An examination of the experiences of gifted preschool and primary age children.

Submitted by

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A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy.

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September 2008
DECLARATION

I certify, that except where due acknowledgement has been made the work is that of the author alone.

The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award.

The content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program.

Any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Karen E. Grubb

April, 2009.
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ABSTRACT

This research is a Case Study of the experiences of two groups of gifted children, including two preschoolers (3-5 years old) and three primary age children (6 - 9 years old), and their families in Victoria. The children were selected utilising a multi-faceted approach to identification appropriate to their ages and stages of development. That is, both objective and subjective procedures were used which included teacher nomination, parent nomination and checklists for the identification of the children for the case study. The focus of the study was on the personal and educational experiences of these children, with a particular emphasis on recording the “voice” of children who have been identified as gifted. Furthermore, this study examines the perspective of their families and the extent to which related support services for gifted children interact and influence the experiences for these children.

The study has highlighted and confirmed that the gifted preschoolers and primary age children examined have specific personal and educational needs. Findings also confirmed that the ‘lived’ experiences of the gifted preschool children and primary age children were significantly influenced by the level of knowledge in gifted education of others who are largely responsible for their identification, education and support. Furthermore, this research identified an imbalance in the responsibility of parents when seeking support and resources for the personal and educational needs of their gifted child. In fact, the parents reported limited accessibility of appropriate information and resources for a number of reasons, but particularly when seeking assistance for their children in the preschool years.

The current study has confirmed that the most negative and harmful influence on the provision and development of services for these young gifted children has been the existence of common myths and misconceptions about giftedness. Further findings from this study have uncovered evidence that the preschool and primary age educational programs attended were not always providing appropriate educational experiences for these gifted children. In addition, the research reported that teacher knowledge about the gifted children, as well as individual teacher attitudes and feelings, were highly
influential in the quality and provision of appropriate strategies and practices when catering for the educational needs of these gifted children.

Finally, this research recognised that there was a lack of educational provision effectively meeting the educational needs of the gifted children within the study.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of gifted children in early childhood is a much neglected area of research. Therefore, although research has recognised the early years in a young gifted child’s future development and learning as critical (Vygotsky, 1972; Henderson & Ebner, 1997; Geake, 2005; Shavinina, 2007), carers and educators of this population have limited access to informed practice and knowledge about the expression of giftedness at this stage of development. Consequently, this thesis recognises the importance of building on existing knowledge from previous research about young gifted children’s experiences, identifying the characteristics and behaviours of young gifted children, and examining the current provisions made in educational environments and support services for young gifted children and their families. More specifically, this study has valued the ‘voices’ of five young gifted children, their families, and significant others when creating individual stories based on the reality of the children’s experiences.

The inclusion of detailed information using the ‘voices’ of preschoolers and primary age children, as well as their parents and teachers, within case study research has also been rarely conducted (Sankar-Deleeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007). Few case studies have examined the characteristics and educational experiences of primary age gifted children (Gross, 1986; Gross, 1993; Harrison, 2003; Sankar-Deleeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007) and even fewer studies have examined the characteristics and educational experiences of preschoolers through a case study design (Harrison, 2003; Sankar-Deleeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007). Furthermore, previous research on the experiences of gifted children have reported that the parents of gifted children feel disconnected and frustrated with their interactions and experiences within a range of early childhood and educational environments (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001; Kronborg & Meyland, 2003; Solow, 2003; Grant, 2004). Therefore, in Chapter 2 three main areas of focus have included the examination of gifted children’s experiences in relation to identification and characteristics, educational experiences, and available support services. These focus areas will be elaborated on in a review of the research literature including an overview of gifted education internationally and within the Australian context. Previous research studies inspiring and contributing to the current research will be discussed. In addition, internationally recognised definitions of giftedness and the definition of giftedness framing the study, a range of identification issues and strategies, descriptions of the characteristics and behaviours of gifted children, and the social interaction experiences in gifted children will be presented. Furthermore, the experiences of gifted children in educational environments, their teachers’ attitudes and understanding of giftedness and their parent experiences will be discussed. Finally, available support services catering for the needs of gifted children will be presented along with common myths and misconceptions in gifted education.
The methodology of this research will be discussed in Chapter 3. This research has adopted a case study research design. The case study is a powerful and easily accessible research design to relate and compare the personal experiences of the participants (Moon, 1991) and therefore, considered the most effective for the nature of this inquiry. The two main research questions examined through the implementation of this case study approach included:

1. What are the experiences of two gifted preschoolers?
2. What are the experiences of three gifted primary age children?

In addition to the rationale and critical analysis of the research methodology, Chapter 3 explains the selection of children suitable for the study; use of pre-interview questionnaires and interviews as main data collection strategies in conjunction with other recognised strategies. Finally, preliminary investigations and phases used in the major study are illuminated. It was the aim of the researcher to gather data which would be informative about the most recent understandings of the characteristics of these two groups of young gifted children, describe the ‘reality’ of their personal perceptions and experiences within educational environments from a range of perspectives, and finally, compare and contrast the experiences of all five participants.

The results of this study have been presented in Chapter 4 in the form of five separate stories. Each of the stories have been created from a combination of all participants’ responses as expressed in pre-interview questionnaires, interview transcripts, checklists, parent records, work samples and assessment records. Furthermore, as set out in Chapter 5, the results have been summarised in the form of tables highlighting common themes and, with the support of direct quotes from the participants, form the basis for analysis and discussion of each of the case studies in relation to the research literature.

In conclusion, chapter 6 has identified the links from previous research studies with the current study. The researcher states that the current research findings about the ‘lived’ experiences of the gifted preschool children and primary age children were significantly influenced by the level of knowledge in gifted education of others who are largely responsible for their identification, education and support. These conclusions were supported by the research literature and provided opportunities for the researcher to suggest future recommendations and directions in gifted education on this issue. However, the researcher was also able to identify issues related to the identification, education and support of young gifted children that have not been discussed in previous research studies, and therefore, suggest possible strategies and practices to further support and enhance the ‘lived’ experiences of young gifted children.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Background

International perspectives on education of the gifted have dramatically changed since the formation of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children Incorporated in 1977 (Passow, 1984). As discussed in Passow (1984), although the World Council is not a large organisation in terms of membership, it has provided an international forum for the exchange of information, initiating research and sharing insights into the ways in which countries worldwide may encourage the development of programs and services for gifted and talented children. Passow (1984) also states that internationally there is a common concern for the identification of talent potential and the nurturing of talent performance possibly because of the obvious benefits in society resulting from this. However, the extent to which the gifted are catered is not as forthcoming but rather it is dependent upon the availability of resources and the specific Government policies outlining the definition and identification procedures of this population.

2.2 International Perspectives on Gifted Policy and Practice

Evidence of high intellectual aptitude continues to be central to most gifted education programs. In the United States of America, however, the principle of using multiple sources of information in identifying the gifted has also been acknowledged (Passow, 1984). Furthermore, formal, structured teacher education programs at the pre-service and in-service levels are customary in the United States of America, and in many states, special licensing or certification of teachers of the gifted are expected. However, even though these principles recognise best practices in gifted education research related to the identification of gifted students, there has been argument and controversy surrounding the consequent provision of effective personal and educational experiences for gifted children.

Colangelo, Assouline and Gross (2004) submitted The Templeton National Report on Acceleration, it was entitled A nation deceived: How school’s hold back America’s brightest students. This national report utilised the expertise of scholars and educators from around the United States of America to
dispel the myths and misconceptions surrounding educational practices for the gifted specifically in relation to acceleration. This report has been highly regarded by experts in the field of gifted education – particularly when highlighting the benefits of acceleration; however, it has also raised several other questions in relation to a range of personal and educational issues experienced by gifted children. Therefore, although identification policies in the United States highlight the importance of a range of strategies when recognising gifted students, current debate is largely based on the provision of appropriate educational policies and practices for this special population.

As with the United States of America, many other countries continue to use basic identification procedures that involve assessment of intellectual and academic aptitude. However, researchers in nations such as New Zealand are exploring and accepting newer concepts of intelligence and giftedness. New Zealand’s gifted and talented education has been informed by research and theory relevant to the specific population of New Zealand and, therefore, differs from many other nations in several ways. As stated in the New Zealand Government’s policy statement, *Initiatives for gifted and talented students* (Ministry of Education, 2002), provisions for gifted and talented children in this nation must recognise that giftedness and talent can mean different things to different communities and cultures, and therefore, there must be a range of appropriate approaches when meeting the needs of all such students. Furthermore, it states that policies need to differentiate learning experiences across a continuum of approaches, beginning in inclusive classrooms, and that there are distinctive cultural considerations to be taken into account in the planning and delivery of adequate gifted education provisions.

Consequently, a government research initiative, entitled *The extent, nature and effectiveness of planned approaches in New Zealand schools for identifying and providing for gifted and talented students* (Riley, Bevan-Brown, Bicknell, Carroll-Lind & Kearney, 2004), produced a booklet aimed at assisting schools in developing and implementing policies and practices required by a change to National Administration Guidelines (NAGs). The issues raised in this booklet have demonstrated a forward looking approach to the education of the gifted and talented in New Zealand, and although a
number of recommendations suggest that New Zealand’s school-wide approaches have many challenges yet to conquer, it does demonstrate a clear plan for future research and initiatives aimed at the successful implementation of services for the gifted.

As discussed in McCann (2005), Australia and New Zealand have collaborated for many years when sharing teacher education programs and best practice research in relation to developing gifted education policy. New Zealand policy related to the education of gifted and talented children is comprehensive, reflective of latest research findings and representative of the policies embedded in the education system throughout the entire country. In comparison, when discussing the role of policy in Australia, McCann (2005, p.132) recognised that as ‘policy is basically the articulation of best practice and intended future directions in a field’, a universal design and implementation of specific policies to support gifted students within our nation is critical. Best practices need to be articulated in order to provide positive personal, social and educational experiences for gifted children and their families. Currently in Australia, each State and Territory has their own separate Departments of Education and policy in relation to gifted education and, although each of these policies has been largely influenced by the Australian Senate Inquiry which was published in 2001 (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001), there is not a uniform approach to the main issues and recommendations that have been proposed.

2.3 The Australian Senate Inquiry (2001)

In October, 2000, the Australian Senate referred to the Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee the inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Children (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001). A range of organisations and individuals including gifted education specialists, education authorities, teacher unions, parents of gifted children and citizen associations contributed comprehensive and thoughtful submissions which were valuable in constructing an understanding of the range of experiences of individuals and groups involved with gifted education in Australia to date (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001). As a result of the inquiry, the committee recommended that the Ministerial
Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs should develop a national strategy on the education of the gifted. This outlined a national strategy which should be adopted in order to promote the profile and acceptance of gifted education through the establishment of a stable state of policy and practice. It was suggested that the strategy should recognise a nationally uniform definition of giftedness, provide the professional development required to aid teachers in recognising gifted students from all backgrounds, offer appropriate curriculum materials and raise public awareness of gifted education needs by addressing misconceptions and negative attitudes (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001).

2.4 Existing Practices and Policies in Australia

One initiative implemented by the Australian Government in response to the recommendations made by the Australian Senate Inquiry (2001) relates to the provision of professional development and awareness in the identification of gifted children. The Department of Education, Science and Training contracted a team of professionals at the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) to produce a *Gifted Education Professional Development Package* (Gross, Merrick, Targett, Chaffey, MacLeod & Bailey, 2005). This package has been posted on the Department of Education, Science and Training website and consists of six modules designed to scaffold teacher’s learning over the course of a professional development programme. The course aims to cover the most essential information every teacher needs to understand when addressing the needs of gifted children and included in the Package are pre-tests for teachers to determine what they might already know and practical components with case studies and tasks for teachers to demonstrate that they have understood the modules. As well as providing an overview of current research about particular areas of gifted education, the modules cover all levels of schooling from the initial years of schooling through to secondary. In addition, as outlined on the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008), in July 2007, the government also announced a new initiative for gifted education that included funding for a 10 day residential school for 40 teachers, as well as workshops and professional development for teachers and parents in all
capital cities, and funding to investigate the possibility of establishing a National Centre for Excellence in Gifted Education.

As stated previously, there is no uniform policy statement for all States and Territories in Australia in respect to the identification and education of gifted children. However, as a result of the Senate inquiry into the experiences of gifted children, each state or territory has formulated their own Department of Education Policy. Chessman (2005), describes a revised gifted education policy for New South Wales as strengthened and improved through the inclusion of current research. She states that regions and schools within the state are better informed by the provision of policy documents that provide practical support and also clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of each service when delivering effective policy implementation.

In Victoria, the State in which this study has been located, there has been evidence of some response to the recommendations by the Senate Inquiry (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001). Initially in 2006, the government trialled the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) which it stated would address the needs of high potential students from Prep to Year 12. Following this, the Victorian Government’s Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2008) updated their website to include more recent information for parents and teachers. Several areas in relation to gifted education services have been provided and include more current information for parents; details about the select entry accelerated learning (SEAL) program; characteristics of gifted and high potential students; schooling options; and learning and teaching. Finally, the Victorian Government announced the future location of two co-education selective state schools for gifted children enrolled in their final four years of secondary schooling commencing in 2010 (Metlikovec, 2008). The Victorian Premier states that this initiative will give bright students from ‘boom’ areas the opportunity for an advanced education; will ease demand on the state’s existing select-entry schools; will allow highly able students to work on joint research projects, attend special classes and lectures, and share facilities with a neighbouring tertiary institution; and finally, provide opportunities for secondary teachers to collaborate with university staff when sharing knowledge which would
benefit the students. Therefore, each of these initiatives addresses some of the recommendations made by the Australian Senate Inquiry (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001), however, the degree to which they are directly influencing the personal and educational experiences of gifted children in Victoria, at this present time, is yet to be determined.

Since commencing this study in 2005, there have been significant changes in government leadership which appear to have had a significant impact on the development and implementation of both early childhood policy, as well as, gifted education. Therefore, this study provides an opportunity to examine the lived experiences of young gifted children and their families during a time of change, both politically and educationally. Furthermore, the range of Government initiatives introduced as a result of the Senate Inquiry (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001), and the implementation of subsequent policies and practices on gifted and early childhood education in the state of Victoria will be reflected on when discussing the findings.

2.5 Definition of Giftedness

As discussed in Gross (1999a), prior to the 1980’s, definitions of giftedness and talent in Australia tended to be performance-based and identified students who were usually successful, motivated and achieving. In 1988, a nationwide Senate Inquiry into the education of gifted children in Australia (Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, 1988) identified groups of children who were at risk of non-identification as a result of several factors such as economic disadvantage, physical or learning disability, English as a second language, underachievement, geographic isolation and those who felt pressured to camouflage their abilities for peer acceptance. Moreover, the Senate Inquiry in 2001, confirmed that the situation had not changed significantly during this period and that a review of the definitions used to identify the gifted population was essential.

Therefore, one main issue raised in the Senate Inquiry (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001) was related to the definition and identification of giftedness or the gifted.
Furthermore, as noted in the inquiry by The Parliament of Australia (2001), concepts of giftedness have a political dimension because they are influential in determining what the main areas of focus will be and what interventions should be taken. Many definitions of giftedness have been proposed, however, as stated in Fryndenberg and O’Mullane (2000), the main conceptions adopted by Australia in the past have been variations on the work of Marland, Renzulli, and Tannenbaum. Furthermore, the work of Gardner, Goleman, and François Gagné, has also been influential and has increased in popularity. The contributions of these authors will now be discussed.

The Marland Report in the United States (1971) defined gifted and talented children as those identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. Children capable of high performance included those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in one or more of general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability. This definition has been influential in many later definitions and has recognised that potential can be demonstrated in a range of areas. The Marland Report states that identification of gifted students using the criteria would produce results of 3-5 students in every hundred.

Although the Marland Report has been a pioneer for gifted education, as outlined in the Senate Select Committee Report of 1988, on its own it does not adequately define many other characteristics these children present. Firstly, it refers to imprecise concepts such as ‘creative thinking’, ‘psychomotor ability’ and ‘leadership ability’. This raises questions as to what creativity and leadership are and how they could be reliably measured. Furthermore, it is difficult to ascertain what skills are included in psychomotor ability, such as athletic or gymnastic excellence or fine motor coordination, and whether some of these skills belong in other concept areas such as the performing arts. Secondly, the Marland Report does not include motivation or task commitment which is characteristic of many gifted individuals, and finally, it is argued that many educators tend to misinterpret and misuse the definition by treating the six areas of ability as individual, independent categories that do not have
relationships with the other categories. Thus, State education authorities have broadened the concept of giftedness in order to reflect a more contemporary understanding of this definition.

