate when there is a stigma attached”. Sam’s mother had not communicated the child’s giftedness to the pre-school teacher. Until he attended a pre-Kindergarten interview she was unaware that he was gifted, “No, I didn’t even talk to . . . in retrospect I didn’t even tell Jenny that he was reading. I just assumed that everyone in the class was. I thought well why would she want to know that because everyone else is (laughs). I didn’t even flag it”.

9. Do you believe the labelling of your child as gifted has changed your expectations for your child’s achievement?  
(RR=10/11)
For eight parents, the identification of their child as gifted did not change their expectations. In contrast, for Hugh’s parents, the labelling did change their expectations, “We don’t wish to place pressure on Hugh to achieve everything at the highest level – but we will encourage him to try new things and just do his best”. Sophie’s parents were reluctant to comment, as no formal identification had taken place, “At the moment it is just a possibility, it is not confirmed. Either way, as long as she grows up happy and healthy we’ll be happy and proud!”
10. Do you believe the labelling of your child as gifted has changed their pre-school teacher’s expectations for your child’s achievement? (RR=10/10)

Seven parents felt the labelling of their child as gifted didn’t change the pre-school teachers’ expectations. Fergus’ mother reported, “I don’t think so, I think Bronwyn’s the sort of teacher who probably sees that there’s possibly potential in all children and she just tries to unlock it for all of them”.

Three parents reported that they couldn’t comment whether the labelling of their child as gifted had changed their pre-school teachers’ expectations.

11. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the identification of your child as gifted? (RR=3/11)

For two parents, Hugh’s and Sophie’s, the desire not to be labelled was again highlighted.

12. Would you describe how your child’s interests and needs are catered for in his/her current pre-school setting? (RR=3/11)

For Kaitlyn’s mother, the pre-school teacher catered for their child’s needs and interests by focusing upon strengths and giving the child academic work such as take home readers. However, it must be noted that this child attended a Pre-Kinder class, rather than a traditional pre-school. In a pre-kinder class a full-time, yet flexible, program is offered for four-year-old children.

Fergus’ mother felt the pre-school teacher’s focus upon the child’s needs was catering for the child’s interests and needs, “I think putting structure into his day to make sure he feels safe and secure and to increase his confidence are probably the main things”. Hugh’s parents reported that the pre-school teacher followed the child’s interests.
13. In relation to the needs and experiences of your gifted child, have you, attended a conference, attended an information evening, read books or journals, enrolled in a parenting course, had discussions with teachers or professionals in the field of gifted education, or other? (RR=8/11)
Six parents had not searched for any information. Annabel’s mother had drawn on her pediatric occupational therapy and child development background. Hugh’s mother had completed an Internet search.

14. Have any support services specifically catering for the needs of gifted children been recommended to you? (RR=11/11)
No parents had any such support services recommended to them.

15. In relation to your child’s identification as gifted, have you sought assistance or utilised any of the following resources from organisations or services specifically established to cater for the needs of gifted children and their families? Internet access or website, telephone information, pamphlets or brochures, professional development, newsletters, checklists, professionals (e.g. Psychologists or experts in the field of gifted education or other. (RR=11/11)
Three parents utilised the Internet. Five parents had not sought assistance or utilised resources. Sam’s parents reported, “No, we are new to the concept and any support that may be available”. Three parents had not sought any assistance.

16. What has been done to meet the educational needs of your children at home? (RR=11/11)
Some parents recorded multiple responses to this question. For eight parents, reading to (and in some cases, with, the child), was the most common answer to this question. Four parents highlighted ‘answering questions and finding information’. Annabel’s mother reported, “We use the iPad a lot to Google/research if the children have a question – it’s great as the answer is always immediate and relevant and they can do it independently whilst I prepare dinner etc.”
Mathematical concepts were also highlighted by the parents of Hugh and Andrew. These parents spent time with their children counting and discussing shapes and colours.

17. What does your child most enjoy about pre-school at present? (RR=11/11)
Some parents recorded multiple responses to this question:
Four parents felt that their child enjoyed the social element of pre-school.
Four parents highlighted making things, such as craft and box construction.
Four parents reported that academic skills were most enjoyable, reporting literacy activities such as making booklets and writing stories. For example, Annabel's mother reported, “The staff have recognised her talents in these areas and help plan these tasks into their planning”.

Figure 5.4: Annabel’s drawing

Figure 5.4 shows a drawing done by Annabel at 3 ½ years. It was used on an invitation to the breaking of ground for a new pre-school building.

18. What does your child find most challenging about pre-school at present? Why? (RR=7/11)
Six parents each reported that, while their children enjoyed the social side of pre-school, social interactions could be a challenge. Claudia’s mother commented, “She can be quiet and shy at pre-school, so the social side is probably the most challenging part for her”.

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19. What areas of development and learning do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of your child? (RR=11/11)

Two parents reported that social skills such as ‘being more comfortable in the group environment’ were the most important for the educational experiences of their child. However, for three – Advit, Annabel and Hugh’s parents, recognition of the child’s abilities and provision of appropriate opportunities was also significant. Annabel’s mother reported, “Having teachers recognise her abilities (as she can mask them so well). Give her the opportunity and it’s all she needs”.

20. Are you aware if the pre-school specifically uses a gifted policy when planning and programming educational experiences for your child? (RR=10/11)

Nine parents were not aware if the pre-school used a gifted policy when planning and programming. One of these parents responded that she was aware of the difficulties associated with planning for a gifted child, “No, programming is obviously very play-based – stepping up to the next educational level can be a hurdle”. Another parent felt a policy wasn’t necessary.

21. What educational experiences or strategies have been utilised or suggested to meet the needs of your child in pre-school? (RR=7/11)

Five parents commented that they were unaware if any specific educational experiences or strategies had been used to meet the child’s educational needs in pre-school. Kaitlyn’s mother reported, “Just lots of comments about how clever she is and how well she is doing”.

Two parents reported that their children were being encouraged towards activities they avoid. Kabir’s mother commented, “They know he is interested in technology so they are focusing on his handwriting and social skills” and for Fergus, “Encouraged towards activities that he avoids due to a lack of confidence”.

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22. During your child’s time at pre-school, are you aware of any changes that have been made to planning and programming for your child? (RR=9/11)

Eight parents were not aware of any changes that had been made to planning and programming for their child. However, Hugh’s parents were aware of changes, “Hugh has some special interests which have been used to develop a greater understanding for the benefit of the whole class (e.g. flags, countries, dinosaurs, maps and space)”.

23. Have you been involved in any stage/s of the planning and programming of educational experiences for your child?
(RR=11/11)

No parents reported they had been involved in any stage of the programming and planning of educational experiences. However, Annabel’s mother commented,

I had to do a sort of double take because I initially said: ‘Oh, they’re not’. But of course in their programming and the way they structure things, they are. The pre-school environment is very nurturing and suited Annabel’s needs. Whilst they recognised she is clever, I am not sure how much individual programming was completed to challenge or extend her.

These responses contradict the responses of three pre-school teachers who reported that the child’s family had been involved in the planning and programming of educational responses for the child.

24. Has your child been involved in any stage/s of the planning and programming of educational experiences for him/her?
(RR=11/11)

Ten parents reported their child had not been involved in any stages of the planning and programming of educational experiences. In contrast, Hugh’s parents reported their child had been involved, “Yes, he will identify what he likes and what he wants to learn more about and seek out information about it”.
5.3.2 Phase II: Prior to school entry

Poppy’s parents declined to participate in Phases II and III of the study. This reduced the number of parent and child participants to 10.

Parents (*n*=10).

1. Do you believe your gifted child has special needs regarding their primary school education? (RR=7/10)

Six parents answered “Yes” to this question. However, they clarified that this was in terms of their child’s need to be stimulated or challenged. One of these six parents, Sam’s father, acknowledged,

> We find if his brain is occupied, there’s harmony. We did talk about this a while ago, with the school. I went through a school where I wasn’t particularly challenged and there wasn’t a culture of, I suppose, academic excellence so as a result I cruised, and ah, which means I didn’t do as well as I could have in high school and it probably set me up with a bunch of bad habits for life. So our focus is definitely to get him a good grounding and academic habits early.

2. Do you believe these special needs will impact upon your child’s transition to school? (RR=4/10)

Annabel’s mother reported that there would be no impact upon the child’s transition to school,

> I suspect at school, she’ll just do the right thing, all the way through. In terms of her transition, she’s so excited to be there, I think she’ll be fine. She’ll probably be that helper, in the classroom, I would suspect.

Andrew’s mother was unsure if her son’s special needs would have an impact upon his transition to school. Two other parents were concerned about how the Kindergarten teachers would be able to cater for the different needs and abilities in the class. Fergus’ mother reported,

> I think it will be difficult, well mainly for teachers initially to . . . I suppose like with any child, to get the feel of where everyone’s
at. To try and . . . find their mark with each individual child. I
could only imagine if you had 20 odd kids in the room and
they’re probably all going to be at varying sort of stages or each
have different strengths and different sort of gifts I guess. So
trying to teach them . . . teach them as a group would be
difficult anyway.

3. At what age do you believe a child should start school?
(RR=6/10)
Five parents wanted their child to be ready socially and emotionally as
well as academically. Sam’s parents commented,

Even if they’re intellectually there it’s just the maturity and the
social interaction with other children I suppose is probably the
thing. I’d rather Sam was old enough to engage in his peer
group rather than being much younger and not being able to
interact. That ability to get on with other humans and
engagement is a big part of it.

Annabel’s parents reported,

5-6 years. I feel that children should be able to enjoy ‘being
kids’ – learning through play and everyday experiences.
Personally, I place a lot of emphasis on the opportunity for play
and that socialisation. They’re only little once and that’s a
lifetime of being in routine and that sort of schooling, but by the
same token, they certainly need opportunities to be engaged
and to further themselves. So I’m sort of conscious with
Annabel, the sort of things we do together to keep her occupied
and the three days of pre-school are really essential for her.

4. At what age do you believe a gifted child should start school?
(RR=6/10)
Three parents recommended 5 to 6 years of age. Sam’s parents
commented,

5-6 years old. There has to be a balance between child’s
academic and intellectual as well as social needs, maturity of
the child, family situation etc all need to be considered. We
believe, though the child is academically ready to benefit from
social interactions, school should start later. Academic needs
can be met at home.

Kaitlyn’s mother believed early entry was valuable,
It would be good if they could start earlier, I imagine. Just because I suppose I saw . . . I think the last six months of Kaitlyn’s pre-school she just sort of lost the plot, and was a bit over it, because I suppose she wasn’t being stimulated enough any more. So if there was a program where that was available, I think it would definitely be beneficial from that point of view. I’m not sure if it’s going to set her back now or what.

Fergus’ parents reported what the child had been doing at pre-school was a contributing factor,

I suppose it all depends on what they’re doing in pre-school. I think Fergus going to the pre-school that he went to was perfect for him, I’d say maturity wise and that sort of went along with his social skills with other children, he probably was lagging, he needed to be the age that he is now. However, I think that environment in the pre-school was enough to keep him stimulated.

5. Has the identification of your child as gifted changed your expectations regarding school? (RR=8/10)

Five parents responded “Yes” to this question. Annabel’s mother reported, “It makes me think that the curriculum is not a ‘one size fits all’. I am aware of constraints on teachers and probably would do more myself for her at home rather than pester her teacher for extension work”. Two parents answered “No” to the question. Sophie’s parents were unsure, “Still unsure if Sophie is ‘actually’ gifted but at the same time I expect this to be made quickly obvious in the early weeks which is when I will be expecting the school to meet her needs”.

6. Has the identification of your child as gifted changed your child’s expectations regarding school? (RR=7/10)

Parent responses to this question indicated that no parents had told their child that they had been identified as gifted. Despite also not telling their daughter of her identification, one parent was unsure if this had changed their child’s expectations, “We haven’t used the gifted/clever word at home”.

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7. Do you believe labelling your child as gifted will change their Kindergarten teacher’s expectations? (RR=9/10)

Five parents reported their child’s identification as gifted would change the Kindergarten teacher’s expectations. Fergus’ parents thought this would be positive, “Teacher will be actively looking for his strengths and react appropriately in planning his classroom activities”. For another parent, this change in expectations was of concern, “I fear it may have a negative effect, in that if Annabel doesn’t immediately excel or stand apart from other students it will be disregarded”. Hugh and Andrew’s parents were unsure about whether identification and labelling of their child as gifted would change the Kindergarten teacher’s expectations.

Four parents reported that their child’s identification as gifted would not change the Kindergarten teacher’s expectations.

8. What have you done to help your child get ready for school? (RR=10/10)

All parents had tried to familiarise their child with the school. Some parents recorded multiple responses to this question:

Sam and Andrew’s parents reported they had attended orientation days. Kabir’s had taken their child to visit the school during the school holidays.

Five parents had had lots of conversations about school. Kaitlyn’s mother commented, “Just talked about school – all positive things. It is fun, making friends, playing and learning”.

Claudia’s mother mentioned they regularly drove past the primary school.

With sensory issues to consider, Kabir’s parents had their 2E son practice wearing their school uniform.

Sam’s parents showed their own school photos to their son.

Hugh’s family started attending Mass at the school,

I suppose that’s one thing, we thought we’d introduce it to make it a bit more seamless at school, as opposed to having to go to Mass every week at school and it’s the first time he’s ever been
and think, ‘Hang on, what’s all this about?’ So we’ve tried to prepare him that way.

At the encouragement of the pre-school teacher, Claudia’s mother had provided her daughter with an extra day at pre-school in order to help develop social skills.

Six parents also encouraged learning as preparation for school. Five parents supported their child’s interests in reading, three supported their child’s interest in numbers, and educational games were seen as important by Claudia’s mother. Two parents discussed routines and expectations with their children. Sam’s mother reported,

Probably just the expectation, setting the expectation of school in terms of he’s going to be responsible for more things. In the morning, you know, getting his uniform on and being more timely because you know pre-school starts later, plus there’s flexibility in the timings, it’s a little bit more: ‘Sam you know we have to be at school on time this time so you have to eat breakfast’, just the expectation management I suppose.

9. What are some of the things your child’s pre-school has done to prepare your child for school? (RR=10/10)

Some parents recorded multiple responses to this question. School familiarisation rated highly. Four parents commented that the co-located pre-school had visited the school with their child. One parent mentioned that their pre-school had helped the children make up booklets about their school and two reported there had been lots of discussion about school.

Hugh and Annabel’s mothers reported the pre-school had focused on academic skills to prepare their child by teaching the child to write their name, sending home upper and lowercase letters in NSW foundation style font and having the children use the Reading Eggs computer program.

Three parents reported their child’s pre-school had given the children more responsibility and encouraged them to develop independence. Fergus’ mother commented, “There were a few things towards the
end there, like unpacking their bags and putting their things where they belong instead of the parents doing it for them”.

Andrew’s mother reported the pre-school had done nothing to prepare their child for school,

No. Actually, I’d say that they probably didn’t do anything. I’d have expected more. Not just for the ones that are moving on within that school, I think the ones that are staying at that school might have gone over and had a little visit, I’m not sure if Andrew was actually involved in that because I didn’t decide until about November that he wouldn’t be continuing there. There’s nothing that I’m aware of, really and I actually would have expected [something] from them, but I don’t know what. But then again, there might have been things going on day-to-day that I don’t know about.

10. What would you like to see take place in the transition to school process? (RR=7/10)

Five parents were interested in communication with the Kindergarten teacher regarding their child’s transition. Sam’s parents reported, “For me, to cap off the transition, just a meeting with the teacher and talking about what Term One brings, what her expectations are of us and what’s happening in the classroom”. Kabir’s mother mentioned that they would like communication between the pre-school and the school, “Probably specific questionnaire from school both for preschool and childcare teachers and parents that gives more detailed information about where the child is at, what his interests are. Both strengths/weaknesses in academic, physical activities, technology, social skills etc”.

Annabel’s mother was concerned about the time it would take for the teacher to understand each child’s abilities and differentiate the curriculum,

Acknowledging Annabel’s strengths and building on her learning from the level she is at, rather than the baseline for the class. I would love for Annabel to be acknowledged for the level she is at, and then her learning further extended. I’m sure Best Start Assessment hopefully will drag some of that out but I think
the thing that disappoints me about that whole curriculum is that essentially while they extend some learning, really everyone does the same thing so, I think it will probably take a while before she starts to learn anything as such, because she’ll be doing it but she’ll already know it. So I would really love some extension from the beginning of the year, from where she’s at. So with that I’d love to see . . . I know she’s . . . the pre-school concert’s a really good example of where I was really quite amazed, for someone so shy that she presented so well. So I’d love to see her have an opportunity to do a bit more.

Children (n=10).

1. Can you tell me about when you went to pre-school?
(RR=10/10)
Four children talked about specific activities at pre-school. Two mentioned drawing, and the other two mentioned painting as something they did at pre-school.

Sophie remembered doing puzzles and Kabir liked using the computers. Andrew and Sam mentioned riding their bike and playing in the sandpit. For Annabel, making new friends was important. Play was important to Sam, “I played and played and played”.

Fergus reported that he couldn’t remember what he had done at pre-school, “Ah, I don’t know . . . we haven’t been there for SO long!”

2. What part of pre-school did you enjoy the most? Why?
(RR=10/10)
Creative activities rated highly among activities the children enjoyed most. Sam and Annabel enjoyed construction such as making mailboxes. Sam reported, “I made volcanoes too, and a jet pack and lots of rockets and space ships”. Two children enjoyed painting and one enjoyed playing with play dough the most. Annabel listed playing with friends as her most enjoyable activity. Claudia reported that reading books was most enjoyable.
3. What part of pre-school did you find the hardest? Why?
(RR=10/10)
Four children reported that they found nothing at pre-school hard. Five individual children referred to playing hard games, writing, making something, Lego and the fish puzzle. Fergus found rest time the hardest part of pre-school.

4. What are some of the things you like to do at home?
(RR=10/10)
Five children identified playing with specific games or toys. One child each identified the following games: Minecraft on the computer, Hungry Hippo, Mums & Dads, Toys and Barbies.

Four children identified educational games as something they liked to do at home. Claudia loved playing a CD School game and Andrew liked playing a plus and equal game on the iPod. 2E Kabir identified drawing ceiling fans with either 3 blades or 6 blades as something he liked to do at home.

5. What are some of the things you have done to get ready for school? (RR=10/10)
Eight children identified purchasing school equipment such as their bag, uniform, lunchbox etc. Kaitlyn mentioned learning to read and write was something she had done to get ready for school,

Kaitlyn: Learn how to write.
Researcher: Learn how to write? What have you learnt how to write?
K: Love, for.
R: And your name?
K: No!
R: Could you already write your name?
K: Yes.
R: Ok, what else have you done to get ready for school?
K: Daddy’s been teaching me to read ‘Felix the Fire Engine’.

Andrew mentioned they had done nothing to get ready for school.
6. What do you think you will do at school? (RR=10/10)
Three children thought they would do academic skills such as learning to read and write. Three other children, Sophie, Claudia and Kaitlyn thought they would do activities such as craft, puzzles, and drawing. Kabir, Hugh and Andrew thought they would play outside at school.

Fergus was unsure what he would do at school, “I don’t really know yet because I haven’t done it (laughs). When I do it I will know!” Fergus then decided they would “Probably do homework after school most of the time”.

7. What would you like to do at school? (RR=10/10)
Some children recorded multiple responses to this question. Three children would like to achieve academic skills such as learning to read and write at school. Fergus wanted to do homework at school, Sam wanted to “learn everything” and Annabel wanted to write. Kabir and Andrew wanted to use computers at school, and Sophie and Claudia wanted to paint. Advit wanted to make up new games during free time while Hugh wanted to play outside.

8. How are you feeling about starting school? (RR=10/10)
Nine children were feeling positive about starting school and Annabel was “a little nervous”.

9. What do you think will be the best thing about starting school? (RR=10/10)
Five children were unsure what the best thing about starting school would be. Annabel mentioned, “Seeing who my teacher is”. Kabir mentioned going to the library would be the best thing about starting school. Three individual children mentioned painting, using the computer, and making new friends.
10. What do you think will be the hardest thing about starting school? (RR=10/10)
Five children thought that learning to read and write would be the hardest thing about starting school. Claudia was concerned about doing new things. Fergus reported nothing would be hard and Andrew was unsure what would be the hardest thing. Playing on the play equipment was thought to be the hardest thing for Advit and Sam expected “Getting there early” would be the hardest thing about starting school.

5.3.3 Phase III: Post school entry

Parents (n=10).

1. Are you happy with how your child has made the transition to school? (RR=10/10)
Nine parents were happy with how their child had made the transition to school. Andrew’s mother commented,

Yes, I’m surprised, pleasantly surprised. I thought there would have been a few more dramas but I’m really happy with how it’s gone. Really well, better than expected. Really, really well. He doesn’t like Saturday and Sunday because he doesn’t go to school. When I arrive to pick him up he’s upset because I have arrived too early.

Hugh’s parents reported,

Yes, very happy, loves learning. I spoke to his teacher then, still I never mentioned it but she said, ‘How is he settling in? Is he enjoying it?’ and I said, ‘Yeah, he loves it! Just loves it’. And she said he wasn’t having any issues or problems and she said he’s very . . . he’s very studious; he just wants to learn . . . which we probably knew, really. But we weren’t sure whether the attention was going to stay . . .”

However, Annabel’s mother was very unhappy with her second child’s transition to school,

Parent: No. I think if anything what she’s learnt is what she needs to do, be . . . not mediocre because that makes it sound
really snooty . . . she’s worked out what she has to do to be one of the masses and I think she’s sort of found that place and that may be why she’s a bit happier now, whereas before when she tried to do things a bit differently or show, you know, a different way, it didn’t work for her.

Researcher: How did she go on Best Start?
P: I haven’t given you a copy of that. I don’t even know that I read through the entire assessment, I just thought it was nonsense. I really . . . I was really disappointed because it didn’t reflect her ability at all, and Mrs. Rogers, I know, would challenge that! But I don’t agree. I know that there are things that she didn’t score on that she can do easily.
R: It’s interesting isn’t it?
P: Yeah, and I wonder if her initial . . . from that when they were placed in small groups, if she was placed with children were probably at that level where she scored, and that might have been part of the initial difficulty. And I know in the classroom, just from the way she talks, a lot of the time is spent around reward systems for children that are well behaved, and using that as modelling for children who are not so well behaved and I think that probably takes a lot of Mrs. Rogers’ time.

2. Was there anything you would like to change about your child’s transition to school? (RR=10/10)
Nine parents responded no, there was nothing they wanted to change about their child’s transition to school. Kabir’s parents mentioned,” No, talking to school principal, class teacher beforehand and keeping in touch with the teacher regularly is quite helpful”.

When reminded, during the follow-up conversation, “You mentioned in the questionnaire that you wanted a bit more communication between the teacher and parents”, Fergus’ mother commented,

I think that, I know that they do that initial testing . . . before he started, Best Start. I think that’s probably helpful for the teacher to work out where children are up to, to a certain degree, but, I don’t know if I was telling you but Fergus lost his two bottom front teeth . . . What happened was his speech changed and he developed a definite lisp. Which I didn’t worry about because he was just compensating for having the teeth missing, but that happened about fourth term last year and then after Christmas I had a look and his teeth were completely up and he was still doing it. So he went off to school with this lisp, and I then took him out of school for a couple of mornings to the speech therapist and the teacher was a bit surprised that I was concerned about it at all, but I think what she didn’t understand
was that it was a regression for Fergus. He’d had really good, strong language skills and then had regressed . . . She didn’t know what he was like before. She actually thought that he was still developing, not that it was a regression and that’s probably the sort of stuff that is missed in the ‘hand over’ if you want to call it that, you know when they go off to school if they get a lot of information from the kinder teacher. Something that was a significant regression for Fergus, she just thought was still developing.

Advit’s father responded that there were things he would like to change about their child’s transition to school but did not elaborate.

3. What do you believe has had a significant impact in your child’s transition to school? (RR=10/10)

Some parents recorded multiple responses to this question. Nine parents reported their child’s Kindergarten teacher had a significant impact on their child’s transition to school. Six parents also mentioned the child’s pre-school teacher. Five parents reported the school’s transition program was significant and two thought the pre-school’s transition program was significant. Two parents reported the School Principal had an impact.

Sam’s parents thought a combination of all was significant,

Kindergarten teacher, pre-school educator, pre-school director, school principal, school’s transition program and pre-school’s transition program. The transition programs and readiness work at the school’s pre-school, coupled with Sam’s move to primary school with friends, certainly helped with the transition.

For Andrew’s mother, the role of family and friends were significant, “Family and friends talking to him over the Xmas period, lots of positive comments about school”.

4. Do you believe the identification of your child as gifted has impacted upon their transition to school? (RR=10/10)

Nine parents thought the identification of their child as gifted had not impacted on the child’s transition to school. However, five parents had not told the school that their child had been identified as gifted,
preferring to find out what the school thought first. Kaitlyn’s mother acknowledged, “No, nothing has been said to the school” and Hugh’s father reported,

I don’t think so, and I suppose not having told them, right from the start, was probably one of the reasons why we didn’t tell them, because we didn’t want to change their opinions, and I don’t think . . . nothing was said, so they might, they may have thought oh whatever . . . Another one of these parents who thinks their child . . . I don’t know whether they did or they didn’t but . . . I probably got the impression there was maybe a little bit of that when I spoke to Brian, the Principal, he wasn’t rude or confronting or anything like that, I think he . . . looking back on it, I think he probably, in his mind, as we sort of alluded to before, I think he would have probably just appreciated if we had of said: ‘Look, Hugh’s sort of been identified as being at the upper end of it’, I think he probably would have appreciated that in hindsight, but from our point of view we just didn’t want to put him out there.

Kabir’s parents reported their child’s identification had impacted on the child’s transition to school, “Yes, his teacher has high expectations and as she is aware of what he is capable of she is planning his work accordingly”.

5. What changes would you like to see made regarding gifted children’s transition to school? (RR=10/10)
Five parents did not identify any changes they would like to see made. Three parents wanted more communication in their child’s transition to school. For example, Fergus’ mother commented, “I think there needs to be communication between the pre-school teacher and the Kindergarten teacher that the parents are made aware of” and Sam’s parents considered, “Perhaps greater communication regarding differences between how gifted children are treated in academic terms versus other members of the class”. Kabir’s parents wanted more assessment of their child’s abilities (even if informally) and further communication in the form of a questionnaire for parents, pre-school/childcare about their child’s strengths and needs. Advit’s father wanted activities the children like
and pairing with like-minded friends as changes made regarding their child’s transition to school.

6. Do you believe gifted children have special needs regarding the transition to school? (RR=10/10)

Six parents answered, “Yes” to this question. Hugh’s father reported, “Yes, because they are at a formative time and they need to remain challenged while being socially integrated into the class (re not being ‘different’)” and Sophie’s mother commented, “Yes, school and teachers especially child’s class teacher need to know what the child already knows, what motivates the child, so he/she doesn’t get bored or distracted”. Figure 5.5 show an example of Sophie’s early writing, provided by her Kindergarten teacher.

Participating in the study had changed Annabel’s mother’s mind on this question,

At the beginning (laughs) of this study I would have thought no, because in Annabel’s situation, I would have thought her social skills would have been enough to carry her through, but . . . where I’m at now I’m thinking like mental health. Really her feeling of self-worth, her feeling of not achieving and her poor recognition of what she values, I think I had an example of where she’d done another craft activity that she’d taken to school again and was quite dismissed, and even this story about holidays, it’s a long story, there’s lots in it, but she took it to school and bought it home the next day so she didn’t even get to put it on the desk. She took some seashells in with some coral but she didn’t really get much of a chance to kind of show it through and things . . . like her interest in Monet and that . . . we haven’t really had a chance to bring any of that in and it’s really hard. Yeah, so I think they do have special needs and I think testing . . . and I would have ordinarily thought a standardised test like the Best Start would have been enough to help identify some of those areas, but in this case I don’t think it has. If you haven’t got a good relationship or dialogue with the teacher, it’s really hard for them to find that place where they can help extend.

Four parents answered “No”: they did not feel gifted children have special needs in the transition to school.
Figure 5.5: Example of Sophie's early writing

"The little old lady heard a scratching noise coming from the coven."

What a great picture of the gingerbread man! Remember to look at the chart when writing the letter ‘b’ or ‘d’.

Sophie
7. What does your child most enjoy about school at present?

**Why?** (RR=10/10)

Some parents recorded multiple responses to this question:

Four parents answered that social interactions was what their child was presently enjoying most about school.

For one child the opportunity to interact with older children was particularly enjoyable.

Four parents acknowledged sport as a favourite activity.
Two parents recognised reading and computers as their child’s most enjoyable activity at school, “Computer studies – he just loves computers and iPads and the games he can play”.

Another two parents reported their child most enjoyed getting awards. Hugh’s parents commented, “Being recognised (certificates for what he does)”.

One parent each responded with: exposure to new areas (French), independence, music, maths and craft.

8. What does your child find most challenging about school at present? Why? (RR=10/10)

Four parents reported that their child found social interactions the most challenging element of school. For Claudia, this interaction was related to her own behaviour, “She is still very quiet socially but this is improving”. For three of the four parents, their child’s difficulties with social interactions related to the behaviour of other children. Sophie’s parents reported, “Sophie doesn’t like when rough kids in class punch her, doesn’t understand why” and Kabir’s parents commented, “Kabir doesn’t know how to deal with it when someone is rough”.

Two parents reported their child found concentration challenging, at times. Fergus had difficulty “Concentrating – is more interested in interacting with his peers” and “Sam finds sitting still and listening for long periods of time to be challenging, he gets a bit distracted in his own thoughts or by other things happening around him”.

One parent recognised the challenge in reading while another mentioned work that was not challenging,

The work is at times not challenging for Kaitlyn e.g. this week she said to me, ‘Letter of the day is boring’. I explained to Kaitlyn that while she knows all the letters and sounds of the alphabet, some kids don’t!

For twice-exceptional children Kabir, “Just going to school – anxiety (before going). Once he is there he is fine”.
9. What areas of development and learning do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of your child? (RR=10/10)

For five parents reading and writing were considered most important. Sam’s parents felt he needed to gain confidence in his reading ability, “Reading and writing and everything else will follow”.

For two parents, socialisation was important, although for different reasons. For Sam, “Socialisation is a significant developmental enabler for his educational experiences. This includes the child understanding his own strengths/weaknesses”. The other parent simply listed, “Socialisation with peers”.

For Fergus’ parents, providing varied and unusual topics to structure work around was important,

He says he’s bored at school, because they don’t do anything interesting. I think he’s not interested in learning how to read and write (laughs), he wants information. He wants detailed information on multiple topics and if he sees something, then and there. So I think that is what he’s struggling with. If they read a story about a dinosaur then he’d want to know everything about that particular dinosaur, then and there when the teacher probably wants to move on with the story or focus more on the writing . . . I don’t know what you can do about that – I just keep reinforcing to him that the more he practices his reading, the better he will get and then he can pursue his own interests in depth because he’ll have the ability, and he sort of gets that. He’s frustrated (laughs).

For Advit’s parents, the ability to focus was important for their child, “Focus, gets bored very fast”. Hugh’s parents wanted his teacher to “Realise the stage he is at and tailor to his needs re reading”.

11. Do you believe your child’s Kindergarten teacher has adjusted their expectations due to your child’s labelling as gifted? (RR=10/10)

Five parents answered yes, they reported their child’s Kindergarten teacher had adjusted their expectations. For example, “Yes, she is
giving him homework according to his level. Also in planning she has higher expectations for Kabir, which in turn motivates him” and Claudia’s mother reported, “Yes, her teacher understands Claudia’s strengths and weaknesses”.

Three parents were not sure if their child’s teacher had adjusted their expectations, largely due the fact that the teacher was unaware the child had been identified as gifted, “I found these hard to answer as I am not aware if Kaitlyn’s teacher has been made aware of this. I certainly haven’t had a conversation with her”.

Two parents mentioned that they didn’t believe their child’s Kindergarten teacher had adjusted their expectations, essentially because the teacher didn’t see the focus child as gifted, “I don’t think that she sees Fergus as gifted. He keeps up with minimal effort and requires one-on-one attention in order to show his strengths” and Annabel’s mother commented, “No, I don’t, and look, her take might be she hasn’t because she doesn’t see it, she doesn’t feel like there’s a need because she’s just managing to do what is required”.