Another model of giftedness that has been used extensively in Australia was devised by Joseph Renzulli (see Figure 1). In 1977, Renzulli proposed that gifted individuals were those who possessed three critical traits. These traits included above average general ability, high levels of task commitment and high levels of creativity (Renzulli, 1977). This definition has been updated by Renzulli and Purcell (1996) and recognises gifted underachievers who are rarely described as ‘task-committed’, as well as the fact that many fields of performance do not require creativity.

![Figure 1. Renzulli’s three critical traits of gifted children. Taken from the Department of Education and Training, 2005.](image)

In a more recent definition, Renzulli and Purcell stated that “Giftedness is now recognised as a complex set of behaviours which occur in certain people, at certain times, and under certain circumstances” (Renzulli & Purcell, 1996, p.174). This definition has several implications for identification procedures and program structures in that it raises the need for schools to decide on
individual definitions and understandings of giftedness that are representative of their own communities, as has been implemented by policies in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2002). Furthermore, as suggested by Julie Landvogt (1997), this definition would allow a greater number of individuals, up to 25%, to be considered in a program at various times. Therefore, even though it is impossible to design an identification system that is perfect, this would include a large number of students who could move in and out of the program according to need.

A more recent contribution to the discussion comes from Tannenbaum (1997) who defines giftedness through the use of a model demonstrating several qualities often associated with talent potential (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Tannenbaum’s model](Taken from Department of Education and Training, 2005)

Tannenbaum states, that a combination of five factors need to be present in order for this potential to become actualised. The five factors are superior general intelligence; distinctive special abilities or aptitudes; non-intellective factors that contribute to success, such as energy, effort, motivation,
willingness to take risks, task-commitment, health, immersion in an interest, self-concept and “meta-
learning”; a nurturing environment through which the family, school, the peer group and the
community enable the talent to flourish; and factors which also play their part in the form of luck and
being able to recognise opportunity when it arrives. The most influential of these chance factors are
related to family and the circumstances into which an individual is born.

Tannenbaum (1997) divides these factors into two dimensions - static and dynamic. The static
dimension is a reflection of the environment encompassing an individual and the dynamic dimension
is a reflection of an individual’s inner-self and how they interact with their surroundings (see Figure
2). However, his conception of giftedness does not necessarily reflect creativity for he believes that
creativity is not a prerequisite for giftedness. That is, proficiency in certain domains of production
and performance deserve to be recognised as signs of excellence even though they are not viewed as
a result of creative qualities, for example, micro-surgeons who perform lifesaving operations due to a
proficient understanding of medical texts. One important point, as a result of Tannenbaum’s theory,
proposes that to search for childhood abilities that guarantee superior accomplishment is useless
because giftedness is achieved through the combination and interaction of many personal attributes of
an individual with their surroundings over their lifespan. This is a particularly poignant point when
debating what criteria should be used when identifying and designing programs for gifted individuals
in early childhood. That is, consideration of what characteristics of gifted adults was perpetuated in
childhood that resulted in high levels of excellence.

An increasingly popular addition to the identification and programming for gifted children has been
raised by Howard Gardner. Through his theories of multiple intelligences, Gardner (1983, 1993) has
challenged the notion that human beings have a single intelligence. Initially, Gardner (1983)
identified seven intelligences he believed all individuals possess, and later identifying eight
intelligences including verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic,
body-kinaesthetic, naturalist, intra-personal and interpersonal intelligences. Most recently, Gardner
(1999) has considered an intelligence called existential intelligence which can be defined as the
ability to be sensitive to, or have the capacity for, conceptualising or tackling deeper or larger questions about life, death and how we came to be. At this point, Gardner has alluded to this intelligence only as his work is largely based on neurological evidence of site specific locations within the brain and he does not have the evidence, as yet, to support the existence of this intelligence.

As discussed in Ramos-Ford and Gardner (1997), one common criticism of the multiple intelligences theory has been based on the use of the word ‘intelligence’ in this theory as it has been suggested that some of the intelligences, such as musical-rhythmic and bodily-kinaesthetic could be better defined as ‘talents’. However, Ramos-Ford and Gardner (1997) deliberately challenge this criticism and argue that it is incorrect to suggest that logical-mathematical or linguistic abilities should be considered on a different level of ability to others. Furthermore, they suggest that these intelligences may be defined as ‘potentials’ that are either realised or not depending on the cultural context and opportunities available for individuals to express and develop these intelligences.

Consequently, the influence of Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences on educational programs and practices has significantly influenced the methods in which many teachers plan for individuals in the classroom. Some of the most important aspects of the multiple intelligences theory, as outlined by Ramos-Ford and Gardner (1997), recognise that in order for children to achieve their potential educators must help them feel good about themselves and encourage them to utilise their interests and strengths so as to improve in areas which they demonstrate less interest or skill. Therefore, it is also argued that a multiple intelligences approach to assessment and instruction will identify the talents and ‘gifts’ in every individual, and furthermore, identify more children ‘with potential’ than traditional methods of identification. This approach may prove particularly important when considering policies and practices during the pre-school and early years when there is a greater need to maximise the opportunities for individuals to explore a wider range of domains.
Daniel Goleman’s emotional intelligence theory, like Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence theories, is also based on findings in neurological research. He defines emotional intelligence (EQ) as a different way of being smart and whereby an individual knows their feelings and uses them to make good decisions; manages their feelings well; motivate themselves; maintain hope in difficult situations; demonstrate empathy and compassion; interact smoothly with others; and manage their relationships successfully (Goleman, 1995; Goleman, 1996). As discussed in Goleman (1995, 1996), these characteristics of emotional intelligence are divided into five dimensions including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills, all of which must build on each other in a hierarchy if an individual is to achieve all five competencies.

Goleman’s five dimensions (1995, 1996) appear to correlate strongly with Gardner’s intra-personal and interpersonal intelligences. He agrees that, like Gardner (1983, 1993), different individuals have aspects of each domain to varying degrees, combinations and intensities but that individuals competent in one domain of emotional intelligence may not necessarily demonstrate success in another domain. In contrast, Goleman differentiates his approach from that of Gardner’s by stating that his emotional intelligence theory places greater emphasis on the role of ‘feelings’ or ‘emotions’ and less on cognition. These views raise an awareness of the need to focus on the emotional climate in classrooms and how this affects the learning of all individuals in these settings. Therefore, Goleman’s theory raises the importance of considering the dimension of emotional intelligence when constructing the most contemporary definition of giftedness and the importance of programs catering for the educational and emotional needs of the gifted.

Currently, the most popular definition of giftedness in Australia is Françoys Gagné’s “Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent” (see Figure 3). Gagné (1991) proposes that giftedness is the possession and use of natural or innate abilities in at least one ability domain to a degree that places an individual at least among the top fifteen percent of their same age peers. That is, children or adolescents who have the potential to perform, in some area of human ability, at a level more usually achieved by children some years older. He further proposes that talent is the superior mastery of
systematically developed abilities and knowledge in at least one field of human activity that also places an individual at a level typical of the top ten to fifteen percent of their same age peers who has also been active in this field, that is, talented children whose achievement or performance is already at this higher level.

In Gagné's definition, the presentation of giftedness as talent is dependent on several factors including the gifted individual’s personal experience in the developmental process, environmental and intrapersonal catalysts, and chance. Therefore, he recognises the further learning needs of children who are already talented achievers but even more importantly he draws our attention to the needs of gifted underachievers - children who certainly have high ability but who, for some reason, have not yet been able to translate their potential into performance. In fact, Gagné (2003), 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. Finally, Gagné states 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 giftedness through talents that are valued rather than recognised.
Consequently, he makes it clear that a child’s learning will not progress optimally unless they have the ongoing support of their significant others and educational systems.

2.6 Study Based on Gagnés Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the researcher has decided that Gagnés differentiated model of giftedness and talent offers the most inclusive and comprehensive definition of giftedness and talent for the Australian context. Firstly, this model encompasses the recognition that giftedness is multi-dimensional rather than unitary, that is, that giftedness is based on a number of contributing dimensions in comparison to a stable measure of intelligence through testing. Secondly, that giftedness develops over the lifespan. As history has shown, some children will not be noticed as they should be. Gifted performance may not appear at all during a student’s life at school, for example, Einstein did not appear as remarkable until he was an adult, and in fact he was considered a very poor student (Holt & Willard-Holt, 1998). Thirdly, it recognises that gifted 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, different groups value different kinds of qualities, for example, Indigenous families in Australia may value ‘self-awareness’ and ‘social ability’ whilst Maori families in New Zealand value areas of service to others and sharing one’s special abilities and qualities for the good of humanity as highly desirable qualities of giftedness (Bevan-Brown, 1996).

As giftedness is a dynamic concept which reflects changes in society’s needs and priorities, it is essential that a definition of this concept is flexible and recognises the cultural and social interests of Australian schools and the communities who attend them. Furthermore, in order for a definition of giftedness to be effective in meeting the needs of gifted children it requires links between definitions, identification procedures, programs and evaluation. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Victoria (2008), as well as other states in Australia, use Gagnés model when defining giftedness. In conclusion, the researcher has also recognised Gagnés Differentiated
Model of Giftedness and Talent as the most suitable model when defining giftedness and when identifying children for this study.

2.7 Identification of Gifted Children

The consensus among researchers is that there is no single reliable method of identifying gifted children just as there is no single way of defining giftedness (Gross, 1993; Renzulli & Purcell, 1996; Silverman, 1986; Tannenbaum, 1997; Porter, 1999; Fryndenberg & O’Mullane, 2000; Harrison, 2003). Consequently, a multi-faceted approach to identification is important. Means of identifying gifted children include subjective and objective procedures. Subjective procedures are those that rely on judgements from general observation of the child. They may include nomination by teachers, nomination by parents, nomination by self or peers, checklists, drawings or work samples, interviews and community perceptions. Objective procedures include standardised tests of ability and achievement, checklists, teacher made tests, class grades and school records. Most importantly, however, it is essential that the most frequently used identification procedures will be linked to good research and theory, and therefore, understood in terms of their limitations and strengths. The range of approaches to identification of gifted children will now be discussed.

2.7.1 Teacher Nomination

As part of the identification process, teachers may nominate gifted children in their classes, specifying those who are performing well and those who are underachieving. However, research evidence indicates that teachers are more likely to nominate conforming students who are well behaved rather than nonconforming students who demonstrate high potential (Nasca, 1979). On the other hand, the efficiency of teacher identification of gifted students appears to increase with the age of the children. In a study conducted in Holland, it was concluded that secondary teachers were relatively proficient at identifying underachieving gifted students (Monks, van Boxtel, Roelofs & Sanders, 1986). Regardless of the possible deficiencies, teachers have an important role to play in identification. A submission to the Parliament of Australia from the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001) argues
that teachers’ judgements are considerately more accurate when they are trained to recognise gifted children. It was suggested that teacher training and professional development relating to gifted education on understanding how to identify gifted children was essential to enable teachers to more readily recognise gifted children. Therefore, the experience and training of teachers who nominate a child as gifted will be an essential consideration when utilising this strategy in the identification process.

2.7.2 Parent Nomination

Parents may also contribute to the identification of the gifted because of their intimate knowledge of their children’s development. Research has consistently shown that parents are significantly more successful than teachers in identifying giftedness in the primary years of schooling. In a study by Louis and Lewis (1992), 61% of parents correctly identified their preschoolers’ advanced development, and the remaining 39% correctly identified that their children were advanced but not to the extent of being gifted. Despite the accuracy of parents’ reports of their child’s developmental milestones, quite often their impressions are dismissed as biased (Gross, 1993) and arguably this may be a result of a lack of training by teachers or a denial that some children display exceptional abilities in comparison to their peers. Therefore, an important identification procedure in this study will include parent’s views in collaboration with trained teachers and other specialist staff.

2.7.3 Self Nomination

As discussed by the Department of Education and Training (2005), self nomination is a useful subjective identification tool when understood in terms of its strengths and limitations. The strengths of self nomination include the opportunity for gifted children to express their personal knowledge in relation to their characteristics and qualities. Furthermore, when self nomination forms are designed with specific needs in mind, and by suitably qualified teachers, they are effective in eliciting information not usually provided by other methods. Finally, self nomination forms can assist teachers in matching specific information in relation to specific goals of programs for gifted children.
A sound understanding of the possible limitations of self nomination is also essential in order to capitalise on the benefits of this method of identification. For example, awareness that some gifted children may choose not to self nominate so as not to be seen as different, children not recognising that they are capable of high performance due to inaccurate personal perceptions of their abilities in relation to others, and children selecting to remain with their peers rather than being selected to participate in separate programs related to their abilities. Consequently, self nomination is most effective when utilised by qualified teachers in gifted education who are able to synthesise the information from several identification strategies including self nomination.

2.7.4 Peer Nomination

Peer nomination is another form of identification of gifted children. Sometimes there may be reluctance in identifying talent or a tendency to nominate friends, however, it can be used as a supplementary method to provide information about the way students are viewed by others or what extra-curricular activities are attended (Landvogt, 1997). The Gifted Children Task Force in Victoria (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001), designed a questionnaire with questions such as whom would you go for help if the teacher was not present? Who in the class is the most curious about things? Who should thank a guest speaker? If you cannot do something that you planned, who in your class is likely to come up with another plan or idea? These questions on their own do not establish giftedness but they do provide supplementary pieces of information to help form a more balanced identification of students with gifted potential.

2.7.5 Checklists, Interviews, Community Perceptions

Other subjective measures that could be used to identify gifted children in the study include checklists, interviews with parents or others who have been associated with the child over a period of time, and community perceptions. As discussed by Porter (1999), checklists can be a useful way to sensitise parents, caregivers and teachers to typical talented or gifted behaviours. However, most have a number of deficiencies and have not established their reliability or validity. One exception to this criticism is the list proposed by Silverman & Maxwell (1996) which is recognised as a valid and reliable assessment tool by some reputable organisations for the gifted throughout Australia. There
are several problems with using checklists as identification tools in that the items indicate what types of advances gifted children display but not the degree and parents have difficulty assessing what ‘most of the time’ or ‘often’ means. Also checklists do not indicate how many characteristics children need to demonstrate before they are judged as gifted, they can incorrectly imply that all gifted children are the same, and finally, checklists that rely on children’s performances do not identify the underachiever. Therefore, for confirmation of a child’s advanced development it would be desirable to compare abilities to the typical skills of children of the same age through ‘normed’ tests. Therefore, identification through the forms of checklists should be assessed in conjunction with the evidence from other more rigorous strategies such as teacher and parent nominations or standardised testing, and therefore, could be viewed as a complementary strategy in the identification process.

2.7.6 Standardised Tests

As discussed in the Parliament of Australia report (2001), the use of standardised tests to disclose giftedness is controversial. Tests are often criticised for being too narrow in focus or culturally biased and certain organisations such as The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) report that the use of objective procedures are being actively discouraged in several Australian states. According to the Children of High Intellectual Potential Foundation (CHIP) individual intelligence tests are more accurate and useful than group aptitude tests and teacher nomination when identifying gifted students. However, it is widely acknowledged that standardised testing should not be used alone. Porter (1999) summarises the many strengths and limitations 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. Standardised tests can also provide diagnostic information on how students approach tasks. Furthermore, they are useful in avoiding biases inherent in subjective assessments as they provide more reliability and validity than current alternatives. Finally, standardised tests have the ability to make comparisons between children in order to design educational programs that will target the most in need.
However, 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 and program according to the specific needs of differing levels of giftedness. She states that IQ and achievement testing can identify whether a child is gifted as well as the degree of giftedness, just as is practiced when assessing children with a hearing impairment and developing an appropriate intervention to match their degree of condition. Therefore, appropriate standardised testing procedures with gifted children can assist greatly in the intervention of appropriate programming.

The Wechsler Pre-school and Primary School Scale of Intelligence – Revised (WPPSI-R) (Wechsler, 2002) and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale For Children – Revised (WISC-R) (Wechsler, 1974) is a highly regarded test in terms of accuracy and thoroughness in identifying giftedness in Australia and internationally. Other reputable and respected tests include the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – Third Edition (PPVT-111) (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) and the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement – Revised (Woodcock, McGrew & Mather, 2001). Therefore, children who have been assessed formally using internationally reputable tests such as the WPPSI-R and the WISC-R have been clearly recognised as suitable participants for the study.

Another effective method for identifying gifted children is to use ‘above-level testing’. As discussed in Hansen (1992), the work of Leta Hollingworth in the early 1900’s has inspired other researchers (Stanley, 1990; Van Tassel-Baska, 1986) to initiate the concept of above-level testing through a talent search model. The results of research on above-level testing report that many highly gifted students are able to demonstrate a full range of abilities, as well as extremes in ability that would not normally be recorded in their same grade level curriculum. Therefore, when highly gifted students are provided opportunities to take tests that have a ‘high ceiling’, or are above level for their grade-level, it is an effective method of identifying the student’s degree of giftedness and range of abilities.
Finally, Smutny (2003) adds a new dimension to the identification of gifted children debate, when she suggests four main strategies that are highly successful in identifying young gifted children. These strategies include understanding the limitations and strengths of testing, networking with parents, considering new ways of thinking about and observing giftedness which include incorporating different learning styles and identification strategies in teaching, and using portfolios to collect actual samples of children’s work. The portfolio is an effective tool that both parents and teachers can use when constructing a record of a child’s intellectual, social and emotional development. A collection of a child’s work, activities and interests - including the use of photographs and transcriptions of dialogue - can provide valuable information in relation to the abilities and characteristics of a gifted child which may not be apparent from other means such as in meetings or through personal interactions.

2.7.7 Drawings and Work Samples

Harrison (1999b, 2000) states that the drawings of young gifted children can provide useful information in the process of identification of giftedness, and furthermore, indicate advanced development in other areas of ability. She explains that an awareness of both the product and process in children’s drawings provides evidence of skills and understandings significantly different to those of the gifted child’s same-age peers. The abilities and characteristics demonstrated in young gifted children’s drawings may reflect advanced skills in physical development, ability to concentrate for extended periods of time, task commitment, intensity of purpose, perfectionism, persistence, heightened perceptual awareness, creativity, humour, emotional sensitivity and the ability to think abstractly. Drawing is a means by which young gifted children are able to express and communicate their ideas, feelings and abilities in an age appropriate manner, and therefore, can provide a valuable and insightful method of exploring and identifying the characteristics of young gifted children.

2.8 Levels of Giftedness

An important aspect to consider when identifying young gifted children is related to ‘levels of giftedness’. As discussed earlier, Gagné (1991) considers gifted children to be those who
demonstrate ability levels that place them in the top fifteen percent of the population. In relation to intellectual ability, this would mean children with an IQ of 115 or above would be considered gifted. However, as argued by Gross (1998), there are five levels of ability within giftedness, including mildly, moderately, highly, exceptionally and profoundly gifted, that require different types and levels of response. Feldhusen (1993, cited in Department of Education and Training, 2005) described these five levels of giftedness according to the categories provided (see Figure 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of giftedness</th>
<th>Prevalence</th>
<th>Programming options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mildly (115 – 129) (basically)</td>
<td>1:6 to 1:40</td>
<td>Enrichment in regular classroom, Modified curriculum, Curriculum compacting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately (130 – 144)</td>
<td>1:40 to 1:1,000</td>
<td>Advanced work, Challenges within content, Some form of ability grouping, Mentorships, Single subject acceleration, Single grade skip or early entrance to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly (145 – 159)</td>
<td>1:1,000 to 1:10,000</td>
<td>Fast-paced content work in talent area, Ability grouping at least in talent area, Acceleration options, Challenging academic enrichments, e.g. Latin, Mentorships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionally (160 – 179)</td>
<td>1:10,000 to 1:1 million</td>
<td>Highly individualised programs, High school / university level programs, Advanced placement, Radical acceleration (3+ carefully spaced grade skips), Ability grouping in specific talent areas, Specific counselling services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profoundly (180+) (Feldhusen, 1993)</td>
<td>Fewer than 1:1 million</td>
<td>Radical acceleration, Early admission to university, Highly individualised programs, Special program searches, Special counselling services, Ability grouping in specific talent areas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Levels of giftedness. 
Taken from the Department of Education and Training, 2005.
Feldhusen (1993, cited in Department of Education and Training, 2005) outlines the IQ ranges associated with each level as well as the prevalence of each level within the population and the most appropriate programming options when catering for each level’s educational requirements. These levels of giftedness also recognise that a group of gifted children can be as different to each other as they are to an average ability child. Moreover, Hollingworth (1926) recognised that gifted children who were within the 125-155 IQ range were generally observed to be well-balanced, self-confident and outgoing individuals who were able to form positive friendships with their same age peers.

Studies conducted by Hollingworth (1926) reported that gifted children within the 125-155 IQ range as having ‘socially optimal intelligence’, in contrast, gifted children who fell outside of this range commonly reported greater frustration and difficulty when interacting with their same age peers. Research conducted by Hollingworth (1926; 1942) and Gross (1993; 2004) on intellectually gifted children recognised significant developmental differences in their abilities and experiences. In particular, their research identified that highly gifted children often demonstrated early development in speech, mobility and reading. Furthermore, Gross (2004), who’s longitudinal study involved sixty gifted children with an IQ 160+, reported that most of the participant’s experiences in full time regular classrooms were extremely lonely, with very few or no friends, and extreme intellectual frustration and boredom. These findings were also supported by Hollingworth (1926) and Janos (1983), however, gifted children in these studies reported greater dissatisfaction during the primary years. In contrast, those participants who were offered opportunities to experience higher levels of intellectual challenge through ability grouping or acceleration reported much higher levels of social satisfaction.

2.9 Early Identification and Programming of Gifted Children

There is overwhelming evidence from research to support early identification of gifted children and subsequent programming of appropriate educational experiences, particularly with highly gifted children (Hollingworth, 1926; Hollingworth, 1942; Feldman, 1980; Janos, 1983; Bloom, 1985; Gross, 1986; Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, 1988; The
As stated in Gross (1999b), gifted preschool children are at particular risk as few programs exist in this age group. Furthermore, she suggests that it is probable that few preschool teachers will have had training in the identification, characteristics and provision of appropriate learning experiences for gifted preschoolers. This suggestion has been supported in a study by Sankar-DeLeeuw (2007), who conducted an exploratory study of the issues and concerns of the parents of gifted preschoolers and preschool/kindergarten teachers in relation to early identification and programming for giftedness. Results showed that seventy-four percent (74%) of parents compared to fifty percent (50%) of teachers believed that giftedness should be identified in preschool, and seventy-six percent (66%) of parents compared to thirty-two percent (32%) of teachers believed that gifted preschool children require a different curriculum. Therefore, although research strongly supports the practice of early identification and programming for giftedness (Hollingworth, 1926; Hollingworth, 1942; Feldman, 1980; Janos, 1983; Bloom, 1985; Gross, 1986; Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, 1988; The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001) significant discrepancies were evident between the views of parents in comparison to teachers. The small percentage of parents, and particularly teachers, who believed that gifted preschoolers needed a different curriculum, has implications for the provision of young gifted children. Firstly, they are unlikely to be identified, and if identified, unlikely to be individually catered for.

Research by Kennedy (2002) also raises the issue of early identification and subsequent appropriate planning for another disadvantaged group of gifted children – the gifted learning disabled (GLD). She stated that giftedness is typically associated with high achievement and students who have been identified as having a learning disability are usually not achieving in academic subjects possibly related to difficulties with cognitive processes. However, gifted learning disabled children, who are also called ‘twice exceptional’ or ‘dual-exceptional’, have been recognised as being similar to gifted children in intellectual ability, although their reading, writing and language ability are more reflective of learning disabled children (Nielson, 2002, as cited in Kennedy, 2002). Kennedy (2002) informs that the two greatest issues in the education of gifted learning disabled children are the inability of
educators to accept that giftedness and learning disability can coexist in one child, and therefore, teachers often focus on the disability in an attempt to ‘fix it’. Secondly, she states that in some cases, the giftedness and the learning disability can camouflage each other thereby presenting as lower level function for a specific grade level or as laziness when a student is not performing at an expected superior level. Therefore, Kennedy (2002) argues that if there is not a consistent identification process for children with specific learning needs, then many children will be unidentified and be excluded from appropriate program planning.

2.10 Neuro-science and Education of Young Gifted Children

Research by Professor John Geake (2005, p. 2), states that “every brain that ever was, or ever will be, is uniquely different” and that “this is predominantly due to the nonlinear processes involved in neural morphogenesis as much as the unique life experiences that differentially affect our brains to make us the unique personalities that we are.” This knowledge underlines the most important reasons for why gifted children need to be identified.

Gifted children are uniquely different from each other, just as they are to their non-gifted peers. They have uniquely different abilities, needs and personalities, they respond in uniquely different ways to environments or experiences within their personal or educational lives, and they are exposed to uniquely different environmental factors which are known to either enhance or disadvantage their potential to achieve. Research has recognized that negative early childhood experiences have the potential to disrupt the formation of synapses in the developing brain, particularly during the early years (0-8 years). In fact, Henderson and Ebner (1997) state that the critical time for many gifted children could be even earlier than one to three years of age – which is a critical period for typically developing children. In addition, Shavinina (2007, p.37) suggested that ‘a child’s sensitivity plays a critical role in the emergence of the gifted’ and that as discussed by Vygotsky (1972) there are special age periods defined as ‘sensitive periods’ where there is heightened sensitivity and consequently greater influence on the developing child and their subsequent potential. Therefore, it is our responsibility to ensure that young gifted children are provided an equal chance in reaching their
potential at all stages of development and this would involve a comprehensive knowledge of effective identification strategies and appropriate early childhood education strategies.

2.11 Characteristics of Gifted Children

One major factor influencing our decisions in relation to the needs of young gifted children is strongly influenced by our understandings of what behavioural characteristics they may present with. Many studies in the field of gifted education have explored the experiences and characteristics of gifted children in great detail and findings indicate that the behaviours of gifted children are regularly misunderstood and have a significant impact on the individuals’ educational journey (Wright, 1990; Lovecky, 1992; Foster, 1993; Silverman, 1993; Neihart, 1999; Coleman & Cross, 2000; Kottman, 2000). As summarised by Hodge (2006), research has shown that the behaviours of young gifted children can be explained as behaviours that are ‘consistent’ indicators of giftedness, behaviours that ‘might’ be indicators of giftedness as they can also be observed in non-gifted children, and behaviours that have ‘no-proven link’ with giftedness. Hodge (2006) also noted that there are characteristics of both the child and their family that can ‘mask’ giftedness. Therefore, it is important to recognise that there are a wide range of behaviours and characteristics which may be presented by young gifted children but that are not typical for all young gifted children.

2.11.1 Consistent Indicators of Giftedness

Gifted children are often described as ‘good thinkers’ (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998; Porter, 1999; Hodge and Kemp, 2000). Van Tassel-Baska (1998) states that gifted children often demonstrate their advanced thinking skills when creatively and originally expressing their ideas, when thinking logically and symbolically about quantitative and spatial relationships, when reasoning analytically or transferring learning to novel solutions or real world problems. Therefore, this cognitive strength may be observed in a wide range of learning areas such as Mathematics, the Arts or Languages.

Other characteristics consistently demonstrated by gifted children include the ability to learn core content or skills quickly and easily, exceptional memory, exceptional concentration or attention span,
and high levels of perseverance or motivation. As summarised by Hodge (2006), gifted children may learn from being told or shown a skill once, may be quicker to see mistakes as learning opportunities, and may be able to integrate large quantities of knowledge in a short time. This skill can also be related to the gifted child’s ability to retain detailed information after a brief exposure or recall early life events in complete detail. Furthermore, often gifted children can concentrate on topics of interest for extended periods of time, and in the case of highly gifted children, on more than one topic at a time. Gifted children have also demonstrated greater persistence when completing projects, a strong motivation to learn and a desire for challenge and complexity.

Many studies and descriptions of gifted children recognise early language interest and development as a consistent indicator of giftedness (Hollingworth, 1926; Hollingworth, 1942; Van Tassel-Baska, 1983; Gross, 1986; Gross, 1993; Porter, 1999; Hodge & Kemp, 2000). As stated in Porter (1999), early comprehension, advanced speech in terms of vocabulary, grammar and clear articulation, use of metaphors and analogies, ability to make up songs or stories spontaneously, ability to modify language for less mature children, the use of language for real life exchange of ideas and information at an early age, and finally, the ability to follow several instructions simultaneously, are common characteristics presented by gifted children.

Gifted children consistently present with wide ranging interests and knowledge. Van Tassel-Baska (1998) states that gifted children are able to utilise their exceptional memory skills with their ability to synthesise stored information whilst also explore a variety of topics or interests. They are consistently observed demonstrating qualities such as being a keen observer – such as noticing subtle visual changes or details (Porter, 2005); preferring older companions which is possibly a reflection of their advanced language levels and preference for complex play (Schmitz & Gailbraith, 1991; Davis & Rimm, 1994) exceptional spatial ability when working with puzzles, construction, maps and diagrams (Hodge & Kemp, 2000); high interest and skill in number concepts such as counting, mathematical concepts, computers and money (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998; Porter, 1999; Hodge &
Kemp, 2000); and an early use of symbolic representation through sophisticated drawing or writing (Harrison, 1999b; Harrison, 2000).

As stated earlier, these ‘consistent’ indicators of giftedness are not necessarily ‘typical’ characteristics presented by all gifted children; in fact, any one gifted individual may demonstrate a unique combination of these characteristics and behaviours.

2.11.2 Possible Indicators of Giftedness

Hodge (2006) has also summarised several ‘possible’ indicators of giftedness, defined as characteristics or behaviours that have been observed in non-gifted children and where research has provided mixed evidence. The possible indicators highlighted by Hodge (2006) include early development across domains, precocious reading, sense of humour, birth order, curiosity, high energy level, imagination or creativity, and temperament.

As discussed in Porter (1999), it is difficult to accurately assess giftedness, particularly in young children, and this is a main reason for the reluctance of parents and educators to label a child as gifted. For example, ‘possible’ indicators of giftedness, such as early development across domains, can create uncertainty when our professional ability when identifying giftedness may be better in some areas compared to others. For example, a child with high verbal talent can be more obvious than a child with high mathematical or creative talent. Consequently, although many gifted children may not be reading before they enter school, early reading is a powerful indicator of giftedness and particularly when this skill is evident at an early age and in conjunction with early development of speech and mobility (Gross, 1999b). As discussed in Van Tassel-Baska (1998), a possible indicator of giftedness in young children is an advance sense of humour. She states that as humour is used for a wide range of purposes, such as for self-defence or to interpret the world in a less threatening manner, the young gifted child who uses and understands humour may be demonstrating the ability to interpret the world and their experiences at a level atypical for their same age peers. However, as
stated by summarised by Hodge (2006), some research on this characteristic has suggested that humour may be affected by cultural experiences and influences.

Moreover, birth order is another ‘possible’ indicator of giftedness, and first-borns are over-represented in gifted samples. Silverman (2002) reports that second children often exhibit different characteristics from their older siblings and are less likely to be achievement driven, consequently, parents may not recognise giftedness expressed differently by subsequent siblings.

Finally, the ‘possible’ indicators of giftedness such as curiosity, high energy level, imagination or creativity, and temperament, are often referred to as ‘over-excitabilities’, which were first investigated by Kazimierz Dabrowski (Dabrowski, 1967; cited in Piechowski, 1999). Piechowski stated that ‘over-excitabilities’ may occur in intellectual, emotional, psychomotor, sensual and imaginational domains, and are specific characteristics and behaviours experienced by an individual at high intensity. Firstly, intellectual ‘over-excitability’ is expressed at high levels through behaviours and characteristics such as curiosity and concentration. This may be observed in children who like to analyse, reflect and examine real world experiences and compare these to what would be ideal. They often demonstrate intense concern about world issues and have a strong sense of justice.

Secondly, psychomotor ‘over-excitability’ is expressed at high levels through behaviours and characteristics such as physical energy, enthusiasm, competitiveness, rapid speech, fingernail biting, and a strong desire to ‘do’ things. High energy levels are often reported by parents of gifted and non-gifted children, and as stated by Silverman (1993), children with extra physical energy are ‘doers’ who are constantly on the go. However, it has been recognised that gifted children who have high energy levels usually demonstrate this intensity both physically and psychologically (Schetky, 1981).