12. Do you believe your child’s Kindergarten teacher has adjusted their teaching due to your child’s labelling as gifted? (RR=10/10)
Three parents answered “No”, they didn’t feel their child’s Kindergarten teacher had adjusted their teaching. Finbar’s parents reported,

No, I get the impression that first term has been used to work out where all the children ‘are at’! I think as a result Fergus has not been challenged and therefore has shown himself to be average and highly distractible.

Hugh’s family thought this lack of adjustment was because the Kindergarten teacher was unaware that the child was gifted,
Parent: These are the words up here... their words for the term. They have these words for the term and when he brought them home and went bang, bang, bang, I thought wow! That was probably a bit surprising. Maybe that’s a gauge of where... maybe some kids take a whole term to learn those words. When I was doing the ones that they had for the first term, I wonder where the Term One is... the first term when I went in to do reading, they had the words cut up and we put them all on the floor, throwing the bean bags onto them, then they have to say the word that the bean bag lands on. This was at the end of first term and some of the kids still couldn’t get them.

Researcher: So does he know all those words?
P: Yes, and did day one when they came home. From the first or the second day of term. He said, ‘I know these words’ and he read them. We did them here and here and here...
R: It would be good if he got some more challenging ones, he’s ready for them. P: I think so, yeah. That was my view without, like you said, you don’t want to march into the Principal’s office or down the school and say, ‘Give my boy some better words!’ But yeah, it would be nice because he’s not being pushed. I mean even in the first, I think it was the words for the first term, he knew them straight away.

Three parents responded that their child’s Kindergarten teacher had adjusted their teaching due to your child’s labelling as gifted “Yes, her teacher has already been planning additional tasks for Claudia” and for Sophie,

Yes, Sophie is offered Year 1 and Kinder work for her to choose from. Is given Year 1 homework but she chooses easier work in class if she is tired etc. She is allowed to. Given opportunities to do other work but isn’t pushed.

Figure 5.7 shows Sophie’s Best Start Assessment results, in the format that her school sent to parents.
Figure 5.7 Sophie’s Best Start Assessment results – Part A

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

This term your child took part in the Best Start Kindergarten Assessment.

Your child’s teacher observed them individually completing a range of specially designed tasks to guide ongoing literacy and numeracy planning for teaching.

The following pages contain information about what your child’s teacher has learned about your child.

We have also included some ideas for how you can assist their learning at home.

In keeping with our usual practice, you are very welcome to discuss this feedback with your child’s teacher.

Principal: 

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<th>In Numeracy,</th>
<th>Ideas to use at home</th>
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<td>Counting Sequence - Forward number word sequences</td>
<td>Have your child count as far as he or she is able to and encourage your child to join you while you continue counting. Ask your child to continue to count from numbers seen in the environment, e.g. numbers on a car’s licence plate.</td>
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<td>Counting Sequence - Numerical Identification Recognises the numerals from 1 to 100.</td>
<td>Have your child read the numbers on houses or licence plates. Help your child to find and read large numbers in a newspaper.</td>
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<td>Early arithmetical strategies Counts from one without needing to use objects or fingers to find the total of two groups and to complete subtraction problems.</td>
<td>Place 10 small objects on top of a bowl. Ask your child to turn away while you hide some of the objects under the bowl. Ask your child to turn back and work out how many have been hidden. Roll two dice and encourage your child to find the total by starting from the larger number rolled and counting on the smaller number.</td>
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<td>Pattern and number structure Recognises, describes and continues a given pattern.</td>
<td>Ask your child to make a simple pattern using two different coloured pegs, such as red, blue, red, blue. Ask your child to create other patterns using everyday objects such as beads, stones, or pegs and describe the pattern.</td>
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Three parents were unsure if their child’s Kindergarten teacher had adjusted their teaching. Annabel’s mother reported, “I haven’t been privy to the classroom, so I don’t know but certainly doesn’t seem like it.”
13. Do you believe the identification of your child as gifted has impacted upon their educational experiences? (RR=10/10)

Six parents answered “No” to this question. Annabel’s parents reported this was due to the Kindergarten teacher not seeing Annabel as gifted,

I don’t think her teacher thinks she has, I think she just thinks she’s a good student, and she is a good student . . . I don’t know if gifted is the word I’d use . . . I think she’s really clever and I think she’s got enormous potential. And I think . . . I can’t see it ever being reached because what’s championed and what’s been reinforced to her this year is really to fit in, and that’s what she’s doing. She’s getting a sticker for sitting on the mat, not for a great idea or piece of thinking or work. So I think probably the way it’s impacted on her it’s . . . I don’t think the teacher agrees so it’s almost been a bit negative.

Four parents answered, “Yes”, the identification of their child as gifted had impacted upon the child’s educational experiences. Sophie’s parents commented, “Yes, Sophie is getting the work that is more suited to her abilities instead of being forced to participate in what other kinder kids are doing and possibility getting bored”. Kabir’s mother reported, “Yes, though we never mentioned that he is gifted, Kabir seems to be aware of what he is capable of and also positive encouragement from us has given him confidence and joy of learning” and Claudia’s mother stated, “Yes, there has been a lot more one-on-one time with her teacher”.

14. Was there anything else you wanted to mention regarding your child’s transition to school? (RR=10/10)

Some parents recorded multiple responses to this question. Five parents expressed positive comments about their child’s transition to school. For three parents, these comments focused on the child’s Kindergarten teacher. For example, “We are happy with the way Claudia’s teacher has embraced her abilities” and for Kabir, “We believe that the school’s attitude, especially the class teacher’s attitude influences (makes a huge difference) to the child’s development. We are fortunate to have Mrs. Williams as Kabir’s
teacher who is so positive and so quick to implement strategies that benefit Kabir”.

Sophie’s parents commented,

Sophie was placed in the kinder/year one class so that she has the ability to extend her learning. As a result, she has mostly year one friends. Academically she is excelling but emotionally she is just like the other kinder kids. She doesn’t like getting things wrong and at times if things are too hard she won’t do it. Teacher is working on the idea that it is ok to make mistakes.

For Kaitlyn’s parents, both the school and the teacher were positives,

Kaitlyn is thriving at school. At parent/teacher interviews I was told Kaitlyn is in the top reading group of 3 children. Whilst Kaitlyn is bored with just letter activities, she has the flexibility to advance at reading and is now writing sentences. Learning French is also one of her favourite activities. She enjoys access to the library and often visits it in her lunch break. I am truly rapt with Kaitlyn’s teacher – just the right personality for Kaitlyn. Also very happy with the school and their resources.

Sam’s parents commented on the benefits of the study, “Our involvement with this study has helped us, as parents, to be better prepared for Sam’s transition to school”.

Two parents had further concerns regarding their child’s transition. Fergus’ mother commented, “I am concerned that he could get bored (unchallenged) at a later stage”. Annabel’s mother also commented,

Parent: I’m happy for her feedback, I’m not going to be disappointed if she’s . . . academically she’s average, my real concern is in terms of her ideas and trying to extend that, it just doesn’t work within the realm of classroom teaching and it’s having an impact on her self-worth. That’s where I’m at. I’m just a bit of a loss at it, and it’s in terms of her own mental health, and I think well, it’s really hard to address her happiness and sense of self-worth and sense of achievement, when you’re not addressing school as a really big player in that.
Kindergarten Teachers (n=9).

1. What characteristics has the focus child displayed that suggest to you that they are ‘different’ from other children? (RR=9/9)

Some Kindergarten teachers reported multiple responses to this question. Five Kindergarten teachers identified academic skills. Three identified literacy and numeracy skills as characteristics suggesting the focus child was different from other children. For example, Kabir’s “Outstanding ability to decode any material” and Sophie, “Can read three digit numbers”. See Figures 5.9 and 5.10 Sophie’s hundred’s chart.

Language was another indicator that the child was different for two teachers. Sam was reported to be “Very articulate”. Two other teachers identified general skills such as “Learns easily” and “Asks probing questions”.

Other characteristics identified by one teacher each were a good sense of beat and rhythm, extreme anxiety at inappropriate times, fearful – needs reassurance, very interested in what others are doing, often compares herself to others.

Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher commented that she didn’t feel that Annabel was any different from other children – all children are individuals and need to be treated that way.
Figure 5.9: Sophie’s number chart – Part 1

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Figure 5.10: Sophie’s number chart – Part 2

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Number Chart
2. What characteristics has the focus child displayed that suggest to you they are gifted? (RR=9/9)

Some Kindergarten teachers reported multiple responses to this question. Five teachers identified academic skills as characteristics suggesting the focus child is gifted. These skills were in literacy, for example, “Exceptional reading skills”. For three of these teachers the characteristics included numeracy. For three teachers, language skills, particularly vocabulary, were mentioned,

General skills such as “Problem solving”, “Recall of facts”, “Notices things” and “Learns easily” were identified by three teachers. Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher reported, “Wanting to learn and a very strong work ethic”.

3. Have you used any identification strategies or approaches to confirm that the focus child should be identified as gifted? (RR=9/9)

Five Kindergarten teachers had not used any such identification strategies. Two Kindergarten teachers had used the general assessment tasks that they used with all of the children in their class. For one teacher this included a series of literacy and numeracy tests, for another teacher it was the NSW Best Start Assessment. Another primary teacher used Marie Clay’s Concepts about Print and Observational Survey (Clay, 2005) in literacy. Advit’s teacher had considered stories of the child shared by the parents.

4. Have any specialist teachers used any identification strategies or approaches to confirm that the focus child should be identified as gifted? (RR=7/9)

Six Kindergarten teachers reported that no specialist teachers had been involved. Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher reported,

No, at this stage not, and that will probably be because of Best Start. For us, that’s been the line in the sand. Okay, other children have not shown up on Best Start and they have then gone on and perform in better ways.
Sam’s Kindergarten teacher responded that specialist teachers had been involved in the identification of the focus child as gifted. In this instance, the child was identified by the Head of the Junior School in prior-to-school screening. The teacher of the school’s Challenge program was also involved as she worked closely with Sam’s Kindergarten teacher.

5. Has the identification of the focus child as gifted changed your expectations for them? (RR=8/9)

Five Kindergarten teachers responded “No” to this question. Kabir’s teacher reported, “No, I try to teach to the ability level of all my students so although his academic abilities are obvious, it means my expectations flow from that – also taking into account autism”. However, identification of the child was thought to be an important starting point for Kabir’s teacher in their understanding of the child, “That’s the trouble with the labels - we need the labels, it helps a lot, whether somebody is autistic or has asperger’s so you can be ready, but then you can’t expect that each child will be the same”. This position was reinforced by Sam’s teacher,

We’ll I guess once I work with the kids, I have different expectations for all of them. I always say to people, I always feel like one of those circus performers spinning all the plates, working on confidence because until they’ve got the confidence they won’t take a risk, and until you take a risk you’re not going to learn so I don’t know that it’s changed my expectations, it’s just that it’s given me information and that’s my starting point I guess. I always just try and get them to where they’re ready to get to, so even within the same task I would have different expectations for the children in the class.

Advit’s Kindergarten teacher answered that identification of the focus child had changed her expectations for the child, “I’ve really started asking him in-depth questions”.

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6. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the identification experiences of the focus child? (RR=1/9)
Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher responded to this question, commenting that based upon Best Start testing prior to starting school, Annabel did not seem gifted, “Compared to others in the Best Start, Annabel’s results were not outstanding, in top third.”

7. Do you believe the focus child has had a positive transition to school? (RR=9/9)
Eight Kindergarten teachers believed the focus child had had a positive transition to school. Claudia’s teacher commented,

Kindergarten Teacher: Yes, I think so! She’s made some friends. She’s a very quiet girl, and she doesn’t readily seek out people. She has friends and she’s chatting happily to people around her and playing in the playground and things.
Researcher: Ok, can you tell me a bit more about her experiences? She’s obviously settled in really well. Did it take her a while?
KT: Not really, she was such a quiet . . . she’s such an easy going little girl and she’s very quiet so she just sort of followed in class, where she was supposed to be. If I hadn’t have done Best Start, and been told that she had been identified as gifted, I probably wouldn’t have realised she was such a clever person, because she is very quiet and she won’t offer information unless she’s asked. So she didn’t readily put up her hand, although she’s becoming more confident now, so in the beginning though she wouldn’t put her hand up to answer questions or . . . she probably would have gone a little bit unnoticed”.

For Advit, despite a positive transition within the classroom, attending after school/out of school hours care (OOSH) was a complication,

Kindergarten Teacher: I do believe he has, but I think it was a little bit difficult for him in the sense that he supposedly wasn’t enjoying OOSH, when they were trying to . . . and I think being the only child as well, they’re quite protective of him.
Researcher: and long days too!
KT: Long days! Long, long days. He wasn’t being picked up until 5 – 5.30. I think they were getting other people to try and pick him up as well so . . .”
Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher acknowledged that the focus child had not had a positive transition to school, “No, very unhappy about coming”. During the follow-up conversation the teacher elaborated,

She was not happy when she got to school. Kate would come in saying she wasn’t really happy, getting her to school was an issue, you know just general happiness, enjoyment, you know things that you really want, things that are important to me as a teacher, making her feel comfortable, making her feel safe, wanting to come, wanting to learn . . . it really affected me because I really wanted them all to be in that environment where they feel they want to be here, because if you want to be here, you want to learn. And I really didn’t want it to impact on her learning. Obviously she was going to be a very capable learner.

8. Are you happy with how the focus child has made the transition to school? (RR=7/9)
Six Kindergarten teachers were happy with how the child had made the transition to school. However, Annabel’s teacher who believed the focus child had not had a positive transition commented, “Yes, after much talking/sorting out/feedback from parents etc but it took weeks”.

9. Was there anything you would like to change about the focus child’s transition to school? (RR=6/9)
Four Kindergarten teachers responded that there was nothing they would like to change. Kabir’s teacher commented,

No look, I have days where I think I could be doing things differently, or days where I think I should be doing things differently, then I have lots of days where I think, ‘No, I don’t want to extend him upwards, I want to go sideways’. My main focus I guess is on him being happy, and that sounds pretty . . . I suppose it sounds lame but it’s so important! Well for all the children. If they don’t want to come, it makes home life difficult; it makes anything we do in the classroom so much harder.

Two Kindergarten teachers responded that there was something they would like to change about the focus child’s transition to school. For Advit’s Kindergarten teacher this was the difficulty the focus child had
experienced at OOSH. For Annabel’s teacher “More orientation days
and explain about activities and her role in the room, making
relationships with others”.

10. Do you believe the identification of the focus child as gifted
has impacted upon their transition to school? (RR=5/9)
Four Kindergarten teachers answered “No” to this question, while
Sam’s teacher felt that the identification of the child had had an
impact upon their transition, “Yes, we have been able to extend him
with extension activities in English and Maths”.

11. What do you believe has had a significant impact on the
focus child's transition to school? (RR=9/9)
Some Kindergarten teachers reported multiple responses to this
question. Four Kindergarten teachers believed the parents of the
focus child had a significant impact on the child's transition to school.
Fergus’ Kindergarten teacher commented, “Parents encouragement
of him accepting responsibilities for actions and routines”.

Two Kindergarten teachers believed the school's transition program
had a significant impact. One Kindergarten teacher considered that
the pre-school teacher of one child impacted on the transition, but
she didn’t elaborate how or why this was the case. Making
relationships was significant for Claudia’s Kindergarten teacher.

Sam’s Kindergarten teacher identified numerous influences,
including the co-location of his pre-school and primary school, “He
arrived familiar with his teacher, environment and peers. He has very
easy going, happy parents so he is a well adjusted child who loves
school”.
12. What changes would you like to see made regarding a gifted child’s transition to school? (RR=4/9)
Two Kindergarten teachers suggested no changes be made. Fergus’ Kindergarten teacher suggested, “Depends on the gifted child’s special needs” while Advit’s teacher recommended, “Provision of age-appropriate activities that can flow from pre-school to school, where appropriate”.

13. Do you believe gifted children have special needs regarding the transition to school? (RR=5/9)
Four Kindergarten teachers believed gifted children did not have special needs regarding their transition to school. Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher responded, “No, I don’t. I think they’re just like everybody else, and deliberately. I don’t look at their ages, because I don’t want to put them in a box before I can see what’s going on in their head”.

Andrew’s Kindergarten teacher answered, “Yes, depends on child and school”.

14. Were cross-age buddies involved in this child’s transition to school? (RR=9/9)
Five Kindergarten teachers stated that buddies were involved in the focus child’s transition. Advit’s teacher reported,

Kindergarten Teacher: Yes, we have cross-age buddies, and he loved it! He absolutely loved it! They’ve got their buddies out there with them now. The buddies come up every Friday, they have recess with them and now they actually go to peer support. Term One is just one-on-one with them, and then Term Two, Three & Four are peer support where their buddy collects them from the room and they have . . . the buddy does relationship type activities with him.
Researcher: He mentioned that he had a book that he got yesterday in Canberra that he was bringing for his buddy to read.
KT: Yeah! And he gets quite excited which is so gorgeous, I love it! He brings him gifts and Easter eggs.
For Kabir, his buddy was an important part of the child settling into school,

Yes, now his buddy is a boy who has some home problems but the whole class has a buddy, they’re buddies with a year 5/6 class and when he was having problems in the playground earlier this term maybe, he was feeling a bit lonely, we’d get Dan to come over, at lunchtime, after he’d eaten his lunch and he would just take Kabir for a walk around the playground and just look at the equipment. He didn’t have to stay with him all of lunchtime, so, he took him up to the library and he did that on his own bat for a couple . . . just for a few days in a row, he’d come over and make sure that Kabir was ok . . . Kabir didn’t seem so bothered then. He’s been really, really terrific in that role as a buddy to Kabir, even though they’re nothing alike! It was funny, the other day Dan was saying, “Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Williams, Kabir can remember how to spell my name!” I felt like saying he could spell your first name, middle name and your last name without even batting an eye, because this boy has trouble with literacy so it was kind of . . . he was so excited. They’re nothing alike but that doesn’t matter!

For four children in the study, their school did have a buddy program. However, this program did not start in Term One, it began later in the year.

15. Does the focus child have an older sibling/s who you believe have helped this child’s transition to school? (RR=9/9)
The teachers of three children, Claudia, Annabel and Sophie, reported the child had a sibling who helped in their transition to school. Six Kindergarten teachers reported that the child did not have older sibling/s who helped in the child’s transition to school. However, one of these teachers, while reporting that Kabir had an older sibling, was unsure about how helpful this was as the sibling was much older and did not attend the same school.

16. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the transition experience of the focus child? (RR=2/9)
Fergus’ Kindergarten teacher advised, “I have 7 children who are as bright as Fergus. One child is reading at level 26+ and operating in
stage 1 Maths so it is easy to place him in a group with students with similar needs”. Kabir’s teacher acknowledged, “I didn’t have Kabir for the orientation sessions. I didn’t really know much about him, I have quite a lot of paperwork, which was very useful, just to have some background about him”.

17. Do you consider the focus child to have any special needs regarding their education? (RR=6/9)

Three Kindergarten teachers answered “No”. Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher reported, “All students have special needs. As a result of Best Start students are on individual programs, grouped for teaching/instruction purposes, common needs”. Fergus’ teacher acknowledged, “No, all students are individual and I cater for this in small group work”.

Three Kindergarten teachers considered the focus child did have special needs regarding their education. However, two of these teachers suggested this was partially due to other factors, for example, “Yes, mainly to address Kabir’s Autism issues and extension of my program to cater for his abilities”. Sam’s Kindergarten teacher reported, “He is coping well with school but he is changing school at the end of the year. This could be a challenging time as his friends are very important to him”.

18. In relation to the focus child’s identification as gifted, have you sought assistance or utilised any resources from organisations or services specifically established to cater for the educational needs of gifted children? Such as Internet access or website, telephone information, pamphlets or brochures, professional development, newsletters, checklists or professionals (e.g. psychologists or experts in the field of gifted education?) (RR=6/9)

Four Kindergarten teachers had not sought assistance or utilised any such resources, “No. At the moment I have not experienced any difficulty extending Sam. I tend to have different expectations for
each child anyway so he gets extended academically and supported socially to make more ‘good choices’”. This teacher elaborated during the follow-up conversation,

No I haven’t, at the moment because there are so many gaps. There’s plenty to work on. As he gets a little bit older that might be more relevant. They’re only here for about twelve months, a little bit further down the track he might go to a bigger school where there’s a gifted and talented sort of program that he can slot into.

Two of the Kindergarten teachers who had not sought assistance or utilised any such resources had had discussions with their Principal or colleagues,

Kindergarten Teacher: No, no, I have spoken to a few people, about Claudia, not really specialists.
Researcher: Other classroom teachers?
KT: Other classroom teachers. I have spoken to someone from the department, had a chat . . .
R: And what did they say?
KT: Just talking in general about gifted and where to move on from there. I wanted to sort of check I was on the right track.

19. In relation to the needs and experiences of the focus child, have you attended a conference, attended an information evening, read books or journals, had discussions with teachers or professionals in the field of gifted education, other? (RR=9/9)
Five Kindergarten teachers had discussions with teachers or professionals, “I discuss Sam regularly with the special education teacher (Challenge program) and at times with his specialist teachers” and, Annabel’s teacher reported, “We continue to have professional conversations with our peers about students and how to extend them”.

Four Kindergarten teachers had not had sought any advice.
20. Have you been recommended any support services specifically catering for the needs of gifted children? (RR=6/9)
Four Kindergarten teachers had been recommended support services. Sam’s Kindergarten teacher had utilised the services of the teacher of the school’s Challenge program. Five Kindergarten teachers had not been recommended any such support services.

21. Are you aware if your school specifically uses a gifted policy when programming and planning to meet the educational needs of the focus child? (RR=9/9)
There was confusion about each school’s gifted policy. Four Kindergarten teachers answered yes, there was a policy, but that it’s implementation was up to them, “It does. I think it has a policy, but implementation I think it depends on the classroom teacher”.

Four Kindergarten teachers were not sure if their school used a gifted policy. Claudia’s Kindergarten teacher reported,

   Yes, I’m sure we do (laughs). I’m not aware of it. We have a learning support team and a lot of it is covered within the learning support team, and this covers some of your questions further on too. Yeah, we have been going to the learning support team about Claudia because I found it quite difficult in the beginning, like I said, there is a vast range of abilities and she was just so far ahead that it was hard to cater for Claudia in the beginning. Particularly as she wasn’t a person who would go out there and readily do things. She would just follow along with what we were doing.

Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher believed the school did not have a gifted policy.

22. What has been your role or influence in the planning and programming of educational experiences of the focus child? (RR=5/9)
Four Kindergarten teachers explained that it was their role to program and implement educational experiences. Sam’s Kindergarten teacher, while also advising that this was her role,
stated that this was done with support from a specialist teacher from the *Challenge* program.

23. **What educational experiences or strategies have been utilised or suggested to meet the needs of the focus child in school?** (RR=4/9)

Fergus and Annabel’s Kindergarten teachers answered that they provided group based activities with children of similar needs such as reading groups. Kabir’s Kindergarten teacher included the following answers: varied learning experiences, hands on activities, discussion and using new words, curriculum differentiation using Bloom’s Taxonomy, the L3 program, getting to know the child and their strengths, providing extra reading material, using technology such as cameras, laptops, PC, microscope, social play, and encouraging questioning and reflection. Sophie’s Kindergarten teacher stated,

Kindergarten Teacher: Yes, well this year more so, because of the range of kids that I’ve got in the room, I’ve really focused in on group-based work. So I do writing groups, reading groups, and Maths for that purpose. Not specifically for Fergus but so I can better cater for those kids.

Researcher: That works well?

KT: Yeah, it does. A lot of teachers don’t do writing groups, they do whole class writing but I can’t see the value in giving that to students who are still struggling to write their name.

R: Yes, and you’ve got others who are writing a sentence.

P: Yes, yeah, and kids like Fergus who knows all his sounds and is using them, so we need to progress on from there.

In another example, Claudia’s Kindergarten teacher commented,

Kindergarten Teacher: I’m trying to use Bloom’s Taxonomy and things like that to just differentiate the curriculum without changing it because I really feel like Claudia needs socialisation and this is what’s worried me, because this is the time that they make their friends at the beginning of kinder, and I didn’t want to set her off to do different work so you know, or even to sit on her own and do something. I sort of want her with the others.

Researcher: If they’re doing letters . . .

KT: It’s really hard.
R: Ok, so you’ve made a few changes to your planning and programming for Claudia?
KT: I sort of find too that the school program has helped with this a lot because we do the TEN program in Maths, so you can extend them through that. In literacy we do the L3 program so that’s helping there as well.

24. Who has been involved in any stage/s of the planning and programming of educational experiences for the focus child? (RR=9/9)
Six Kindergarten teachers responded that as the classroom teacher they had been involved in the planning and programming for the focus child. In addition, three teachers acknowledged the involvement of other teachers. Of these three teachers, Sam’s Kindergarten teacher acknowledged the support of the Challenge program teacher while two Kindergarten teachers (Advit and Kabir’s) drew on the expertise of the school’s executive staff, such as the Principal and the curriculum advisor.

25. What areas of learning and development do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of the focus child? (RR=9/9)
Five Kindergarten teachers reported that the child’s social-emotional and personal development, for example, taking risks and being confident and having fun were the priority in the first few weeks of school. Sophie’s teacher reported,

Kindergarten Teacher: It’s important for her to . . . my big thing for her is more the being confident and having fun and not being scared to take risks. Cause if I let her make everything right, when something challenges her she’s not going to have a go at it. So they’re the kind of things that I’ve focused on for her. I don’t know that I program for that, there the individual focuses I have for her.
Researcher: She’s not going to get very far with her writing if . . .
KT: . . . She’s not prepared to take risks.

Social skills were important for Fergus and Annabel’s Kindergarten teachers who listed social development, interaction with peers, and
working with others. Fine motor skills was a focus for Kabir’s Kindergarten teacher,

Kindergarten Teacher: His fine-motor skills, and I’ve taught a few autistic children over the years and that seems to be an issue with all of them, hand, pencil control, hand-eye coordination – just holding a ball, not being fearful. So gross motor and fine-motor, obviously social skills, that would be . . . we just keep working on that day in and day out. Just like we do with all the children, that constant observation and also formal assessment. Just keep an idea of where they are up to, where to go next or where to stay? I also like to try at some stage, because of his fine motor control his creative work, art work and craft work, he gets a bit disappointed in it because it can be not . . . I mean I never judge it, but he gets a bit frustrated. Researcher: Maybe it’s not what he planned. KT: So I try very hard not to show them anything that’s complete, so that it doesn’t have to look like that, is how we start. But he doesn’t seem to have those clues as to when to stop putting paint on, or when to stop putting water on. R: That’s interesting isn’t it? KT: Mmm. I think they’d be the most . . . so fine and gross motor skills, socially and just keep up to date with what he’s doing academically. Although I’m not, that’s not really . . . I’m not really worried about that, that’s not my biggest concern. R: What is your biggest concern? KT: His social skills. I don’t want him to come to school being anxious. And I know that that is innate to a certain degree, but I would like to do everything I can to ensure that I don’t make it worse.

Sam’s Kindergarten teacher also emphasised the initial focus upon the child’s personal development acknowledging, learning to be a good learner was a priority, “Learning to be a good learner e.g. body organised, eyes looking at person talking. Focus, sustaining effort & concentration, pride in quality of work, love of learning about new things, tolerance of others”.

Three Kindergarten teachers also included a focus on intellectual development such as literacy and numeracy skills. For example,

Researcher: Obviously she has a real strength in her reading and writing, so is that a main focus for you? Kindergarten Teacher: At the moment it is because that’s what she’s comfortable with. I think, like I said, I think the Maths will
come out as being that way too, so I want to develop that as well.

For Fergus’ Kindergarten teacher, specifically targeted teaching and learning experiences were foci, “I have no time for teaching the whole class ‘a’ when half already know its name/sound”.

26. What does the focus child find most challenging about school at present? (RR=9/9)

Some Kindergarten teachers included multiple responses to this question. Seven responses focused on the social-emotional side of school, including sharing, interacting with others, working with others and making friendships, and social problem solving. Sophie’s Kindergarten teacher listed compliance – responding to the necessary structures and rules of school, as something Sophie found most challenging about school,

Sometimes it is the just doing what you have to do, even if you don’t feel like it. Sometimes she’ll say: ‘I don’t want to’. But, she kind of comes around because I don’t pay any attention to her. I don’t know that . . . academically I don’t think she finds things challenging. I think sometimes she does it, if there’s something that’s a little bit different.

For one of the twice-exceptional children, Kabir, challenging things included, “Inability to ask questions to clarify a seemingly trivial matter. This leads to emotion, stress and acting out”. Changes in routines were also challenging,

Kindergarten Teacher: The other day I was away on Friday, at a course. It’s always a toss up, do you tell them your going or not, but I do now because I think its worse for him to come to school and find I’m not here. And obviously if I know I’m away I say to the kids, everything is left . . . it’s very important that they know it’s exactly the same routine, and Kabir especially, again, likes routine. He pretty much knows how the day is run. I guess the size of the playground, the number of children, different teachers they go to library, they get a different teacher there, they have a different teacher for French, they have a different teacher for computer. That at the beginning of the year was probably a challenge, but he never protests! He’s very good at being self-contained. But again, I've found out later from Mum
that he was worried. You can see occasionally he’ll get . . . he cried in class the other day because he wanted to get something, and I had told them to sit down when they came in, and he wanted to get something out of his bag, and he was crying. I thought by now he would have known that he just needed to put his hand up and say . . .

Researcher: To ask.
KT: Because that’s . . . we probably talk about that everyday. So that’s still an ongoing concern for him.

The answers of two Kindergarten teachers acknowledged the skills involved in being a good learner, “Sam is very much a little boy and he has needed lots of help with getting settled and listening to others, not touching and distracting others and making ‘strong sensible decisions’”.

Fergus’ Kindergarten teacher’s response to the question of challenge was Maths, number identification and counting backwards. This response was extended during the follow-up conversation,

Most challenging? Probably his ability to share things, I’ve noticed, particularly in small groups, when they’re doing things for Maths like hands-on pattern blocks or snakes and ladders even. Not necessarily turn-taking, just sharing, solving simple situations of conflict maybe.

27. What does the focus child enjoy most about school at present? (RR=9/9)
Kindergarten teachers included multiple responses to this question. Four primary teachers answered that the social side of school such as playing with friends was what the focus child enjoyed most. Two Kindergarten teachers responded that technology was important to the children. Two others listed literacy activities as most enjoyable. Claudia’s teacher commented,

I think she’s enjoying reading, she seems to love reading and writing and she loves getting up in front of the class reading. For such a quiet little girl I was quite surprised. One day I asked her if she’d like to read the class a story and she was, ‘Yes!’ very excited which I thought was great, it really surprised me because I thought she was too shy. She’s obviously quite proud of her talent and enjoys showing other people. It’s such a lovely
class as well, they all give her a clap at the end. They talk to her about it, so she really enjoys it. She likes that people are interested.

Fergus' Kindergarten teacher also commented, “He really does love the literacy side of things . . . he takes a lot of pride in the work he produces. Apart from playtime. Obviously playtime as well, but he really is proud of his achievements”.

Kindergarten teachers listed the following activities, playing in the playground, drawing, music, Maths, hands-on construction, discussion about topics of interest (animals, worldly knowledge) and art and craft. Sophie’s Kindergarten teacher reported, “She loves to draw. She does beautiful, beautiful drawings. We do lots of independent activities in the morning and she loves to go to the writing table, she’ll spend a long time there, writing and drawing”.

28. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the educational experiences of the focus child? (RR=2/9)

Claudia’s Kindergarten teacher acknowledged,

Just that I think it is hard to have a gifted child, like it is very hard in the start, I can sort of see how it will become easier as time goes on, it’s just a matter of establishing those patterns where they can go off and do some work and hopefully take other people with them and work within a group.

Kabir’s Kindergarten teacher expressed concern that she was not doing the right thing for the focus child. She commented, “I have not taught many truly gifted. My biggest challenge with Kabir is catering for his literacy skills. But he’s quite happy reading and I’d like to develop his writing. He likes the computer”.

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Child (n=10).

1. How are you enjoying school? Why? (RR=10/10)
All ten children responded positively. Six children responded, “Good”.
Fergus responded, “Great!”