Thirdly, imaginational ‘over-excitability’ is expressed at high levels through characteristics such as imagination, creativity, inventiveness, fantasy, creation of imaginary friends when young, ability to visualise and think in images. Sensual ‘over-excitabilities’ are expressed at high levels through...
characteristics such as sensitivity to textures, smells, tastes, sights and sounds. Individuals may experience vivid memories associated with the senses, notice subtle differences or have adverse reactions to certain foods or textured fabric – such as the seams or labels in clothing.

Finally, emotional ‘over-excitability’ is expressed at high levels through characteristics such as feelings of inadequacy, guilt, shyness, extremes of positive and negative feelings or feeling several emotions all at once. Piechowski (1997) linked Dabrowski’s ‘over-excitabilities’ to the gifted as he recognised that the emotional sensitivity and intensity found in gifted children – and particularly highly gifted children – could explain their vulnerabilities in childhood and their difficulties in formal education.

Research by White (2007) explored Dabrowski’s five ‘over-excitabilities’ with a view to discovering whether there was any correlation between the ‘over-excitability’ construct and perfectionism - a need to complete tasks to match their vision. The results from this study, which included a sample of 71 gifted and 27 non-gifted students, showed a high correlation between individuals with high levels of perfectionism and giftedness. Perfectionism often becomes evident in a gifted child’s early years and, as discussed by Porter (1999), some characteristics of perfectionism can be counter-productive to learning whilst other characteristics can be positive and enhance potential. For example, a fear of failure with subsequent non-production is a negative side effect of perfectionism, however, realistic high personal standards is a positive characteristic of perfectionism and should be encouraged.

Therefore, gifted children present with a wide range of temperaments but the more commonly recognised emotional characteristics or ‘over-excitabilities’ have been related to perfectionism (Coleman and Cross, 2000; Kottman, 2000); sensitivity – feeling easily hurt and highly empathetic; and intensity – a concern with moral and social issues.
2.11.3 **Characteristics and Behaviours Not Related to Giftedness**

In contrast to the many characteristics and behaviours associated with giftedness, Hodge (2006) summarised several characteristics and behaviours not related to giftedness, and not related to IQ and therefore, are not common indicators of giftedness. Firstly, gifted children may demonstrate a range of motor development skills and abilities, and there is no link to the presence of advanced or slow fine or gross motor skills. Secondly, rote skills such as counting, reciting the alphabet or knowledge of body parts does not indicate giftedness unless applied in meaningful ways. Thirdly, gifted children are observed with a range of social skills and abilities. In fact, often gifted children choose to work independently, and even mature gifted children may appear to lack appropriate skills when interacting with others, particularly if they are lacking intellectual peers. Hodge (2006) recognises that a fourth characteristic, emotional adjustment, is also not related to giftedness as a family circumstances and lack of appropriate educational opportunities are more likely to be related to issues with maladjustment. Finally, as gifted children vary in sleep needs, sleep problems are also not related to giftedness.

2.11.4 **Child Characteristics that Mask Giftedness**

There are several characteristics summarised by Hodge (2006) that appear to mask giftedness and therefore, can make identification of gifted children difficult when uninformed. Problematic behaviour, including being disruptive in class, non-participation in class experiences due to a dislike of repetition, or learning difficulties can mask giftedness. For example, the child may not be recognised by an adult or teacher as possessing both qualities of giftedness and learning difficulty and this can make identification of gifted children difficult. Also, children may hide their abilities so as to gain peer acceptance, meet teacher expectations, or avoid perceived demands by adults and others for perfection. As discussed by Gross (1989), gifted children are often faced with a ‘forced-choice’ dilemma when seeking social acceptance as well as a drive for excellence in their intellectual pursuits. If the gifted child chooses to forfeit the drive for excellence then they may also be at risk of forfeiting social acceptance and intimacy with their same age peers, however, if their choice is to
seek social acceptance, they may be forced into ‘a pattern of systemic and deliberate underachievement to retain membership in the social group’ (Gross, 1989, p.189).

Introversion is another factor which influences the presentation and experiences of gifted children. Research indicates that gifted individuals are more likely to be introverts than extroverts (Silverman, 1994; Winner, 2000). Introverts tend to prefer small groups of friends to larger groups (Silverman, 1986), tend to withdraw into themselves rather than respond aggressively towards others (Silverman, 1994), are comfortable with their own company but would prefer the company of like-minded friends (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde & Whalen, 1993). Finally, introverts may be emotionally vulnerable in a culture that values extroversion and dominant behaviour above introversion (Lovecky, 1992). Consequently, gifted children with introversion as a dominant characteristic are often underestimated by others.

Asynchrony is a common characteristic in all gifted children regardless of gender, culture or socio-economic class (Silverman, 1994; Morelock & Morrison, 1996; Winner, 1996; Morelock & Morrison, 1999). Typically moderately gifted children often demonstrate skills two or more years ahead of their chronological age and therefore, their development will be more uneven than a non-gifted child (Silverman, 1993). This suggests that a four year old child may understand incoming information as a five or six-year-old but has the emotional repertoire still of a four-year-old. As a result children may experience ‘tension’ or frustration because they are trapped in the body of a four-year-old but see things and think of things years ahead of themselves. For example, often a child may have a tantrum or demonstrate uncontrollable behaviour because of their inability to communicate what they want or for anyone to accept that they can do more. It can then often present as competitive or defensive. Consequently, the greater the discrepancies between a child’s vision and their ability to express their ideas, the greater the frustration and inner turmoil they will experience as they may not have the emotional resources to match their cognitive awareness (Silverman, 1994).
Hodge (2006) summarised several ‘family’ characteristics that can mask giftedness including economic disadvantage and/or ethnic minority, minority language or bilingualism, cultural customs, and gifted siblings. Gifted children who live with economic disadvantage or are recognised as belonging to minority ethnic groups are more likely to remain unidentified (Harris & Ford, 1999; Richert, 1999; Naglieri & Kaufman, 2001). Furthermore, if a gifted child also has proficiency in their home language they may not be recognised for their abilities in the language of their formal educational environment (Harris & Ford, 1999). Customs and cultural norms can also play a part in the presentation of giftedness particularly in respect to approaches to thinking, cultural or social motivation, or cultural expectations of the relationships between adults and peers (Lindstrom & Van Sant, 1986; McIntosh & Greenlaw, 1986; Baldwin, 1987). Finally, as mentioned earlier, if a child within a family has been identified as gifted, it is possible that other siblings may present different skills and interests, and therefore, not be recognised (Silverman, 2002).

In summary, research has shown us that there are several consistent, possible, unrelated and masking characteristics that may indicate giftedness and that there are no unique combinations of characteristics or behaviours presented by gifted children that are not found in non-gifted children. However, the degree of high ability, alongside the combination of skills presented, suggests that gifted children are more similar to older children with the same mental age. Therefore, these factors influence the cognitive and emotional experiences of gifted children, as well as the development of positive social experiences.

2.12 Social Interaction of Gifted Children

Gifted children tend to prefer the companionship of others a little older, or sometimes many years older (Gross, 2004). 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, 1999b). It is recognised that often gifted children see the ‘truth’ more clearly or the rules more clearly and may have little tolerance for anyone else who cannot see it their way. Their frustration may be interpreted as ‘bossy’ or anti-social, but it is possible that gifted children may have trouble
relating to their peers, remembering their peers are by virtue of age only (Lovecky, 1992).

Furthermore, often gifted children have an unusually well-developed sense of justice and fairness. They can become very upset if they feel that one child has been unfair to another, or a teacher has unfairly treated another student. However, gifted children continue to prefer the close and regular contact of at least one good friend, or a few select friends, because of their cognitive abilities and the enduring frustrations they tend to experience.

Porter (1999) explains that, although gifted children are often accused 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. In fact, gifted children have better social adjustment in classes with children like themselves but lower social self-concept in same age or regular classroom environments (Silverman, 2002). This factor can be particularly apparent with gifted preschoolers who have less opportunity to interact with like-minded peers as these children have already entered school.

Gifted children may also have rather different conceptions and expectations of friendships from those of their same age peers (Gottman & Parker, 1986; Gross, 2002). Studies have found that the social isolation experienced by many highly gifted children is more acute between the ages of four and nine, (Hollingworth, 1926 as cited in Gross, 2002), that highly gifted children demonstrate advanced conceptions of friendship typical of children many years older, and that substantial gender differences are noticed – with girls significantly further along the developmental scale of friendship conception than boys (Gross, 2002). Gross (2002) suggested that this factor may explain the tendency for exceptionally gifted boys to sometimes prefer the company of girls. Gross (2002) also stated that it was in the earlier grades, rather than the upper grades, that gifted children experience the greatest social isolation if their intellectual and emotional maturity is not considered during placement.

It is well documented that gifted children’s need for friendship is often coupled with a strong motivation to achieve and for many, these two areas conflict with one another (Porter, 1999; Gross,
Porter (1999) highlights several social difficulties related to this issue including the expectation by the gifted child that others match their high standards of performance; the need to learn tactful ways in which to demonstrate advance skills in front of less able peers, or the need to be supported when reluctant to display talents for risk of criticism; the choice to under-perform in order to feel that they fit in socially; and finally, difficulty when placed in leadership roles, especially when the ‘followers’ are not supportive of the leader. Consequently, many gifted children are faced with the ‘forced-choice’ dilemma (Gross, 1989), as discussed earlier, when seeking social acceptance as well as a drive for excellence in their intellectual pursuits.

### 2.13 Educational Environments

Gifted children present with a range of specific characteristics that affect their ability to learn and are unlikely to reach their potential unless provided with an appropriate program that recognises their social, emotional and cognitive needs (Maker, 1986; Borland, 1988; Smutny & Blocksom, 1990; Harrison, 1995; Morelock & Morrison, 1996) as well as caters to their interests and strengths. These needs are likely to be met in an environment that values and understands the learning process and the skills that a gifted child and their peers bring to the environment as a whole. In contrast, if a gifted child were to remain in learning environments with limited understandings and experience of giftedness it is probable that they would have difficulty meeting the child’s social, emotional and cognitive needs, and consequently, the child may develop problematic behaviour as a result.

As discussed in Delisle (1998), many gifted children demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to their surroundings. Stress is one of many problematic factors created in educational settings where gifted children experience extreme personal and external pressures to achieve when unrealistic or unclear expectations are imposed by themselves, adults or peers. A pressure to excel, when combined with other influences, such as a desire ‘fit in’ when feeling different, self-doubt and the need to live up to their giftedness, can result in unhealthy levels of stress. However, stress can also be a result of intellectual frustration and boredom. Stress in gifted children presents itself in different ways.
depending on the age of the child and their individual personality characteristics. There are several signs and symptoms that adults and teachers can be aware of, particularly in relation to ‘burnout’, and can include overreaction to normal concerns or events; sleeplessness; extreme fatigue; unhappiness with self and accomplishments; physical ailments such as weekly or daily stomach-aches; nervous habits such as eye blinking; dependency through increased clinging and demanding; and engaging in attention-seeking behaviours such as aggression or acting out. However, in order to avoid the incidence of stress and other negative behaviours among gifted children and youth, it is recognised that appropriate and informed practices for this special population would provide the best solution.

Barbour and Shalilee (1998) state that best and most appropriate practices in gifted education recognise the importance of the role of the child in the curriculum making, the parent’s voice, and the responsibilities of the teacher. Similarly, within the early childhood field, this view is supported by the Reggio Emilia philosophy which utilizes an “emergent curriculum” approach. The Reggio Emilia philosophy was developed by Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia, Italy (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993), and is well known for the phrase “The hundred languages of children”. This approach not only recognizes essential curricula elements when planning for children but also encompasses careful preparation of the learning environment; a focus on the ‘relationships’ between parents, teachers and children; the view of education as an active process; the insistence that ‘reflection’ of practices and philosophies be ongoing; and, the development of child-centred curriculum and recognition of children’s rights. Internationally, the philosophies and practices of Reggio Emilia have been considered ‘most appropriate’ and ‘best practice’ in early childhood education and offer new possibilities when exploring the unique needs and rights of gifted children.

Play continues to be an essential element of program planning for gifted children in early childhood environments. As discussed in Harrison (1995), in order to maximise the value of play, programs need to provide self-selection of experiences, adequate time, accessible and open-ended resources, flexibility in routines, and support in developing successful social interactions. Wright (1990) and
Foster (1993) recognised that more studies needed to focus on the ‘play’ of gifted children and their comparative peers as gifted pre-schoolers manifest higher levels of socio-cognitive behaviours in homogenous groupings and may be supported more effectively in separate differentiated programs for these young children. Several educational programs have been established specifically catering for preschool children in Australia which have addressed the asynchronous development of young gifted children, focused on their emerging skills and abilities and recognised the importance of ‘play’ (Harrison, 2000; Hodge & Kemp, 2002; Grant, 2004). These studies have also highlighted aspects of early childhood education that challenge traditional practices and yet provide strategies that are reflective of best practices when identifying young gifted children and when providing appropriate learning experiences.

In a study by Hodge and Kemp (2002), a part-time preschool enrichment program was created with the aims of developing strategies to meet the educational and socio-emotional needs of young children who appeared gifted. It also aimed to guide parents in understanding their preschooler’s needs, whilst also provide a naturalistic setting for researchers to observe the ways in which young gifted children express their potential giftedness. Findings indicated that there was highly significant value in utilising both qualitative and quantitative measures when gathering information on both the level of advanced ability presented by each child, as well as the diverse ways in which gifted preschoolers might express their potential. Hodge and Kemp (2002) concluded that an ‘invitational curriculum’ which avoids placing a ceiling on the expectations of ability in preschoolers and recognises unevenness in development, can allow children to express their potential and their needs for educational intervention to their teachers so as to avoid unfulfilling educational experiences.

Programming for the educational needs of gifted preschoolers is not extensively researched nationally or internationally, however, some studies have highlighted the unique educational needs and characteristics of this group of gifted children and proposed appropriate practices and assessment when programming (Maker, 1986; Parke & Ness, 1988; Harrison, 1995; Morelock & Morrison, 1996; Hodges & Kemp, 2002; Harrison, 2005; Cuikerkorn, Karnes, Manning, Houston & Besnoy,
Practices that have been suggested when programming for gifted preschoolers include planning for the child’s mental age rather than chronological age; pre-determining prior knowledge so as new learning will build on existing knowledge; increasing the pace of instruction; designing learning experiences according to the children’s interests and abilities; and recognising the diversity of gifted children and be flexible when planning a range of experiences. Whilst also planning from the existing interests and abilities of individual children, studies have also recommended modifying the educational environment by enriching and extending typical everyday experiences by adding unusual resources or equipment usually aimed at older children; providing more complex or abstract experiences such as harder puzzles or construction and then scaling back to simpler experiences if necessary; and allowing adequate time to work on projects. In respect to providing and supporting learning in socio-affective development recommendations have included giving opportunities to discuss their own experiences in relation to leadership, justice and empathy; supporting and guiding behaviours such as ‘perfectionism’ so as the positive aspects are harnessed; planning age typical physical experiences that practice their skills in this area; and utilising ‘play’ as an enjoyable and valuable learning tool. Although these programming guidelines have been suggested for preschoolers, they are also supportive when planning for gifted primary age children.

Liz Robinson (2002) from the Victorian Department of Education and Training has provided guidelines for primary and secondary educators of gifted students similar to those proposed for gifted preschoolers. She outlines that a differentiated curriculum must include pacing and depth; pre and post testing to establish prior knowledge and inform planning; teaching major ideas and concepts that provide opportunity for children to integrate knowledge and work across key learning areas; content that covers gaps in knowledge as well as extends prior learning; teaching and exercise of processing skills or higher order thinking – such as introducing de Bono’s Six Thinking Hats; opportunities to work on real world problems and products; and a range and balance of open ended tasks requiring both individual and group work opportunities. However, whilst there are publications suggesting programming guidelines for the gifted (Maker, 1986; Parke & Ness, 1988; Harrison, 1995; Morelock & Morrison, 1996; Robinson, 2002; Harrison, 2005; Cuikerkorn, Karnes, Manning, Houston &
Besnoy, 2007) there has been less information in relation to the implementation of these guidelines (Hodges & Kemp, 2002; Grant, 2004).

The ‘transition to school’ experience for many gifted children and their families have been reported as significantly different to their mainstream peers (Whitton, 2005). As discussed by Whitton (2005), the ‘Starting School Research Project’ spanned six years and examined the responses of four hundred gifted children and two thousand parents in relation to their perceptions and expectations about starting school, activities undertaken and the skills each child had attained before entry. The parent’s responses were ranked under the following eight categories from most important to least including Knowledge, Social Adjustment, Educational Environment, Family, Rules, Skills, Disposition and Physical. The children’s responses were ranked under five categories from most important to least including Knowledge, Social Adjustment, Educational Environment, Family and Rules. Therefore, results found that both the gifted children and their parents ranked the first five categories in the same order and identified ‘knowledge’ as the most important category. The category of ‘Knowledge’ to the children was expressed as having the opportunity to learn more and different things, however, to parents ‘Knowledge’ focused on assurance from the school that the curriculum would meet their child’s academic needs. However, the degree to which the perceptions and expectations of gifted children and their families match the reality of the transition to school is yet to be examined and the present study may provide some insight into this topic.

Early entry to school is another issue facing parents who may be considering educational options for their potentially gifted pre-schooler. As discussed in Wellisch (2004), school readiness is assessed on a range of factors related to the child, the parents, the teachers and the educational system being considered. Wellisch (2004) identified levels of attachment to parents, cognitive and language skills, general knowledge and social competence as indicators of child readiness. Findings also found that, in addition to these indicators for school readiness, teachers identify the ability to understand and follow instructions, express their needs and ideas, play cooperatively, be physically well, concentrate and complete tasks, be independent and responsible for their belongings and hold a pencil correctly.
However, Wellisch (2004) argues that not all gifted children demonstrate many of these 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 potentially gifted pre-schoolers whilst many misunderstandings and misconceptions of this strategy continue to exist.

Neihart (1999) raises an interesting view on what influences the positive and negative psychological outcomes for gifted children. She argues it is clear from the research that intellectually or academically gifted children who are achieving, and participate in special education programs for gifted students are at least as well adjusted or are perhaps better adjusted than their non-gifted peers. Neihart (1999) posits that the three factors influencing this outcome are the type and degree of giftedness, the educational fit or lack thereof, and one’s personal characteristics.

Van Tassel-Baska (1992) states that grouping gifted students should be used in conjunction with other learning environment modifications such as alternative choices in materials; flexibility when catering for individual needs; opportunities for gifted children to interact with other like minds; organization of groups according to common special interests shared by the gifted children in the group; and finally, provision of time to explore independent study. Cluster Grouping is one form of grouping gifted children that is strongly supported by research (Borland, 1988; Benbow, 1997; Gross, 1997; Kulik & Kulik, 1997) and is found to improve academic achievement; promote true peer interaction; provide group skills training; positively assist in the ease of differentiation of content and instruction; enrich content and instruction; accelerate content; and accelerate instruction.

However, when planning a curriculum for groups of gifted children, it has been recognised that a clear understanding of Passow’s Test of Appropriate Curriculum (1988) is essential for appropriate and significantly differentiated curriculum for gifted children. As outlined in Passow (1988), units of
work must be truly differentiated by including experiences that gifted children WOULD want to be involved in, COULD participate in, and SHOULD be expected to succeed in. Alternatively, these units of work ‘would not’, ‘could not’ and ‘should not’ be planned for regular children. Furthermore, Van Tassel-Baska (2003), states that evaluation of specialised gifted programs is essential for providing information that can be used to improve and advance the quality of such programs. There should be a collaborative process involving all stakeholders such as gifted preschoolers and primary age children, parents, staff and committee, and they should utilize multiple data sources so as to illuminate the complexity of issues that may arise. Finally, Karnes, Lewis and Stephens (1999) and Besnoy (2005) add that it is essential that teachers of the gifted become advocates and public relations strategists in order to further the advancement of gifted services and programs to all children in an effort to remove the perception of gifted education as elitist among professionals and the community.

In summary, it has been widely acknowledged in the field of gifted education that the most successful educational experiences for highly gifted children has been experienced in settings whereby the children are enrolled in fulltime programs with gifted peers, qualified teachers in gifted education and supported by an appropriately designed accelerated curriculum (Feldhusen, 1991). This becomes particularly evident as gifted children move upwards in their formal schooling and when their special talents begin to emerge.

In the state of Victoria, Kronberg and Plunkett (2006) have found that the expansion of Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Programs for academically able students in secondary government school, as well as the development and implementation of individually focused programs in the private sector, has been an effective solution to meeting the needs of gifted students in the secondary years. This solution includes educational provisions through ability grouping, differentiated curriculum and accelerated learning with suitably educated teachers. Furthermore, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2008) demonstrates an awareness of identification tools and issues for the Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program, but does not establish
the success of these practices in the education system to date. For example, it was found that gifted aboriginal students are more ‘at risk’ of underachievement because their cultural and intellectual characteristics are not generally well accommodated in our school system, namely culture conflict, a lack of knowledge of culturally sensitive identification measures of giftedness, and an anti-intellectual Australian culture (Cronin & Diezmann, 2002). Therefore, gifted education practices have been more successful with some populations than others.

2.14 Teacher Attitudes and Understandings of Gifted Children

The majority of gifted children are educated within the mainstream education system and are best served by teachers who have specific personality characteristics and professional competencies in relation to gifted children (Knopfelmacher & Kronborg, 2003; Woods, 2004). However, negative teacher attitudes and understandings about gifted children have been influenced by misconceptions about the characteristics and needs of gifted children, lack of pre-service and post-service teacher training when programming for gifted children, and personal biases and prejudices towards specific populations of gifted children (Begin & Gagné, 1994; Carrington & Bailey, 2000; Callahan, Cooper & Glascock, 2003; Carnellor, 2003; Knopfelmacher & Kronborg, 2003; Chipego, 2004; Woods, 2004.) Therefore, as the present study included the perspectives of teachers within both early childhood and primary education systems, it will also identify the professional and personal qualities of each teacher when examining their responses.

2.15 Experiences of Parents of Gifted Children

A stimulating home environment is crucial if giftedness is to develop optimally. As recommended by Silverman (1986), a rich family life for gifted children would include early opportunities to develop special talents, and exposure to a wide variety of experiences that reflect their interests and abilities. However, parents often report a wide range of issues and difficulties in relation to providing positive personal and educational experiences of their gifted child.
The personal experiences of gifted families are often reported as challenging (Solow, 2003; Wormald, 2004), intense (Smutny, 2005) and isolating (Bayly, 1999). The social isolation of parents with gifted children is particularly significant when they do not have access to other families with children who also show advanced development (Bayly, 1999). In contrast, when parents have professional and personal interactions with others who recognise and understand the nature of their children’s special needs they report positively in relation to behaviour management and parenting (Sanders, Turner, Ralph & McTaggart 2008), and educational co-advocacy when navigating the educational system (Solow, 2003). However, even though the roles and responsibilities of parents, schools, regional and state office personnel clearly outline strategies for the education of the gifted and talented in some states (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2004), it appears that many families continue to feel disillusioned with the implementation of these policies.

In recent studies it has been reported that the parents of gifted children feel disconnected and frustrated with their interactions and experiences within a range of early childhood and educational environments (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001; Kronborg & Meyland, 2003; Solow, 2003; Grant, 2004). For example, prior to commencing a project exploring how a typical preschool program could be differentiated to provide for gifted preschoolers, Grant (2004) collected anecdotal responses from a range of parents of gifted preschoolers who expressed little confidence in early childhood programs to cater adequately for the specific needs of their children. 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. The findings highlighted three main areas of concern including the provision of professional co-advocacy to assist in their efforts to attain appropriate educational programs for their children; to promote understanding about their experiences through regular and more open avenues of communication with professionals and support services; and assistance in understanding and working with administrative school systems so as individual needs may be identified and improved. Finally, as discussed in the Senate Inquiry (2001), many individual contributions by parents of gifted children were included and also highlighted a
dissatisfaction, inconsistency and frustration with many of the services and programs provided by the existing practices and policies of that time.

Similarly, results from Kronborg and Meyland (2003), showed that a significant percentage of parents, who enrolled their children in a short term program for gifted and talented preschool students, expressed frustration about their primary school’s assurances and provisions when their gifted preschoolers when entered formal education. It was suggested that, although many of the schools attended by this sample of gifted children were positive about their abilities to cater for these special needs, many did not have the understanding and knowledge to do so. Therefore, Kronborg and Meyland (2003) state that when parents supply assessments and reports to educational services to support planning for their child’s unique educational needs, it will be essential that they first select educational services that offer gifted or individual learning philosophies, have flexible curriculum structures, and utilise identification and programming methods that develop their child’s abilities.

2.16 Support Services for Gifted Children and their Families

As represented in the Senate Inquiry, a wide range of gifted education organisations have been established to support the needs of gifted children. These services aim to provide research, professional development, family support and educational resources catering for the needs of highly able children. Some of the most prominent services within Australia and Victoria include the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT), the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), the University of New South Wales’ Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC), the Krongold Centre at Monash University and the CHIP Foundation (Children of High Intellectual Potential).

As stated by the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT) (2008), the AAEGT was established in 1985 due to a growing recognition by educators that a national forum should be available to Australian teachers and parents throughout Australia which provided accurate information, support, advocacy and networks in the field of gifted education. A
decade later, the AAEGT became an affiliated organisation when all Australian state and territory associations for the gifted and talented affiliated with the AAEGT. The main aims of the AAEGT and its affiliated associations such as the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC) are to recognise and identify the existence and needs of gifted and talented children; explore the nature of giftedness; encourage and provide assistance to parents and teachers in developing the special abilities of gifted and talented children; promote educational programs for teachers through pre-service and in-service training; provide opportunities and formal and informal interaction between gifted and talented children and their families; work in the community, educational institutions and government agencies to encourage greater acceptance and awareness of the needs of gifted and talented children; and maintain networks with similar associations within Australia and overseas. These aims are supported through a range of services including twice yearly newsletters, provision of professional development, access to experienced and qualified professionals in the field of gifted education, support networks for parents and educators, seminars and workshops, counselling, resource library, enrichment days for gifted and talented children, support for school-based extension programs such as Tournament of the Minds and Future Problem Solving Program, and Biennial Conferences.

As stated by the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) (2008), since 1991 the University of New South Wales has established a strong academic focus on teaching and research in gifted education. As a result, the University established GERRIC to provide support services within the field of gifted education including the development and expansion of a range of vacation programs for gifted children, courses for parents, counselling services, conferences, seminars and workshops for teachers with an interest in gifted education, and the development of a range of teaching resources. The objectives outlined by GERRIC underpin the services it provides and include the aim to encourage and conduct research on effective gifted education; to conduct research for outside agencies, such as the Department of School Education, related to issues such as the welfare and education of the gifted and talented; to establish a database of Australian and overseas research and practice; to develop and conduct teacher in-service programs to educational
services on a contractual basis; to establish and administer workshops and specialist seminars for
teachers, counsellors and parents of gifted children; to be responsible for extension programs for
gifted children; and to publish professional development resources designed to assist educators in
identifying and responding effectively to the needs of gifted and talented children. GERRIC is
directed by Dr Miraca Gross who is renowned internationally as an outstanding educator in the field
of gifted education. With the assistance of a committed and highly qualified staff, Dr Miraca Gross is
actively involved in delivering the services offered by the centre.

The Krongold Centre is based at Monash University in Clayton, Victoria. It is one of several centres
in Australia which offer psychological services and assessments for children, adolescents and adults
with a range of special needs including gifted and talented individuals. As stated by the Krongold
Centre (2008), it is dedicated to cutting edge research and practice and often clients are invited to
participate in research projects conducted under the supervision of Krongold and the Faculty of
Education. The range of services provided for the gifted and talented by the Krongold Centre are
largely focussed on psychological assessment and counselling, and therefore, other associations
within the community are needed to extend on the recommendations and assessments raised by
services such as the Krongold Centre.

The CHIP Foundation (Children of High Intellectual Potential) (2008) has been operating for over a
decade and is a ‘fee for service’ organisation working to encourage the development and educational
needs of CHIP and their families. The CHIP Foundation provides advice and assessment,
professional development, and gifted education resources or materials to professionals and families
within the field of gifted education; however, its main focus has been in the provision of services for
parents and educational programs for their gifted children. The organisation aims to assist parents
through information groups, CHIP Chat Rooms, assessment and selection of appropriate schools and
programs for individual children and families. Furthermore, CHIP organises a vast range of in-
school, out of hours and holiday programs for gifted children aged from Prep to VCE, of which some
of these programs include focuses in mathematics, forensic science, debating, electronics, public speaking and writing.

A well known and respected resource centre for parents of gifted children has been established in the north-east suburbs of Melbourne called Gifted Resources (2008). Gifted Resources is an information service for parents, teachers and service providers of gifted children and their families. Their services include consultations, guest speakers, lecture presentations, film discussions, information packs, an internet site and Email newsletter, and sale of books, educational games and CDs. The website is particularly useful to parents and teachers as it provides links to parent support groups all over Victoria and Australia, professional development opportunities in gifted education and journal articles on the latest research. Unfortunately, funding is often a main stumbling block in the continued provision of this resource and therefore, it relies on the support of community involvement and contribution through attendance at scheduled events and sponsorship.

Although only a selection of support services have been discussed in this proposal, it is evident that there are a vast range of support services available to families and professionals in the field of gifted education throughout Australia (Australian Association of Education for the Gifted and Talented, 2008; CHIP Foundation, 2008; Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, 2008; Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, 2008; Department of Education, 2008;). Many of these services aim to provide comprehensive and contemporary information and solutions to the issues often raised by the families of gifted children, however, it is still to be determined how effectively gifted children and their families believe they are identified and catered for in their communities through the support structures available to them. The needs of children in the early childhood or pre-school stages of their education are of particular interest in this study as many services primarily cater for later primary school age children through to adults.
2.18 Previous Related Case Studies in Gifted Education

The Case Study design has been one of the most popular research methods utilised in the examination of giftedness in young children over the past century (Terman & Oden, 1925; Terman & Oden, 1926; Hollingworth, 1926; Hollingworth, 1942; Terman & Oden, 1947; Terman & Oden, 1959; Gross, 1986; Gross, 1993; Kennedy, 2002; Harrison, 2003; Saunders, 2003; Sankar-Deleeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007). Two landmark pioneers in the field of gifted education and case study research were Terman & Oden (1925, 1926, 1947 & 1959) and Hollingworth (1926, 1942). The participants considered for these case studies were selected as suitable according to their age and levels of achievement, and high IQ levels assessed through formal intelligence testing. With the expansion of the concept of giftedness towards the end of the century, later case studies began to recognise that giftedness could present itself in a range of domains other than intellectual intelligence, and therefore, examined the diversity of their participant’s gifts and talents, in conjunction with their intellectual intelligence (Gross, 1986; Gross, 1993; Kennedy, 2002; Harrison, 2003; Saunders, 2003; Sankar-Deleeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007).

Few case studies have examined the characteristics and educational experiences of primary age gifted children (Gross, 1986; Gross, 1993; Harrison, 2003; Sankar-Deleeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007) and even fewer studies have examined the characteristics and educational experiences of preschoolers through a case study design (Harrison, 2003; Sankar-Deleeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007). Furthermore, the inclusion of detailed information using the ‘voices’ of preschoolers and primary age children, as well as their parents and teachers, within case study research has also been rarely conducted (Sankar-Deleeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007). Therefore, the current case study research has built upon several aspects of previous research designs, whilst also examining the ‘lived’ experiences of a population of gifted children. Young children have been largely excluded from gifted education research due to the perceived complexities often associated with their ages and stages of development.
2.19 Contribution to Previous Studies

The current study has examined the ‘lived’ experiences of two gifted preschoolers and three gifted primary age children. Utilising some similar aspects to Sankar De-Leeuw’s research (2004, 2007), this study has recognised a range of identification strategies in selecting suitable participants; however, formal intelligence testing was not a pre-requisite unless provided by the participants voluntarily. The researcher’s decision to include children who had not been formally assessed as gifted was largely a reflection of the definition of giftedness adopted by the study which recognised that formal testing with very young gifted children is not always a valid assessment tool. As with other studies (Sankar-Deleeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007), this research also collected data from pre-interview questionnaires and transcribed interviews with the child, their parents and teachers, however, an additional perspective was included with a specialist or family support persons who could also contribute detailed information in relation to the child’s ‘lived’ experiences. The ‘voice’ of each participant, later recorded in a story format, was a unique contribution to the case study approach, and each participant has provided a rich perspective on the experiences of these gifted children in relation to their identification, characteristics, educational experiences, and involvement with support services catering for the gifted population.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The literature presented in the previous chapter has framed the focus of this study. The research method selected has enabled the perspectives of individual gifted children, their parents, family support persons and teachers to be presented in relation to their experiences of identification, educational experiences and availability of support services for gifted children. The two main research questions considered in the research process are:

- What are the experiences of two gifted preschool children?
- What are the experiences of three gifted primary age children?