2. What has been the hardest thing about starting school? Why?
(RR=10/10)
Two children felt nothing was hard about starting school. However, for Sam, being sensible was difficult.

For seven other children, various aspects of literacy have been difficult. Hugh reported,

Hugh: Spelling out long words.
Parent: It’s a bit hard to do that sometimes isn’t it?
Researcher: Do you have to write them?
H: Very hard!
P: What sort of words? Give me an example.
H: Because.
Researcher: That’s a hard one!
H: I tried to write it today. I tried my best but I couldn’t do it.

For Andrew, learning to read had been the hardest thing about starting school.

3. What has been the best thing about starting school? Why?
(RR=7/10)
Some children recorded multiple responses. Four children’s responses focused on the social side of school. Annabel enjoyed “Meeting new people” and Fergus reported, “I get to play with my friends”. For Hugh and Fergus, going to the canteen was one of the best things about starting school. For Hugh, PE lessons were also important.
4. Is there anything the teachers could do to make starting school easier for you? (RR=6/10)
Five children found this question difficult to answer. Three children responded, “No” and two, “Not sure”.

5. Is there anything your parents could do to make starting school easier for you? (RR=5/10)
Five children believed there was nothing their parents could do to make starting school easier for them.

6. What are some of the things you do at school? (RR=10/10)
Play was the most common response, with six children identifying this as something they did at school. Three children, Sam, Sophie and Fergus, mentioned academic skills such as Maths, reading and writing. Creative activities such as making and drawing were identified by Annabel.

7. What do you like doing the most at school? Why? (RR=7/10)
Four children enjoyed the academic side of school the most. Fergus enjoyed, “learning everything”, Kabir, “writing” and Hugh, “typing good sentences”. The social side of school was identified by Annabel, “meeting new friends”.

For two children neither the academic side, nor the social side was what they enjoyed most. Sam enjoyed cleaning the playground. Fergus loved going to the canteen.

8. What don’t you like doing at school? Why? (RR=6/10)
For four children there was nothing that they didn’t like doing at school. Fergus was yet to find anything, “I don’t know yet”. Hugh did not like spelling out long words and Kabir didn’t like his friends hurting him.
9. Do you do anything that is different from any of the other children in your class? Why? (RR=7/10)
Three children answered “No” to this question, although one of these children, Sophie, was in a K-1 class and the teacher reported that she was doing Year One work.

Three children answered, “Yes” to the question. Sam mentioned he read at a higher level than anyone else,

Sam: I think I actually . . . wait, I’m in a higher level than anybody else. I’m a very good reader.
Researcher: Right, so you read some different books to them do you?
S: Yes.

Kabir reported that he didn’t do scribble colouring in.

10. Is there anything else you think I should know about you starting school? (RR=6/10)
Five children answered, “No”. Fergus responded, “That’s about all I know”.

5.4 Chapter summary
This chapter has reported the results of the study. Data from the Sayler’s checklists, completed by parents and pre-school teachers, and from questionnaires and conversations with children, parents, pre-school and Kindergarten teachers have been included. Analysis of these data is found in Chapter Seven.

The next chapter, Chapter Six, presents four case studies devised from the data collected. The intention of this chapter is to examine and discuss individual children’s transition experiences of children identified as gifted.
6. Case Studies

Organisation of the chapter

This chapter focuses upon four case studies of individual children’s experiences of the transition to school. It is organised in the following way:

6.1 Introduction
6.2 Case study one: Sam
6.3 Case study two: Sophie
6.4 Case study three: Fergus
6.5 Case study four: Annabel
6.6 Chapter summary

The chapter begins by explaining the use of the four case studies within the thesis. The chapter then moves to detailing the individual transition experiences of four of the eleven child participants.

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reported the results of the qualitative data sets collected to explore the experiences of the child identified as gifted as they start school. The data pertaining to questionnaires and conversations with pre-school teachers, Kindergarten teachers, parents and the children themselves, as well as participant’s completion of Sayler’s Checklists ‘Things this young child has done’ and ‘Things my young child has done’ were presented.

This chapter examines and discusses individual children’s experiences of the transition to school, as analysed through a bioecological lens. This will be achieved through the presentation of
four case studies. The completion of these case studies has assisted in the identification of key themes that contribute to the following analysis and discussion chapters. ‘Points of difference’ have also been highlighted to demonstrate the particularities of students’ experiences. When considered in combination, these case studies contribute to a documented evidence base to address the focus of this study – specifically, the transition to school for the child identified as gifted.

The four case studies have been specifically selected because the transition experiences of these children have commonalities as well as differences. Brief summaries of the four case study children are given in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Brief summaries of case studies

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<td>With an only child, Sam’s parents had no one with whom they could compare his abilities. They didn’t realise that his advanced literacy and numeracy skills were unusual, commenting, “We don’t know what ‘normal’ is”.</td>
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<td>Case study two: Sophie</td>
<td>When four-year-old Sophie started pre-school, the staff were waiting for her, alerted to the possibility of her intelligence by the abilities of her older sister. Sophie walked in and wrote five words, and her pre-school teacher thought, “Whoa! Put your seatbelt on, here we go!”</td>
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<td>Case study four: Annabel</td>
<td>Annabel did not perform as well as expected on her Best Start Assessment. Her mother believed the test did not provide an opportunity for her daughter to show her skills, yet for Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher, “That’s been the line in the sand”.</td>
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6.2 Case study one: Sam

“We don’t know what ‘normal’ is”

Within his first month of school Sam, an only child, received an award at his school assembly. This was an unusual award for a child who has just started school. While his classmates were been rewarded for ‘Being an organised student who tackles every challenge with enthusiasm’ and ‘Being a responsible student who takes care of his classmates’, Sam received a medal from the Australian Army. Both of Sam’s parents are soldiers who regularly serve overseas – often simultaneously. The army, and its community, is a significant contextual influence for Sam. In light of the family’s commitment, the army felt it was important to recognise Sam’s involvement, as he can be without his parents for extended periods. During this time Sam is cared for by his grandparents, described by his mother as “the constant in the background”.

Pre-school education.

Sam’s pre-school teacher believed that attending a co-located pre-school was an advantage, allowing access to beautiful grounds, specialised staff and amenities, and unique experiences, particularly within transition to school. Sam loved pre-school and his parents found it difficult to get him home in the afternoon. The interactions among Sam’s process concept were significant and, as an only child, he particularly enjoyed the social side of pre-school. Sam’s parents were happy with the pre-school’s social-emotional focus and appreciated the opportunity for Sam to be directed towards things he wouldn’t normally do, such as art and craft.

Identification as gifted

As part of his school orientation, Sam attended a prior-to-school interview and assessment at his independent school. During this interview with the Head of the Junior School, Sam was identified as gifted. In the interview Sam was not only able to easily answer the
questions asked, but to also read the questions, designed for the teacher to read to the child. In addition to Sam’s advanced literacy skills, the Head of the Junior School also noted the child’s advanced vocabulary, exceptional general knowledge and superior memory.

Sam’s Kindergarten teacher remembers when the Head of Junior School first mentioned the assessment to her, “I can remember the word that stood out, ‘walked’, in isolation. Very, very unusual! ‘Walked’ in context is probably even tricky for a little person at that age, but ‘walked’ in isolation. That’s a very unusual little person!”

After the assessment, the Head of Junior School spoke to Sam’s parents, commenting that he hadn’t had anyone come through reading as well as Sam for 10 years or so. This was a surprise to Sam’s parents, not that their son was reading, but that a pre-school child reading at his level was unusual. As an only child, Sam’s parents had no one with whom they could compare his abilities, “We’ve got no frame of reference for Sam. We don’t know what ‘normal’ is, or what the standard is. It’s just like well he’s reading, that’s nice (laughs)”. Sam’s parents realised they should have mentioned his reading to his pre-school teacher, “In retrospect I didn’t even tell his teacher that he was reading. I just assumed that everyone in the class was (laughs). I didn’t even flag it!”

However, Sam’s identification as gifted in this way caused some discord between his co-located pre-school and school contexts. The pre-school teacher felt uncomfortable that the Head of Junior School had seen something special in Sam during an hour long interview, yet she hadn’t seen it during the two years that he had attended pre-school. Consequently Sam’s pre-school teacher decided not to participate in the study.
All other stakeholders within Sam’s microsystem were positive about Sam’s identification as gifted. His Kindergarten teacher was excited about teaching him and his parents were happy that he had “some level of ability”. They hoped his identification as gifted might allow Sam additional opportunities. Yet, they were uncomfortable with the term ‘gifted’. Sam’s father felt the term gifted made it sound like it’s something that’s been given to you – you didn’t need to work at it. Sam’s parents decided not to discuss his ‘giftedness’ with him.

*Transition to school.*

Oblivious to his difference, Sam started school like every other child, and his transition to the co-located school was smooth. His Kindergarten teacher observed, “Sam arrived familiar with his teacher, Principal, environment and peers. He has very easy going, happy parents so he is a well adjusted child who loves school”. The connections and interactions between Sam’s context – between Sam, his parents and his Kindergarten teacher – presented a “united front” and supported Sam during his transition (Murray, 2014, p. 55).

However, Sam was described as ‘mosquitoish’ by his Kindergarten teacher and she decided to focus upon his attention related skills – his persistence and self-regulation (Duncan et al., 2007). Sam’s bioecological person concepts, in particular his force and resource characteristics, became a priority for his Kindergarten teacher. She encouraged him to be a ‘good learner’, having his body organised and eyes looking at the person talking. In a questionnaire Sam’s Kindergarten teacher listed the attributes that she believed were important for his learning and development. She wanted him to:

- learn to focus;
- be able to sustain effort and concentration;
- take pride in the quality of his work;
- love learning new things; and,
- be tolerant of others.
As is the aim for all children in her class, Sam’s Kindergarten teacher “wanted to lay a nice firm foundation for Sam to move on from”. She recognised his uneven intellectual and social-emotional development. She was confident in Sam’s cognitive abilities, but felt his attention related skills and social-emotional skills and behaviour (Duncan et al., 2007) were also important.

Sam initially found these attention related and social-emotional skills difficult. Sam was asked what the hardest thing about starting school had been,

Sam: You’re able to be sensible but you might be silly. When I started I was silly and I just got sensible.
Researcher: What does it mean to be sensible? What sort of things do you do?
S: Um, sitted . . . I sat next to Geordie. He’s very, very, very, very sensible!

Sam’s Kindergarten teacher commented that in Geordie, Sam had found an intellectual peer, “He now enjoys the company of Geordie who is a very intelligent, calm and sensible boy – a great influence. This is very important to Sam, as he is an only child”. The interactions between Sam and his new friend became an important influence in Sam’s microsystem during the transition to school.

Wanting to focus upon Sam’s attention related and social-emotional skills, as well as his intellectual development, his Kindergarten teacher took a holistic approach. She focussed upon teaching the ‘whole’ child. In this approach Sam’s advanced literacy and numeracy skills were extended, while he was supported to make ‘good choices’ in his behaviour. When asked if he did anything different from the other children in the class, Sam saw himself as a very good reader. His evidence was that he was on a higher reading level than anyone else, even his friend Geordie. Sam’s Kindergarten teacher was comfortable extending him, particularly as she was able to draw upon the knowledge and experience of the teacher of the
school’s Challenge program\(^2\), which supports children with additional needs.

Sam’s parents were pleased with a “well-rounded” curriculum. They were happy that he was being challenged academically but also appreciated the other opportunities the school provided. They explained,

> It’s a bit of everything, because we want him to be a person. Whilst being intellectually gifted in literacy, that’s fantastic, don’t get me wrong, but that’s not going to get him through life. He needs to be well-rounded. That’s one of the beauties of his school, you’ve got the academic thing, but there is also great emphasis on service so doing volunteer stuff and sports and things other than class. I think it helps to build the person . . . not just an academic person.

This holistic approach worked for Sam, and all parties were happy with his learning and development. However, the bioecological concept of time was also a significant influence in Sam’s transition to school. When Sam started school his parents and his Kindergarten teacher were aware that his time at the school was limited. At the end of the Kindergarten year Sam’s family would be moving and another transition would be required. Wishing to provide some educational stability for their son, Sam’s parents had requested a transfer in the army, hoping that this move would be a final one.

**Summary.**

This close examination of Sam’s data sets indicates a number of factors that may be interpreted as contributing to the positive experiences in his transition to school. As outlined in this case study, Sam’s identification as gifted and its subsequent communication to those involved, prior to him starting school, impacted upon his positive transition to school.

\(^2\) The Challenge program at Sam’s school caters for children with special needs, including the gifted.
While Sam’s identification as gifted caused some discord between his pre-school and school contexts, research (NSW DEC, 2012b) indicates that teachers may not be aware of the aspects of giftedness that have become more familiar to parents and other caregivers, “The child who reads at home, watches complex documentaries and studies encyclopaedias may behave very differently when his or her classmates at school do not talk about any of these things” (p. 19).

Highlighted in Sam’s data set is the reluctance to label children in early childhood. Sam’s parents, in particular, were concerned with the consequences of the child’s awareness of his ‘giftedness’. While Sam was aware of his advanced abilities, his parents preferred not to use the term ‘gifted’ with him. This concern was also raised by Dweck (2009), who worried, “if children believe they simply have to sit there with their gift and success will come, this is a recipe for disappointment” (p. 310).

In addition to this was Sam’s Kindergarten teacher’s focus on both his strengths and needs, essentially a holistic approach. Her attention to extending Sam’s abilities while supporting his attention related and social-emotional development as a learner was particularly powerful. Reinforced through the analysis of these data is the ETC Research Group’s (2011) focus on the competencies, strengths and achievements of children and families as they make the transition to school. Opportunities were afforded to Sam that enabled his ‘holistic’ development, a strategy that satisfied all parties.

An examination of the data that supported Sophie’s experiences in the transition to school is now presented. These data parallel in many ways – yet also build on – the results reported for Sam, providing a complementary picture of the experiences of the child identified as gifted in their transition to school.
6.3 Case study two: Sophie

“Put your seatbelt on, here we go!”

The second child in a family of two girls born twenty-one months apart, Sophie, like her elder sister Lucy, attended a co-located pre-school. Lucy was starting year one and was a significant influence in Sophie’s microsystem.

**Identification as gifted.**

When Sophie started pre-school the staff were waiting for her, alerted to the possibility of her intelligence by the abilities of her older sister. Sophie’s pre-school teacher remembers, “When Lucy started school I said, ‘Woo hoo, this one’s on fire!’ . . . So then we were all watching Sophie . . . to see what would come. She hasn’t let us down!” Sophie’s father also warned the pre-school staff, “You know all those things you noticed in Lucy, Sophie did them earlier – so she’s even smarter than Lucy!” Her pre-school teacher confirmed, “I had some expectation because of knowing what Lucy was like, and knowing Mum and Dad, and even seeing Sophie before pre-school”.

In spite of the early identification of both girls as developmentally advanced, both Sophie’s pre-school teacher and her parents struggled with the notion that Sophie was gifted. Influenced by mass media and culture within the exosystem, her parents were confused about what a gifted child is. Sophie’s mother thought of a gifted child as a five-year-old playing the piano. Her father corroborates, “The prodigies. That’s what I would class as gifted. You see shows like ‘A Current Affair’, and they’ve got parents who have taught their kids to read by the age of 2. Sophie doesn’t do any of that”. Despite identifying Sophie as gifted, the pre-school teacher explained her own confusion with the gifted term,
I struggle a little bit with the notion of gifted and talented, a bit frightened of labels anyway, particularly at this age. To me, right or wrong, the notion of a true gift or talent would be quite specific, one area of talent – more of a talent. So I struggle with that as opposed to a child is really quite bright in a whole bunch of areas. For me there is a little bit of a discrepancy between what is intelligent and what is gifted, in a four-year-old.

All parties confessed to being frightened by the term gifted. Sophie’s father, drawing upon his own experiences, was particularly apprehensive. He was concerned that once a label is attached to someone, people are treated differently. As top of his own class, Sophie’s father had been bullied and now wanted both his daughters to “grow up really, really normally”. Sophie’s pre-school teacher was also concerned about the gifted label, “It’s got a bit of negative press! You know, the Sheldon\(^3\) idea. That characterisation is very much what we see of gifted kids, so there’s a reluctance to want that – I think it carries baggage”.

Despite all parties’ reluctance with the gifted label, Sophie’s advanced abilities were obvious at pre-school, “She is constantly giving me little ‘wow’ moments. I am constantly photographing her, constantly taking notes . . . she’s very exciting to watch!” The pre-school teacher quickly communicated her possible identification of Sophie to the parents and the co-located primary school’s Assistant Principal, saying, “My God! What do I do with this one?” Such communication between the two contexts in Sophie’s microsystem, working in conjunction with her parents within her mesosystem, resulted in Sophie being supported by a “united front” (Murray, 2014, p. 55) during her transition.

\(^3\) Sheldon Cooper is a fictional character on the television series The Big Bang Theory. Sheldon is a theoretical physicist at Caltech. He is a former child prodigy with genius level IQ, but has an almost total lack of social skills (Wikipedia, 2014, June 8).
Sophie’s pre-school teacher was unsure what to do with a gifted four-year-old. She was concerned about Sophie’s social-emotional skills, yet from observing Sophie in the sandpit, she realised these skills were not a weakness. Sophie said, ‘The long skinny one actually holds as much as the short, fat one’. She was off on a scientific investigation and she just didn’t need her peers for that’. Yet Sophie’s pre-school teacher wanted to connect the child to her peers. She wanted to,

Teach her tolerance of other people. Yes, this child’s going to waffle at you for ten minutes but actually there will be things they say that will be interesting, so listen – don’t just write them off. I think sometimes she had low expectations of everyone else, so I had to show her ways that actually, so and so is really good at riding the bike, so why don’t you go over and have a turn with her because she knows how to get it going . . . or the skipping rope, or whatever.

Sophie’s learning and development presented an ongoing dilemma for her pre-school teacher: should she focus on social-emotional, attention related or intellectual development or Sophie’s strengths or her needs as she saw them? She decided her goal for Sophie was lateral development, to offer her a broader, enriching program,

I’ve been looking more at what’s not up, so I’ve looked at her social skills and her communication, thinking these other things are going to serve you very well in Kindergarten, but at the moment, you’re shy and reluctant and not socialising with your peers. I’d like to bring that up.

Yet Sophie’s pre-school teacher remained conflicted about Sophie’s intellectual development. She was averse to acceleration, “I think other areas need to develop. I’m very holistic, they might be academically bright, but no-one wants to be that 15 year-old with a university degree. Do they really want that? I don’t want that for my children!” But as Sophie had come to pre-school writing Sophie, Ginger, Mum, Dad, and Lucy, her pre-school teacher wondered why hadn’t she focused on Sophie’s writing? During a conversation she reported that she rationalised this by saying she was extending other
areas, but she asked herself, “Have I done enough? Has Sophie developed that skill, or has she lost that skill, or have I set up other things that are going to serve her well when she does extend that skill in a formal environment?” Sophie’s pre-school teacher remained torn about her role – and how best to prepare Sophie for school.

Struggling with this dilemma, the pre-school teacher tried a different approach, using the child’s advanced cognitive abilities as a way of connecting her to her peers. She felt that if Sophie could “be the expert and teach others – and to teach others she’ll have to talk to others. They will appreciate what she has done for them and we’ll be able to build upon this”. To achieve this Sophie’s pre-school teacher used her advanced literacy skills, “She taught them to read – it’s the most explicit little lesson! She read with this girl and said, “No, you must put your finger here’. She showed her one-on-one, return sweep and to turn the page”. Sophie’s pre-school teacher felt this approach has resulted in some success. Sophie had spent time reading with her peers. However, during a conversation Sophie’s pre-school teacher reported that was still not convinced her approach was appropriate. The lessons had been very much on Sophie’s terms and Sophie had been very much in control.

Sophie’s pre-school teacher turned to professional reading, “I was reading something about how pre-school teachers adopt a medical model – fix what’s wrong – a deficit model, when we should be working on something different. That really has challenged my thinking!” Even at the end of pre-school, Sophie’s pre-school teacher was questioning her approach, “I am looking at Sophie and going, ‘Oh man, are you ready? Have I done enough?’”
**Orientation activities.**

Sophie’s pre-school teacher was concerned about Sophie’s transition to school. She was also troubled by the activities the children completed during the three orientation sessions at the school. In one session, the children had all traced a clown. After returning to the co-located pre-school, Sophie’s pre-school teacher realised this was an opportunity to challenge her staff. Using the children’s clown pictures, she asked a colleague, “What can you tell me about these kids? What would you say about this child here, who had actually done immaculate tracing, but had coloured in like a mad thing, because they ran out of time and were stressed?” She pointed out that was the work of Sophie, the most intelligent child, but there was no evidence on the work sheet. She believed asking the children to draw a clown, or their family, or even themselves, would have produced much richer data, giving the Kindergarten teacher a better understanding of each child.

Familiar with the Kindergarten practices due to their daughter Lucy’s experiences, Sophie’s parents were also worried. They were nervous about the level of work she would be doing once she started school. Sophie’s mother thought that she would “find it super easy. I don’t think she’ll have any trouble”. Her father worried that the level of work would be problematic, “I think she’s going to be bored. When she’s home and she gets bored she punches her sister”. To avoid this, Sophie’s pre-school teacher believed drawing attention to Sophie’s strengths prior to her starting school would be of benefit. She believed meeting with the Kindergarten teachers in Term Four would be beneficial. She wanted to say, “Sophie has already got quite a grasp on volume and capacity. Sophie can read a level 8. Sophie can do this and this. What are you going to give her on that first day that will support that?”
Assessment.
The Kindergarten teachers at Sophie’s school were reliant upon on the Best Start Assessment (NSW DET, 2008). This test, conducted at the start of the year, ‘allows teachers to explore the depth of skills, knowledge and understanding that students demonstrate as they enter formal schooling’ (NSW DET, 2008, p. 5). Yet, Sophie’s preschool teacher was concerned that the assessment would not reveal Sophie’s advanced abilities, “It will be really fascinating to have a look at how she scores. I know she’d blitz it, ability wise, but, having administered that test, I don’t think she’d necessarily show . . .” She was worried that being tested by an unfamiliar teacher would not achieve a true result. She discussed this with the school’s Principal and Kindergarten teachers,

I said one of the problems is they don’t know who you are. I wonder how those results would be different if I could do the Best Start testing? Of course it was: ‘No, no no no no, that’s totally outside the parameters of rationalism’, but really, if you want to test the child’s ability, then it should be me. It begs to question the nature of that testing. Sophie won’t necessarily shine in that testing, because she is going to answer what she thinks they want her to answer. She’s going to over-analyse and she’s also going to doubt herself . . . she’s not confident enough to give them the high level I know she can.

Sophie’s parents and pre-school teacher were divided on how the child would fare in the Best Start Assessment. Her parents were depending upon it to show their daughter’s abilities, but her preschool teacher believed that the teaching staff’s knowledge of the child was also required.

When Sophie started school she was placed in a class with a teacher who already knew her through her sister Lucy. Assessed in the third week of school, the time and process concepts of bioecological theory had an impact in Sophie’s transition. She was comfortable with the school environment and with her teacher. Consequently, Sophie performed well on the Best Start assessment; scoring at levels expected at the completion of Kindergarten. The following
passage is an extract of an interview with Sophie’s Kindergarten teacher, as we looked at the results for her class,

Kindergarten Teacher: That’s the base level and you hope they come out here. That’s the end of Kinder.
Researcher: But there are one or two children above her?
KT: No, they’re my year ones.
R: So she’s up with the top year ones?
KT: Yes, those are my year ones, so there was a couple there, and her Maths, she came out . . . there you are, ‘Counting beyond.’
R: Counting beyond 100?
KT: She counted to 150 for me!

Transition to school.
As Sophie’s pre-school teacher and parents had hoped, her Kindergarten teacher recognised her skills early. This early awareness of Sophie’s abilities reflected time concepts within the bioecological theory and contributed to Sophie’s positive transition to school. However, while Sophie was happy to be at school, she was used to a play-based curriculum at pre-school, and she struggled with the structure of the Kindergarten classroom. Her Kindergarten teacher explained that Sophie didn’t always want to do what everyone else was doing, “She was quite happy to flitter around at times” – Sophie’s person concepts were an influence upon her transition.

Primary school education.
Sophie’s transition to school was supported by the bioecological context influences of her classroom and school organisational factors. She was placed in a composite Kinder/Year One class, which proved to be beneficial for her. Confident in Sophie’s advanced cognitive skills, her Kindergarten teacher allowed her to choose between Kindergarten and Year One work. Sophie’s teacher was also confident in her approach to the child’s learning and development. She focused upon the other key dimensions of children’s ‘readiness to learn’: attention related skills and social-
emotional skills and behaviours (Duncan et al., 2007). Sophie’s 
teacher worked on both of Sophie’s strengths . . .

In her number work she’s doing lots of great things. She’s 
counting on, she can read three-digit numbers. The only 
problem we have is if there’s a zero in the ten’s place, that 
tricks her. I’ve got her reading on a 15, she could read higher 
but I don’t want to push her because there’s a risk of losing 
fluency and comprehension. I’ll just leave her there.

. . . and what she considered a deficit or need – Sophie’s 
perfectionism,

Sometimes she doesn’t want to do something if there’s that risk 
of not getting it right. If there’s a mistake she has to fix it, so I’m 
working on: ‘It’s ok to make mistakes and we learn from 
mistakes’. We worked on writing, if she’d made a mistake and 
she wanted me to rub it out, I just told her that I wanted her to 
put a cross, because I can’t be everywhere when everyone’s 
writing and if I don’t see it until later, if you rubbed it out I 
wouldn’t know that you did some really good noticing. So now 
she’s putting a cross if she makes a mistake.

Sophie’s Kindergarten teacher commented further, “The big thing for 
her is being confident and having fun and not being scared to take 
risks, because if I let her make everything right, when something 
challenges her she’s not going to have a go at it”. Sophie’s 
Kindergarten teacher focused on the key dimensions of readiness to 
learn, extending her academically but also developing her attention 
related and social-emotional skills where necessary. Grant (2013) 
found that the most supportive child-educator relationships combined 
emotional security and high levels of intellectual stimulation. Sophie 
experienced such a supportive relationship with her Kindergarten 
teacher.
Summary.
The data presented in Sophie’s case study reiterates many of the features discussed in the previous case study. Like for Sam, Sophie’s Kindergarten teacher’s early awareness of the child’s abilities contributed to a positive transition to school. In this case, the assessment conducted by Sophie’s Kindergarten teacher, the Best Start Assessment, in combination of the teacher’s prior knowledge of the child,highlighted Sophie’s advanced abilities. Such early acknowledgement of Sophie’s advanced abilities allowed her Kindergarten teacher to focus on her development, right from the start of her formal schooling.

Also reinforced in Sophie’s data set is the role of the Kindergarten teacher, and her holistic approach. Sophie’s Kindergarten teacher focused upon Duncan et al.’s (2007) three key dimensions of readiness to learn: cognitive abilities; attention related skills; and social-emotional skills and behaviours, essentially applying a holistic approach.

However, particular to Sophie’s data set are the concerns raised by her pre-school teacher regarding the orientation activities conducted at the co-located primary school. Sophie’s pre-school teacher worried that provision of simple, restricted activities was not valuable for Kindergarten teachers and provided children with a poor first impression of the Kindergarten classroom.
6.4 Case study three: Fergus

“He won’t draw, He won’t paint!”

Fergus’ pre-school teacher recommended he stay on in pre-school for another year rather than start Kindergarten. While she acknowledged that he “displayed quite a few gifted characteristics”, his pre-school teacher was concerned about Fergus’ person characteristics, particularly his impulsivity and unwillingness to take risks – he wouldn’t draw or paint at pre-school. Fergus’ mother remembers the pre-school teacher’s words, “He won’t draw, he won’t paint, and it seems to be related to some sort of anxiety in his personality where he doesn’t want to do anything he’s not perfect at”. Fergus’ person characteristics became a focus for his pre-school teacher. In light of Fergus’ reluctance to draw and paint, she recommended his parents seek assessments from an occupational therapist and a behavioural psychologist.

Identification as gifted.

The pre-school teacher, who identified Fergus as gifted, remembers, “It was pretty obvious to me that he probably had lots happening intellectually when he first came, but that he had some challenges developmentally as well”. She continued,

I think Fergus is a gifted child, but he is . . . a mixed bag, because he has really quite complex ways of thinking and he will notice things that other children don’t notice, and he has excellent comprehension, really good vocabulary, a very advanced sense of humour, so all of that side of it is what you would expect but then he has got some of the immature (without being sexist) male things where he is very, very impulsive, and I have recommended to the family that they have an OT assessment because I wouldn’t be surprised if there were some under sensitivity or over sensitivity to stimulus, or it may just be that impulsivity that, and so even though he’s got really good cognitive skills, the impulsivity affects how he operates.
Fergus’ pre-school teacher suggested he be assessed by an occupational therapist and a behavioural psychologist. However, during the data collection his parents had not yet acted upon this advice. However, Fergus’s parents sometimes found his behaviour difficult. His mother complained,

'It’s really tiring, especially when you’re distracted or you’re trying to do something else. Driving is probably the worst time, she (indicates Fergus’ younger sister) might be crying and he just doesn’t even hear that, it’s just ‘I need to know about this and I need to know about it now!’

Despite the pre-school teacher’s concerns about Fergus’ needs, his parents found his identification as gifted to be positive. It helped them understand his person characteristics, in particular his intensity. His mother explained, “I think we thought maybe before it was more of a deliberate, well not a deliberate behaviour, but when we sit down and think about it now, it’s his thirst for knowledge that drives us insane really! (laughs)” They also found that some of Fergus’ unusual behaviours made more sense,

Parent: I do remember him being probably, maybe this age (indicates daughter), nine-ten months and sitting on the kitchen floor making this really horrible noise and I said to Pete: ‘Can you just see what’s wrong with Fergus?’ and he came over to me and he said, ‘There’s nothing wrong with him, he’s pretending to use the Bamix, you know those stick-mixer things. And that’s what he was doing – he just grabbed something and it was sort of cylindrical shaped and he was just going, Nnnnnn, nnnnnn up and down’ (laughs) and then I thought, ‘Oh ok’. And that seemed to me to be really young to be pretending. I don’t know if it is or not, and then it just sort of went on from there, his pretending became more obvious to us. He used to do a whole range of things but sounds seemed to be something that interested him when he was really young and he would get an object and he would just go round the house, tap it on all different surfaces, and it was like he was recording, ‘Ok, on a soft surface it makes this noise, it makes this sound on a hard surface’, and he would go round the house with it, then he would discard that and then he’d pick up another object. And he’d go round and do the same thing. And it got to the point with the banging that we had to . . . we made what we called a banging station and it was just this little table where he was allowed to bang things and it was outside on the deck because
it was just driving us mad (laughs)! He was doing it all the time! And he was young then too, he was probably only, I don’t know, maybe thirteen-fourteen months. But it did seem like he was really trying to teach himself.
Researcher: It sounds like he’s doing science experiments . . .
P: I think you’re right!

Fergus’s identification as gifted by the pre-school teacher had further implications for the family. When asked if this had changed their expectations for him, his mother replied,

No, I’m probably less hard on him. I understand there’s potential in him to do probably whatever he would like to do, I think the biggest thing for me has been realizing that he could potentially just fly under the radar and if we don’t provide him with the opportunity to forge on a little bit more and extend himself a little bit more.

Pre-school.

While acknowledging his giftedness, Fergus’ pre-school teacher chose to concentrate upon his needs - his attention related skills and social-emotional behaviours (Duncan et al., 2007). She focused upon his bioecological person concept. In a questionnaire his pre-school teacher listed the following areas as priorities for his learning and development:

- social difficulties;
- impulsivity;
- reluctance to take risks (paint);
- managing own behaviour; and,
- need for structure – anxiety.

Drawing upon Duncan et al.’s (2007) key dimensions of children’s ‘readiness to learn’, Fergus’ pre-school teacher was unconcerned about his cognitive abilities. He was articulate and already able to recognise letters and numbers, for example. Instead Fergus’ pre-
school teacher focused upon his attention related skills and social-emotional skills and behaviours, his self-regulation, risk taking and impulsivity.