Identification issues were examined when considering methods of identification and characteristics presented by gifted children that suggested they were different to other children. The educational experiences of gifted children were examined when considering what behaviours were presented by gifted children in supportive and unsupportive environments, and whether gifted children were disadvantaged in their educational environment when not recognised. Finally, the experiences participants had with support services for gifted children have been examined. Consideration was given to the information that was provided about the characteristics of gifted children by support services, the availability of services for gifted children, how these services support gifted children, and what factors have influenced the ways in which gifted children are supported by these services.

3.2 Research Aims

This research aimed:

- To build on existing knowledge from previous research about gifted children and their families’ experiences.
- To examine the provision of services for families of gifted children through family service and educational environments.
- To listen to the ‘voice’ of the child about their experiences.
To identify ways in which the lived experiences and characteristics of gifted children and their families may be unique from other children the same age.

To examine the educational environments and provisions made in mainstream environments when planning for gifted children.

3.3 Rationale for research design

A qualitative approach has been used for the study. Through the application of a range of qualitative methods, it was possible to gain greater insight into individual perceptions and understandings of the experiences of young gifted children and their families, leading to the discovery of deeper levels of meaning. That is,

“The task of the qualitative methodologist is to capture what people say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world, to understand events from the viewpoints of the participants” (Burns, 2000, p.11).

This study has also utilised a phenomenological approach and encompasses an interpretive perspective. The interpretive perspective disputes the view held by positivists that all individuals share the same meaning, system and views of the world in the same way (Neuman, 2000). That is, the interpretive perspective states that an individual’s experience of social or physical reality may or may not be similar.

A phenomenological research approach is considered the most appropriate paradigm to gain insight into the experiences of gifted children and their families as it increases the understanding of lived experiences by emphasizing descriptions of what has happened and how a phenomenon was experienced (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). As discussed in Burns (2000), this form of examination focuses on the importance of the ‘lived’ experiences of individuals and recognises that the ‘reality’ of the research setting is dynamic. The researcher recognises that this approach provides a method by which the study can improve our understanding of the ‘lived’ experiences of the participants through careful description of their experiences. Therefore, this study has sought to understand and interpret the lived experiences of gifted children and their families through the examination of the personal responses generated by the children, teachers, family support people and families themselves.
Harrison (2003) completed research on giftedness in early childhood which utilised the interpretive paradigm. This approach was based on naturalistic enquiry and interpersonal and professional connections with her participants. A phenomenological approach was also used in an attempt to capture the nature of the social and emotional development of young gifted children during the period of early childhood. For this study, the researcher has also adopted an interpretive perspective with a view to finding meaning and identity for each of the case study children through the personal perspectives of all of the participants involved in the research. Therefore, this study has replicated aspects of Harrison’s research design by including a range of perspectives described and interpreted through the use of parent records, records of developmental milestones, anecdotal observations of children’s behaviour, drawings and work samples, comments and conversations. However, in addition to the data sources utilised by Harrison (2003), this study has included play sessions (with the preschool participants), semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers, specialists, family support personnel and the children themselves, with a view to recording the specific details of the individual’s perspectives and experiences during these early years.

A critical aspect of this study focuses on representing the personal views and opinions of gifted children, a notion which has been suggested by many reputable researchers in the field of gifted education (Frasier, as cited in Martin, 2003; Harrison, 2003; Renzulli, 2004; Soto & Swadener, 2005) but is an approach which has only recently been utilised by early childhood and gifted education researchers (Harrison, 2003). Harrison (2003) suggests that the inclusion of children’s views and opinions add a richness and integrity to any examination of the personal experiences of the young child and should be a key aspect of any future studies explaining the nature of gifted children and their interactions with their environment.

“The comments of the children included in the study are perhaps the most difficult to ignore. The thoughts and feelings they express give insight into the inner world of the gifted child and suggest the need for both parents and early childhood professionals to take time to listen to the perspective of the child” (Harrison, 2003, pp.39-40).
This opinion has been further supported by Mary Frasier in an interview with Darlene Martin (2003) entitled, ‘A Master and a Mentor in the field of Gifted Education’. Frasier recommended that future research in the field of gifted education should also approach the notion of giftedness from the perspective of gifted children themselves rather than constructed from the perceptions of adults.

The researcher suggests that the greatest challenge or issue associated with collecting data from children is related to the ‘view’ of the child a researcher holds and the experience they have with the range of ages and stages of the children involved in the study. As discussed in Soto and Swadener (2005) and Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead (2008), children have been excluded from participating directly in research due to adult assumptions that children lack experience and adults are ‘all knowing’. Consequently, prior to commencing this study, the researcher had identified a clear, personal definition of ‘the child’ as competent, capable and to be respected for their ability to contribute meaningful knowledge to the research questions explored. As described by Farrell (2005) the researcher wished to collaboratively produce the interview with the child participant. The children were able to be gate keepers of their own accounts and withhold or share their experiences as they wished. The researcher also recognised a high level of confidence and knowledge in the behaviours and characteristics of young children and was able to transfer this knowledge to the questionnaire design, interview questions and face to face meetings with the children. Challenges associated with children in research are largely influenced by the knowledge of the researcher about the children they are studying, a lack of preparation when meeting and developing a rapport with the children and their families, and inflexibility when questionnaires or interviews are delivered. However, when careful and knowledgeable preparation is planned during the research process, the voices of even the very youngest children in the study provide a richness and invaluable perspective when answering the research questions.

Therefore, this study contributes to the field of gifted education through the inclusion of the ‘voice’ of the gifted children being studied, in conjunction with the views of significant others such as teachers, parents and specialists. The main aim of this research approach has been to collect a
representation of the ‘reality’ of the experiences of gifted children and their families. Moreover, it was decided that this would be best accomplished using a case study design.

One of the most popular research methods employed in the examination of giftedness of young children throughout history has been the Case Study design (Burks, Jensen & Terman, 1930; Hollingworth, 1942; Gross, 1986; Harrison, 2003; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007). As described in Moon (1991), the embedded, multiple-case design can:

“…examine more than one unit of analysis within a number of cases. They are especially appropriate for examining complex, nested systems” (p.163).

Therefore, this study has also utilised an embedded, multi-case design because it was interested in the experiences and perceptions of a range of gifted children and their families who are influenced by three main units of analysis including identification, educational programs and support services. As suggested by Stake (2000), the multi-case study design was considered most effective in this particular study because it focused on the interest in the individual subjects rather than the methods of inquiry used. Secondly, it drew attention to the specific questions framing the study. In addition, it seeks to explore what is common and uncommon within any one case study, but more often than not focuses on the uncommon experiences portrayed – including those experiences reported by the population of very young children participating in this study. Finally, it requires the researcher to be highly descriptive and reflective so that the reader can learn about the cases more vicariously and draw their own conclusions. Furthermore, the multi-case study design would provide multiple sources for triangulation through converging lines of inquiry, and improving reliability and validity within the study. Therefore, the perspectives of each participant in any one case study would provide comparative descriptions of the child’s ‘lived’ experiences whilst also provide opportunities to compare the perspectives of other participants in the other case studies researched. This would assist the researcher in interpreting the ‘reality’ of the ‘lived’ experiences in each of the children’s case studies as described by all participants in the study.
3.4 Critical Analysis of Research Methodology

As stated in Moon (1991), case study research provides a valuable method of linking research, theory and practice within the field of gifted education. It is a powerful and easily accessible study design through which individuals, parents and educational specialists can relate and compare their personal experiences and practices.

Ultimately, the aim of this study was to gather data which would be informative about the most recent understandings of the characteristics of gifted children, describe the ‘reality’ of their personal perceptions and experiences within education environments, and most importantly, explore these themes utilising the ‘voice’ of the children and families themselves, framed by the interactions and perceptions of education and support specialists. Finally, this study has aimed to inform future directions related to Government policy in education that influence both the early childhood and primary learning environments of gifted children.

“Opportunities for in depth interaction with young gifted children provide a valuable source of information regarding the realities of giftedness. When this is combined with knowledge of the research of giftedness, early childhood educators, parents and families can move beyond superficial awareness to in depth understanding and knowledge of appropriate responses to giftedness in early childhood” (Harrison, p.99, 1999a).

As discussed in Yin (1989), the evidence from multi-case study designs is more robust than the evidence from single-case study designs. A multi-case study is extremely demanding, however, it is particularly powerful in areas, such as gifted education, where methods based on sampling logic are difficult or impossible to use because of the rarity of the phenomena. Therefore, a multi-case study design in this research provides opportunities to compare and contrast the lived experiences of a sample of five gifted children and their families.

Naturally there have been some issues that needed to be addressed when embarking on a case study approach. Probably the greatest concern, as suggested by Burns (2000), has been subjective bias. Subjective bias can easily infiltrate the case study when the researcher allows questionable evidence or personal views to influence the direction of the findings and the conclusion. Therefore, it has been essential that the researcher in this study regularly check for subjective bias, particularly when
designing questionnaires or interview questions, as the interpretation of the data collected may be strongly swayed by the personal beliefs and schemas held by the interpreter. One way in which the researcher has checked this has been by seeking clarity of the researcher’s interpretations with participants during the interview process. However, as discussed by Fontana and Frey (2003), as questionnaires and interviews are not neutral tools in the data gathering process, there are some limitations within questionnaire and interview design that the researcher in this study has been required to consider.

In this study, the design of the questionnaires and interviews for both adults and very young children was a very challenging and complex process, in particular. Several limitations in the design of these tools included: the need for the researcher to modify the wording in the children’s questionnaire and interview due to their levels of cognitive and developmental ability and yet remain true to the common research questions asked of all participants; the method of delivery of the children’s questionnaire required parents to record their responses, and therefore may have been explained or interpreted differently to their child’s original responses; and the method of delivery of the interviews by the researcher needed to be flexible to allow for the personality and reactions of the individual children. The youngest participants responded best to a play-based interview session where questions were embedded in casual and age appropriate conversation. These adaptations to the design of the questionnaires and interviews may have impacted on the data collected, although as all adult participants and all three primary age children were provided an opportunity to clarify their responses to the questionnaire through follow up interviews and transcripts of their interview, the researcher was confident that descriptions of the ‘lived’ experiences had been interpreted as closely as possible.

A second concern with case study research is generalisation (Burns, 2000). It is regularly argued that, unlike experimental studies, case studies cannot be generalised to theory as there are too few participants involved in the study, however, Burns (2000) states that the researcher’s role in a case study approach is to develop theories and, therefore, the findings may be used to further explain theoretical propositions. In other words, the aim of the researcher has been to assist the reader’s
personal analysis and synthesis of the data presented rather than attempt to generalise the findings in
the study to specific theories.

Moon (1991) raises the importance of validity in case study research. Construct validity is referred to
as the extent to which abstract terms, concepts and meanings are shared across times, settings and
populations and can be enhanced with the use of multiple sources of evidence that are recorded
accurately and reviewed by key informants at the draft stage. That is, in relation to this study, the
researcher has been required to accurately and clearly detail the methods and sources of data
collected so as the reader may identify more precisely whether the study has construct validity. As
explained in Moon (1991), internal validity refers to the extent to which extraneous variables have
been controlled by the researcher. He states that although internal validity is less of an issue in case
study designs due to their descriptive explanations rather than causal statements, it is important to
acknowledge the extent that inferences are made from events that have not been directly observed.
To enhance internal validity, Yin (1989) proposes three tactics based on analytic logic and include
pattern matching, explanation building and time-series analysis. Pattern matching is a strategy that
compares the obtained pattern with a predicted one. That is, a case study can claim internal validity
if the patterns obtained correspond with each other and there is no pattern to match rival alternative
theories. Explanation building refers to the process of comparing initial propositions with initial
results and then revising these findings with further data. This process allows for the testing of rival
explanations and propositions before accepting or discarding them according to the evidence
presented in the study and how it relates to established theories. The final tactic proposed by Yin
(1989) is time series analysis whereby a case study may highlight changes over time and relate these
changes to theoretical propositions previously articulated. That is, it may be evident that a predicted
pattern or trend stated prior to the investigation is supported or refuted based on the data collected in
the present study. This study used internal validity to effectively control possible sources of error by
using triangulation to compare the perspectives of the child, the parents, the family support persons,
specialists and teachers in the representation of their perspectives. If participants reported different
perspectives, these could be investigated further.
Finally, Moon (1991) explains the issue of reliability in case study designs and refers to the structures established to ensure that the results of the study may be replicated. Naturally, replication is difficult in the use of case study research, especially when the phenomena studied is unique, however, as cited in Moon (1991), careful documentation of data collection and analysis methods, detailed reporting of research methods and a clear identification of the researcher’s role and status can improve external validity. Therefore, as suggested by Yin (1989), this study has developed a case study data base and utilised clearly defined rules and procedures for collecting the data. This increased the reliability of the data in this study. Furthermore, as suggested in Burns (2000) this case study has included protocol that contains the purpose of the study, the issues, the setting, the propositions being investigated, the letter of introduction, review of theoretical basis, operational procedures for collecting data, sources of information, questions and lines of questioning, guidelines for the report, relevant readings and references.

3.5 Getting Approval for the Study

Prior to the commencement of the investigation, approval was granted by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (see appendix 1). The research was classified as ‘minimal risk’ (MR) as the subjects were not considered to be exposed to physical, psychological or social risk above the everyday norm, but that the study may contain an element of slight risk to subjects. Awareness of the study in the community occurred through advertising at a parent support group for gifted children and through discussions with teachers at early learning centres, kindergartens, and state or private schools in the north-east and south-east areas of Melbourne, Victoria. During these meetings the researcher was able to describe the study being undertaken, provide plain language statements, request their assistance in locating suitable families for the study, and outline the issues of voluntary participation and confidentiality for each phase of the study should participants volunteer to partake in the research (see appendix 2).
3.6 Description of Research methods

3.6.1 Selection of the Sample

A purposive sample of five young children and their families were selected. For the cases in the study, purposive sampling has been identified as the most appropriate method to “identify a difficult to reach specialised population, in order to conduct a more in depth investigation and gain a deeper understanding” (Neuman, 1997, p.198). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to use their own judgement for selecting the most appropriate participants for the study (Dixon, Bouma & Atkinson, 1990). The criteria for final selection within the purposive sample determined by the researcher were that the subjects be:

- Male and/or female children. The researcher sought to represent both genders with a view to possibly identifying similarities or differences in the experiences of gifted males and females.

- Aged between 3 years to 11 years. These ages are recognised as representing the preschool and primary age groups the researcher was seeking to study.

- Located within the north-east and south-east region of Melbourne, Victoria. This provided the researcher greater accessibility to the subjects in relation to University and home locations.

- Recognised as demonstrating advanced skills or abilities in relation to same age peers either through formal testing, work samples or observation. These advanced skills and abilities may be evident in a wide range of learning domains such as intellectual, musical, artistic, social or emotional and may have been identified by parents, teachers, professionals in the field of gifted education, or significant others with close and regular involvement with the child.

The intention was to identify a sample of gifted children and compare their experiences in relation to their initial identification, educational programs and support structures.
The gifted children in the study were recruited from a small selection of state and private early learning centres, schools and community groups. These educational settings were providing early childhood and primary age educational services to the families and children involved in the study. The educational services were conveniently located within the northeast or southeast region of Melbourne, Victoria including one teacher education university, two community based preschools, two private preschool to year 12 schools, three state primary schools and one support network for parents with gifted children for assistance in locating suitable participants. Following this request, eight children were recommended for the study by their respective educational or community services, however, only seven were determined by the researcher as developmentally advanced according to the specified criteria. The researcher then approached the families of the children, or was approached by the families themselves, to discuss the research. Two families withdrew due to illness or moving location and the researcher completed this study with the remaining five case study children who met the criteria for selection.

Families and children from these educational settings who expressed an interest in participating in the research were then briefed on the topic of interest. Issues of confidentiality were also discussed and Plain Language Statements provided (see appendix 3). Separate Plain Language Statements were written for the adult participants and children so as to ensure appropriate language was used for the younger participants. The researcher also discussed interviewing teachers and specialists, and clarified the processes for obtaining permission from the individuals to conduct the research. The researcher also discussed this with interested staff, and times were arranged to meet with individual teachers, parents, specialists and children at a location of their choice.