**Transition to school.**

Despite his pre-school teacher’s concerns, Fergus’ transition to school was positive. His mother believed that he would be “a bit clingy” but this was not the case, he was keen to be independent. After his first week of school he asked his mother not to walk him up to the classroom any more.

Fergus’ mother believed the large class size – an exosystem influence – was good for him, “He’s really enjoyed the social side of lots of different people to mix with. He seems to be heading into play areas and playing with the big kids as well so he seems comfortable”. Fergus confirmed this during his Phase III interview. Alongside, “going to the canteen”, Fergus reported, “playing with his friends” was the best thing about starting school.

**Assessment.**

Fergus’ transition was also influenced by his exosystem and bioecological context and time concepts. The school’s regional diocese had decided to test the Kindergarten children on *Best Start* before they started school. Conducted before Fergus started school, he did not ‘shine’ on the *Best Start Assessment*, and consequently, his Kindergarten teacher did not consider him gifted. When asked if she had made any changes to her planning and programming for Fergus, his teacher answered, “I've really focused in on group-based work, so I do writing groups, reading groups, and Maths groups for that purpose. Not specifically for Fergus but so I can better cater for all kids”.

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Primary school education.

While Fergus was enjoying the social side of school, he was finding the academic side to be less positive. When asked what had been the hardest thing about starting school, Fergus responded, “Mmm (pause) nothing at all!” Fergus’ mother explained that he was bored at school, “He wants detailed information on multiple topics . . . He’s frustrated (laughs)”. In this case, Fergus’ person concepts were a significant influence upon his transition. While his cognitive abilities were good, his attention related skills such as persistence and self-regulation and his social-emotional skills and behaviours were again considered by his teacher to be a need. When asked what Fergus currently found most challenging about school, his Kindergarten teacher responded, “Most challenging? Probably his ability to share things, particularly in small groups, when they’re doing things for Maths like hands-on pattern blocks or snakes and ladders. Not necessarily turn-taking, just sharing, solving simple situations of conflict maybe”. Just as it had at pre-school, Fergus’ giftedness took a backseat.

Fergus’ parents were becoming frustrated by the educational opportunities he was afforded, by the lack of focus upon his cognitive abilities at school. His mother complained about the readers Fergus was bringing home, “We’ve had the same one over and over and over. It’s killing me! (laughs). But that’s ok because I just make him do it and then he can choose his own”. The readers termed ‘his own’ were from the local public library. Before the end of his first term at school Fergus’ parents had already begun to rely on resources from outside the school to cater for their son’s abilities.
Summary.

The evidence presented from an analysis of Fergus’ data set reinforces a number of factors that may be interpreted as contributing to the positive experiences in the transition to school. As the previous two case studies have done, Fergus’ case study highlights the time and context concepts and the critical role of early assessment in the transition to school, yet there was a point of difference. This case study highlights difficulties with the Best Start Assessment. For Fergus, the timing and context of the assessment’s implementation may have been the reasons why his advanced development was not identified, giving his Kindergarten teacher an incomplete picture of his abilities and becoming a significant influence of the context and process concepts within his transition to school.

Particular to Fergus’ data set is the pre-school teachers’ approach to the child’s learning and development. Fergus’ pre-school teacher focused upon his person characteristics. She considered some of his ‘readiness to learn’ skills (Duncan et al., 2007) – his attention related skills and social-emotional behaviours – as possible problems. Similarly, Sophie’s pre-school teacher had commented, “I’ve been looking more at what’s not up”. Yet, the data sets of Sam and Sophie stress the importance of pedagogy that takes a holistic approach to the child’s person characteristics, focusing upon both the child’s strengths – their cognitive abilities – and their needs, often attention related skills or social-emotional behaviours (Duncan et al., 2007).
6.5 Case study four: Annabel

“For us, that’s been the line in the sand”

The second child in a busy household with four young children, Annabel demonstrates maturity and leadership beyond her years. Her mother gave an example of Annabel’s personality,

The other day we got home really late from being out riding the bike track and it was dark by the time we got home and no-one had had baths and we couldn’t find Annabel. We were going: ‘Where’s Annabel?’ because she and Wilbur were riding round the block, thinking maybe she’s gone around the block again and I thought we’ll just check at home, no bike in the backyard . . . where is she? We walked in the backyard and went: ‘Oh no, she’s put her bike away’ in the garage, walked inside, could hear the bath running, she’d started stacking the dishwasher (laughs), had all the kids’ pyjamas out . . . it’s so like her, I’d obviously made the comment: ‘Oh, it’s so stressful!’ and so this is what she does, she just tries to smooth it all over.

Annabel’s mother believed that her daughter’s position as the second eldest child, the eldest daughter, in the family’s busy household, a bioecological context influence, had moulded her daughter’s personality, her person concepts, “She’s the mother and the helper, and I think she has had to be that in our family – just to cope!” Yet Annabel’s mother hoped that in the school environment, a new context, her daughter would be able to be herself.

Identification as gifted.

Even before she was two, Annabel’s parents were becoming aware that their daughter was different to her peers. Initially, her carers at childcare expressed their delight at Annabel’s language abilities. Her mother remembered, “She was still in the babies’ room – the 0-2 room, and they just kept saying to us, ‘Her speech is so good! Her language is so good!’” Yet Annabel’s advanced development soon became apparent in other areas and her parents began to think she may be gifted. Her mother recalled, “I remember they had a round table and her pre-school teacher made buckles and fasteners and
that sort of thing because she was interested in that. Everyone else was on the floor playing with other bits but she was challenging herself".

**Pre-school education.**

Once Annabel began attending three-year-old pre-school she again caught the attention of her teachers, as well as the parents of her peers,

I remember turning up on the first day of pre-school and they were just doing a craft activity and they had some little cut out shapes and the kids were kind of just wacking them on the page and she actually made a garden so there were circles and she made a caterpillar and she ripped something else in half to make some worms and then made some butterflies and then wrote her name, Annabel Smith, her name on the page on the first day and I could see other parents going, ‘Right!’

As a four-year-old, pre-school was a positive experience for Annabel. Her mother explained, “She’s likeable, she’s popular. She’s a good student so she endears herself to people, and she does really interesting work, so it’s been really positive”. Annabel’s parents realised that, while socially four-year-old pre-school was “fabulous for her”; intellectually, their daughter wanted more. Annabel was desperate to improve her reading and writing, spending much of her time at pre-school making ‘booklets’. This context, the pre-school, left her to her own devices, allowing Annabel to focus upon her interests. However, Annabel’s parents started to think that their daughter needed more than her pre-school was currently offering.

Annabel’s mother attempted to discuss her daughter’s abilities with the pre-school teacher, yet found the pre-school was “very much a closed door – very much! They didn’t want to explore it at all and I was quite surprised because I had a really good relationship with them”. Annabel’s mother did, however, decide to mention this study to them. After consulting with the researcher, the pre-school teacher chose not to participate, citing, “We don’t put a label on them at this
age”. The pre-school teachers reluctance to discuss Annabel’s possible giftedness was disappointing for the family,

You don’t want to boast, but you want to have an opportunity for them to extend and show how much they learn. Pre-school was good, and she has been very happy there, but I’m not sure how they’ve extended her – at that next stage.

Annabel’s last few months of pre-school caused her mother to question what her daughter needed and she began to wonder how Annabel would handle the transition to school.

**Prior to starting school.**

Attending a large school in a regional area, Annabel’s Kindergarten year consisted of four large Kindergarten classes, each containing 29 children. Annabel’s mother valued the opportunity for play and socialisation. With two children born in February, the family decided to ‘hold back’ Annabel as they had held back her brother - two years older. Annabel’s mother clarified her thinking, “They’re only little once and that’s a lifetime of being in routine and that sort of schooling”. This meant that when school started, Annabel was almost 6 and was very enthusiastic about starting school.

By the time Annabel started school, her mother was concerned that her daughter’s personality – a person concept of bioecological theory, in combination with the large class size – an exosystem influence - would mean that she would be ‘lost’. Annabel’s mother expressed her apprehension, “My fear for Annabel too is in her transition, she is one in a very large class, because she is the perfect student . . . she’ll always do the right thing . . . She’ll just get lost”. Her mother commented, “I’d just like her to be able to hit the ground running. I think if she doesn’t, she’s going to get caught up in that helper, quiet, just kind of do what she thinks is right, kind of thing”.

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Before Annabel started school, she was assessed using the NSW Best Start Assessment. Annabel’s classroom teacher had previously taught her older brother, also considered gifted, and her mother believed this would help with Annabel’s transition. She hoped that the Best Start Assessment would also help the teacher to get to know her daughter, “I would love for Annabel to be acknowledged for the level she is at, and then her learning further extended. I’m sure the Best Start Assessment hopefully will help”. This was not the case. Surprised by Annabel’s performance on the assessment, her mother recalled, “I was really disappointed because it didn’t reflect her ability at all, and Mrs. Rogers, I know, would challenge that! But I don’t agree. I know that there are things that she didn’t score on that she can do easily”. The school’s regional diocese, an influence on Annabel’s exosystem and her context concept, had decided to test the Kindergarten children on Best Start before they started school. This meant Annabel was tested before she had developed a comfortable relationship with her teacher. In this case, time was also an influence and the timing of the assessments implementation did not provide the optimum opportunity for Annabel to demonstrate her skills.

Due to the results on Best Start, Annabel’s teacher did not consider Annabel as gifted. Her Kindergarten teacher explained, “For us, that’s been the line in the sand”. In an interview she confirmed her doubts about Annabel’s identification as gifted, “She wasn’t reading a level 13 or 15 or 26. She wasn’t reading the Bible when she came in, like other children have done. So I didn’t see that giftedness as such”.

Assessment.
Starting school.

Starting school a week after she was assessed on Best Start, Annabel’s transition did not go well, and her initial impression of school was not positive. Both Annabel’s parents and her Kindergarten teacher described Annabel’s transition to school as difficult. The time and context concepts of bioecological theory became a significant influence upon her transition. After the choices she experienced at pre-school, Annabel struggled adjusting to the structure of school and her teacher’s rigid focus on routines. Her Kindergarten teacher, trying to provide continuity between pre-school and school, provided free-play activities for the first few weeks of school. For Annabel, this did not provide a positive impression of the Kindergarten classroom. As she had started school keen to learn, this caused difficulties – she was looking for more. Described by her Kindergarten teacher as having “an extraordinarily strong work ethic”, Annabel experienced a discord between her expectations and the reality of the classroom. Lombardi (1992) warns that children may be at risk of not adjusting easily to school when there is a mismatch between the skills, attitudes and knowledge they bring to school, and the expectations of the school itself.

For Annabel, the free-play activities, in combination with the large class size, an initial emphasis on routines and her person characteristics, soon took their toll. She experienced personal incompatibilities and dislocations in her transition (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Erikson, 1963) and became very reluctant to go to school. Her mother reports, “She started doing things like saying: ‘I don’t want to wear my hair that way!’ ‘No, I want to wear these pants not this uniform’” and her Kindergarten teacher commented that “Annabel needed to learn her role” at school. Home life became so difficult that Annabel’s mother turned to a colleague, a psychologist. The psychologist reported, “She was trying to tell you that really, ‘I don’t want to go’”. Prior to this explanation Annabel’s mother did not
understand her daughter’s reluctance and her need for control over her learning.

Allowing Annabel to exercise more control and choice at home helped, although her mother, Kate, remained concerned, “She seems happier. It will be interesting to see where it ends up. It has made me really, really get to the point of, ‘Is this where I need to step in?’ I’ve been worried about her”. Annabel’s unhappiness continued for a term. All parties found this challenging. Her Kindergarten teacher remembered,

Kate would come in saying she wasn’t really happy, getting her to school was an issue. Things that are important to me as a teacher; making her feel comfortable, making her feel safe, wanting to come, wanting to learn; are the most important things to me at the beginning of the year. It really affected me because I really wanted them all to be in that environment where they feel they want to be here, because if you want to be here, you want to learn. I really didn’t want it to impact on her learning, obviously she was going to be a very capable learner.

For Annabel, the time concept of bioecological theory was also important within her transition. Transition to school is often described as a process that takes time (Dockett et al., 2014). Within this process, individual children and families may need different amounts of time to adjust to school or to feel a sense of belonging in the school environment (Dockett et al., 2014). For Annabel, time, as well as the process and context concepts was also significant. Annabel’s teacher commented, “The first couple of weeks might have been just more play, she was looking for maybe some more challenging things, but we had to start, to kind of build that happening”. In Annabel’s case, the institutional aspects of the transition process – classroom and school organisational factors (Margetts, 2014) – were a significant influence upon her transition.
**Primary school education.**

With classroom routines and structure becoming established, Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher finally moved from the free-play activities to the Kindergarten curriculum. For Annabel, this shift in classroom organisation was beneficial. Her Kindergarten teacher commented, “Once the challenging stuff began . . . then I think we began to see some changes”. Annabel slowly became happier, but her mother felt that by this point, time had taken its toll and her daughter had learnt to moderate her expectations. She observed,

I think if anything what she’s learnt is what she needs to do, be . . . not mediocre because that makes it sound really snooty . . . she’s worked out what she has to do to be one of the masses and I think she’s sort of found that place and that may be why she’s a bit happier now, whereas before when she tried to do things a bit differently or show, you know, a different way, and it didn’t work for her.

Annabel’s mother verified, “I don’t think her teacher thinks she is gifted, I think she just thinks she’s a good student, and she *is* a good student!” However, Annabel’s mother believed her daughter had enormous potential, but she couldn’t see it being reached “because what’s championed to her this year is really to fit in, and that’s what she’s doing. She’s getting a sticker for sitting on the mat, not for a great idea or piece of thinking or work”. Prior to Annabel starting school, her mother had expressed concern that unless Annabel’s abilities were recognised early, she could become the ‘helper’ at school. Her mother’s concerns were justified – Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher began to see her as a helper. She reported,

I think she’s enjoying the social side, and I think she’s beginning to see that she has skills in that area: that she can, not be bossy, but that she can organise. The other day I said to her: ‘If I work with the children on the floor, can you do that?’ and once the children finished could you make sure that they’re all up the right way, so giving her skills to demonstrate her ability to organise and then afterwards to explain what she’s done so I think that’s very important to her. So that’s very important too, I think school is not only about her learning, it’s about being able
to explain the new learning and . . . there’s a lot more to it than that.

Annabel’s process interactions with her Kindergarten teacher, in combination with her person characteristics, influenced her transition. Yet for Annabel’s parents, communication with her classroom teacher was difficult. With such large class size, a process concept influence, her parents felt there wasn’t the opportunity to discuss their daughter with her Kindergarten teacher. Annabel’s mother felt the Kindergarten teacher had been quite dismissive, yet she was confident in her daughter’s cognitive abilities, “I don’t think she’s really shone in the classroom, and I think it’s because she hasn’t been given the opportunity to”. Describing Annabel as placid, her mother believed this would hinder her opportunities, “She might know a lot about a particular topic, but they might never ever know, so probably a lot comes down to communication. Just them, taking the time really, to listen to her, to let her have a say”.

Annabel’s mother believed had it not been her daughter’s giftedness that she wanted to discuss, her Kindergarten teacher may have been more responsive,

It’s really hard to navigate your way through when there’s a bit of stigma attached to it, if people don’t recognise that there’s even potential, you know it might not be really gifted but there’s a potential for . . . I’m interested in different things. I don’t know many six-year-olds that would have one bedroom wall plastered with a series of Monet paintings, and another of Paris . . . I mean her friends are just not doing that. They’re interested in Barbie dolls.

Annabel’s mother realised that the influence of society and culture, a macrosystem influence, was significant. Also contributing was the process concept of bioecological theory. Annabel’s transition was not supported by a “united front” (Murray, 2014, p. 55) between the child, the parents and the Kindergarten teacher.
The lack of opportunity for their daughter to show her interests and abilities was disappointing for the family. Initially they thought that “a standardised test like the Best Start would have been enough to help identify some of those areas, but in this case I don’t think it has”. Annabel’s parents were unable to see a solution. Her mother commented, “There’s nothing that can help, it’s hard, and I don’t really feel as a parent that it has to be my job for them to come home from the school day and then start a curriculum”. They considered counseling, yet there was a six-month waiting period to see the school counselor. At the end of the data collection period they were also considering psychological testing, believing that formal identification of Annabel’s abilities may assist her Kindergarten teacher, and her subsequent teachers, understand their daughter better.

**Summary.**

Annabel’s case study contributes further to the body of evidence informing the transition experiences of children identified as gifted. Importantlty, this case study reiterates the findings of the previous three case studies, highlighting the critical role of early assessment in the transition to school. Consistently, assessment was perceived as central to each Kindergarten teacher’s early awareness of the child’s abilities. Yet for Annabel and Fergus, this early assessment, in the form of the *Best Start Assessment*, became a barrier. Their Kindergarten teachers were overly dependent upon these results and consequently were not open to giving the child further opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. This contributed to Annabel’s difficulties during this ‘sensitive period’ (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

In addition, this case study has highlighted the role of continuity in the transition to school for children identified as gifted. Wanting to provide continuity for the Kindergarten children, Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher provided free-play activities. Yet for Annabel, this caused problems. At pre-school she was accustomed to a play-
based curriculum which helped develop her independence and flowed with her agenda (Fabian, 2010). At school she wanted more, experiencing a discord between her expectations and the reality of the Kindergarten classroom. Whitton (2005) found, gifted children ranked knowledge most highly as a concern about starting school, emphasising learning, working and developing more knowledge. This focus on knowledge is in contrast to the concerns identified by ‘mainstream children’ starting school who nominated rules, disposition and social adjustment before knowledge (2005).

Particular to Annabel’s data set was the Kindergarten teacher’s focus on compliance, encouraging children to adjust to the structure of school. This may be affected by the large class size, as a class of almost 30 Kindergarten children at the start of the year may be difficult to manage. Initially Annabel was getting a sticker for sitting on the mat, rather than for a great idea or piece of work. This focus on compliance caused Annabel to adjust her expectations of school. Subsequently her image of herself as a learner was influenced by her school experiences, during a time significant for the development of self-identity and attitudes to learning. For Annabel, her school environment, rather than becoming a source of support, constituted a source of risk to her social-emotional development.

6.6 Chapter summary

This chapter reported on four case studies of individual children’s experiences and has identified aspects of the students and teachers’ transition practices particular to the questions posed by this research. Presented as individual case studies, the examination of these four data sets has made some preliminary links to bioecological theory and to the relevant literature to support an informed analysis of the data.
7. Data Analysis

Organisation of the chapter
This chapter is organised in the following sections:

7.1 Introduction
7.2 Level one analysis: Content
7.3 Level two analysis: Context
7.4 Level three analysis: Content and context
7.5 Summary

This chapter draws upon the aggregated data sets of the eleven individual children in the study and unpacks the multiple levels of analysis used in the study. The chapter comprises four main sections. The first section is the introduction. The second section contains themes established through the first level of analysis: content analysis. The third section contains level two analysis: analysis of context. Together, these two levels of analysis form the foundation of the final level of analysis. Level three analysis allowed the researcher to compare and evaluate each theme across the four PPCT elements of bioecological theory and determine the level of influence of each PPCT element upon individual themes and forms the final section of this chapter.

7.1 Introduction
The purpose of this study was to explore the transition to school for children identified as gifted, as experienced by a sample of eleven children, their parents, their pre-school teachers and their Kindergarten teachers. Extracting the data from aggregated data sets for the eleven individual children has allowed an analysis of significant factors from the participants' experiences that may
contribute to a positive transition to school for children identified as gifted.

There were three levels of data analysis utilised in this study:

i. The first level of data analysis involved the exploration of data content. At this level, data were collated, sorted and reviewed. Checklists and questionnaires were read numerous times, and interviews were transcribed by the researcher, before being read and reread. At this stage, the researcher became familiar with the participants' voices and categories were determined. From these categories, codes were identified, then data reread and codes refined. A coding frame was then created and used to analyse the data.

ii. The second level of data analysis considered the context of the data – the bioecological lens. At this level of analysis, the elements of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory – process, person, context and time – were used to analyse the data. In this analysis statements were written which considered the influences of the PPCT elements on the content of the data – the themes of the study. This analysis involved the researcher re-examining data through the PPCT lens, resulting in new meanings being drawn from the data (Glaser, 1965).

Exploring each of these elements separately laid the foundation for the third level of analysis:

iii. The third level of analysis explored the relationship between content and context: the established themes and the theoretical framework. Level three analysis develops the matrix which provides presents the ratings of the levels of influence of each of the PPCT elements on each of the themes.
These three levels of data analysis created a dynamic model in which the transition to school was explored by focusing on the intersecting contexts of the children’s experiences. The multi-level model of analysis considered the influences of the child and their prior experiences as well as the influences of family, pre-school and primary school contexts. As a consequence, data were able to be assessed in relation to both content and contextual richness.

7.2 Level one analysis: Content

Content analysis of the data sets of the eleven children identified as gifted, their pre-school teachers, their parents, and their Kindergarten teachers derived five themes concerning the success or otherwise, of the transition to school for these children. These themes are now explored.

7.2.1 Continuity between educational settings

The first theme derived from the data relates to teachers’ provision of continuity of pedagogy between pre-school and primary school. Continuity is defined as, “coherence of children’s experience in curriculum, pedagogy and culture” (Petriwskyj et al., 2005, p. 57) and is an important element of transition to school (Einarsdóttir et al., 2008). Continuity between home, pre-school and primary school reduces the alienation children may feel in school (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Sheets, 2005).

One way in which Kindergarten teachers in the study endeavoured to offer pedagogical continuity between pre-school and school was to provide some time throughout the day for children to engage in free-play activities in the first few weeks of school. For the majority of the children (7) in the study, this was found to be beneficial, it aided in their transition to school. However, for three children identified as gifted pedagogical continuity created difficulties. For Sophie, Annabel
and Fergus, their Kindergarten teacher’s provision of what was perceived by the teachers to be pedagogical continuity caused problems. The children had developed expectations of what happened in the Kindergarten classroom. Yet these expectations seem to be derived from what the children observed throughout the year prior to starting school, not on the initial few weeks of school. At this time of year, many teachers’ foci were not on teaching and learning.

For all three children, their parents reported that their children found the Kindergarten teachers’ approach to developing routines in the first few weeks of school to be problematic. For example, in Annabel and Fergus’ classrooms, children were rewarded for sitting on the mat, among other behavioural aspects. While positive reinforcement is valuable, and may be considered essential for managing a classroom of Kindergarten children, for children keen to learn, such a rigid focus on compliant behaviour may cause frustration. For Fergus, Annabel and Sophie, this was the case. They were accustomed to either an emergent or play-based curriculum, and were reluctant to conform.

In combination with the free-play activities implemented to provide continuity, the Kindergarten teachers’ focus upon developing routines created expectations on the children’s levels of conformity. Annabel’s mother commented that her daughter was getting a sticker for compliantly sitting on the mat, rather than for a great idea or piece of work. This focus, in combination with differences in Annabel’s expectations of school, resulted in adjustment difficulties. For Annabel, in particular, there was discord between her expectations and what happened in the Kindergarten classroom within the first few weeks of school.
Summary.
Endeavouring to offer pedagogical continuity between pre-school and school, many Kindergarten teachers in the study provided opportunities for free-play activities in the first few weeks of school. For the majority of children (7), this practice was beneficial. For other children in the study (3), this provision caused difficulties. There was a discord between the children’s expectations and what happened in the Kindergarten classroom within the first few weeks of school.

7.2.2 Approaches to learning and development
The second theme derived from the data is the pre-school and Kindergarten teachers’ approach to learning and development for the child identified as gifted. Teachers in the study placed a high priority on children’s social-emotional skills and behaviours and attention related skills, wanting to ensure that children felt secure and had established social connections. In the early part of the first year of school, for some of the Kindergarten teachers, the social-emotional priority seemed to overtake provisions for the children’s intellectual development.

Several pre-school teachers (4) in the study adopted a needs-based approach to their teaching, aiming to ‘fill in’ the gaps in the child’s development. Three of these pre-school teachers felt that their approach to the child’s learning and development was appropriate. However, one pre-school teacher was conflicted about this approach.

Evidence from parent responses showed different levels of satisfaction. Two parents reported that their children were being encouraged towards activities they avoided and parents appreciated this, “They know he is interested in technology so they are focusing on his handwriting and social skills” and, “Encouraged towards activities that he avoids due to a lack of confidence”. The vast
majority of parents (10) felt the educational program provided by the pre-school was appropriate. Parents were happy with the pre-schools’ broad approaches. Only one parent (1), expressed dissatisfaction with the pre-school’s approach to learning and development. Advit’s father wanted more of a focus on his son’s intellectual development.

The majority of Kindergarten teachers (6) also adopted a needs-based approach, focussing upon the children’s perceived weaknesses, rather than their strengths. However, other Kindergarten teachers in the study (4) were conflicted about their approach to the learning and development for the child identified as gifted. These teachers saw themselves as walking a tightrope between the child’s personal and intellectual development – their social-emotional skills and attention related skills, and their cognitive abilities. While such a tightrope may be relevant for all teachers, when the children were identified as gifted, the walk was considered to be even more perilous. These Kindergarten teachers, while conflicted, attempted to strike a balance between the child’s personal and intellectual development – adopting what many of them termed a ‘holistic’ approach.

Summary.

The teachers’ approaches to learning and development for children identified as gifted were found to be important factors within the transition to school. Pre-school and Kindergarten teachers in the study tended to adopt a needs-based approach to the child’s learning and development – focusing upon the child’s needs – rather than their strengths. One pre-school and four Kindergarten teachers questioned this approach. They saw themselves as walking a tightrope between the child’s social-emotional, attention related development and intellectual development.
7.2.3 Curriculum differentiation

The third theme is curriculum differentiation, which was identified as a concern of parents, pre-school teachers and some Kindergarten teachers.

The majority of pre-school teachers in the study (7), expressed strong concerns about what may happen to the child identified as gifted when they started school. Sophie’s pre-school teacher lamented, “If she’s still making a crepe paper octopus to hang from the ceiling for ‘O’ week I’ll die!” She worried that such an undemanding curriculum would result in gifted children being naughty, or “passively useless”. She feared the child’s potential wouldn’t be reached.

Evidence from parents also highlighted concerns with curriculum differentiation. The parents of Hugh, Fergus and Annabel were concerned about a lack of curriculum differentiation in the Kindergarten classroom. These parents didn’t feel their children’s Kindergarten teachers had adjusted their teaching for the child identified as gifted and this was disappointing for the families. They had expected the Kindergarten teachers to take their children’s strengths and needs seriously, and to cater for them accordingly. To find that this was not the case, so early in their child’s formal education, was of great concern to them. In contrast, four parents believed teaching had been adjusted for their children and that their children’s Kindergarten teachers differentiated the curriculum to suit the children’s advanced abilities. While the parents understood that the Kindergarten had a full class of differing needs to cater for, they found the lack of curriculum differentiation in Term One difficult.

Data from children differs from that of parents and Kindergarten teachers. The majority of children in the study (9) reported they did not do anything different from their peers. However, one child, Sam, did recognise that he read at a higher level than anyone else.
Summary.
Curriculum differentiation was identified as a concern for some parents, pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers. In particular, the data sets of Hugh, Fergus and Annabel emphasised the need for curriculum differentiation within the transition to school. In contrast, Sam, Sophie, Claudia, Advit and Kabir’s Kindergarten teachers, despite difficulties, provided a differentiated curriculum with varying levels of emphasis on the children’s intellectual development, and this contributed to their positive transition.

7.2.4 Early Assessment
The fourth theme identified in the data is linked to early assessment. Highlighted by the responses of parents, pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers, is the need for appropriate early assessment and the dangers of inappropriate assessment within the first few weeks of school. Assessment is perceived as central to each Kindergarten teacher’s early awareness of children’s abilities, yet both pre-school teachers and parents in the study were concerned that testing would not show the children’s advanced development.

Completed in NSW government and Catholic schools, the Best Start Assessment (NSW DET, 2008), aims to help teachers identify the literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills that each child brings to school. Schools using the Best Start Assessment have two options for the implementation of the test. Children can either be assessed within the first few weeks of school, or at the end of their pre-school year. However, the NSW DEC – who developed the assessment – recommends that the assessment be completed within the first five weeks of school.

Data from one pre-school teacher drew attention to Kindergarten teachers’ implementation of the NSW Best Start Assessment. She worried that an unfamiliar teacher leading the assessment would result in the children not giving a true indication of their abilities.
Kindergarten teachers’ data also discussed the implementation of the Best Start Assessment. Four children out of the seven who completed the assessment, did so after attending school for a few weeks. In Kabir and Kaitlyn’s school, the Principal released the four Kindergarten teachers from normal teaching duties during week 3 of Term One so that they could complete the Best Start assessments for children in their class. This way the children were familiar with the school and had developed a rapport with their Kindergarten teacher before the assessment was completed. When the assessment was completed a few weeks after the children had begun school, their results were consistent with their parents’ expectations.

In contrast, some children (3), attended schools where they were tested on the Best Start Assessment before they started school, before they had developed a relationship with their teachers. In each of these cases the results were disappointing for parents. It is possible these parents had unrealistic expectations. Perhaps, administered in such a way, the assessment did not provide the optimum opportunity for the children to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Three other children were not assessed on Best Start because they were attending independent schools. These schools assessed the children using a combination of various assessments.

Data from parents also drew attention to the implementation of the Best Start Assessment. Prior to the assessment’s implementation two parents were concerned about their children’s results. Sophie and Annabel’s parents were unsure if their assessment would show their daughters’ advanced abilities. The results of three children in the study did not show the advanced abilities of the child, as expected. For Hugh, Annabel and Fergus, assessment results were not consistent with their parents’ expectations.
Summary.
The data sets of Fergus, Hugh and Annabel emphasise difficulties with the *Best Start Assessment*. These three children were assessed prior to starting school and their results did not highlight their advanced abilities. For these children, it would appear that the *Best Start Assessment* did not provide the optimum opportunity for them to demonstrate their skills, consequently giving their Kindergarten teachers an incomplete understanding of their abilities, and resulting in inadequate educational provisions.

In contrast, four children, Sophie, Kabir, Kaitlyn and Claudia, were assessed in their third week of school. Their *Best Start* results did highlight their advanced abilities. This finding raises questions regarding the validity of the test’s implementation.

7.2.5 Communication between stakeholders

The fifth theme which emerged from the data supplied by parents, pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers involves communication. Research promotes communication between pre-school and primary school teachers as a way of gathering authentic information about children’s prior knowledge to assist Kindergarten teachers in constructing teaching and learning programs based on prior learning and assist children to become confident and capable learners in the new school setting (Dockett & Perry, 2006; Niesel & Griebel, 2007). Results from this study confirmed the need for effective communication, both written and verbal, among parents, pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers within the transition to school.

Data from pre-school teachers (3 of the 7 pre-school teachers participating) highlighted effective intersetting communication – between the pre-school and the primary school settings. These pre-school teachers communicated their identification of the child as
gifted, resulting in a united approach to the child’s learning and development. For twice-exceptional Kabir, who attended a pre-school as well as an early intervention service, effective intersetting communication between the early intervention setting and his primary school was beneficial in his transition to school. However, little communication occurred between his pre-school and primary school.

For one Kindergarten teacher, however, the timing of the communication was significant and she preferred not to have initial communication with either pre-school teachers or parents before she met with the children, so that she could make her own assessment. This teacher believed in making up her own mind about the children. She also preferred not to look at the child’s age, not wanting “to put them in a box before I can see what’s going on in their head”. However, intersetting communication provides a crucial connection between pre-school and primary school that can build relationships between children’s teachers. These relationships have the potential to impact on the experiences of children as they start school, as well as their educational outcomes (Hopps, 2014). Evidence from the little literature available to date, indicates that pre-school-school communication can be problematic (Hopps, 2014) and this was found to be the case for three of the children in this study. Either their pre-school teachers’ or their Kindergarten teachers’ reluctance to consider their advanced abilities within the transition period caused difficulties.

Communication between the pre-school and the parents of the children identified as gifted was found to be difficult in three cases. These pre-school teachers were uncomfortable with the term ‘gifted’ so were unreceptive to discussions with parents about the child’s abilities. While the pre-school teachers reported to parents about childrens’ learning, the child’s giftedness or advanced development was not raised. Such communication difficulties may be attributed to
pre-school teachers’ reluctance to identify and/or label young children as gifted.

Data also highlighted difficulties in communication between the Kindergarten teachers and the parents of the child identified as gifted. Four parents wanted more communication between themselves and their child’s Kindergarten teacher during the transition to school. These parents wanted clarification on what Term One would bring, the teacher’s expectations of the parents, and what was happening within the classroom. In contrast, three parents preferred not to alert the school to their child’s identification as gifted. These parents wanted the school to make up their own mind about the child’s abilities. Parents did not want their child considered the ‘smart kid’, treated differently, or bullied. However, one parent realised, in hindsight, that this approach had not been successful.

**Summary.**

Margetts (2002b) argues that ongoing communication between pre-school and Kindergarten teachers is a critical component of successful transition programs. Many pre-school teachers in the study wanted the opportunity to communicate with the child’s Kindergarten teacher. Parents also wanted more communication, in particular with their child’s Kindergarten teacher during the transition to school. For many Kindergarten teachers, communication itself was also considered important. However, the timing of the communication was significant.

**7.2.6 Summary of level one analysis**

Content analysis of the data sets of the child participants, their pre-school teachers, their parents, and their Kindergarten teachers in the study derived five themes concerning the success, or otherwise, of the transition to school for these children. The themes are used in the third, and final, level of analysis. However, before analysis between the content and context of the data – between established
themes and the theoretical framework – can occur, level two analysis of the context of data, as a separate element, is necessary. Level two data analysis is now discussed.

7.3 Level two analysis: Context

The second level of analysis – detailed in chapter 4 – explored the data in terms of the theoretical framework. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory – the process, person, context and time elements – were used to explain the complexity of the interactions between the systems involved in the development of the child identified as gifted.

7.3.1 Statements relating themes to the theoretical framework

7.3.1.1 Introduction

Children’s development and early school success are influenced by a set of complex bioecological factors as well as complex interactions among them (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Broström, 2000; Crnic & Lamberty, 1994). According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), children’s development is strongly influenced by the settings or contexts in which they actively participate. Bioecological theory situates the child at the centre of its model, drawing attention to the contexts in which the child is located and the interactions among these contexts (Murray, 2014). As this study was based upon the belief that children’s lives cannot be separated from their environments – children and their environments influence each other (Einarsdóttir, 2014) – analysis necessitated considering both the content and context of children’s data.

Contextual analysis of the data within the study assigns, “significance to the active role of individuals as they influence, and are influenced by, the contexts in which they live” (Dockett et al., 2014, p. 5). Such
analysis also identifies potential for change as different systems or contexts, and those located within them, interact. This combination of interactions, change and time creates a dynamic model in which the transition to school can be explored by focusing on the overlapping or intersecting contexts of the children’s experiences.

The PPCT elements of bioecological theory are of critical importance to the contextual analysis in this study. The PPCT elements were then used in level two analysis to create statements which explored the contextual elements of the data. When statements were being written questions were asked about the data that went beyond a surface level interpretation and included the exploration of questions such as, “What does this theme mean?”, “Which PPCT elements are linked to this theme?”, “How is this theme influenced by each PPCT element?” and “What do the different PPCT elements reveal about the theme?”. In asking these questions, a clearer understanding of each theme emerged that related to both the results of the content analysis and to the theoretical framework.

Statements are included in Appendix S: Statements for level two analysis.

7.3.7 Summary of level two analysis

This section of the chapter discussed the second level of analysis, the relationships between individual child participants’ characteristics and bioecological theory. At this level of analysis, the elements of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory – process, person, context and time – were used to analyse the context of the data. Such analysis determined the links between individual children’s experiences and the PPCT elements. With children situated at the centre of these contexts, exploration of the relationship between these contexts allowed the researcher to understand the systems as a whole. Such analysis drew attention to the complexities of the bioecological contexts, and the intersections of these contexts, of child participants.
7.4 Level three analysis: Determining the ratings

7.4.1 Structure of the matrix
Drawing upon the statements about themes organised through the PPCT elements (level two analysis), level three analysis enabled the construction of a matrix which further analysed the influences of the elements on the themes. In this matrix one axis is defined by the themes established through the first level of analysis, while the other axis is aligned with the second level of analysis, the PPCT elements of bioecological theory. The entries in the matrix represent the level of influence of each PPCT element on the themes as demonstrated through the statements constructed in the level 2 analysis.

7.4.2 Analysis presented in the matrix
In the matrix, the definition of influence was used to analyse the levels of influence of the elements upon the themes. Using constant comparison analysis (Glaser, 1965), data from level two statements were able to be analysed according to each content theme and the level of influence of the PPCT elements. Such analysis allowed the researcher to compare and evaluate each theme across the four PPCT elements of bioecological theory and determine the level of influence of each PPCT element upon individual themes. This process is now detailed:

The level one analysis results in the categorisation of the raw data from parents, preschool and school educators by identified themes. For each of these themes, the relevant data were revisited in order to tally the number of references to each of the PPCT elements in these data. These tallies were then converted to percentages of the total number of references for each theme. These tallies and percentages are recorded in Table 7.1.
Table 7.1 Tallies and percentages for level three analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuity between settings</td>
<td>3 (5%)</td>
<td>5 (9%)</td>
<td>23 (42%)</td>
<td>23 (42%)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach to learning and development</td>
<td>19 (8%)</td>
<td>100 (42%)</td>
<td>97 (41%)</td>
<td>20 (8%)</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum differentiation</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
<td>14 (24%)</td>
<td>31 (53%)</td>
<td>9 (15%)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Assessment</td>
<td>5 (11%)</td>
<td>11 (24%)</td>
<td>22 (48%)</td>
<td>7 (15%)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication between stakeholders</td>
<td>41 (42%)</td>
<td>30 (30%)</td>
<td>22 (22%)</td>
<td>6 (6%)</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparisons were then made between the percentages for each element in each theme and the statements written in level two analysis. This approach tested the reasonableness of the results and the associated argumentation (van Eemeren et al., 2011). These percentages were then converted to a rating for each element, based upon the criteria shown in the following table.

Table 7.2: Criteria for determining levels of influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of influence</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: High level of influence</td>
<td>&gt; 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Moderate level of influence</td>
<td>10-40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Low level of influence</td>
<td>&lt; 10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of these ratings were then shown in the matrix – Table 7.3.
7.4.4 Summary of level three analysis

This final level of analysis determined relationships between the content and the context of the study – between established themes and the theoretical framework. Level three analysis used a matrix – shown in Table 7.3 – to analyse emerging relationships between the derived content themes and the bioecological elements of process, person, context and time. This analysis also identified potential for change as different systems or contexts, and those located within them, interact.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor/Theme</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuity between educational settings</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to learning and development</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum differentiation</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early assessment</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication between stakeholders</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strong link (A)  Moderate link (B)  Limited link (C)
7.5 Chapter summary

The current educational climate in Western countries has moved towards inclusion of all primary school aged children within the ‘mainstream’ learning environment (Ellis & Tod, 2010; Hyde, 2010; Moltzen, 2005). This study has highlighted some difficulties within the mainstream learning environment for children identified as gifted, during their transition to school. In particular, difficulties for some children were exposed during the children’s first few weeks. The need for inclusive practices within their orientation was raised by pre-school teachers. For some children, their Kindergarten teacher’s attempts at providing continuity between pre-school and primary school caused difficulties. For other children, the Kindergarten teacher’s rigid approach to compliance and routines in the first few weeks of school was problematic. Allowing children to show their advanced abilities within the first few weeks of school was also found to be significant, with the use of appropriate early assessment crucial. Stemming from such assessment is the need for effective curriculum differentiation, offering an inclusive approach to education. The approach of pre-school and Kindergarten teachers to learning and development for children identified as gifted was also shown to be important.

While some of the characteristics and behaviours of gifted children can create challenges within mainstream educational settings, drawing upon the perspectives of the child identified as gifted, their parents, their pre-school teacher, and finally their Kindergarten teacher, has highlighted the need for inclusive practices within the transition to school. Rather than treating all children the same, an inclusive education system should mean that all children’s needs are recognised and met. Yet, within this inclusive learning environment, the educational needs of gifted children are often overlooked. This may result in schools failing to meet children’s needs during their induction to the education system, discouraging them from the very beginning of their formal education.
8. Discussion

Organisation of the chapter
This chapter is organised around the central research question for the study and its six guiding questions. It deals first with the guiding questions and then brings the discussion together using the central research question. The sections in this chapter are:

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Guiding question 1: How are pre-school children identified as gifted?

8.3 Guiding question 2: How is the identification of a pre-school child as gifted communicated among those involved?

8.4 Guiding question 3: How does the labelling of a child as gifted change the expectations for those involved?

8.5 Guiding question 4: What are the experiences of the child identified as gifted beginning school?

8.6 Guiding question 5: What are considered the special needs of children identified as gifted in their transition to primary schooling in NSW?

8.7 Guiding question 6: Does the identification of a pre-school student as gifted impact upon the student’s transition to school?

8.8 Central research question: How is what happens in the transition to primary school different for children who have been identified as gifted as opposed to those who have not been identified as gifted?
8.1 Introduction
The purpose of this study was to broaden and deepen knowledge of the transition experiences of children identified as gifted in regional and rural NSW. The sample for the study was eleven children identified as gifted, their parents, their pre-school teachers, and their Kindergarten teachers. The study provided opportunities for an in-depth analysis of the experiences and perspectives of a range of stakeholders within a range of educational settings. It highlighted variations in the ways in which pre-schools and schools attempt to address the needs of children identified as gifted.

The research questions are now answered. Responses to each question draw upon the three levels of data analysis and the relevant literature.

8.2 Guiding question 1:

How are pre-school children identified as gifted?

In this study, pre-school children were identified as gifted by various people. Some pre-school children were identified as gifted by their parents; others were identified as gifted by their pre-school teacher. In one instance, a child was identified as gifted during a pre-Kindergarten assessment conducted within the co-located primary school.

Five children in the study were identified as gifted by their parents. Andrew was identified as gifted by his mother based upon his superior memory and advanced numeracy skills. Previous research recognises parents and other primary caregivers as significant observers of the child's early development, behaviour and learning. Through such observations, parents and other caregivers may observe many of the characteristics of giftedness (Clark, 2002; Harrison, 2003a, 2005; NSW DEC, 2012b). Evidence, in this study, is consistent with previous research; parents were able to see their
child’s advanced abilities and consider the possibility that they were gifted.

Five of the children in the study were identified as gifted by their pre-school teacher. For example, Advit’s superior memory, exceptional general knowledge, advanced vocabulary and strong problem solving skills caught his pre-school teacher’s attention. Like primary teachers, pre-school teachers observe students in a variety of situations and under a variety of conditions. This gives them valuable insight and means they often play a significant role in the identification process (Davis & Rimm, 2004; Hallahan et al., 2009; Siegle et al., 2010; Siegle & Powell, 2004). In this study, the majority of participating pre-school teachers were comfortable identifying children as gifted. However, they were all uncomfortable communicating this identification to the child’s parents. Such communication is discussed in Guiding question 2.

When pre-school teachers in this study identified the child participants as gifted they usually didn’t involve any other specialists in the identification process. However, three pre-school teachers did seek confirmation through discussions with co-located primary staff, such as the Head of Junior School, the Assistant Principal or other teaching staff. Only two children in the study, Andrew and Kabir, were formally assessed and both were diagnosed as twice-exceptional. Kabir had been formally assessed by a psychologist and found to be on the autism spectrum. In the sample in this study, it was only when additional difficulties were suspected that formal testing occurred.

One child in the study was not identified as gifted by either his parents or his pre-school teacher. Instead, Sam was identified by the Head of the Junior School of his co-located primary school. It was not until he attended a pre-Kindergarten interview that Sam’s advanced abilities were identified. In this case, the Head of the Junior School recognised Sam’s exceptional general knowledge,
thirst for knowledge, superior memory, advanced literacy skills and his advanced vocabulary. However, Sam’s parents had not identified him as gifted, as being an only child, they had no reference point for comparison. Previous research by Gross (1999) and Porter (2005a, 2005b) acknowledge that some parents of gifted children remain surprisingly unaware that their children are developmentally advanced. This finding was confirmed in this study by Sam’s parents.

8.2.1 Summary of guiding question 1.
In this study, data for Guiding question 1: How are pre-school children identified as gifted? produced no new contributions to research. Evidence reinforced previous research on the identification of young gifted children by their parents and teachers. Observation by parents and teachers was found to be the main method of identification. Formal assessment of children was only found to occur when additional difficulties were suspected.

Tied to the identification of young children as gifted, is the communication of this identification, which is addressed in Guiding question 2.

8.3 Guiding question 2:

_How is the identification of a pre-school child as gifted communicated among those involved?_

With one exception, all of the children in this study were identified as gifted by either their parents or their pre-school teachers. In some cases, this identification was communicated to the other involved parties immediately and clearly. In other cases, parents were reluctant to communicate the identification of their child as gifted. However, in all cases, communication of the identification of a child as gifted was done orally. The theme of communication between stakeholders was found to be strongly or moderately linked to the process, person and context elements of the PPCT model. The time
element was found to have limited links to communication between stakeholders. These links are now discussed in relation to the theme and the relevant literature.

When parents identified their pre-school child as gifted they were often reluctant to communicate this to their child’s pre-school teacher. Three parents chose not to communicate their child’s identification with their child’s Kindergarten teacher. This reluctance to communicate was attributed to two factors. Firstly, some parents preferred the school to be able to come to their own conclusions about the child’s abilities. Secondly, in some cases this hesitation stemmed from the parents’ reluctance to be seen as ‘pushy’. They were concerned that their communication of the child’s identification as gifted would impact negatively upon their teacher-parent or teacher-child relationships. In these cases the strong links between the process element of bioecological theory and the communication between stakeholders influenced parents’ decisions regarding the communication of their child’s identification as gifted. It seems that the relationships between the children identified as gifted, their parents and their pre-school or Kindergarten teacher, determined whether communication of the child’s giftedness occurred or not.

Also tied to the process elements and the influence of relationships between stakeholders on communication are the person characteristics of the stakeholders. Level three analysis determined the person elements were moderately linked to the communication between stakeholders theme. However, the stakeholder’s person characteristics, in particular their temperament, were determined to moderately influence whether parents were comfortable communicating their child’s identification as gifted. For example, Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher’s busy demeanor and the large class size, in combination with her experience with the pre-school teacher’s reluctance, influenced Annabel’s mother’s decision not to raise her daughter’s abilities with the Kindergarten teacher.
The context element’s moderate link to the communication between stakeholders theme also influenced whether parents communicated their child’s identification as gifted. For example, the changes in Kindergarten teachers that Hugh and Andrew experienced influenced their parents’ communication between stakeholders. For Annabel’s mother, her prior experience with a pre-school teacher who was uninterested in discussing Annabel’s advanced abilities influenced her communication.

The time element was determined to have limited links to the communication between stakeholders theme. For example, Advit’s parents’ busy professional lives meant Advit was regularly at school until OOSH closed at 6 p.m. This influenced the opportunities his parents had to communicate with his Kindergarten teacher – they simply weren’t at school when she was available. While they had the option of ringing or emailing her, there were few opportunities for face-to-face interactions.

In contrast, seven parents communicated their child’s identification as gifted to the Kindergarten teacher, either prior to starting school or after the first term had started. Like the other parents, these parents were also reluctant to communicate their child’s identification. However, their reluctance was overridden by their wish to be an advocate for their child. Previous research (Freeman, 2006b) recognised that although some parents pushed their gifted children to excel academically, most simply wanted to ensure that their children were happy and well-adjusted. Freeman found that rather than wanting special treatment for their child, parents believed that their child, like all children, should simply be given the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential. Parents of all children may be anxious when their children start school. However, they can be primary sources of information concerning their children.

In this study, the reluctance to communicate a child’s identification as gifted was not isolated to children identified by their parents. Pre-school teachers also found the child’s identification as gifted a
difficult subject to broach with parents. Evidence in this study found that even when pre-school teachers identified the child as gifted, they were usually reluctant to raise their identification with the child’s parents – particularly to use the term ‘gifted’. Formal identification was one reason cited for this reluctance, as in this study no children had been formally identified as gifted. Another reason cited by pre-school teachers was the reluctance to label children in any way at such a young age. Evidence from this study regarding parents’ reluctance to communicate the identification of the child as gifted is consistent with previous research (Macintyre, 2008; NSW DEC, 2012b; Porter, 2005b).

However, research highlights the opportunities within the transition period for establishing and maintaining positive, respectful collaboration between home and school contexts that can set a pattern for ongoing interaction (ETC, 2011; Gallagher, 2005). During this time families are able to build links for their children and themselves between prior-to-school and school experiences and to collaborate with educators and other professionals in ways that strengthen and support each child’s ongoing learning and development (ETC, 2011). Yet, the parents of three of the children identified as gifted chose not to initially respond to these opportunities, as one parent commented, “It’s hard to negotiate when there is a stigma attached”.

8.3.2 Summary of guiding question 2.
How the identification of the child as gifted was communicated essentially depended upon who identified the child. In many cases this determined whether this communication occurred, or didn’t occur. When parents identified the child as gifted, they found sharing this information difficult, influenced by the strong links to the process element. They didn’t want to be considered pushy and were concerned about influencing teacher-child and teacher-parent relationships.
When pre-school teachers identified the child as gifted, their teachers were often reluctant to share this identification with parents and Kindergarten teachers. Reasons cited by both pre-school teachers and parents for this reluctance, were an unwillingness to label children at such a young age, a reluctance to be seen as ‘pushy’, or that no formal identification of the child had occurred. However, once this identification was shared, parents were more comfortable communicating the child’s identification to the Kindergarten teacher.

8.4 Guiding question 3:

*What are the experiences of the child identified as gifted beginning school?*

Margetts (2014) acknowledges, “that while teachers and parents may share some expectations relating to children’s transition to school, they also have some very different ideas and expectations about what makes for a successful transition and adjustment to school” (p. 82). Children in this study had diverse experiences in their transition to school. Of the ten children participating in Phase II and III of the study, eight had very positive transition experiences, and two (Annabel and Fergus) experienced significant difficulties. This research question highlighted the variation in the ways in which pre-schools and schools attempted to address the needs of children identified as gifted in their transition to school. The themes derived from data collected in relation to this research question are now explored, in relation to the relevant literature and evidence from the study.

For the majority of children in the study, their Kindergarten teacher’s provision of pedagogical continuity eased their transition to school. However, evidence from this study showed that for three children, this was problematic. The theme of continuity of pedagogy was found to have varied links to the PPCT elements. These links are now discussed in relation to the theme and the relevant literature.
The process element was determined to have limited links to the Kindergarten teachers’ provision of continuity between educational settings. For many children, the provision of educational continuity gave children the opportunity to develop supportive teacher-child relationships, similar to the relationships developed with their pre-school teachers. It also provided Kindergarten teachers with opportunities to interact with the children in their class, and develop relationships when their teaching was not a priority.

The person element – the internal processes and characteristics of children was also allocated a limited link ranking for the continuity between educational settings theme. The child’s internal processes and characteristics were determined to have limited links to the kindergarten teachers’ provision of pedagogical continuity in the first few weeks of school. However, for three children in the study, the links between person and continuity were stronger. For Sophie, Annabel and Fergus, their teachers’ attempts at the provision of continuity was problematic – the children expected, and wanted, the Kindergarten classroom to be different from pre-school. Whitton (2005) acknowledges that a gifted child may have different perceptions and expectations about starting school from ‘mainstream’ children. The mismatch between the child’s expectations of school and the reality of the Kindergarten classroom in the first few weeks of school may have negative consequences for the gifted child. They may begin to underachieve, misbehave, become anxious or even disengage with school (Porter, 1999; Reis & McCoach, 2000). Yet when these children are provided with learning experiences that are challenging, their experience to school was positive. The children tended to make good progress with their learning, were more likely to engage at school, and were happier.

While the overall links between the person element and pedagogical continuity were found to be limited, the context element was found to have strong links. Level three data analysis showed that pedagogical continuity was strongly linked to the context elements, and to
Kindergarten teachers and schools, rather than to the child’s person characteristics. The institutional aspects of the transition process, such as classroom and school organisational factors, influenced Kindergarten teachers’ provision of pedagogical continuity.

Finally, the time element was also determined to have strong links to Kindergarten teacher’s provision of continuity between educational settings. Teachers provided educational continuity for parts of each day, for the first few weeks of school. This time was provided to allow children to ease into both the practices of school, and the academic demands. It also provided Kindergarten teachers with time to get to know their students, when their ‘teaching’ was not a priority.

Pedagogical continuity was found to be beneficial for some children in the study, yet, for others, it was problematic. Grant (2013) raised continuity and discontinuity as significant influences for the gifted child in their transition to school. She suggests the attempt to provide continuity may create practices that resulted in a de-emphasising of intellectual learning. Evidence from this study confirms the significant influence of continuity and discontinuity for the child identified as gifted in their transition to school.

The Kindergarten teachers’ approach to learning and development was found to either have strong or limited links to all elements of the PPCT model. These links are now discussed in relation to the theme and the relevant literature.

When children were asked how they were enjoying school, all ten responded positively. The majority of children reported that they enjoyed the social side of school, meeting new people and playing with friends. In contrast, only four parents, but all of the Kindergarten teachers in the study identified the social-emotional side of school as challenging for the children identified as gifted. This contrast suggests a mismatch between what parents and Kindergarten teachers reported and children’s actual experiences during their
transition to school. This mismatch may be explained by what each stakeholder perceived as important. Kindergarten teachers placed a higher priority on children’s social-emotional well-being and attention related skills, whereas for parents, the child’s intellectual development was just as significant. This is supported by Margetts (2014) who acknowledges, “while teachers and parents may share some expectations relating to children’s transition to school, they also have some very different ideas and expectations about what makes for a successful transition and adjustment to school” (p. 82). However, Duncan and colleagues’ (2007) key dimensions of children’s readiness to learn, general cognitive ability (oral language, basic literacy and numeracy skills), attention related skills (task persistence, self-regulation and impulsivity); and social-emotional skills and behaviour (internalising and externalising behaviours) are all key to a positive transition to school. Yet, Kindergarten teachers placed priority on the social-emotional and attention related skills and behaviours.

Using the PPCT elements of bioecological theory, the teacher’s approach to learning and development theme was determined to have limited links to the process element. The level of links of teacher-child and teacher-parent relationships developed within the transition was found to vary for individual children, often affected by the child’s person characteristics.

The process element was determined to have limited links to the teacher’s approach to learning and development. For example, Sophie’s pre-school teacher’s previous experience as a Kindergarten teacher contributed to the development of their positive relationship. Her teacher understood the Kindergarten context and helped her to provide educational provisions for Sophie. Other Kindergarten teachers in the study considered children’s social-emotional interactions, the process element of bioecological theory, the priority.
The level of links between the person element of bioecological theory and Kindergarten teacher’s approach to their learning and development was found to vary for individual children, depending upon their abilities, gender, and temperament. However, the average of children’s rankings determined that the overall level of links was strong. For some children, their person characteristics, in particular their force characteristics, had very strong links to their teacher’s approach to learning and development. Evidence from pre-school and Kindergarten teachers reported that the children experienced difficulties with sharing, interacting with others, making friendships, social problem solving and containing their behaviour/excitement. Supporting this finding is Grant (2013), who found that Kindergarten teachers believed that in the first year of school, social-emotional adjustment was more important than intellectual progress.

Professional development of teachers, however, may place a different perspective upon this social-emotional focus. Porter (2005a) found that when teachers have an understanding of the characteristics of gifted children, they may consider a different perspective – most of the gifted child’s social problems occur when there is an absence of ‘intellectual peers’ rather than an absence of social skills (Porter, 2005a). When in classes with their intellectual peers, gifted children may have better social adjustment, accompanied by improved social self-concept.

These differences may cause conflict with the early childhood emphasis on the development of social skills (Sankar-DeLeeuw, 1999) and learning through social play (Arthur et al., 2012). Kindergarten teachers’ focus on social-emotional and attention related skills may have resulted in a de-emphasising of academic learning in the Kindergarten classroom (Grant, 2013). The child’s intellectual abilities, often considered their strengths, were not a priority. The focus was on their ‘needs’, their social-emotional skills and attention related behaviours. In this study, the Kindergarten teachers’ primary focus upon children’s social-emotional skills and
attention related behaviours caused conflict and resulted in adjustment difficulties for two children. Annabel and Fergus’ results on the *Best Start Assessment*, in combination with provision of continuity and their Kindergarten teacher’s focus upon social-emotional and attention related skills and behaviours, rather than their intellectual development, meant their Kindergarten teacher had put in place a “glass ceiling” (Morrissey, 2014, p. 14) and one child learnt to modify her behaviour.

Annabel’s behaviour modification confirms previous research which recognises a gifted child’s need for friendship is often coupled with a strong motivation to achieve and for many, these two areas conflict (Gross, 2002a; Porter, 2005a). Gross (1998) suggested that children who are forced to modify their behaviour to conform to a peer group of mainstream children are at risk of experiencing frustration both intellectually and emotionally. Consequently, many gifted children are faced with the ‘forced-choice’ dilemma – the choice that some intellectually gifted students feel that they must make between the needs for acceptance by peers and the pursuit of high-level academic achievement (Gross, 1989, 1998; Wesley & Buysse, 2003).

The context element was determined to have a strong link to the teacher’s approach to learning and development. For example, for Sam and Sophie, their classroom context influenced their teacher’s approach to learning and development. Sam’s small class size, allowed his Kindergarten teacher to spend significant time with him. The small class size also meant Sam received significant support from the school’s *Challenge* teacher, providing him activities and interactions on a 1:1 basis. For Sophie, her placement in a Kinder/Year One class, provided opportunities which suited her advanced development. It was also determined that when schools had multiple Kindergarten classes, their teachers’ approaches to learning and development were found to often be consistent.
However, the Kindergarten teachers’ focus upon the child’s social-emotional and attention related skills and behaviours is a limited approach. The transition position statement (ETC, 2011) suggests teachers also focus on the competencies, strengths and achievements of children and families as they make the transition to school. While the social-emotional development of the gifted child is just as significant as the academic development (Robinson, 2002), a balance is needed. Cross (2010) argues that the relationship between students’ social-emotional needs and their academic needs is important. Each affects the other. For example, whether a gifted student is being challenged in class or able to work at a stimulating pace can affect their social-emotional well-being. NAEYC (2009) elaborates, “All the domains of development and learning – physical, social-emotional, and cognitive – are important, and they are closely interrelated. Children’s development and learning in one domain influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains” (NAEYC, 2009, p. 11).

The time element of bioecological theory was determined to have limited links to the teachers’ approach to learning and development. The different amounts of time individual children and families may need to adjust to school or to feel a sense of belonging in the school environment was important. Analysis showed that many Kindergarten teachers allowed time, often several weeks, for children to settle into school.

Evidence from Kindergarten teachers in the study showed that most teachers’ initial focus was on children’s social-emotional skills and behaviours and their attention related development. Intellectual development was often not considered a focus for children during the first few weeks of school. The Kindergarten teachers’ did not employ a ‘holistic’ approach to the child’s development. While parents in the study agreed that the Kindergarten year was important for laying a firm foundation, they also felt a ‘holistic’ focus was important. For Sam, Claudia and Sophie, their Kindergarten teachers’ holistic
approach, the focus on social-emotional, attention related and intellectual development, resulted in particularly successful transitions. As Greibel and Neisel (2003) suggest, the interaction between all developmental domains was considered, and resulted in the children experiencing a positive transition to school.

Assessment which identifies the literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills that each child brings to school is important to Kindergarten teachers (NSW DET, 2008). Such assessment allows Kindergarten teachers to provide appropriate educational provisions for all children in their transition to school. Evidence from the study highlights the importance of appropriate early assessment within the first few weeks of school. Yet, not all children in the study experienced appropriate implementation of assessment. Analysis of the early assessment theme found moderate or strong links to all PPCT elements. These links are now discussed.

The process element of the PPCT model was determined to have moderate links to early assessment in the transition to school. In some cases, the relationships children had with their Kindergarten teachers were linked to the outcomes of early assessment. When children had developed a relationship with their teacher, and had become comfortable with the school environment, the outcomes of the assessment compared favourably with parent and pre-school teacher expectations and highlighted children’s advanced abilities.

Also influencing the outcomes of early assessment is the person element. The child’s person characteristics, in particular their temperament, was determined to have moderate links to early assessment within the transition. In most cases, the child’s person characteristics, in particular their force characteristics, were strongly linked to the results of the assessment. While appropriate assessment is essential (Thomson & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2013), assessment of young children is a contentious matter (Davis et al., 2011; Hertberg-Davis, 2009; Porter, 2005a). For a child identified as
gifted, further complexities arise. A gifted child may present very differently at home and school (NSW DEC, 2012b), modifying their behaviours to fit in with their same-age peers or classmates (Harrison, 2003a). Consequently, teachers may not be aware of the child’s abilities that have become more familiar to parents and other caregivers (NSW DEC, 2012b, p. 19).

The context, or institutional aspects of bioecological theory, was determined to have strong links to early assessment within the transition to school. Analysis showed that decisions were made regarding the implementation of early assessment at a school, or a regional school system level. Seven children in the study were assessed using the *NSW Best Start Assessment* and the school, or school system, determined how the assessment was implemented.

The context element was also found to influence the level of emphasis upon assessment results. The Kindergarten teachers in one school system in the study also placed much emphasis on the results of their *Best Start* assessment, essentially labelling the children, “by means of a single score on a single test on a certain day” (Piirto, 2007, p. 119), or as one Kindergarten teacher reported, “For us, that's been the line in the sand”. While other Kindergarten teachers used other data, Annabel’s teacher relied solely on the *Best Start Assessment*. However, basing children’s assessment on one test, on one particular day, in less than ideal circumstances – before the child had started school – may not provide an accurate picture of the young children’s academic knowledge and skills. Wager et al. (2015) advises that assessment with young children should be considered more about triangulating multiple sources of evidence than a simple thumbs up or down for a response. To obtain accurate assessment of children’s knowledge, data are needed from a variety of sources so that assessment is multifaceted, multidisciplinary, and culturally sensitive (Joseph & Ford, 2006). Gathering data in different settings and using different media allows children to show what they
can do, leading to a more complete picture of a child’s abilities (Smutny & von Fremd, 2011).

The time element of the PPCT model was determined to have moderate links to early assessment. Earlier analysis showed that the timing of the *NSW Best Start Assessment* was linked to the results of the assessment. Three children were tested on the *Best Start* assessment before they had started school, before they were “socialised into the rules of schooling” (Wager et al., 2015). Consequently, their assessment results are inconsistent with the expectations of the children’s parents and pre-school teachers. Evidence from other school systems, in contrast, showed positive assessment outcomes with the *NSW Best Start Assessment* when children were assessed after they had been at school for a few weeks.

Data from this study have confirmed difficulties with assessment of young children in their transition to school. Evidence has also shown difficulties particular to the implementation of the *NSW Best Start Assessment*. Problems arising from the implementation of *Best Start* within some school systems in the study, are in concert with previous research citing accurate assessment as difficult in young children (Davis et al., 2011; Hertberg-Davis, 2009; Porter, 2005a). While the assessment of all young children should be approached with care, without appropriate early assessment, teachers may fail to realise the potential of the child identified as gifted. Appropriate early assessment must allow all children the optimum opportunity to show what they know and can do. Without this opportunity children whose abilities remain unidentified and consequently not nurtured in the early years may fail to realise their potential and may begin to underachieve (Bates & Munday, 2005; Koshy & Robinson, 2006; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2004).
8.4.4 Summary of guiding question 3.

This question highlighted the variation in the ways in which schools attempted to address the needs of children identified as gifted in their transition to school. Some children had very positive transitions, yet others experienced difficulties. For children identified as gifted, there were three elements affecting their transition to school. Firstly, their teacher’s approach to learning and development was crucial to supporting the child’s social-emotional, attention related and intellectual development. Secondly, impacting the childrens’ transition was their Kindergarten teachers’ provision of pedagogical continuity. Thirdly, the schools implementation of early assessment was found to be significant.

8.5 Guiding question 4:

What are considered the special needs of children identified as gifted in their transition to primary schooling in NSW?

Data from this study have shown that not everyone agrees that children identified as gifted have special needs when they start school. It seems the lines between what is considered a special need and necessary educational provisions are blurred. However, when special needs were evident, they were linked to either the child’s person characteristics, or the context and time elements. These links are now discussed in relation to the theme and the relevant literature.