As mentioned, a purposeful sample of five, young children were the focus of the study. The features of the group were as follows:

- Lucy – 4 years old and attending 3 year old kindergarten
- Harry – 5 years old and attending 4 year old kindergarten
- Kate – 6 years old and attending Prep (Pilot study participant), and later, Grade One at a State School
One child, David, was significantly older than the other four children included in the study. The researcher recognised David as providing important information in the study when examining the personal and educational journey of a gifted child from the preschool to upper primary years. David also provided a unique contrast to the other children in that he had attended both home schooling and formal educational services.

### 3.7 Identification of Sample as Gifted

A range of identification and data methods have been utilised in the study including:

- Teacher nomination
- Parent nomination
- Checklists
- Standardised tests

This study applied a range of identification procedures in order to select a representative sample of gifted children exhibiting both typical and atypical characteristics associated with the nature of giftedness.

#### 3.7.1 Teacher Nomination

Teachers were able to nominate gifted children in their classes, specifying those who were performing well and those who were underachieving. However, research evidence indicates that teachers are more likely to nominate conforming students who are well behaved rather than nonconforming students who demonstrate high potential (Nasca, 1979). On the other hand, the efficiency of teacher identification of gifted students appears to increase with the age of the children. In a study conducted in Holland, it was concluded that secondary teachers were relatively proficient at identifying underachieving gifted students (Monks, van Boxtel, Roelefs & Sanders, 1986). Regardless of the possible deficiencies, teachers have an important role to play in identification and a
submission from the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001, Submission 215, GERRIC, p.7) argues that teachers’ judgements are considerately more accurate when the teachers have been trained in gifted education. Therefore, teacher nomination was considered as an important element of this study.

3.7.2 Parent Nomination

Parents have also contributed to the identification of the gifted because of their intimate knowledge of their children’s development. Research has consistently shown that parents are significantly more successful than teachers in identifying giftedness in their children but often dismissed as biased (Louis and Lewis, 1992; Gross, 1993). Therefore, an important identification procedure used in this study has included parent’s views in collaboration with trained teachers and other specialist staff. Two children in this study were identified through parent nomination.

3.7.3 Checklists

Identification through the forms of checklists has been utilised in conjunction with the evidence from the other more rigorous strategies such as teacher and parent nominations or standardised testing, and therefore, has been viewed as a complementary strategy in the identification process. Checklists that have been utilised in this study have included the ‘Characteristics of Giftedness Scale’ (Silverman & Maxwell, 1996), Introversion/Extraversion Continuum (Silverman, 1995), the ‘Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development’ (Morrison, 1995), the ‘Young Children’s Development: Parent Questionnaire’ (Weimer & Robinson, unpublished), and the ‘Things my young child has done’ (Sayler, 2005c); ‘Things my child has done’ (Sayler, 2005b), ‘Things this child has done’ (Sayler, 2005a). All of these checklists are recognised as suitable for use by parents of preschoolers, primary age children and teachers when identifying characteristics that may suggest giftedness. Four of the five cases studies have completed these checklists in order to support their identification of their gifted child. The family of the older child in the study did not complete these checklists as they felt that their child was clearly recognisable as a gifted child. The researcher was also satisfied that checklists were not essential for identifying his advanced abilities.
3.7.4 Standardised Tests

It is widely acknowledged that standardised testing should not be used alone (Gross, 1993; Gross, 1998; Porter, 1999; The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001). However, it is also recognised that there are several highly regarded standardised tests that are critical when identifying significant differences in mental processing between the ranges of levels of giftedness in gifted children. Therefore, this study has recognised results from several standardised tests including:

- Wechsler Pre-school and Primary School Scale of Intelligence – Revised (WPPSI-R) (Wechsler, 2002).
- Wechsler Intelligence Scale For Children – Revised (WISC-R) (Wechsler, 1974).

Therefore, in this study standardised tests were used only as one part of the data gathering process. One case study child who had been assessed formally using these tests was clearly recognised as a suitable participant for the study. It is important to note that four out of five of the case study families expressed reluctance in pursuing formal testing for reasons such as lack of finance and age of the children. These parents stated that formal standardised testing was expensive, or that they understood that young children did not necessarily test well and, therefore, their results may not accurately reflect their skills and abilities. The researcher decided that completion of checklists or formal testing was not a mandatory criterion in the selection of the gifted children in this study. This decision was based on a belief that there was, more likely than not, a higher proportion of gifted children within the overall population without formal assessment of any form.
3.8 Data Collection Strategies

Several research methods have been utilised when examining the personal experiences and perceptions of gifted children and their families in relation to initial identification (prior to study), educational experiences and support structures. These methods included:

- Interviewing
- Semi-structured Play Interviews
- Parent Records, Records of Developmental Milestones and Anecdotal Observations of Children’s Behaviour
- Children’s Drawings and Work Samples

3.8.1 Interviewing

Interviewing techniques were the main research methods utilised in this study. This decision was based on the previous successful past experience of the researcher when utilising semi-structured play for understanding children’s perspectives and interviews with young children and their families. This method also provided the means to understand the experiences of the participants more solidly and deeply from the combined perspectives of the child and their parents. The main aim of the interview as discussed in Stringer (2004) is to provide opportunities for participants to describe and interpret their situations and issues in their own words whilst also inviting others to view their world and understandings from their perspective.

Furthermore, Rubin and Rubin (2005) state that for responsive interviewing to occur effectively, the interviewer must demonstrate qualities of self-confidence, adaptability and a willingness to listen and change direction if they discover that a new focus or theme is evolving in the conversations with their interviewees. As highlighted in Rubin and Rubin (2005) and critical when planning and conducting interviews with young children, the interviewer must ensure they remain objective and establish precise guidelines or protocol that must be followed throughout the study. Any adaptations to this process must be documented and reported to ensure the study maintains rigour.
A number of specific interview questions were constructed as a guide for structured and semi-structured play interviews with separate guides constructed for the children (see appendix 9) and adults (appendix 11). That is, the expression of questions constructed for the interviewing sessions were appropriate to the ages and stages of the participants, whilst also asking the same research questions guiding this study.

3.8.2 Semi-structured play interviews

“Gifted children themselves are perhaps the greatest source of knowledge and understanding of giftedness. Careful observation, active listening and close interaction over a period of time with a child who is gifted can provide a unique insight into the nature of giftedness in early childhood” (Harrison, 1999a, p.100).

Utilising the ‘voice’ of the young gifted child is a rare, and yet, increasingly popular method of research in early childhood and gifted education. As mentioned, a main aim of this study was to accurately represent the ‘lived’ experiences and perceptions of gifted children and the researcher recognised that a highly effective method to obtain these would be through semi-structured play interviews.

The interviews with the preschool children in this study were based on semi-structured play interview techniques as they can be used with all children no matter what their potential. Play techniques were essential for interviewing the pre-schoolers. Quite often young children have not developed adequate vocabulary nor reached a level of cognitive development for expressing themselves effectively through verbal language, but they are able to do so naturally through the language of play. Barlow, Strother and Landreth (cited in Hoffman, 1992) concluded that play is a medium through which children express their feelings, explore themselves and their relationships, and attempt to organise their experiences. Therefore, when play is used in interviewing, it helps pre-schoolers to feel less anxious and more comfortable, thereby fostering a positive relationship between the child and the interviewer. Furthermore, as the children become involved in play they also become involved in the interviewing process.
Play in interviewing offers an opportunity to gain insight into the world of individual children and in the process help them to express themselves and discuss their personal opinions and ideas. Gumaer (1984) observed that expressing their feelings and behaviours in play increases pre-schooler’s self-confidence and feelings of security so they are able to be more open. Furthermore, Hoffman (1992) cited that through play children can act out and face their feelings of anger, anxiety, and frustration in safe, constructive ways.

Carter (1987) discusses two types of play appropriate in interviewing pre-schoolers (Carter, 1987, cited in Hoffman, 1991). Unstructured, or free play, allows children to spontaneously choose the toys or materials they will use and continue the interview at their own pace. Structured play, or controlled play, is set up by the interviewer who makes available play materials that are related or useful in focusing on the child’s thoughts and feelings, and therefore, gains insight into the child’s world.

In this study, the researcher used both an unstructured or free play interview technique with one preschooler. This decision was based on discussions with the child’s parent that this would work best. It was decided with the parents of the second preschooler that a more structured or controlled interview would work best for this child. The researcher decided to bring along her 7 year old daughter to the play sessions to enable each child to have someone to play with and take the individual focus off the young child. The children played together during the initial stages of the interview. The preparation of this situation involved parents asking their preschoolers if they would like to also meet the researcher’s daughter and have a play before the researcher administered the play interview questions. This was done so as to provide time for the younger children to get to know the researcher and therefore feel more comfortable in answering the focus questions. Both children were known to enjoy the company of older ‘girls’ and were very excited to have a new playmate to play with before, during and after the interview.
The play interviews were not used with the primary age children as all parents, and the children themselves, stated that they were comfortable with one on one interviews with the researcher. The primary age children also expressed excitement and a feeling of importance when asked to participate in the one on one interviews.

3.8.3 **Parent Records, Records of Developmental Milestones and Anecdotal Observations of Children’s Behaviour**

Parents of gifted children can offer a wealth of information in relation to the abilities and characteristics of their child. The recording of dated examples of early language development, developmental milestones, interesting events and behavioural observations may have been collected throughout their child’s life to date (Roedell, 1989). Most parents have been their child’s lifelong teacher and consequently, possess a detailed and descriptive dialogue about the responses and experiences of their gifted child. Therefore, this study has utilised records provided by parents when constructing a picture that represents the lived experience of their gifted child.

3.8.4 **Children’s Drawings and Work Samples**

As previously mentioned, collections of student drawings and work samples provide a rich source of highly informative and concrete visual information relative to certain abilities demonstrated by gifted children. As discussed in Stringer (2004), work samples may be used to demonstrate variation, extreme examples, typical and particular characteristics or exceptional examples of student work. Furthermore, work samples may provide opportunities to become involved in descriptive dialogue with young children who may prefer to discuss their thoughts through pictures.

For this study, drawings and work samples were provided by one preschooler prior to the semi-structured play interviews, throughout the duration of the play interview and many weeks following the interview. The second preschooler completed drawings during the play interview and their parent provided several work samples at the conclusion of the parent interview. One primary age child was enthusiastic to show and tell their work portfolio during the interview, and another primary age child provided two writing pieces at the conclusion of their interview.
Therefore, although a wide range of data gathering strategies have been utilised, not all case studies were consistent. This inconsistency reflects the complexity and uniqueness of each case study based on the child’s age; stage of development; parent, teacher or family support persons’ level of knowledge in relation to identification and characteristics of giftedness; or each participant’s personal enthusiasm or ability to supply work samples or examples of each child’s experiences, which could be dependent on influences such as accessibility to records or even time.

3.9 Preliminary Investigations

Preliminary investigations took place with a small sample prior to the major study in order to trial each phase of the design of the study and to trial the analysis of data. The intention of the trial or pilot study was to provide the necessary data on the likely success of each phase of the major study. Pilot studies provide an opportunity for the researcher to refine their skills, practice interpretative abilities and plan for a range of influencing factors that have been unrecognised during the initial design structure of the study (Davitz, 1996).

3.9.1 Sample for the preliminary investigations

One gifted primary age child, her parents and a family support person were used to pilot the pre-interview questionnaire and to participate in a follow up interview. This child had been nominated by her parent at a parent support group for gifted children and her family was willing to take part in the trial and the major study. The researcher distributed the pre-interview questionnaire to the parents, child and a willing family support person.

3.9.2 Primary age child pre-interview questionnaire trial and results

Prior to the administering of the pre-interview questionnaire, the researcher wrote a letter to the parents of the child with information about the pre-interview questionnaire (see appendix 6). The researcher also sent a letter specifically written for the child explaining the reasons for the pre-interview questionnaire and encouraging them to give freely of their personal views in their responses.
(see appendix 3). Due to the age and stage of the child, verbal feedback was provided to the researcher (through the child’s parent) regarding how long it took to complete the questionnaire, the clarity of the instructions, the clarity of the questions asked and the layout. The child was asked to comment on any questions that they didn’t like answering, they were also asked to comment on whether or not they felt any aspects related to ‘finding out more about them’ had been left out of the questionnaire. The child was invited to make further comments. The pre-interview questionnaire was revised following the feedback from the parent and child. The responses were used as a starting point for constructing the questions to be asked in the interview with the children.

All sections of each question on the pre-interview questionnaire were completed. The parent of this primary age child reported that the pre-interview questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes. The researcher believed that the pre-interview questionnaire was satisfactory for the major study. The parent stated that the primary age child was happy to complete the pre-interview questionnaire.

The parent of the primary age child reported that the instructions for delivery of the pre-interview questionnaire were clear and there were no questions that the parent or the child objected to answering. The format and ordering of the questions remained the same as the parent and child commented favourably on these.

3.9.3 Primary age child interview questions trial and results

The interview was trialled using the same child who had completed the pilot pre-interview questionnaire. The focused interview questions were designed by using the responses of the child from the pre-interview questionnaire to determine the aspects of the pre-interview questionnaire where the child could explain further about their life experiences as a gifted child. The process of audio recording the interviews with a small IC-recorder was determined during the trial interview. The recordings from this instrument during transcription provided a high degree of clarity, and therefore, ensured that participants were heard in the way they intended.
Prior to the interview, the researcher asked the primary age child if they were comfortable with the interview being recorded by an IC-recorder, in which they responded that they would be happy to be recorded but would like to hear their voice afterwards for fun. Feedback was sought from both the child and their parents the following day as to the interview approach adopted by the researcher. Both parent and child commented favourably on the questions asked, the order of questions and the time it took – although the child was disappointed that there were no ‘hard’ questions. Therefore, the researcher decided that the interview questions and process would be satisfactory for the major study.

It was decided that the primary age child who participated in the pilot study would also become one of the five case studies in the major study due to the success of the initial research process and the richness of the pre-interview questionnaire and interview data collected.

3.9.4 Parent pre-interview questionnaire trial and results

The same process was used to trial the parent pre-interview questionnaire as was used to trial the child pre-interview questionnaire. Participants completed the pre-interview questionnaire and provided feedback about the format, order of questions, wording and nature of the questions as requested in an introductory letter to the parent (see appendix 5). This feedback was used to modify the parent pre-interview questionnaire.

The parents completed most questions in detail but felt that the last section on ‘support services’ was an area they were ‘unsure’ of as they knew little about this area. They reported that the pre-interview questionnaire took over an hour to complete. The researcher believed that the pre-interview questionnaire was therefore too long and needed to be shortened significantly. When discussions were held about which questions might be left out it was suggested that some questions appeared to be repetitive across the three main sections and that the final section on ‘support services’ could be reduced to one page only. The participants were satisfied with the nature of the questions in the original pre-interview questionnaire and they reported that there were no questions they objected to answering. They did report that, through the process of completing the pre-interview
questionnaire, many other questions were created they felt were not answered in their personal experiences with a gifted child and were looking forward to raising these further during the interview process, as well as hearing the findings from the final study.

3.9.5 Parent interview questions trial and results

The interview questions were trialled using the same parents who had completed the pre-interview questionnaire. The focused interview questions were designed by using the responses of the parent from the pre-interview questionnaire to determine the aspects of the pre-interview questionnaire where the parent could explain further about the life experiences of their gifted child. The proposed focus questions were then modified following verbal feedback from the parents.

Prior to the interview, the researcher asked the parents if they were comfortable with the interview being recorded by an IC-recorder, in which they reported that this method would be satisfactory. Feedback was sought from the parents as to the interview approach adopted by the researcher and both commented favourably on the questions asked, the order of questions and the time it took – although they apologised for talking so much as the interview took approximately an hour. Therefore, the researcher decided that the interview questions and process would be satisfactory for the major study. Furthermore, due to the richness of the data in the interviews, the researcher chose to remove several pre-interview questionnaire items which were covered in the interview process and thereby, shorten the pre-interview questionnaire for the major study.