Evidence from five pre-school teachers reported that the child identified as gifted did, in their opinion, have special needs in their transition to school. In three cases, these special needs related to the child’s person characteristics. For example, Hugh’s pre-school teacher reported his special needs were only in allowing him to stretch his mind and utilise his strengths in practical activities. Yet for other children, additional person characteristics were identified as a
special need. Two (Kabir and Andrew) of the five children reported to have special needs within their transition to school were also identified as being on the autism spectrum, considered twice-exceptional. Such a dual diagnosis impacted upon participant responses, with the autistic characteristics of the child seen by preschool teachers as a priority in the transition. In contrast, two preschool teachers responded that the child identified as gifted did not have special needs regarding their education.

While Sophie’s pre-school teacher reported that Sophie did not have special needs regarding her education, she clarified this, advising that Sophie’s Kindergarten teacher would need to accommodate her and extend learning where appropriate – teaching would need to build on her current knowledge – a combination of person and context elements. While Sophie’s pre-school teacher considered this a necessary educational provision, she did not consider this a special need.

Kindergarten teachers in the study were also divided about whether the children identified as gifted had any special needs regarding their education. Four teachers reported such children didn’t have special needs in their transition to school – they considered all children students have their own special needs. Five other Kindergarten teachers did consider the focus child to have special needs regarding their transition to school. However, for two of these children, the special need again related to the child’s person characteristics – their diagnosis as being on the autism spectrum.

For Sam, however, his Kindergarten teacher also believed he had special needs, but these were linked to his family circumstances – his context and time elements. Sam’s military family would be moving at the end of the Kindergarten year and his Kindergarten teacher worried that another transition could be challenging for him. Dunlop (2007, 2014), also an army child, developed the concept of ‘transitions capital’. Using this concept, Sam’s positive transition to
Kindergarten would help build his transition capital. With this capital, he would be able to draw upon this success as he approached, engaged in, and then moved on into his transition into Year One within a new school and city.

Parents were asked about the special needs of their gifted child in Phases II and II of the study, prior to the children starting school and after they had started. Initially, most parents of the children identified as gifted believed their children had special needs but clarified that this was in terms of their child’s need to be stimulated or challenged. For example, Sam’s parents commented that if their son’s brain was occupied, there was harmony. When asked this question in phase III – after their child had started school, nine parents did not change their opinions about their child’s special needs. However, Annabel’s mother did change her opinion after her daughter experienced a difficult transition.

Like all children, gifted children have a right to a curriculum that caters for their individual needs, and which allows them to develop their strengths in an ethos where diversity is both recognised and celebrated (Bates & Munday, 2005; Cooper, 2009) in an atmosphere of “genuine respect, integrity, trust, and compassion” (Cooper, 2009, p. 284). However, gifted children, with their atypical academic development, may be at a distinct disadvantage in the mainstream school environment (Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2010; Gross, 2004). Freeman (2006a) acknowledges that in a busy mainstream classroom, promoting the needs of children who are likely to be ultimately successful was not seen as a priority and this was certainly the case for many of the children in the study. Level three analysis found curriculum differentiation to have varied links to the PPCT elements in the transition to school. The links to the process element are discussed here.
The process element – the relationships children have with others was determined to have limited links to curriculum differentiation within the Kindergarten classroom. The teacher’s ability to differentiate the Kindergarten curriculum is only limitedly linked to these relationships. For example, Kabir’s Kindergarten teacher’s understanding of ASD aided in the development of a positive and supportive teacher-child relationship. She understood his strengths and his needs and differentiated the curriculum to focus upon his fluent reading and musical ability. Strong relationships between stakeholders (between children, children and teachers, families and teachers, teachers in different settings) offer a secure base for effective transition of children (Niesel & Griebel, 2007).

The person element was also determined to have moderate links to the curriculum differentiation theme. Children’s person characteristics influenced their Kindergarten teacher’s curriculum differentiation. For example, Fergus’ impulsivity and enthusiasm meant that his Kindergarten teacher focused upon his social-emotional and attention related skills, rather than his intellectual development. However, for Claudia, her quiet nature meant that catering for Claudia’s intellectual development, as well as her social-emotional and attention related skills became a focus for her Kindergarten teacher.

The context element was determined to have strong links to the curriculum differentiation theme. Previous research shows that children starting school with ability or achievement levels above syllabus expectations may need a conscious and focussed intervention if their learning and development are to proceed appropriately (Gould, 2012; Rogers, 2002). However, this is difficult for many teachers. Petriwskyj (2013) acknowledges that teachers in inclusive early education environments face competing pressures as children transition from play-based settings into formal school. She identifies the challenge to engage in curriculum differentiation, which caters for the complex range of abilities of children starting school.
Research by Petriwskyj (2013), Dunlop (2007) and Thorpe et al. (2004) also reports that limited attention has been paid to changes in pedagogy associated with the transition from play-based education into formal school classes, and to the shared role of schools and prior-to-school settings in meeting all children’s individual patterns of progress. This was found to be the case for the majority of children in the study. Evidence from this study highlighted that appropriate early assessment, and effective communication between parents and teachers, impact upon the Kindergarten teacher’s ability to differentiate the curriculum and cater for the special needs of the child identified as gifted.

The time element was determined to have moderate links to the curriculum differentiation theme. For example, for Fergus and Annabel, time was an important element in their transition to school. Attending the same school, the first term of school was allocated to settling in and learning routines. This meant that curriculum differentiation was initially not a focus for their Kindergarten teachers.

**8.5.2 Summary of research question 4.**

Evidence from this study showed that pre-school teachers, Kindergarten teachers and parents had different perspectives regarding what was considered a special need for children identified as gifted. In some cases, special needs were easily identifiable, such as when children were twice-exceptional. However, there was uncertainty about what is considered a special need and what is a necessary educational provision for children identified as gifted. This uncertainty impacted upon Kindergarten teachers’ curriculum differentiation. However, differentiation of early school experiences is essential, offering a positive way of attending to diversity during the transition to Kindergarten (Dunlop, 2014). Limited evidence is available of such practices (Petriwskyj, 2013).
8.6 Guiding question 5:

*Does the identification of a pre-school child as gifted impact upon the child’s transition to school?*

Responses to this guiding question draw upon the themes derived from the data, evidence from the study, and the relevant literature. Most adult participants in the study considered the answer to this question to be ‘No’. This response was often based upon the fact that many parents had not communicated their child’s identification as gifted to the school, preferring the school to come to their own conclusions about the child. In other cases, the Kindergarten teachers did not consider the child gifted, either because they disagreed with the identification or that the child was yet to display gifted characteristics at school.

The majority of parents in the study thought the identification of their child as gifted had not impacted on their child’s transition to school. In contrast, one parent thought the identification of the child as gifted had had an impact, reporting that the child’s Kindergarten teacher’s high expectations and knowledge of the child’s abilities resulted in her planning his work accordingly. This is consistent with previous research within *The Starting School Research Project* (Whitton et al., 2003) which found that the concerns of the parents of gifted children differed from those of mainstream children’s parents. Parents of gifted children had two primary concerns, both of which related to schoolwork. Firstly, the school’s ability to stimulate and challenge their children was highlighted. This is consistent with the findings in this study, the majority of parents were concerned about the level of work their children would be doing in their first year of school.

The second primary concern of the parents of gifted children in Whitton’s (2005) study involved their children’s social adjustment to school life. Parents in Whitton’s study were more concerned with ways in which their child would work with the teacher in order to
learn, rather than about working and playing with their peers. In this study, findings are in contrast to Whitton’s findings. No parents in the study reported being concerned about their child’s social adjustment to school life, either with their peers or their teachers. However, the majority of Kindergarten teachers in the study were concerned with the child’s ability to relate to their peers.

8.6.1 Summary of guiding question 5.
Most adult participants in the study reported that the identification of a pre-school child as gifted had not impacted upon the child’s transition to school. However, in some cases this response was based upon the fact that parents had not communicated their child’s identification as gifted to the school, preferring the school to come to their own conclusions about the child. In other cases, the Kindergarten teachers did not consider the child gifted.

8.7 Guiding question 6:

*How does the labelling of a child as gifted change the expectations for those involved?*
Most adult participants in the study felt that the labelling of a child as gifted had not changed their expectations for the child identified as gifted. Yet previous research recognises that labelling a child as gifted may influence the way adults view a child and how a child may view themselves (Gates, 2010). Labelling children as gifted can be harmful to their social-emotional well-being (Dweck, 2009; Gates, 2010; O’Connor, 2012).

Evidence from the study found parents experienced a disconnect between the identification and the labelling of their child as gifted. The majority of parents (9) in this study found the identification of their child as gifted to be a positive experience – it helped them understand their children better, giving additional insights into the child’s person characteristics. However, these parents, while happy
that their child had been identified, were reluctant for their child to be labelled as gifted. Parents reported that the use of the term ‘gifted’, essentially labelling the child, was the most negative aspect of their child’s identification. Consistent with previous research (Gates, 2010) parents in the study were concerned about the possible negative consequences for the child identified as gifted.

Sam’s parents worried that the term made it sound like something that’s been given to you, you didn’t need to work at it. This finding is consistent with previous research. Dweck (2009) is also concerned that students who have been led to think of themselves as ‘bright’ or ‘gifted’ can become very conservative learners, afraid to accept new challenges where their chances of success are uncertain, worried that their status as ‘bright’ or ‘successful’ is put in jeopardy.

Other parents (Sophie and Hugh’s) were concerned about the possible negative consequences on the way others view their child. Parents didn’t want their child bullied, singled out, or set aside. They recognised their child’s potential but hoped for increased expectations - without extra pressure.

While also positive about their child’s identification as gifted, Fergus’ parents considered certain characteristics of his giftedness – his person characteristics – and the associated behaviour, to be a negative. For example, Fergus’ parents had difficulties with his exceptional memory. He was able to remember things from when he was two-and-a-half years old and often asked for those items. For Fergus’ parents, the need for constant stimulation was a negative of their child’s identification, yet these characteristics were present before the child was identified and labelled. Fergus’ identification as gifted provided an explanation for his need for constant stimulation.
None of the parent participants in the study had told their children of their identification as gifted. Parents therefore reported that the identification of their child as gifted had not changed their child’s expectations regarding school.

For seven pre-school teachers in the study, the labelling of the child as gifted did not change their expectations for the child. The pre-school teachers reported that they extended each child along their learning journey with consistently high but realistic expectations. Evidence from seven Kindergarten teachers in the study also showed the labelling of the focus child as gifted did not change their expectations for the child. Yet, for two Kindergarten teachers, identification of the focus child did change their expectations. The Kindergarten teachers of Kabir and Sam thought the label was an important starting point for the teacher in understanding of the child. While these Kindergarten teachers were uncomfortable with labelling children, they felt such labels where often beneficial, such as when a child is autistic. The label allowed the teacher to prepare.

While parents, pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers were reluctant to label a child, literature suggests that it is usually done with good intentions, an attempt to better understand the child, and as a starting point to understand the child and their individual strengths and needs. Gates (2010) recognises that if a behaviour or personality trait can be defined, then it can be addressed more easily. However, Gates continues to caution that while intentions may be good, people may react differently to a labelled person. As such, it is not the label itself that is positive or negative, it is how those involved respond to the label that is important. It is what we understand about that label and how we offer support to those involved that will result in the label having a positive or negative effect on a child’s view of themselves as a learner (Sutherland, 2008).
8.7.1 Summary of guiding question 6.
The majority of parents, pre-school teachers and parents in the study reported that labelling a child as gifted did not change their expectations. Seven Kindergarten teachers reported that they tried to teach to the ability level of all their students so although the child’s academic abilities were obvious, it meant expectations flowed from each child’s individual abilities. However, all parties were reluctant to label the child at such a young age.

8.8 Central research question:

*How is what happens in the transition to primary school different for children who have been identified as gifted?*

For children in the study, what happened in the transition to school was found to be no different for children identified as gifted than for children who had not been so identified. However, it must be acknowledged that all child participants in this study had been identified as gifted. It is not known what impact, if any, this may have had on the results of the study.

In this study, however, responses of parents, pre-school teachers, Kindergarten teachers and the responses of the children themselves contributed to answering the question: ‘How is what happens in the transition to primary school different for children who have been identified as gifted as opposed to those who have not been identified as gifted?’ Results and analysis of data from all stakeholders have highlighted educational provisions such as pedagogical continuity, the teachers’ approach to learning and development, curriculum differentiation, and early assessment. Yet within this study, teachers reported that their educational practices were no different than for children who had not been identified as gifted.
In this study, children were identified by either their pre-school teacher or their Kindergarten teacher. However, this identification was often not communicated between stakeholders. Both parents and pre-school teachers were reluctant to communicate the child’s identification as gifted. Yet, pre-school and Kindergarten teachers reported that the child’s identification as gifted did not impact upon their transition to school. Nor did the identification of a child as gifted change teachers’ expectations for the child. Teachers reiterated that they had different expectations for individual children, even within the same task. The child’s intellectual potential was not considered a special need by teachers in the study. Teachers preferred to focus upon the children’s needs, perceived to be their social-emotional skills and attention related behaviours.

In contrast, for three children in the study, their experiences proved to be the exception. Sam, Sophie and Claudia’s Kindergarten teachers utilised a holistic approach – focusing upon the child’s social-emotional skills, attention related behaviours and intellectual development.

The answer to the central research question is clearly ‘It depends’. Whether the transition to school experiences of a child who has been identified and labelled as gifted are different from those of a child not so identified and labelled depends upon:

- adult beliefs and knowledge about giftedness;
- provision of pedagogical continuity between educational settings;
- the Kindergarten teachers’ approach to learning and development;
- curriculum differentiation
- appropriate early assessment in the transition to school; and
• communication between stakeholders;

Connecting these themes is the need for inclusive and holistic approaches to the transition to school for children identified as gifted. Inclusive and holistic transitions to school incorporate children’s participation and sense of being valued as well as a positive disposition to learning and long-term positive trajectories (Petriwskyj & Greishaber, 2011; Rietveld, 2008). They also recognise the early years of primary schooling as a critical period for both cognitive and psychosocial development (Davis et al., 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Dockett et al., 2007; Goodhew, 2009; Pfeiffer & Petscher, 2008). Consequently, transition approaches must cater for the complexity and diversity of children starting school and consider coherent strategies across early education (Petriwskyj, 2013).
9. Conclusion

Organisation of the chapter

This chapter is organised in the following sections:

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Recommendations for policy and practice

9.3 Limitations of the study

9.4 Further research

9.5 A final word

9.1 Introduction

The NSW Kindergarten environment includes a range of students who differ in areas such as age, family backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences. Within this varied group of students there will be some considered gifted.

While the educational needs of all children must be considered, the intellectual and social-emotional needs of gifted children in their schooling necessitate particular consideration (Clark, 2002; Folsom, 2005; Robertson et al., 2011). Children whose abilities are unrecognised and not nurtured in the early years may fail to realise their potential and may begin to underachieve (Bates & Munday, 2005; Koshy & Robinson, 2006; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2004). This underachievement can begin as early as the pre-school years (Davis et al., 2011; Goodhew, 2009).

This study broadened and deepened knowledge of the transition experiences of children identified as gifted in NSW. Significantly, it explored several unanswered questions, identifies and examines the
educational provisions in place for young children identified as gifted as they begin their formal education. Specifically, the study asked the question: ‘Is what happens in the transition to primary school different for children who are identified as gifted as opposed to those who are not considered gifted?’

9.2 Recommendations for policy and practice

Several of the key themes from this study can be used to strengthen practice and assist in developing policy guidelines for future practice. The following recommendations are provided for pre-school and Kindergarten teachers, policy makers, teacher educators and researchers.

9.2.1 Recommendations for Kindergarten and pre-school teachers

Parents, pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers share a crucial role in the transition to school for all children. The following recommendations are appropriate to both pre-school and Kindergarten teachers:

i. Professional learning in gifted education should be mandatory for teachers

Pre-school and Kindergarten teachers should be required to undertake professional learning in gifted education. Knowledge of gifted children and their education may help teachers better understand the gifted child and consequently be better able to implement educational provisions.
ii. **Holistic approaches to learning and development should be used by teachers**

Kindergarten teachers’ approaches to learning and development are influenced by their understanding of teaching and children. Increasing teachers’ knowledge of the gifted child and educational provisions may encourage teachers, both pre-school and Kindergarten, to implement an inclusive and holistic approach to the education of the gifted child. Kindergarten teachers should consider the child’s social-emotional skills, their attention-relation behaviours and their intellectual development. Increased knowledge of the gifted child and appropriate educational provisions may help teachers better understand the gifted child and be able to accommodate their strengths, as well as their needs, within the Kindergarten classroom.

iii. **Teachers should reconsider the value of labelling a child as gifted**

The current move away from labelling some children as *gifted* (with all others implicitly assigned to the *not gifted* category), and toward a focus on individual differences is seen as beneficial. Educational provisions which focus on developing the potential of individuals may avoid the development of anti-gifted attitudes. By labelling the provisions rather than the children, the same goals are achieved for children, but the educational practices are easily defendable. Such an approach assists in neutralising negative connotations with the gifted label and in turn, this may help children, their parents, their pre-school teachers and their Kindergarten teachers.
9.2.2 Recommendations for Kindergarten teachers

Kindergarten teachers are a crucial element in the successful transition to school for the child identified as gifted. What happens when children start school, particularly within the first few weeks, may help meet the expectations of children, alleviating some of the difficulties experienced by children in the study.

i. **Kindergarten teachers need to implement inclusive orientation practices within the transition program**

Implementation of open-ended orientation activities would take account of a range of variations within a class and allow children to differentiate the activity based upon their skills and abilities. Consequently such activities may provide all children with the opportunity to show what they know or can do and assist all children to feel suitable for school.

ii. **Provision of opportunities for children to ‘work’ as well as ‘play’ is necessary when providing pedagogical continuity**

Providing pedagogical continuity between pre-school and school was found to be beneficial. Through careful consideration of open-ended, free-play activities, for example, including activities where children can choose to ‘work’ – to read, write and count – as well as ‘play’ will help teachers meet the needs and expectations of gifted children. Implementation of such activities may eliminate the discord between the child’s expectations and what happens in the Kindergarten classroom within the first few weeks of school. Such activities may also provide the Kindergarten teacher with opportunities to observe and interact with the gifted children ‘at work’, supplementing early
assessment and giving the teacher a clearer understanding of the child’s abilities.

**iii. Kindergarten teachers need to implement early assessment appropriately in the transition to school**

Assessing children’s specific strengths and using this knowledge to make decisions about educational provisions for the gifted child is crucial (Renzulli, 2005b). Implementation of early assessment should match children’s needs during transition to school. Time should be allowed for children to develop a rapport with the assessor – usually their Kindergarten teacher. Administration of the NSW Best Start Assessment should take place only after children have started school, allowing a period of time, perhaps three to four weeks, for children to develop a relationship with their teachers and to feel comfortable in the new environment. Administered in such a way, the assessment may provide an appropriate opportunity for the children to reveal the skills they bring to Kindergarten.

**iv. Kindergarten teachers should differentiate the curriculum**

Differentiation of early school experiences is essential, offering a positive way of attending to diversity during the transition to Kindergarten (Dunlop, 2014). Consequently, knowledge of children’s abilities should be transferred to educational provisions, implemented in the form of open-ended, differentiated curriculum, taking account of a range of abilities within a class.
9.2.3 Recommendations for parents

Parents of the child identified as gifted are a crucial element in the child’s successful transition to school. Consequently, the following recommendation for parents is made.

i. **Parents should communicate their children’s’ advanced abilities**

Results from this study highlighted the need for effective communication, both written and verbal, among parents, pre-school teachers and Kindergarten teachers during the transition to school. Parents of the child identified as gifted should be encouraged to communicate their child’s advanced abilities and become advocates for their child. Alerting the Kindergarten teacher to the child’s specific abilities, rather than communicating their child’s identification as ‘gifted’, may assist in neutralising negative connotations with the gifted label and in turn, encourages teachers to implement educational provisions appropriate to the gifted child’s specific abilities.

9.3 Limitations of the study

The results of this study draw upon the experiences of transition to school for children identified as gifted, yet limitations exist within the study.

i. **Inclusion of ‘gifted’ children within the study**

The study does not confirm or deny the child participants as gifted. The children were included in the study because they had been ‘identified as gifted’ by their pre-school teacher or their parents. No formal identification occurred, nor was proof required of the child’s ability. As such, it is possible that some of the child participants were not gifted. It is also possible that within their Kindergarten classrooms other children were gifted, yet had not been not identified. It is not
known what impact, if any, this may have had on the results of the study.

**ii. Limited participation of pre-school teachers**

In this study ten Kindergarten teachers were approached regarding their participation in the study. Of the ten approached, the majority – nine – Kindergarten teachers were happy to participate in the study, with only one teacher declining to participate when outside pressures dictated. However, four out of the eleven pre-school teachers eligible to participate in the study declined to do so, citing their philosophical opposition to the identification and labelling of children within the early childhood years. As a consequence, it is the views and experiences of pre-school teachers who were not uncomfortable with using the gifted label that are represented in this study.

**iii. Small amount of data that came from the children**

Only a small amount of data in this study was generated by child participants. The responses of some children were minimal. While some of Sophie’s responses were more elaborate, she responded to some questions with a nod or a shake of her head. The responses of twice-exceptional Kabir, were also minimal. Such limited data did not highlight the voices of children within the study as expected.

**iv. Dominant voices of a small number of parents**

Some parent participants were very generous with their time and vocal about their child’s transition. Other families had limited time for questionnaires and interviews. In addition, the cultures of two families in the study did not encourage parents or their children to be vocal about their abilities. Such a discrepancy may have impacted upon the data and findings.
v. Changes in Kindergarten teachers during the first term of school

Changes of teachers during the first term of school were a challenge for Andrew and Hugh. Their Kindergarten teachers went on leave during Term One. While their replacement Kindergarten teachers participated in the study, they were only beginning to get to know the children and had not been present during the child’s entire transition. As a result, the voices of Andrew and Hugh’s teachers are faint.

vi. Acceptance of participants’ ‘opinions’ about what was happening in the Kindergarten classroom

In this study, no child or classroom observations were conducted. Such observations may have allowed the researcher to further explore the child’s transition, particularly in relation to educational provisions. However, the decision not to include observations was made to avoid deterring teacher participants. Both pre-school and Kindergarten teachers may have found such observations confronting, considering this as ‘evaluating’ their teaching. The acceptance of participants’ ‘opinions’ about what was happening in the Kindergarten classroom may have impacted upon the data.

vii. No opportunity to take parent comments to pre-school and Kindergarten teachers for discussion

Provision of opportunities to discuss comments made by parents would have allowed the researcher to better triangulate data and further explore themes derived from the study, such as the teacher’s approach to learning and development. However, this was not possible within this study. Consequently, there may be instances in the data where participants may have been better able to explain comments – either confirming or denying data.
Despite these limitations, the study does build on a strong theoretical framework and uses appropriate and well-developed data generation and analysis techniques. Hence, the study provides a useful consideration of the experiences of the transition to school for children identified as gifted, leading to a range of important data.

9.4 Further research

There are several areas of this study which provide potential opportunities for further research. Four areas requiring further research have been identified.

9.4.1 Obtaining perspectives of children identified as gifted

The perspectives of children identified as gifted emerged as a significant area for possible exploration which proved to be beyond the scope of this present thesis. It would be worthwhile further investigating the perspectives of such children as this would broaden and strengthen the understanding of the transition to school for children identified as gifted.

9.4.2 Early assessment in the transition to school

Further research into assessment in the transition to school is recommended. In particular, further investigation into the ways in which the NSW Best Start Assessment can be implemented is suggested. As this research highlighted difficulties and inconsistencies with the implementation, predominantly the timing of the assessment, further research is warranted.

9.4.3 Provision of continuity of pedagogy

Limited attention has been paid to changes in pedagogy associated with the transition from play-based education into formal school
classes. Further research is needed regarding continuity of pedagogy in the transition to school. It would be worthwhile investigating differentiated practices, which provide pedagogical continuity, yet which also cater for the differing learning needs and expectations of children in the first few weeks of school. Such practices may help eliminate the mismatches between the child’s expectations and what happens in the Kindergarten classroom within the first few weeks of school.

9.4.4 Use of inclusive orientation practices

Opportunities exist for further research in the provision of inclusive orientation practices. Practices are required which allow for children’s prior learning and the differences between children’s prior experiences over time (Petriwskyj & Greishaber, 2011). Explorations of such practices provide exciting possibilities.

9.4.5 Influence of cultural background on child and family expectations

This thesis did not consider the influence of children’s cultural background upon expectations. It would be worthwhile further investigating the influence of culture on the expectations of children and their families.

9.4.6 The development and use of gifted policies in pre-schools and primary schools

Little attention has been paid to the development and implementation of gifted policies in early childhood, particularly in pre-schools. Numerous pre-schools within this study were found to have no policies regarding the education of children identification of gifted. With the recent implementation of the EYLF in Australian pre-schools, research regarding policies would be well timed.
9.4.7 A comparison between the transition experiences of children identified as gifted and not identified as gifted

Due to ethical concerns, a direct comparison between gifted and those not identified as gifted proved to be beyond the scope of this present thesis. However, opportunities exist for further research in this area.

9.5 A final word

The conclusion of this study has been framed largely by the themes derived from the data and the literature review. Connecting these themes is the need for both inclusive and holistic approaches to the transition to school for children identified as gifted. While some of the characteristics and behaviours of gifted children can create challenges within mainstream educational settings, drawing upon the perspectives of the children identified as gifted, their parents, their pre-school teachers, and finally their Kindergarten teachers, has highlighted the need for inclusive and holistic practices within the transition to school. Rather than treating all children the same, an inclusive education system should mean that all children’s needs are recognised and met. Yet, within this inclusive learning environment the educational needs of gifted children are often overlooked. This may result in schools failing to meet children’s needs during their induction to the education system, discouraging them from the very beginning of their formal education.
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New South Wales Department of Education and Training. (2004b). *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students: Guidelines for the use of strategies to support gifted and talented students*.


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Appendices

Appendix A: Parent consent form

PARENT/CAREGIVER CONSENT FORM

Project: The transition to primary school for children identified as gifted: Nikki Masters (CSU)

This consent form is to show that you freely volunteer to participate in the above-named research project, which has been approved by Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC No. 2012/119). You will not be signing away any rights when you complete this form, but you will be consenting to give your participation as outlined in the information sheet. As stated in the information sheet, all data collected will be strictly confidential and no individual student, parent, pre-school educator, pre-school, Kindergarten teacher or school will be identified.

Please read each of these statements carefully before signing, to make sure you understand what is involved.

- I, (print your name) .......................................................... voluntarily consent to participate in the project titled the gifted child’s transition to school.
- I have read and understood the information sheet, and been told that the project has received ethical approval from Charles Sturt University. My questions about the project have been satisfactorily answered. A copy of the information sheet has been provided for me to keep.
- I understand that this project involves me completing the checklist ‘Sayler’s Things My Child has Done’.
- I understand that this project involves me completing three questionnaires throughout the project.
- I understand that this project involves me participating in three structured conversations throughout the project. These conversations will be taped and transcribed.
- I understand that I can also choose to participate in an online forum in this project.
- I understand that the information I provide and any personal information about me in this research will be kept confidential, and my identity will not be revealed at any time.
- I understand that I can freely withdraw from the project at any time by letting the researcher know, with no negative consequences whatsoever.
- I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact the CSU Ethics in Human Research Committee whose contact details are provided below.

Name: (please print)
Signature: Date:

NOTE: Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you can contact the committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Academic Governance
Charles Sturt University
Panorama venue
BATHURST, NSW 2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4628
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au
Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence, investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix B: Child consent form

Would you like to participate in my project?

Yes  No

Your name: ……………………………………………………………………………………

Date:
Appendix C: Pre-school teacher consent form

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project: The transition to primary school for children who have been identified as gifted: Nikki Masters (CSU)

This consent form is to show that you freely volunteer to participate in the above-named research project, which has been approved by Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC No. 2012/119). You will not be signing away any rights when you complete this form, but you will be consenting to give your participation as outlined in the information sheet. As stated in the information sheet, all data collected will be strictly confidential and no individual student, parent, pre-school educator, pre-school, primary teacher or school will be identified.

Please read each of these statements carefully before signing, to make sure you understand what is involved.

1. I, (print your name) ................................................................. voluntarily consent to participate in the project titled The transition to school for children who have been identified as gifted.
2. I have read and understood the information sheet, and been told that the project has received ethical approval from Charles Sturt University. My questions about the project have been satisfactorily answered. A copy of the information sheet has been provided for me to keep.
3. I understand that this project involves me completing the checklist ‘Sayler’s Things This Child has Done’.
4. I understand that this project involves me completing a questionnaire which focuses on the identification of the focus child as gifted.
5. I understand that this project involves me participating in a structured conversation regarding the identification of the focus child as gifted. This conversation will be taped and transcribed.
6. I understand that the information I provide and any personal information about me in this research will be kept confidential, and my identity will not be revealed at any time.
7. I understand that I can freely withdraw from the project at any time by letting the researcher know, with no negative consequences whatsoever.
8. I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact the CSU Ethics in Human Research Committee whose contact details are provided below.

Name: (please print)
Signature: Date:

NOTE: Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you can contact the committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Academic Governance
Charles Sturt University
Panorama venue
BATHURST, NSW 2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4628
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence, investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix D: Kindergarten teacher consent form

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project: The transition to primary school for children identified as gifted: Nikki Masters (CSU)

This consent form is to show that you freely volunteer to participate in the above-named research project, which has been approved by Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC No. 2012/119). You will not be signing away any rights when you complete this form, but you will be consenting to give your participation as outlined in the information sheet. As stated in the information sheet, all data collected will be strictly confidential and no individual student, parent, pre-school educator, pre-school, Kindergarten teacher or school will be identified.

Please read each of these statements carefully before signing, to make sure you understand what is involved.

- I, (print your name) .................................................... voluntarily consent to participate in the project titled the gifted child’s transition to school.
- I have read and understood the information sheet, and been told that the project has received ethical approval from Charles Sturt University. My questions about the project have been satisfactorily answered. A copy of the information sheet has been provided for me to keep.
- I understand that this project involves me completing the checklist ‘Sayler’s Things This Child has Done’.
- I understand that this project involves me completing a questionnaire which focuses on the focus child’s transition to school and their educational experiences.
- I understand that this project involves me participating in a structured conversation regarding the focus child’s transition to school and their educational experiences. This conversation will be taped and transcribed.
- I understand that I can also choose to participate in an online forum.
- I understand that the information I provide and any personal information about me in this research will be kept confidential, and my identity will not be revealed at any time.
- I understand that I can freely withdraw from the project at any time by letting the researcher know, with no negative consequences whatsoever.
- I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact the CSU Ethics in Human Research Committee whose contact details are provided below.

Name: (please print)
Signature: Date:

NOTE: Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you can contact the committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Academic Governance
Charles Sturt University
Panorama venue
BATHURST, NSW 2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4628
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence, investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Gifted and talented checklist for parents
Things my child has done

Carefully read each of the following descriptions. Each item is followed by a series of examples; use the examples to help understand the description in the item. Decide how much you agree that your child is like the description. Mark your agreement on the scale from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD). Fill in one circle for each item. If you are unclear or haven’t noticed how your child compares to an item, fill in the Unsure or don’t know circle. Then, tell us about a time your child did the things in the item. Try to recall specific incidents or examples about your child. Feel free to add extra pages of stories or examples to tell us more about your child.

Child’s name: _______________________________
Child’s birthday: _____________________________
Your name: __________________________________
School name: _________________________________
Date: _________________________________

This child:

1. Has quick recall of information.
   (e.g. immediately remembers facts, series of numbers, events, words from songs or movies, or parts of conversation heard earlier)

SA10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

Unsure or don’t know

A personal example:

Michael Sayler, Investigation of Talented Students, University of North Texas, Denton TX
2. Knows a lot more about some topics than do other children that age.
   (e.g. recounts facts about dinosaurs, sports, electronics, maths, books, animals, music, art, etc; finds out a lot about a particular subject on his or her own)

   SA(10) 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD
   ○ Unsure or don't know

   A personal example:

3. Uses advanced vocabulary.
   (e.g. surprises older children and adults with the big words used; uses words unusual for a child, knows the correct terms, exact words or labels for things; acts and speaks like a grown-up when talking to adults; uses simpler words when talking to peers or younger children)

   SA(10) 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD
   ○ Unsure or don't know

   A personal example:

4. Began to read or write early.
   (e.g. said or could read individual words at a very young age; started to read before entering school; likes to write or tell stories; learned to read without being taught)

   SA(10) 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD
   ○ Unsure or don't know

   A personal example and age of child at the time:

---

Michael Snyder, Investigation of Talented Students, University of North Texas, Denton TX 2 of 5
5. Shows unusually intense interest and enjoyment when learning about new things.
(e.g. has lots of energy and interest when learning; frequently and persistently asks how and why questions; is not satisfied with simple answers; wants to know details; loves how-to-do-it and nonfiction books)

   SA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD
   Unsure or don't know

   A personal example:

6. Understands things well enough to teach others.
(e.g. teaches other children how to do things; explains things so that others can understand, explains areas of interest to adults)

   SA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD
   Unsure or don't know

   A personal example:

7. Is comfortable around adults.
(e.g. spends time with and talks to adults who visit the house; likes the company of adults; enjoys talking with adults; understands adult humour and creates funny sayings or jokes adults can appreciate)

   SA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD
   Unsure or don't know

   A personal example:
8. Shows leadership abilities
(e.g. other children ask my child for help; organises games and activities for self or others; makes up the rules and directs group activities; may be bossy)

SA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

Unsure or don't know

A personal example:

9. Is resourceful and improvises well.
(e.g. puts together various household objects to make inventions or solve a problem; uses unusual objects for projects; objects in unusual ways; makes 'something out of nothing')

SA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

Unsure or don't know

A personal example:

10. Uses imaginative methods to accomplish tasks.
(e.g. makes creative short cuts; doesn’t always follow the rules; good at finding creative ways to get out of work)

SA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

Unsure or don't know

A personal example:
11. Use the rest of this page or its back to tell us anything you think is important about your child that we have not asked about. Please feel free to add any information you think might be useful in giving us a clear picture of what your child has done. Be as specific as possible in describing your child's interests and accomplishments. If you can share some copies of your child's creative work, we would be delighted to have them.
Appendix F: Sayler’s checklist for teachers

Gifted and talented checklist for teachers

Things this child has done

The following is a checklist of characteristics of gifted young children. The examples after each item are there to help you to understand that item. A child may not show all of the examples given and they may exhibit the item characteristic in ways not listed. Indicate how much you think this child is like the item by using the scale below each item. Mark strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD). Fill in one circle for each item. If you are unclear or haven’t noticed how this child compares to an item, fill in the Unsure or don’t know circle. Use the space below the item for examples concerning the child, add as many details as you can remember. Be as specific as possible in describing the child’s interests and accomplishments. The space is small, so please feel free to add extra pages of stories or examples to tell us more. If you can share copies of this child’s creative work, we would be delighted to have them. Use additional pages to describe anything you think is important about this child that we have not asked about.

Child’s name: ________________________________
Child’s birthday: _____________________________
Your name: __________________________________
School name: _________________________________
Date: _______________________________________

This child:

1. **Has quick accurate recall of information.**
   (e.g. good short and long-term memory; quick to provide facts, details, or stories related to complex events; learns quickly and recalls accurately words to songs, poems, stories or conversations; points out connections between ideas and events)

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Unsure or don’t know

An example:
2. **Shows intense curiosity and deeper knowledge than other children.**
(e.g. asks questions incessantly once imagination has been aroused, pays close attention when learning, has an enthusiastic need to know and explore, remembers things in great detail)

```
SA [10]  9  8  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  0  SD

☐ Unsure or don't know
```

An example:

3. **Is empathetic, feels more deeply than do other children that age.**
(e.g. exhibits maturity usually associated with older children; shows unusual hurt or pain when he or she displeases someone; displays pride in advanced accomplishments; is sensitive to others' feelings and shows distress at other children's distress or adult's distress; will subjugate their needs to the needs of others; reads body language)

```
SA [10]  9  8  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  0  SD

☐ Unsure or don't know
```

An example:

4. **May not always display their advanced understanding in everyday situations.**
(e.g. becomes cranky or non-compliant when fatigued or stressed; playground behaviour may not reflect their verbal reasoning about the same situations; may be frustrated with their ability to meet their own high expectations)

```
SA [10]  9  8  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  0  SD

☐ Unsure or don't know
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An example:
5. **Uses advanced vocabulary.**
(e.g. correctly uses vocabulary and phrasings adults would expect from older children; surprises adults and children with big words or phrases they use; likes complex communication and conversations)

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Unsure or don't know

An example:

6. **Reads, writes, or uses numbers in advanced ways.**
(e.g. reads earlier than most children or if learns to read at the same time as most children, does so very quickly; likes to read rapidly to get the gist of a story even though some words are skipped or mispronounced; interest in copying or using letters, words or numbers; uses computational skills earlier than others)

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An example:

7. **Advanced play interests and behaviours.**
(e.g. exhibits play interests that resemble those of older children; likes to play board games designed for older children, teens or adults; more apt to be interested in cooperative play, complex play situations or sophisticated play activities)

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Unsure or don't know

An example:
8. Shows unusually intense interest and enjoyment when learning about new things. 
(e.g. spends long periods of time exploring interesting new things; listens for long periods of time to stories and conversations; retells events and stories in great detail; entertains self for long periods of time; shows unwavering attention sometimes to the point of stubbornness; sits patiently when reading or listening to books)

SA 10  9  8  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  0  SD

An example:

9. Has an advanced sense of humour or sees incongruities as funny. 
(e.g. is humorous in speech, social interactions, art or story telling; make jokes, puns, plays on words; see humour in situations, even ones against him or her, and laughs at the situation)

SA 10  9  8  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  0  SD

An example:

10. Understands things well enough to teach others. 
(e.g. likes to play school with other children, dolls or stuffed animals; talks like an 'expert' or likes to discuss certain topics a lot; explains ideas to adults when he or she doesn't think the adult understands very well)

SA 10  9  8  7  6  5  4  3  2  1  0  SD

An example:

Michael Sayler, Investigation of Talented Students, University of North Texas, Denton TX
11. Is comfortable around older children and adults.
(e.g. craves for attention from adults; likes to be with older children and adults; listens to or joins in adult conversations; often plays with and is accepted by older children)

SA (10) 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

An example:

12. Shows leadership abilities.
(e.g. has a verbal understanding of social situations; sought out by other children for play ideas; adapts his or her own words and expectations to needs or skill level of playmates; may be seen as bossy; uses verbal skills to deal with conflicts or influence other children)

SA (10) 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

An example:

13. Is resourceful and improvises well.
(e.g. makes ingenious or functional things from LEGO or other building toys; uses toys in unique or non-traditional ways; plays with or carries on conversations with imaginary friends; makes up believable endings to stories)

SA (10) 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

An example:
14. Shows logical and metacognitive skills in managing own learning
(e.g. understands game rules quickly; learns from mistakes in playing games; sees errors or losses as learning experiences rather than failures; monitors difficulty of task to push self to more challenging levels)

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Unsure or don't know

An example:

15. Uses imaginative methods to accomplish tasks.
(e.g. presents unique arguments in order to convince others to allow him or her to do or get things; finds imaginative ways to get out of doing things they don't want to do; curious with a high energy level that is goal directed)

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Unsure or don't know

An example:

16. Use the rest of this page or its back to tell us anything you think is important about this child that we have not asked about. Please feel free to add any information you think might be useful in giving us a clear picture of what the child has done. Be as specific as possible in describing the child's interests and accomplishments. If you can share some copies of this child's creative work, we would be delighted to have them.
Appendix G: Example of completed checklist

Gifted and talented checklist for parents
Things my child has done

Carefully read each of the following descriptions. Each item is followed by a series of examples; use the examples to help understand the description in the item. Decide how much you agree that your child is like the description. Mark your agreement on the scale from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD). Fill in one circle for each item. If you are unclear or haven’t noticed how your child compares to an item, fill in the Unsure or don’t know circle. Then, tell us about a time your child did the things in the item. Try to recall specific incidents or examples about your child. Feel free to add extra pages of stories or examples to tell us more about your child.

Child’s name: [redacted]
Child’s birthday: 10 September 2007
Your name: [redacted]
School name: [redacted]
Date: 04 Dec 2012

This child:

1. Has quick recall of information.
   (e.g. immediately remembers facts, series of numbers, events, words from songs or movies, or parts of conversation heard earlier)
   SA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD
   Unsure or don’t know

A personal example:

- Easily recalls words of songs.
- Remembered the two learnt at music class.

Noted from friend Neil in May 2012 when he stayed with
us overnight. Neil told him that he lived at Bexleyheath.

A couple of weeks ago, Neil mentioned that he was going
to visit Neil, which led us to ask “When are we going to
Bexleyheath?” He remembered where Neil lived without a
reminder.

- He remembers directions to places - he helped one night from our
  home to his swim school when it was my turn to drive him there for
  the first time.

Michael Sayler, Investigation of Talented Students, University of North Texas, Denton TX
2. Knows a lot more about some topics than do other children that age.
(e.g. recounts facts about dinosaurs, sports, electronics, maths, books, animals, music, art, etc. finds out a lot about a particular subject on his or her own)

SA(10) 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

A personal example:

- Loves computer games - he knows a lot about 'Microsoft' and 'Youkai 2' - games he has played with on the computer.
- He: Microsoft - he uses the word 'game' for his games to learn about the characters in the game. He also learned how to use the keyboard himself. He is comfortable with technology.

3. Uses advanced vocabulary.
(e.g. surprises older children and adults with the big words used; uses words unusual for a child, knows the correct terms, exact words or labels for things; acts and speaks like a grown-up when talking to adults; uses simpler words when talking to peers or younger children)

SA(10) 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

A personal example:

- "I'm not referring" - dealing an incident he saw on "Teenage Wipeout" where one of the characters in the show faced over Steps.
- He said the word "reference" to describe how words are used up. He means 'refugee'. He said "the French wrestler in the 'refugee' section..."

4. Began to read or write early.
(e.g. said or could read individual words at a very young age; started to read before entering school; likes to write or tell stories; learned to read without being taught)

SA(10) 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

A personal example and age of child at the time:

- "I was ten when I started filling out my own story ideas. I would fill in the bottom half of the pictures and then make up a story around each picture."
- He started writing stories about six months ago. Now he will read a story and ask what it means.
- He can read "Harry Potter" and he has demonstrated an ability to work out how to read new words.
- He makes up stories when he plays with his toys.

Michael Sayer, Investigation of Talented Students, University of North Texas, Denton TX
5. Shows unusually intense interest and enjoyment when learning about new things.
(e.g. has lots of energy and interest when learning; frequently and persistently asks how and why questions; is not satisfied with simple answers; wants to know details; loves how-to-do-it and nonfiction books)

SA[10] 0 0 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

A personal example:
- Likes to watch on the computer and ask questions about any new games he sees.
- He is interested in board games and asks questions about the rules and how the game is won. For example, the X-Wing game we have just bought.

6. Understands things well enough to teach others.
(e.g. teaches other children how to do things; explains things so that others can understand; explains areas of interest to adults)

SA[10] 0 0 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

A personal example:
- He taught me how to play multiplayer 'Star Wars' and helped me work out if the lights in the game were right.
- He taught a friend of ours how to turn off wifi and volume apps on an iphone in order to conserve battery power.

7. Is comfortable around adults.
(e.g. spends time with and talks to adults who visit the house; likes the company of adults; enjoys talking with adults; understands adult humour and creates funny sayings or jokes adults can appreciate)

SA[10] 0 0 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD

A personal example:
- He always spent time with adults - I guess he doesn't have much choice being an only child.
- He would often ask me or his mum questions about how interesting he can be; particularly when we were playing a board game (for example) - he liked to teach people the rules.
- He also likes being the 'house centre' - he likes to show people the great rooms so they can put their bag down.
8. Shows leadership abilities
(e.g. other children ask my child for help; organizes games and activities for self
or others; makes up the rules and directs group activities; may be bossy)
SA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD
Unclear or don’t know
A personal example:
- The even other children ask help when building things or put
- things together. This makes them USE their tools.
- He doesn’t decide when he has created his own game.
- He makes up the rules that he wants everyone to follow.
- He built a castle that no one could climb. Then, when the others
- made more blocks, he could use a tower. Appropriately, you couldn’t
- enter without a brick."

9. Is resourceful and improvises well.
(e.g. puts together various household objects to make inventions or solve a
problem; uses unusual objects for projects; objects in unusual ways; makes
"something out of nothing")
SA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD
Unclear or don’t know
A personal example:
- Always brings home creative for school, "multicolors," "toothpaste,"
- "gum paste" make doll of recycled materials.
- Loves playing with pop to create "creatures, vampires, etc.
- He made me a model of a character from a show called
- "Mars Attacks."" Made out of cardboard and recycled materials.

10. Uses imaginative methods to accomplish tasks.
(e.g. makes creative short cuts; doesn’t always follow the rules; good at finding
creative ways to get out of work)
SA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 SD
Unclear or don’t know
A personal example:
- I’m not sure if it always work or creating — but
- always manages to get out of things he needs to
do. He will listen to your instructions, and if he determines
that he doesn’t like it, he will say "Who said..."
- then proceed to tell you how he wants to do something.

Michael Safer, Investigation of Talented Students, University of North Texas, Denton, TX
11. Use the rest of this page or its back to tell us anything you think is important about your child that we have not asked about. Please feel free to add any information you think might be useful in giving us a clear picture of what your child has done. Be as specific as possible in describing your child’s interests and accomplishments. If you can share some copies of your child’s creative work, we would be delighted to have them.

- **is very musical. He has always had a great sense of rhythm and took to the drums without much effort. It was one of the first areas in which we noticed some level of special ability. He is currently taking kinderbach lessons in ** and is learning to read music.

  He learned his wood to I saw Her Standing There by the Beatles when he was 3 years old - I have a video of his performance.

- **is also a very good problem solver. He tries to find the source of the problem - as he came in from the backyard after playing and looked the sliding door before closing it - as a result, he would lock the lock couldn’t lock onto the catch on the sliding door. He inspected the lock and realized what he had done and that the lock couldn’t hook onto the catch on the door frame. So he unlocked the sliding door and then closed it - he was happy when the lock worked properly!
Appendix H: Phase I parent questionnaire

Parent Questionnaire 1: Phase I Identification
The Gifted Child’s Transition to School (HREC No. 2012/119)
Nikki Masters (PhD student)

This study explores the experiences of young gifted children beginning primary school in rural and regional New South Wales in 2013.

Please read the attached information letter carefully before completing this questionnaire.

**Part A: Participant profile:**

1. Name of Focus Child: ___________________________________________
2. Age of focus child______________
3. Sex of focus child: Male ☐ Female ☐
4. Your gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
5. Your age: < 30 ☐ 30-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ > 51 ☐
6. Position of focus child in the family: _____________________________
7. Childcare arrangements i.e. where, cared for by whom and for how many days:
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
8. Attendance at pre-school: Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment: ___________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
9. Mother’s education level:
   SC ☐ HSC ☐ TAFE ☐ University (undergrad.) ☐ University (postgrad.) ☐
10. Father’s education level:
    SC ☐ HSC ☐ TAFE ☐ University (undergrad.) ☐ University (postgrad.) ☐
Part B: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the initial identification experiences of you and your child.

1. Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on the characteristics and identification of gifted children:

| very poorly informed | poorly informed | somewhat informed | well informed | very well informed |

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

2. What characteristics has your child displayed that suggest to you they are 'different' from other children?

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

3. Has your child been involved in any experiences that have considered identifying your child as gifted? For example: formal testing by a psychologist, testing by a pre-school educator or Kindergarten teacher:

Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment __________________________

____________________________________________________________

4. Have your child’s teachers identified your child as gifted?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment __________________________

____________________________________________________________

5. Has your child’s pre-school teacher or any other specialists been involved in the identification of your child as gifted?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment __________________________

____________________________________________________________

6. What areas of development and learning demonstrated by your child do you value as the most important indicator/s of giftedness? ______________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

7. What experiences related to the identification of your child as gifted would you consider were the most positive? ________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

8. What experiences related to the identification of your child as gifted would you consider were the most negative?

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________
9. If you identified your child as gifted, have you communicated this to your child’s pre-school educator? Please comment ______________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

10. Do you believe the labelling of your child as gifted has changed your expectations for your child’s achievement?

Yes □ No □ Please comment ________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

11. Do you believe the labelling of your child as gifted has changed their pre-school educators expectations for your child’s achievement?

Yes □ No □ Please comment ________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

12. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the identification of your child as gifted or their pre-school educational experience? ______________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

Part C: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the educational experiences of your child.

1. Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on the educational needs of gifted children:

| very poorly informed | poorly informed | somewhat informed | well informed | very well informed |

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

The Home Learning Environment

2. In relation to the needs and experiences of your gifted child, have you (you may tick more than one box):

Attended a conference □ Attended an information evening □
Read books or journals □ Enrolled in a parenting course □
Had discussions with teachers or professionals in the field of gifted education □
Other (please specify)
3. Have any support services specifically catering for the needs of gifted children been recommended to you?

Yes □ No □ Please comment __________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. In relation to the identification of your child as gifted, have you sought assistance or utilised any of the following resources from organisations or services specifically established to cater for the needs of gifted children and their families? (You may tick more than one box)

Internet access or website □ Telephone information □ Pamphlets □
Professional development □ Newsletters □ Checklists □
Professionals (Psychologists or experts in the field of gifted education) □
Other (please specify) __________________________
Please comment __________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

5. What has been done to meet the educational needs of your child at home?
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

The Pre-School Environment

1. What does your child most enjoy about pre-school at present? Why?
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What does your child find most challenging about pre-school at present? Why? __________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

3. What areas of development and learning do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of your child? __________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Are you aware if the pre-school specifically uses a gifted policy when planning and programming educational experiences for your child?

Yes □ No □ Please comment __________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

5. What educational experiences or strategies have been utilised or suggested to meet the needs of your child in pre-school?
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
6. During your child’s time at pre-school, are you aware of any changes been made to planning and programming in order to improve the educational experiences planned for your child?

Yes □ No □ Please comment ____________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7. Have you been involved in any stage/s of the planning and programming of educational experiences for your child?

Yes □ No □ Please comment ____________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

8. Has your child been involved in any stage/s of the planning and programming of educational experiences for him/her?

Yes □ No □ Please comment ____________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the identification of your child’s pre-school educational experience?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences, opinions and suggestions. Your input is greatly appreciated.

As I have previously discussed with you, I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the information contained in this questionnaire by scheduling a conversation with you where you can explain or elaborate further on the information you have provided.

It would be extremely helpful if you could bring along any items related to the experiences of your child that you feel may assist with your responses to the questionnaire (e.g. records of developmental milestones, diary entries, reports, art work, stories etc).

It is anticipated that this structured conversation will take about 45 minutes. Would you be willing to be involved in such a conversation?

Yes □ No □

If ‘yes’, could you please supply some details so that I may contact you to make arrangements?

Name: ______________________________________________________
Phone: _____________________________________________________
E-mail: _____________________________________________________

Thank you
Appendix I: Phase II parent questionnaire

Parent Questionnaire 2: Phase II Prior-to-school entry

Project title: The Gifted Child’s Transition to School (HREC No. 2012/119)
Nikki Masters (PhD student)

This study explores the experiences of young gifted children beginning primary school in rural and regional New South Wales in 2013.

Please read the attached information letter carefully before completing this questionnaire.

Part A: Participant profile:

1. Name of Focus Child: ___________________________________________
2. Age of focus child __________________
3. Sex of focus child: Male ☐ Female ☐
4. Your gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
5. Your age: < 30 ☐ 30-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ > 51 ☐
6. Position of focus child in the family: ______________________________
7. Childcare arrangements i.e. where, cared for by whom and for how many days: _______________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
8. Attendance at pre-school: Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment: ____________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
9. Mother’s education level
   SC ☐ HSC ☐ TAFE ☐ University (undergraduate) ☐ University (postgraduate) ☐
10. Father’s education level
    SC ☐ HSC ☐ TAFE ☐ University (undergraduate) ☐ University (postgraduate) ☐
Part B: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the special needs of your child.

1. Do you believe your gifted child has special needs regarding their primary school education?
   Yes □ No □ Please comment __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

2. Do you believe these special needs impact upon your child’s transition to school?
   Yes □ No □ Please comment __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

Part C: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the educational experiences of your child.

1. Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on the educational needs of gifted children.
   _______ _______ _______ _______ _______
   very poorly informed poorly informed somewhat informed well informed very well informed

2. At what age do you believe a child should start school? __________ Please comment __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

3. At what age do you believe a gifted child should start school? __________ Please comment __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

4. Has the identification of your child as gifted changed your expectations regarding school?
   Yes □ No □ Please comment __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

5. Has the identification of your child as gifted changed your child’s expectations regarding school?
   Yes □ No □ Please comment __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
Part D: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on your child’s transition to school.

1. What have you done to help your child get ready for school? 
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

2. What would you like to see take place in the transition to school process? 
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

3. When do you believe Kindergarten children should begin attending full days of school? Please comment
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences, opinions and suggestions. Your input is greatly appreciated.

As I have previously discussed with you, I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the information contained in this pre-interview questionnaire by scheduling a conversation with you where you can explain or elaborate further on the information you have provided.

It would be extremely helpful if you could bring along any items related to the experiences of your child that you feel may assist with your responses to the questionnaire (e.g. records of developmental milestones, diary entries, reports, art work, stories etc).

It is anticipated that this structured conversation will take about 45 minutes. Would you be willing to be involved in such a conversation?

Yes □  No □

If ‘yes’, could you please supply some details so that I may contact you to make arrangements?

Name: ________________________________________________________
Phone: __________________________ E-mail: _______________________

Thank you
Appendix J: Phase III parent questionnaire

Parent Questionnaire 3: *Phase III - Post school entry*

**Project title:** The Gifted Child’s Transition to School (HREC No. 2012/119)
Nikki Masters (PhD student)

This study explores the experiences of young gifted children beginning primary school in rural and regional New South Wales in 2013.

Please read the attached information letter carefully before completing this questionnaire.

**Part A: Participant profile:**

1. Name of Focus Child: _________________________________________
2. Your gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
3. Your age: < 30 ☐ 30-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ > 51 ☐
4. Position of focus child in the family: ____________________________
5. Childcare arrangements i.e. where, cared for by whom and for how many days:
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
6. Attendance at pre-school: Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment: ___________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
7. Mother’s education level
   SC ☐ HSC ☐ TAFE ☐ University (undergraduate) ☐ University (postgraduate) ☐
8. Father’s education level
   SC ☐ HSC ☐ TAFE ☐ University (undergraduate) ☐ University (postgraduate) ☐

**Part B:** This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on your child’s transition to school.

1. Are you happy with how your child has made the transition to school?
   Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment ________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
2. Was there anything you would like to change about your child’s transition to school?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment ________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

3. What do you believe has had a significant impact in your child’s transition to school? (You may tick more than one box):

Your child’s Kindergarten teacher ☐ Your child’s pre-school educator ☐
Your child’s school principal ☐ Your child’s pre-school director ☐
The pre-school's transition program ☐
The primary school’s transition program ☐
Other (please specify) _________________________________________
Please comment: _____________________________________________

4. Do you believe the identification of your child as gifted has impacted upon their transition to school?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment ________________________________
__________________________________________________________

5. What changes would you like to see made regarding gifted children’s transition to school?

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

6. Do you believe gifted children have special needs regarding the transition to school?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment ________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Part C: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the educational experiences of your child.

1. What does your child most enjoy about school at present? Why?

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

2. What does your child find most challenging about school at present? Why?

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

3. What areas of development and learning do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of your child?

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
4. Do you believe gifted children have special needs regarding their education?
Yes □ No □ Please comment _________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

5. Do you believe your child’s Kindergarten teacher has adjusted their expectations due to your child’s labeling as gifted?
Yes □ No □ Please comment _________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

6. Do you believe your child’s Kindergarten teacher has adjusted their teaching due to your child’s labeling as gifted?
Yes □ No □ Please comment _________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Do you believe the identification of your child as gifted has impacted upon their educational experiences?
Yes □ No □ Please comment _________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

8. Was there anything else you wanted to mention regarding your child’s transition to school? ___________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences, opinions and suggestions. Your input is greatly appreciated.

As I have previously discussed with you, I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the information contained in this pre-interview questionnaire by scheduling an interview with you where you can explain or elaborate further on the information you have provided.

It would be extremely helpful if you could bring along any items related to the experiences of your child that you feel may assist with your responses to the questionnaire (e.g. records of developmental milestones, diary entries, reports, art work, stories etc).

It is anticipated that this structured conversation will take about 45 minutes. Would you be willing to be involved in such a conversation?
Yes □ No □
If ‘yes’, could you please supply some details so that I may contact you to make arrangements?
Name: ______________________________________________________
Phone: ______________________ E-mail: _________________________

Thank you
Nikki Masters       (Ph) 0431284827       (email) nmasters@csu.edu.au
Appendix K: Phase I pre-school teacher questionnaire

Pre-school Educator Questionnaire: Phase I Identification

Project title: The Gifted Child’s Transition to School (HREC No. 2012/119)
Nikki Masters (PhD student)
This study explores the experiences of young gifted children beginning primary school in rural and regional New South Wales in 2013.

Please read the attached information letter carefully before completing this questionnaire.

Part A: Participant profile:

1. Name of Focus Child: ___________________________________________
2. Gender: Male □ Female □
3. Age: < 30 □ 30-40 □ 41-50 □ > 51 □
4. Current position: Pre-school teacher □ Director □ Assistant □
5. No. of years in teaching: < 5 □ 5-10 □ 10-15 □ 15-20 □ 20-25 □ > 25 □
6. Qualifications: ____________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
7. Year most recent qualification gained: _________________________________
8. Size of pre-school ______________________________________________

Part B: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information the identification of the gifted child

1. Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on the characteristics and identification of gifted children.

   | very poorly | poorly | somewhat | well | very well | informed | informed | informed | informed | informed |

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. What characteristics has the focus child displayed that suggest to you they are ‘different’ from other children? ____________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
2. What characteristics has the focus child displayed that suggest to you they are gifted?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. What areas of development and learning demonstrated by the focus child have you valued as the most important indicator/s of giftedness?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. Have you been involved in the identification of the focus child as gifted?
Yes □  No □  Please comment __________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5. Have the focus child’s parents been involved in the identification of the focus child as gifted?
Yes □  No □  Please comment __________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

6. Have any other specialists or teachers been involved in the identification of the focus child as gifted?
Yes □  No □  Please comment __________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7. Do you believe the identification of a pre-school child as gifted impacts upon their transition to school?
Yes □  No □  Please comment __________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Part C: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the educational experiences of the focus child.

1. Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on the educational needs of gifted children.

very poorly           poorly          somewhat          well           very well
informed              informed        informed         informed        informed

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

2. Do you believe the focus child has special needs regarding their education?
   Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

3. Has the identification of the focus child as gifted changed your expectations for that child?
   Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

4. In relation to the identification of the focus child as gifted, have you sought assistance or utilised any of the following resources from organisations or services specifically established to cater for the needs of gifted children and their families? (You may tick more than one box)
   Internet access or website ☐ Telephone information ☐ Pamphlets ☐
   Professional development ☐ Newsletters ☐ Checklists ☐
   Professionals (Psychologists or experts in the field of gifted education ☐
   Other (please specify) _________________________________________
   Please comment
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

5. In relation to the needs and experiences of the focus child, have you (you may tick more than one box):
   Attended a conference ☐
   Attended an information evening ☐
   Read books or journals ☐
   Had discussions with teachers or professionals in the field of gifted education ☐
   Other (please specify) _________________________________________
   Please comment: _____________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
6. Have you been recommended any support services specifically catering for the needs of gifted children?

Yes □ No □ Please comment ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7. Does your pre-school have a gifted policy?

Yes □ No □ Please comment ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

8. During the focus child’s time at pre-school, have any changes been made to planning and programming in order to improve the educational experiences planned for the focus child?

Yes □ No □ Please comment ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9. If any changes have been made, who has been involved in any stage/s of the planning and programming of educational experiences for the focus child? For example, the child, their parents or other specialists. Please comment ____________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

10. What areas of development and learning do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of the focus child? ________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

11. What does the focus child find most challenging about pre-school at present? ________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

12. What does the focus child enjoy most about pre-school at present? ________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

13. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the educational experiences of the focus child?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences, opinions and suggestions. Your input is greatly appreciated.

As I have previously discussed with you, I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the information contained in this pre-interview questionnaire by
scheduling a structured interview with you where you can explain or elaborate further on the information you have provided.

It would be extremely helpful if you could bring along any items related to the experiences of the focus child that you feel may assist with your responses to the questionnaire (e.g. records of developmental milestones, diary entries, reports, assessments, art work, stories etc).

It is anticipated that this structured conversation will take about 45 minutes. Would you be willing to be involved in such a conversation?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'yes', could you please supply some details so that I may contact you to make arrangements?

Name: ______________________________________________________
Phone: _____________________________________________________
E-mail: ______________________________________________________

Thank you

Nikki Masters       (phone) 0431284827       (email)
nmasters@csu.edu.au
Appendix L: Phase III Kindergarten teacher questionnaire

Kindergarten Teacher Questionnaire: Phase III Post-school entry

Project title: The Gifted Child’s Transition to School (HREC No. 2012/119)
Nikki Masters (PhD student)

Please read the attached information letter carefully before completing this questionnaire.

Part A: Participant profile:

1. Name of Focus Child: ___________________________________________
2. Your Gender: Male □ Female □
3. Your Age: < 30 □ 30-40 □ 41-50 □ > 51 □
4. Current position: Classroom teacher □ Executive teacher □ Principal □
5. No. of years in teaching: < 5 □ 5-10 □ 10-15 □ 15-20 □ 20-25 □ > 25 □
6. Qualifications: ____________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
7. Year most recent qualification gained: _______________________________
8. Size of school: ________________________________________________

Part B: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the identification of the focus child as gifted.

1. Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on the characteristics and identification of gifted children.

very poorly            poorly                   somewhat                 well        very well
informed            informed                 informed               informed informed

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

2. What characteristics has the focus child displayed that suggest to you they are ‘different’ from other children? ____________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

3. What characteristics has the focus child displayed that suggest to you they are gifted? ____________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
4. Have you used any identification strategies or approaches to confirm that the focus child should be identified as gifted?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

5. Have any other specialists or teachers used any identification strategies or approaches to confirm that the focus child should be identified as gifted?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

6. Has the identification of the focus child as gifted changed your expectations of them?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

7. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the identification experiences of the focus child? _________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

Part C: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the transition to school of the focus child.

1. At what age do you believe a child should start school? _______________
   Please comment _________________________
   _______________________________________
   _______________________________________
   _______________________________________

2. At what age do you believe a gifted child should start school? _________
   Please comment _________________________
   _______________________________________
   _______________________________________
   _______________________________________

3. When should Kindergarten children start attending full days of school? Why?
   _______________________________________
   _______________________________________
   _______________________________________
   _______________________________________

4. Do you believe the focus child has had a positive transition to school?
   Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
   _______________________________________
   _______________________________________
   _______________________________________
   _______________________________________

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5. Are you happy with how the focus child has made the transition to school?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment ____________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

6. Was there anything you would like to change about the focus child’s transition to school?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment ____________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

7. Do you believe the identification of the focus child as gifted has impacted upon their transition to school?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment ____________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

8. What do you believe has had a significant impact on the focus child’s transition to school? (You may tick more than one box):
The child’s parents ☐ The child’s pre-school educator ☐
Your school principal ☐ The child’s pre-school director ☐
The pre-school’s transition program ☐
The primary school’s transition program ☐
Other (please specify) ____________________________
Please comment: ___________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

9. What changes would you like to see made regarding a gifted child’s transition to school? ____________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

10. Do you believe gifted children have special needs regarding the transition to school?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment ____________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

11. Were cross-age buddies involved in this child’s transition to school?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment ____________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
12. Does the focus child have an older sibling/s who you believe have helped this child’s transition to school?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

13. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the transition experience of the focus child?
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

**Part D:** This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the educational experiences of the focus child.

1. Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on the educational needs of gifted children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>very poorly</th>
<th>poorly</th>
<th>somewhat</th>
<th>well</th>
<th>very well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>informed</td>
<td>informed</td>
<td>informed</td>
<td>informed</td>
<td>informed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please answer the following questions in the space provided.*

2. Do you consider the focus child to have any special needs regarding their education?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

3. In relation to the focus child’s identification as gifted, have you sought assistance or utilised any resources from organisations or services specifically established to cater for the educational needs of gifted children? (You may tick more than one box)

- Internet access or website ☐
- Telephone information ☐
- Pamphlets ☐
- Professional development ☐
- Newsletters ☐
- Checklists ☐
- Professionals (Psychologists or experts in the field of gifted education) ☐
- Other (please specify __________________________________________

Please comment ______________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

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4. In relation to the needs and experiences of the focus child, have you (you may tick more than one box):

Attended a conference ☐
Attended an information evening ☐
Read books or journals ☐
Had discussions with teachers or professionals in the field of gifted education
Other (please specify) __________________________________________

Please comment: _____________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

5. Have you been recommended any support services specifically catering for the needs of gifted children?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

6. Does your school have a gifted policy or program?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

7. Are you aware if the school specifically uses a gifted policy when planning and programming to meet the educational needs of the focus child?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment _________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

8. What has been your role or influence in the planning and programming of educational experiences for the focus child? _________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

9. What educational experiences or strategies have been utilised or suggested to meet the needs of the focus child in school?
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

10. Who has been involved in any stage/s of the planning and programming of educational experiences for the focus child? For example the child, their parents or other specialists. Please comment
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
11. During the focus child’s time at school, have you made any changes to planning and programming in order to improve the educational experiences planned for the focus child?
Yes ☐ No ☐ Please comment ____________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

12. What areas of learning and development do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of the focus child? ____________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

13. What does the focus child find most challenging about school at present? ____________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

14. What does the focus child enjoy most about school at present?
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

15. What areas of development and learning do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of the focus child? ____________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

16. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the educational experiences of the focus child?
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences, opinions and suggestions. Your input is greatly appreciated.

As I have previously discussed with you, I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the information contained in this pre-interview questionnaire by scheduling an interview with you where you can explain or elaborate further on the information you have provided.

It would be extremely helpful if you could bring along any items related to the experiences of the focus child that you feel may assist with your responses to the questionnaire (e.g. records of developmental milestones, diary entries, reports, assessments, art work, stories etc).
It is anticipated that this structured conversation will take about 45 minutes. Would you be willing to be involved in such a conversation?
Yes ☐ No ☐

If ‘yes’, could you please supply some details so that I may contact you to make arrangements?
Name: ________________________________________________
Phone: ___________________________ E-mail: ___________________________

Thank you

Nikki Masters (Ph) 0431284827 (email) nmasters@csu.edu.au
Appendix M: Phase I parent conversation questions

Parent Structured conversation 1: Phase I Identification

Project title: The Gifted Child’s Transition to School
Researcher: Nikki Masters (PhD student)

You have previously completed a questionnaire regarding your child’s identification as gifted. This structured conversation will now follow up your responses to that questionnaire. It is expected to take 45 minutes and, if you consent, will be audio recorded to help me transcribe the interviews.

Part B: This section of the conversation has been designed to gather information on the initial identification experiences of you and your child.

1. You rated yourself as ___________ regarding characteristics and identification of gifted children. Can you tell me where you gained this knowledge? (personal experiences with the focus child, university, parent-teacher information sessions and interviews, reading etc).

2. You mentioned the characteristics your child displayed that suggest to you they are ‘different’ from other children? Can you tell me when you first began to think they were different?

3. You mentioned that you have/haven’t communicated your child’s giftedness to their pre-school educator? Can you tell me why or why not?

4. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the identification of your child as gifted?

Part C: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the educational experiences of your child.

1. You rated yourself as ___________ regarding the education of gifted children. Can you tell me where you gained this knowledge? (personal experiences with the focus child, university, parent-teacher information sessions and interviews, reading etc)

2. Prior to the identification of _______________ as gifted, how would you describe his/her pre-school experiences?

3. Following identification of your child as gifted, how would you describe his/her pre-school experiences?
4. In the questionnaire you commented that you believe the labelling of your child as gifted has changed your expectations for your child’s achievement? Can you tell me more about this?

5. In the questionnaire you commented that you believe the labelling of your child as gifted has changed their pre-school educators expectations for your child’s achievement?

6. Would you describe how your child’s interests and needs are catered for in his/her current pre-school setting?

7. In your opinion, how would ________________ interests and needs be better catered for?

8. Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the pre-school educational experience of your child?

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences, opinions and suggestions. Your input is greatly appreciated. I look forward to seeing you again when Phase II: Prior-to-school entry begins in September.
Appendix N: Phase II parent conversation questions

Parent Structured Conversation 2: *Phase II Prior-to-school*

**Project title:** The Gifted Child’s Transition to School  
**Researcher:** Nikki Masters (PhD student)

You have previously participated in Phase I. In Phase II you have completed a questionnaire regarding your child’s transition to school. This structured conversation will now follow up your responses to that questionnaire. It is expected to take 45 minutes and, if you consent, will be audio recorded to help me transcribe the interviews.

**Part B:** *This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the special needs of your child.*

1. In the questionnaire you mentioned you believe your child’s special needs were _______________ regarding their primary school education? Can you tell me more?

2. Can you tell me how these special needs will impact upon your child’s transition to school?

**Part C:** *This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the educational experiences of your child.*

1. In your questionnaire you rated yourself as _________ regarding how well informed you consider yourself to be on the educational needs of gifted children. Can you tell me more about this?

2. You mentioned that you believe gifted children should start school at the same age/at a different age as children not identified as gifted. Can you tell me more about this?

3. Did you consider early entry to school for your child?

**Part D:** *This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on your child’s transition to school.*

1. What have you done at home to prepare your child for school?

2. What are some of the things your child’s pre-school has done to prepare your child for school?

3. You mentioned that you would like to see ________________ happen in the transition process. Can you tell me more?

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences, opinions and suggestions. Your input is greatly appreciated. I look forward to seeing you again when Phase III: School entry begins next year.
Appendix O: Phase III parent conversation questions

Parent Structured Conversation 3: Phase III Post school entry

Project title: The Gifted Child’s Transition to School (HREC No. 2012/119)

Researcher: Nikki Masters (PhD student)

You have previously participated in Phase I & II. In Phase III, the final phase of the study you have completed a questionnaire regarding your child’s transition to school. This structured conversation will now follow up your responses to that questionnaire. It is expected to take 45 minutes and, if you consent, will be audio recorded to help me transcribe the interviews.

Part B: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on your child’s transition to school.

1. You mentioned you are happy/unhappy about how your child has made the transition to school? Do you believe there was anything that would have made a difference to this outcome?

2. You mentioned that you believe the identification of your child as gifted has/hasn’t impacted upon their transition to school? Can you tell me more?

3. You mentioned gifted children have special needs such as _______________ regarding the transition to school? Can you tell me more?

Part C: This section of the questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the educational experiences of your child.

1. You mentioned ____________________________ were the areas of development and learning you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of your child? Can you tell me more?

2. You mentioned in the questionnaire you believe the identification of your child as gifted has/hasn’t impacted upon their educational experiences? Can you tell me more?

3. You commented in the questionnaire that you believe your child’s Kindergarten teacher has/hasn’t adjusted their expectations due to your child’s labeling as gifted? Can you tell me more?

4. You commented in the questionnaire that you believe your child’s Kindergarten teacher has/hasn’t adjusted their teaching due to your child’s labeling as gifted? Can you tell me more?

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences, opinions and suggestions in the three phases of this study. Your input is greatly appreciated.
15 August 2012

Mrs Nikki Masters
School of Education
Charles Sturt University
PO Box 789
ALBURY NSW 2640

Dear Mrs Masters,

Your research proposal entitled “The Gifted Child’s Transition to School” has been reviewed by Charles Sturt University’s (CSU) Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

The CSU HREC operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans.

I am pleased to advise that the project meets the requirements of the National Statement; and ethical approval for this research is granted for a twelve month period from 15/8/2012.

The protocol number issued with respect to this project is 2012/119. Please be sure to quote this number when responding to any request made by the Committee.

Please note the following conditions of approval:

- all Consent Forms and Information Sheets are to be printed on Charles Sturt University letterhead. Students should liaise with their Supervisor to arrange to have these documents printed;
- you must notify the Committee immediately in writing should your research differ in any way from that proposed. Forms are available at http://www.csu.edu.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0010/176833/ehrec_annrep.doc
- you must notify the Committee immediately if any serious and or unexpected adverse events or outcomes occur associated with your research, that might affect the participants and therefore ethical acceptability of the project. An Adverse Incident form is available from the website: as above;
- amendments to the research design must be reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee before commencement. Forms are available at the website above;

Version 2

PRA
• if an extension of the approval period is required, a request must be submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee. Forms are available at the website above;
• you are required to complete a Progress Report form, which can be downloaded as above, by 15/8/13 if your research has not been completed by that date;
• you are required to submit a final report, the form is available from the website above.

YOU ARE REMINDED THAT AN APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE CSU HREC CONSTITUTES ETHICAL APPROVAL ONLY.

If your research involves the use of radiation, biological materials, chemicals or animals a separate approval is required from the appropriate University Committee.

The Committee wishes you well in your research and please do not hesitate to contact the Executive Officer on telephone (02) 6338 4628 or email ethics@csu.edu.au if you have any enquiries.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Julie Hicks
Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Direct Telephone: (02) 6338 4628
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au
Appendix Q: Ethics approval for Catholic schools

20 March 2013

Nikki Masters
School of Education
Charles Sturt University
PO Box 789
ALBURY NSW 2640

Dear Nikki,

I refer to your application seeking permission to contact Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Wagga Wagga in order to conduct research for your study titled “The transition to primary school for children identified as gifted”.

I wish to advise that approval is granted for you to approach the schools in the Diocese of Wagga Wagga in order to seek their willingness to participate in this research. However, the decision to participate is the prerogative of the Principal.

Should you require further details, please do not hesitate to contact Rosemary Clarke at this office on (02) 69370048.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Bowyer
Director of Schools
Appendix R: Ethics approval for NSW DEC schools

SERAP APPROVAL LETTER

Mrs Nikki Masters
643 David Street
ALBURY NSW 2640

SERAP number: 2013060

Dear Nikki,

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled ‘The transition to school of children identified as gifted’. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved. You may now contact the principals of the Riverina schools, as indicated in your research proposal, to seek their approval to commence your research.

Your approval will remain valid until 2 April 2014.

You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to the Riverina School Principals, as indicated in your research proposal.

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

- School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time.
- The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering data must be also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school’s convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the Research Approvals Officer before publication proceeds.

When your study is completed, please forward two hard copies of your report. One should be mailed to the DEC regional office which processed your application and the second to the General Manager, Planning and Innovation, Department of Education and Communities, GPO Box 33, Sydney, NSW 2001.

Yours sincerely

Ken Davis
School Development Officer
Riverina Region
2 April 2013
Appendix S: Statements for level two analysis

i. Continuity of pedagogy

**Process.**

- For Sam, his Kindergarten teacher’s preference for teaching Kindergarten supported the development of positive relationships throughout the year. As the co-located pre-school and school spent lots of time together throughout the year, Sam knew the Kindergarten teacher quite well and this supported a positive transition. The consistency of Kindergarten teacher also supported continuity of pedagogy. Had the Kindergarten teacher moved to teach another year level the following year, both the relationship and the familiar environment would not have been as significant in Sam’s transition to school.

- Both Claudia and Sophia spent time in the Kindergarten classroom in the year prior to starting school. Their elder sisters had begun Kindergarten and their mothers were parent helpers in the classroom. This meant that both Claudia and Sophie spent time in the Kindergarten classroom in their year prior to starting school. More importantly, when they did start school both girls had the same Kindergarten teacher as their elder sibling - teacher that they had already developed a relationship with in a classroom they were very familiar with.

**Person.**

- Both Hugh and Andrew experienced changes in their teacher during Term One and this impacted upon their child-teacher relationships. Hugh’s teacher began maternity leave and Andrew's teacher took personal leave. For Andrew, this was disruptive. Initially the school was unable to say when, and if, his Kindergarten teacher would return. This continued for over a
month, before a new Kindergarten teacher took over. However Hugh’s experience was not as disruptive. With his Kindergarten teacher’s departure given a firm date, the school was able to organise a ‘hand over’ between the two teachers. While both schools endeavoured to provide some continuity of pedagogy during the changes of teachers, each replacement teacher bought their own person characteristics to their classroom.

**Context.**
For some children in the study, attending co-located primary schools was beneficial. For example:

- For Sam and Sophie, attending a primary school on the same grounds assisted in smooth transitions to school. Both children had spent lots of time in the primary school so were familiar with the school environment and its organisational factors such as bells, toilets and safe play areas.

- Hugh’s parents were conscious that as he would be attending a Catholic school, religion would bring an added complexity to his transition to school. With this in mind, Hugh’s family began to regularly attend Mass at Hugh’s school. They wanted Hugh, and their younger children, to be familiar with the religious aspect of school.

**Time.**
For the children identified as gifted, time became an important element in the final stages of their pre-school education. In their final term of pre-school, their pre-school teacher’s focused upon school readiness, in particular children’s social-emotional and attention related development. For example:

- Sam, Fergus and Andrew attended the same pre-school. While Sam had a different teacher to Fergus and Andrew, their
teachers’ worked closely together and their approaches were similar. The final term of pre-school focused upon children becoming more responsible and independent. Children were asked to unpack their own bags and were taught to write their name. This period also involved the children beginning to work in small groups, playing some literacy and counting games with an adult.

For some children in the study, time was important:

- Orientation sessions were planned to occur at different times of the day, and also gradually extended the time the children spent at school. This allowed children to experience a whole day of school, albeit over a period of time.

Time was also important once children had started school.

- For Fergus and Annabel, the time their Kindergarten teachers allowed for children to settle in to school created difficulties. These teachers allocated Term One to the development of routines. This meant that both Fergus and Annabel had started school keen to learn and this was not the focus of their teachers.

For parents, the PPCT element of time was also important.

- Both Advit and Andrew, whose parents worked long hours, spent most of their afternoons in OOSH, only leaving school at 6 p.m. Prior to starting school these two children had been in childcare until early evening so in this way their attendance at OOSH, was similar to their previous arrangements. However, once the children were attending school, OOSH became an additional bioecological context so the time element was also relevant. At the end of the school day these two children moved contexts and their time in the OOSH context began. The
children were in a different educational environment, with different teachers, children and activities.

ii. Approach to learning and development

Process.
The process element considers interactions as an integral component of bioecological theory. Interactions such as play and learning new skills – interactions regularly occurring in the lives of the child participants – are considered.

For some children in the study, having older siblings at school provided opportunities for stimulating interactions. For example:

- Sophie and Claudia had elder sisters, close in age, who both started school in the year before their younger sisters. This meant that Sophie and Claudia experienced their elder sisters’ completing Kindergarten homework, which consisted of reading, practicing sight words and counting. This relationship was an advantage for Sophie and Claudia. They were exposed to aspects of the Kindergarten curriculum, in particular home readers, prior to starting school. They learned alongside their sisters and demonstrated advanced abilities.

- Children such as Annabel and Kabir also had elder siblings attending school. However, their siblings were older than Sophie and Claudia’s siblings. Annabel’s brother was in Year Two. Kabir’s older brother had already finished primary school and was attending high school. For Kabir, having an elder sibling did not provide such opportunities for stimulating interactions.

- Some children in the study had little access to the relationships and educational opportunities of Sophie and Claudia. Kaitlyn, Hugh, Fergus, Sam, Advit and Andrew were either the eldest,
or the only child in their families. Consequently, they were the first child in their family to start school. While all parent participants reported providing stimulating activities for their children at home, there was a difference between these opportunities and those provided by elder siblings completing homework. These children did not have the access to Kindergarten homework, and in particular readers, that Sophie and Claudia did.

For other children, the experiences of their parents influenced their transition. For example,

- Sophie’s father, also identified as gifted as a child, was concerned about his daughters being bullied at school. This influenced his relationships with his daughters. He did not want to focus on the children’s intellectual development. He just wanted them to be happy.

- For Andrew, his mother’s resource characteristics were also important. In the year prior to Andrew starting school his parents divorced. The divorce had three main impacts upon Andrew’s transition to school. Firstly, his mother’s desire for him to attend an independent school was in discord with the wishes of his father. A court case ensued and Andrew’s mother was unable to determine which school Andrew was to attend until a legal decision was made. The delay in finalising a school for Andrew meant that during Phase I and II of the study, Andrew’s mother had enrolled him in three schools. Once a decision was finally made, two orientation sessions had already occurred and Andrew was only able to attend the school’s final orientation session.

The second consequence of Andrew’s parents’ divorce and his mother’s choice of school involved her finances. As Andrew’s father did not want him to attend an independent school, his
mother was solely responsible for payment of school fees. This meant his mother needed to work long hours in her business.

Andrew’s parents’ divorce created a third consequence for Andrew in his transition to school. While attending four-year-old pre-school, Andrew’s mother acted upon his pre-school teacher’s concerns about him being on the Autism Spectrum. She had Andrew assessed, but the family discord impacted upon the assessment results. Andrew’s father denied that his son exhibited any characteristics related to Autism and the initial assessment was inconclusive. However, when Andrew started school, the school also raised concerns about the possibility of Andrew being on the Autism Spectrum. By this stage, some harmony had developed between Andrew’s parents. Their assessment responses were consistent and Andrew was diagnosed as being twice-exceptional.

- For Sophie, her pre-school teacher’s previous experience as a Kindergarten and a Reading Recovery Teacher influenced their teacher-child relationship. It also meant that her teacher questioned what was necessary for ‘school readiness’. Sophie’s teacher focused upon children being confident and capable, rather than on being compliant and sitting quietly on the mat. This drew some criticism from one Kindergarten teacher in her co-located primary school. She complained, “It’s taken me five weeks to teach them to sit on the mat!”

- Advit’s pre-school teacher’s experiences with her own gifted children meant that she was familiar with the identification process and educational provisions. Consequently, Advit’s teacher developed a positive and supportive teacher-child relationship with him.
Kindergarten teachers’ approaches to the children’s learning and development were shaped by their knowledge and experience. This knowledge and experience was reflected in the activities, interactions and opportunities provided for the children identified as gifted. For example:

- Kabir’s Kindergarten teacher’s prior experience teaching children on the Autism Spectrum resulted in development of a positive and supportive teacher-child relationship. For example, Kabir’s Kindergarten teacher was able to quickly form a positive and supportive relationship with him. This relationship and experience helped her to focus upon his strengths, such as his fluent reading and his musical talents, while also catering for his social-emotional needs.

- Sam’s parents developed a strong parent-teacher relationship with Sam’s Kindergarten teacher. Their wish for a ‘well rounded’ education, focusing upon both Sam’s strengths and needs, sat well with the Kindergarten teacher’s philosophy, and resulted in a united approach to his learning and development.

In contrast, the rigid approaches to learning and development adopted by some teachers created difficulties for some children. For example:

- Attending the same school, the focus of Fergus and Annabel’s teachers was on the development of routines and compliance, and this was frustrating for both children; they were keen to learn.

**Person.**

For many children in the study, the person element – in particular their families’ resource characteristics, impacted upon their transition to school. For example:
• With two working parents and four children under eight, Annabel’s busy home life meant she was often involved in helping her mother with housework, and Annabel seemed to enjoy this role. This meant she demonstrated maturity and responsibility beyond her years. However, Annabel’s mother hoped that at school her daughter would be able to be herself.

• In contrast, Sam was an only child with two devoted parents. While his military parents worked irregular hours, they ensured that one of them was always able to drop off and pick up Sam from school. When both parents were serving overseas, Sam’s grandmother enjoyed the opportunity to spend time with her only grandchild.

• However, for Advit, also an only child, his parents’ careers meant they had little time available for him. They both worked very long hours and in the two years prior to starting school, Advit had spent five days a week in childcare and pre-school. Once Advit started school he attended out of school hours care until 6 p.m. each school day.

• Advit’s parents, both working long hours, had limited time to spend with their only child. However, they were committed to Advit’s education. In particular, Advit’s father’s force characteristics influenced his son’s transition to school. Advit’s father spent time challenging Advit. For example, he taught his son to recite the alphabet backwards and rewarded such shows of ability. When Advit was able to count to 100 his father gave him $100. Advit then asked how much was 1000? How many 100’s? His father told him that to count to 1000 he would count to 100 ten times. Advit said that he couldn’t count to 1000 but if he counted to 100 ten times would his father give him $1000? His father said that was good – he was too smart for his age! His father then rewarded Advit with a $1000 ipad. Advit’s father encouraged his son’s learning with financial rewards.
Advit’s parents’ resource characteristics were influenced by their difficulties having children. Advit’s mother, after being unable to conceive for 10 years, was finally successful and conceived twins through IVF. However, she had a very high-risk pregnancy and due to extreme gestational diabetes was confined to bed rest from five weeks. Despite this precaution, one twin miscarried at 14 weeks and Advit was born by caesarian at 32 weeks.

Also impacting upon children’s transition to school were children’s force characteristics. For example:

- Fergus’ impulsivity meant that his Kindergarten teacher focused upon his social-emotional and attention related skills, rather than his intellectual development.

- Claudia’s quiet and shy nature made her susceptible to becoming ‘invisible’ in both the pre-school and Kindergarten environment. However, in Kindergarten, this worked in her favour. Claudia’s teacher was aware that such a quiet and shy nature could influence her development, as she was reluctant to stand out from her peers. Catering for Claudia’s intellectual development, as well as her social-emotional and attention related skills became a focus for Claudia’s Kindergarten teacher.

- While school may sometimes be a stressful place for any child, Kabir’s anxiety, associated with his Autism Spectrum Disorder, meant that school was often stressful. However, his Kindergarten teacher put in place strategies to support Kabir in the new environment. For example, Kabir’s Year Six buddy spent the beginning of each lunchtime with him, ensuring that he settled.
The person characteristics of pre-school teachers, particularly their personality and temperament, influenced the children’s transition to school.

- Sophie’s Kindergarten teacher personality was vibrant and enthusiastic. She wanted children to have agency and independence when they started school and this influenced the educational provisions she provided at pre-school. However, such an approach created some conflict with one of the co-located primary school’s Kindergarten teachers – her conceptualisation of ‘school readiness’ was different from the pre-school teachers.

- Fergus and Andrew shared a pre-school teacher and her temperament, perhaps in combination with her background in early intervention, resulted in a very structured and well-organised classroom. This structure was beneficial for twice-exceptional Andrew and Fergus’ impulsivity and anxiousness.

- Annabel and Hugh shared the same pre-school teacher, who when approached about Annabel’s participation in the study declined to participate in the study, citing a reluctance to label young children as gifted. However, when again approached regarding participating as Hugh’s pre-school teacher, the pre-school teacher assented.

For many children in the study, their Kindergarten teachers’ temperament influenced their transition to school:

- Sam’s Kindergarten teacher’s temperament, demonstrated in her calm manner and passion for learning was reflected in the educational provisions she provided for her class. On the first day of Kindergarten she started reading Enid Blyton’s (1946) *The Folk of the Faraway Tree*. Sam’s teacher’s love of books, architecture and art was evident in the educational provisions
she provided. She wove art and culture into the Kindergarten curriculum, teaching children about the art of Monet, Degas and Van Gogh, for example, as well as famous buildings such as the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal and the Leaning Tower of Pisa. This fed Sam’s thirst for knowledge.

- Annabel’s Kindergarten teacher started the year under immense pressure and was not her usual calm organised self. Her husband was unwell and needed further medical tests with a specialist in Melbourne. There was a lengthy delay before they were able to see a specialist and this meant an anxious wait during first term.

- Claudia’s Kindergarten teacher saw her own quiet, reserved nature reflected in the child. This meant she was determined that Claudia wouldn’t go unnoticed. She worked on Claudia’s confidence and asked her if she would like to read a story to the class. Claudia surprised her Kindergarten teacher by being excited by this opportunity and proudly showed off her reading ability. This opportunity became a regular occurrence and provided Claudia with a social connection to her peers, who talked to her about her reading and always gave her a clap at the end.

- Kabir’s Kindergarten teacher’s temperament and knowledge of Autism, including her musical ability, enabled a connection between them. His teacher recognised his interest in music and his very good sense of rhythm and used this to connect with Kabir.

**Context.**
The family microsystem and the relationships within this microsystem contributed to each child’s transition to school. For example:
For Advit’s parents, their busy professional lives meant limited time with their only child. Advit was regularly at school until OOSH closed at 6 p.m. and he initially experienced difficulties at OOSH. He was tired by the long hours spent at school and was bullied by two other Kindergarten children.

Annabel’s busy mother wanted her eldest daughter to ‘be herself’ at school. She recognised the influence of the family microsystem in shaping Annabel’s personality and was concerned that Annabel would also become the responsible helper at school, at the expense of the development of other abilities.

For many children in the study, their pre-school teachers’ experiences shaped their child-teacher relationships. For example:

- For Fergus and Andrew, their pre-school teacher’s previous experience in early intervention meant she had a solid understanding of gifted education. However, it also meant that their strengths were not a priority for her.

- Other children experienced changes in their first term of Kindergarten. Both Hugh and Andrew experienced two Kindergarten teachers during their first term of school, resulting in changes in context for the children. Both replacement teachers were new graduates and relationships and classroom organisational factors changed, at a time when children were settling in.

For children in the study, the context of the classroom, in particular school organisational factors such as class size, influenced their transition to school. For example:

- Fergus and Annabel were two of one hundred and sixteen children starting Kindergarten at their school. There were four
Kindergarten classes of almost thirty. This may have limited the time their classroom teacher was able to spend with individual children.

- In contrast, Sam’s class, the only Kindergarten class in his co-located primary school, contained 12 children – eight boys and four girls. This context, while creating difficulties in some areas such as friendship choices, allowed Sam’s teacher to spend significant time with Sam. This small class size also meant Sam received significant support from the school’s Challenge teacher, providing him activities and interactions on a 1:1 basis.

- Sophie, placed in a Kinder/Year One class, was provided with opportunities suited to her advanced development. She was not restricted to completing Kindergarten work. Her teacher recognised Sophie’s academic strengths and allowed Sophie to work at her individual level. This meant that Sophie regularly completed Year One work.

**Time.**

For children, time was an important element in their transition to school.

- For Fergus and Annabel, time was an important element in their transition to school. Attending the same school, the first term of school was allocated to settling in and learning routines.

- For Annabel and Kaitlyn, time was again an influence on their transition to school. Their parents independently decided that they didn’t want their daughters starting school before they were five. This meant that both girls spent another year in a prior to school setting. For Annabel, this meant another year at pre-school. For Kaitlyn, the year was spent in a Pre-Prep. class.
Time, in relation to children’s ages was also a factor for some children in the study. For example, Annabel and Kaitlyn were almost six and very keen to learn when they started school.

iii. Curriculum differentiation

Process.
For many children in the study, their pre-school teacher’s experience influenced their educational provisions within the transition to school:

- Advit’s pre-school teacher’s understanding of giftedness and appropriate educational provisions, in part due to her experiences with her own gifted children, meant she provided activities and opportunities that stimulated Advit at pre-school.

- For Sophie, her pre-school teacher’s previous experience as a Kindergarten teacher also contributed to a positive experience. Her teacher understood the Kindergarten context and the skills necessary for a positive transition to school.

- For Fergus and Andrew, their pre-school teacher’s previous experience in early intervention meant she had a solid understanding of gifted education. However, it also meant that the children’s strengths were not a priority for their teacher and this influenced the activities and interactions provided. Their pre-school teacher was focused upon each child’s needs in preparation for school.

Person.
- Claudia’s quiet and reserved nature caught her Kindergarten teacher’s attention. Her teacher worried that Claudia could easily just go along with the group, and her advanced abilities would not be further developed. This meant that Claudia’s teacher was particularly committed to providing educational
provisions which focused upon both Claudia’s strengths and her needs.

- Fergus’ impulsiveness was a priority in her approach to teaching and learning for Fergus. This priority, in combination with her focus on routines and settling in, meant that differentiating the curriculum to meet Fergus’ advanced needs was not a priority for his teacher.

**Context.**

- Kabir and Kate’s school allocated Year Six buddies to the Kindergarten children in the first few weeks of school. For Kabir, his buddy became important to his comfort in the school playground. In contrast, the school Fergus and Annabel attended didn’t allocate older buddies for the Kindergarten children until week 6 of first term. These children were not offered the same opportunity for support from their peers.

- Sam’s primary school utilised the school’s Challenge program to support Sam in his transition. Sam was considered a priority and this flexible allocation of teaching resources allowed Sam educational opportunities not often provided for children in Kindergarten.

**Time.**

- For Sam, the time element was also important in his transition. The support provided by the school’s Challenge teacher assisted in him stimulated academically. As Sam had learnt to read prior to starting school this teacher assessed Sam’s phonological awareness and worked on sounds that Sam was missing.
iv. Early Assessment

Process.
- Children attending catholic schools within the regional diocese were assessed prior to starting school. This means they had not had time to develop a relationship with their Kindergarten teacher. In contrast, some children were assessed after they had spent three weeks at school and had developed a relationship with their teacher.

- Sophie’s pre-school teacher suggested that the *NSW Best Start Assessment* should be conducted by the child’s pre-school teacher – a teacher who the child already had a relationship with.

Person.
- Sophie’s pre-school teacher worried that the child’s personality would affect the results of her *Best Start Assessment*. She worried that the conditions in which the assessment was implemented Sophie would not show her advanced abilities.

Context.
- The context of each school (Diocese, DEC or independent) influenced the implementation of the assessment. Both catholic and NSW DEC schools within the regional area of the study were given guidelines regarding the implementation of the *NSW Best Start Assessment*. Independent schools, in contrast, were able to choose their early assessment and when and how it was implemented.

Time.
- Early assessment was influenced by the time element. The timing of the implementation of the *NSW Best Start Assessment*
was found to impact upon assessment results. For Annabel and Fergus, time influenced their early assessment. They were assessed prior to starting school. Yet for Sophie, Claudia, Kabir and Kaitlyn, time also influenced their early assessment. These children were assessed after they had been at school for three weeks.

v. Communication

*Process.*

- Hugh’s parents were reluctant to be seen as pushy by the school. This meant that they didn’t mention their son’s identification as gifted to the school. They wanted Hugh’s Kindergarten teacher to make up their own mind about the school. However, this approach was unsuccessful. Hugh’s Kindergarten teacher sent the same sight words home for all children in her class and Hugh’s parents realised that Hugh could already read these words.

- Annabel pre-school teacher was reluctant to discuss Annabel’s identification as gifted with her mother. When Annabel’s mother broached the subject, she found the pre-school teacher to be very uncomfortable and reluctant to continue the discussion.

*Person.*

- Parents’ person characteristics influenced the communication between parents and their child’s pre-school or Kindergarten teacher. Along with other factors, including their approach to learning, parents’ confidence determined whether they communicated their child’s identification as gifted to their teacher and became an advocate for their child.
Sophie’s father’s experiences as a gifted child resulted in a reluctance to communicate with Sophie’s teacher about her possible giftedness. Sophie’s father didn’t want either of his daughters to be known as ‘the smart kid’. However, when approached by Sophie’s pre-school teacher he agreed with the identification.

**Context.**

Sam’s independent co-located pre-school and junior school ran numerous orientation sessions. During one session the school requested that parents also attended. During this informal session children played in the classroom while parents and the Kindergarten teacher had the opportunity to meet other parents and the Kindergarten teacher.

In Annabel and Fergus’ school, the Kindergarten teachers were not announced until the start of the school year. When children attended orientation sessions they did not know who their teacher would be for next year. It was not until the children began school that they found out who their Kindergarten teacher would be.

**Time.**

Time proved to be an influence in some children’s identification as gifted. For example,

Annabel and Hugh attended the same pre-school and had the same pre-school teacher. Annabel was identified as gifted first and the pre-school teacher was approached about her participation in the study. However, she declined to participate. Approximately a month later Fergus’ parents approached the researcher about his participation in the study. His pre-school teacher was then approached about participating in the study and her consent was given.