The parents of this pilot study agreed to have the data from this trial included as one of the five case studies in the major study due to the success of the initial research process and the richness of the pre-interview questionnaire and interview data collected.
3.9.6 Family Support Person or Specialist and Teacher pre-interview questionnaire trial and results

The same process was used to trial the Family Support Person or Specialist pre-interview questionnaires as was used to trial the child and parent pre-interview questionnaire. A teacher was not involved in the trial. A family support person completed the pre-interview questionnaire and provided feedback about the format, order of questions, wording and nature of the questions in the introduction letter (see appendix 5). This feedback was used to modify the Family Support Person or Specialist and Teacher pre-interview questionnaire.

The family support person completed all questions in detail, however, commented that one question needed to be changed as it ‘assumed’ that ‘programming and planning’ had taken place for the focus child when it had not. The participant also stated that the researcher had not asked ‘whether teachers at preschool or school level have been equipped to meet the focus child’s needs’. Finally, the participant stated that some of the questions for the family support person assumed that they were a professional in the field of gifted education and appeared to not be relevant to a non-professional family support person.

The family support person reported that the pre-interview questionnaire took over an hour to complete. As with the parent pre-interview questionnaire, the researcher believed that this was therefore too long and needed to be shortened significantly. When discussions were held about which questions might be left out it was confirmed that some questions appeared to be repetitive across the three main sections. The participant was satisfied with the nature of the questions in the original pre-interview questionnaire and they reported that there were no questions they objected to answering. The participant also commented favourably on the format and order of questions asked in the pre-interview questionnaire.
3.9.7 Family Support Person or Specialist and Teacher interview questions trial and results

The interview questions were trialled using the same Family Support Person who had completed the pre-interview questionnaire. The focused interview questions were designed by using the responses of the Family Support Person from the pre-interview questionnaire to determine the aspects of the pre-interview questionnaire where the Family Support Person could explain further about their perceptions of the life experiences of the gifted child. The proposed focus questions were then modified following verbal feedback from the Family Support Person.

Prior to the interview, the researcher asked the participant if they were comfortable with the interview being recorded by an IC-recorder, in which they reported that this method would be satisfactory. Feedback was sought from the participant as to the interview approach adopted by the researcher and they commented favourably on the questions asked, the order of questions and the time it took. Therefore, the researcher decided that the interview questions and process would be satisfactory for the major study. However, as decided following the parent pre-interview questionnaire and interview trials, due to the richness of the data in the interviews, the researcher chose to remove several pre-interview questionnaire items which were covered in the interview process and thereby, shorten the pre-interview questionnaire for the major study.

The family support person of this pilot study agreed to have the data from this trial included as one of the five case studies in the major study due to the success of the initial research process and the richness of the pre-interview questionnaire and interview data collected.

3.10 Data analysis for the preliminary study

Data from the pilot study were analysed with the purpose of determining what aspects of the pre-interview questionnaires and interviews should be modified and what should remain unchanged. The analysis of data assisted in ensuring that each question was needed when answering the research questions and that each research question could be answered using the available data. Transcripts
presenting the exact words of the participants allowed the voices of the child, parent and family
support person to be heard and also provided supporting statements and opportunities for clarification
to the responses presented in the pre-interview questionnaires. Therefore, the data analysis resulted
in the development of a technique that provided the type of responses that could answer the desired
research questions.
3.11 Phases used in Method of Data Gathering

The following phases were used as the method of data gathering:

- Phase 1: Preschool Child Pre-interview Questionnaire
- Phase 2: Preschool Child Semi-structured Play Interviews
- Phase 3: Primary Age Child Pre-interview Questionnaires
- Phase 4: Primary Age Child Interviews
- Phase 5: Parent Pre-interview Questionnaires
- Phase 6: Parent Interviews
- Phase 7: Family Support Person or Specialist Pre-interview Questionnaires
- Phase 8: Family Support Persons or Specialists Interviews
- Phase 9: Teacher Pre-interview questionnaires
- Phase 10: Teacher Interviews

3.11.1 Phase One: Preschool Child Pre-interview Questionnaires

Phase one of the research involved the completion of a pre-interview questionnaire by each of the case study children (see appendix 8). Parents of the pre-schoolers were instructed through an attached letter (see appendix 6) to ask the questions on the pre-interview questionnaire, record their child’s responses, and then return the completed questionnaire in the stamped envelope provided within two weeks of receiving it. Reminder phone calls or emails were made to families who had not returned the questionnaire in the two week period. Efforts were made to build a rapport with the pre-schoolers and their parents through approved kindergarten visits, informal face to face conversations, emails and letters. When the pre-schoolers agreed to participate in the study the researcher thanked them for their willingness to participate and encouraged them to openly express their ideas and thoughts about their experiences as a preschooler. The children were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and received positive responses by the researcher to their answers or comments. This open approach to questioning maximised the opportunity for the children to present their perspectives about their experiences accurately and honestly. Content validity was enhanced by protecting the identity of the participants and assuring them of confidentiality. The area of discussion was also focused on the children’s interests and opinions and therefore, may have also increased the likelihood that the responses would be truthful.
The preschool child pre-interview questionnaire involved 14 open-ended questions. This was decided so as the participant had the maximum opportunity to respond in their own way whilst also contribute essential information about their personal experiences as was related to the study. The questionnaire was accompanied by specific instructions as to the delivery of the questions to the child, particularly instructing that the parent record the ‘exact’ words of the child’s responses whether or not they felt it answered the question correctly or made sense (see appendix 6; appendix 8).

The pre-interview questionnaire consisted of a front cover requesting general details related to name, date of birth, pre-school attended, parent names and contact details. Eight questions related to the child’s perceptions of themselves, including their interests, friendships, strengths and challenges. One question related to the child’s view of others perceptions of them, and five questions related to the child’s perceptions of their experiences in educational environments and whilst interacting with other children in these environments. It is possible that the children would respond differently to these questions depending on their verbal ability, their understanding and experience of the questions asked, and the influence of their overall age and stage of development. Furthermore, parental influence when asking and recording the child’s responses may affect the responses and behaviours associated with answering the questions by a preschool child, however, the interview with the researcher may also clarify and add validity to these responses in the pre-interview questionnaire.

3.11.2 Phase 2: Preschool Child Semi-structured Play Interviews

The semi-structured play sessions were designed to provide in-depth information on the specific experiences of gifted preschoolers using an age appropriate method. Each session provided the researcher with an opportunity to request the preschooler elaborate and clarify information they had dictated to their parents in the pre-interview questionnaire whilst also check for parental influence or effect. This process would contribute personal and individual meaning to the preschooler’s story and experiences as a gifted child. The parents of the two preschoolers who agreed to participate in the follow up interview were contacted by phone and given the opportunity to choose a time and date that would be most suitable. Each parent was fully consulted as to how, where and when their
preschooler would be best interviewed. For both preschoolers it was decided that the involvement of
the researcher’s daughter, who was 7 years, would assist with the development of rapport and
confidence when responding to questions with the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher and
preschooler’s parents agreed that their children would be more likely to feel comfortable with the
interview process if they felt there was less focus on the questioning and more focus on the
opportunity to play with an older child.

Confidentiality was guaranteed to the preschoolers and their parents to encourage the preschoolers to
express themselves honestly and openly. Preschoolers were also assured that they could choose not
to answer questions or withdraw from the interview at any time. It was anticipated that each semi-
structured play session would take approximately 30 minutes, however, this varied according to the
length of time it took for the individual preschoolers to develop confidence and a comfortable rapport
with the researcher. One preschooler preferred to answer focus questions whilst playing
imaginatively in the ‘fairy garden’ alongside the older child and when swinging on their swing set.
The other preschooler preferred to answer focus questions whilst participating in a semi-structured
drawing experience. This preschooler happily answered questions when the older child was also
asked similar questions. This method may have influenced the responses to questions posed,
however, the preschooler’s responses were individual to the older child and they were representative
of the responses recorded in the pre-interview questionnaire.

Prior to the interview, the preschoolers were also asked if they would share some of their work or
items of interest to them with the researcher. The preschoolers were content to provide copies of
pictures, portfolios, photographs and writing. Some of these items have been included within each
child’s case study story to assist in representing examples of their abilities and interests. Following
the recording of the interviews with the preschoolers on the IC-recorder, the sessions were
transcribed ready for analysis.
Semi-structured play sessions were utilised in order to provide the pre-schoolers with a ‘voice’ and opportunity to express in detail their feelings and perceptions of their experiences independently. After reviewing the responses from their pre-interview questionnaire, a range of open and specific questions were constructed to enable the children to explain or elaborate on their pre-interview questionnaire responses further. The semi-structured interview and play sessions also provided an opportunity for the researcher to check for clarity of understanding between the written information and the verbal responses.

An interview guide of both specific and open-ended questions were developed with questions relating to the child’s interests, strengths, challenges, friendships and educational experiences (see appendix 9). A more open style of interviewing allowed the preschoolers to give freely of their ideas and also opportunities to guide the interview process when examining their experiences and personal qualities. The intention was to understand the preschooler’s perceptions of their life experiences. It was essential to this study that the child’s voice was included in any discussion about their experiences, as this would highlight contrasting and supporting views presented by the other participants in their case study. It was decided that an IC-recorder would be able to record the questions and responses of the preschooler and researcher accurately.

3.11.3 Phase 3: Primary Age Child Pre-interview Questionnaires

Phase three of the research involved the completion of a pre-interview questionnaire by each of the primary school aged Case Study children (see appendix 8). As with the preschool children’s pre-interview questionnaires, parents of the primary age children were consulted as to whether they would need to assist their child in the completion of the questionnaire before returning the questionnaire in the stamped envelope provided, within two weeks of receiving it. Reminder phone calls or emails were made to families who had not returned the questionnaire in the two week period. Efforts were made to build a rapport with the primary age children and their parents through approved home visits, informal face to face conversations, emails and letters. When the primary age children agreed to participate in the study the researcher thanked them for their willingness to
participate and encouraged them to openly express their ideas and thoughts about their experiences as a primary age child. Prior to attempting the pre-interview questionnaire, the children were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and received positive responses by the researcher to their answers or comments. This open approach to questioning maximised the opportunity for the children to present their perspectives about their experiences accurately and honestly. Content validity was enhanced by protecting the identity of the participants and assuring them of confidentiality. The area of discussion was also focused on the children’s interests and opinions and therefore, may have also increased the likelihood that the responses would be truthful.

The primary age questionnaire was designed to provide another perspective on the experiences of gifted children. The same questions were asked of primary age children as of the preschool children. This was done to provide opportunities for comparing the experiences of gifted children at different stages of their life. The same pre-interview questionnaires helped to make it more manageable when comparing and analysing their responses.

Therefore, as with the preschool child pre-interview questionnaire, the primary age child pre-interview questionnaire involved 14 open-ended questions. Depending on the age and confidence of the primary age child, parents were consulted as to whether they would need to assist their child when completing the pre-interview questionnaire. It was decided that the youngest two primary age children would be assisted by their parents and both of these parents received instructions to record the ‘exact’ words from the child’s responses whether or not they felt the child has answered the question correctly (see appendix 6; appendix 8). The eldest primary age child was unassisted when completing the pre-interview questionnaire.

As with the preschool pre-interview questionnaire, the primary age pre-interview questionnaire consisted of a front cover requesting general details related to name, date of birth, school attended, parent names and contact details. Eight questions related to the primary age child’s perceptions of themselves, including their interests, friendships, strengths and challenges. One question related to
the primary age child’s view of others’ perceptions of them and five questions related to the primary age child’s perceptions of their experiences in educational environments and whilst interacting with other primary age children in these environments. Even though the ages of the children completing this pre-interview questionnaire were more advanced, it is possible that the children would respond differently to these questions depending on their verbal ability, their understanding and experience of the questions asked, and the influence of their overall age and stage of development. However, the interview with the researcher may clarify and elaborate on the understandings of the primary age child’s responses to the questions in the pre-interview questionnaire.

3.11.4 Phase 4: Primary Age Child Interviews

The informal interviews were designed to provide in-depth information on the specific experiences of gifted primary age children. Each interview provided the researcher with an opportunity to request the primary age child elaborate and clarify information they had either dictated to their parents in the pre-interview questionnaire (whilst also check for parental influence or effect), or when completing their responses independently. This process was intended to contribute personal and individual meaning to the primary age child’s story and experiences as a gifted child.

The parents of the three primary age children who agreed for their child to participate in the follow up interview were contacted by phone and given the opportunity to choose a time and date that would be most suitable. Each parent was fully consulted as to how, where and when their primary age child would be best interviewed. For all primary age children it was decided that the researcher would conduct the interviews at home and following an initial visit to their home, in an effort to assist with the development of rapport and confidence when responding to questions with the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher and primary age child’s parents agreed that their children would be more likely to feel comfortable with the interview process if they had already met the researcher informally prior to the event.
Confidentiality was guaranteed to the primary age children and their parents to encourage them to express their views honestly and openly. Primary age children were also assured that they could choose not to answer questions or withdraw from the interview at any time. Parents were asked if they would like to view the questions before they were administered, and one family accepted this offer and were confident that the questions were appropriate. It was anticipated that each interview would take approximately 30 minutes and all were completed within this time frame.

Prior to the interview, primary age children were also asked if they would share some of their work or items of interest to them with the researcher. Two primary age children were content to provide copies of pictures, portfolios, photographs and writing. Some of these items have been included within each child’s case study story to assist in representing examples of their abilities and interests. One primary age child shared items of interest on a separate day following the interview.

Following the recording of the interviews with the primary age children on the IC-recorder, the sessions were transcribed and have been ready for analysis.

Interviews were utilised in order to provide the primary age child with a ‘voice’ and opportunity to express in detail their feelings and perceptions of their experiences independently. After reviewing the responses from their pre-interview questionnaire, a range of open and specific questions were constructed to enable the children to explain or elaborate on their pre-interview questionnaire responses further. The interviews also provided an opportunity for the researcher to check for clarity of understanding between the written information and the verbal responses.

Interviews were considered appropriate for the ages and stages of the primary age children. The same interview guide used with the preschool children, consisting of both specific and open-ended questions relating to the child’s interests, strengths, challenges, friendships and educational experiences, was utilised (see appendix 9). A positive and informal style of interviewing allowed the primary age children to give freely of their ideas and also opportunities to guide the interview process.
when examining their experiences and personal qualities. The intention was to understand the primary age child’s perceptions of their life experiences. As with the preschool child’s interview sessions, it was essential to this study that the child’s voice was included in any discussion about their experiences, as this would highlight contrasting and supporting views presented by the other participants in their case study. It was decided that an IC-recorder would be able to record the questions and responses of the primary age child and researcher accurately.

3.11.5 Phase 5: Parent Pre-interview Questionnaires

The parent pre-interview questionnaire was distributed to the parents of the five case study children. The pre-interview questionnaire was attached to a letter outlining the purpose of the study and also instructions to return the questionnaire in the stamped envelope provided within two weeks of receiving it. Reminder phone calls or emails were made to parents who had not returned the questionnaire in the two week period. Following receipt of the completed pre-interview questionnaires, the researcher telephoned the parents to thank them for their detailed and informative responses and to make an interview time that would be mutually convenient.

The parent questionnaire was designed to provide another perspective on the experiences of the gifted preschooler. Where possible the same questions were asked of parents that had been asked of the preschoolers and primary age children. This was done to provide opportunities for validating information from several different sources. The same pre-interview questionnaire was used with parents of preschool children and parents of primary age children to help make it more manageable when comparing and analysing their responses. Attached to the pre-interview questionnaire was a letter outlining the purpose and intention of the pre-interview questionnaire so as to assist parents understanding of the purposes of the research and to assure them that there are no right or wrong answers (see appendix 6).

The pre-interview questionnaire consisted of three questions requesting parents to rate their knowledge on a continuum focusing on the identification and characteristics of gifted children,
planning and programming of educational experiences for gifted children, and support services for
gifted children. Two questions required parents to tick the box and comment on the activities parents
have attended in relation to the needs and experiences of their gifted child, as well as the resources
they had accessed in relation to identification of their child as gifted. The remaining 20 questions
were open ended so as to provide a detailed perspective of the experiences of the gifted child and
their family in relation to identification and characteristics of gifted children, planning and
programming of educational experiences, and support services for the focus child and other gifted
children (see appendix 10).

The pre-interview questionnaire consisted of a front cover requesting general details related to name,
profession, child and preschool or school attended, and telephone number. The pre-interview
questionnaire was divided into 3 sections – the first section related to identification and
characteristics of the focus child and gifted children, the second section related to planning and
programming of educational experiences of the focus child and gifted children, and the third section
related to the support services for the focus child and gifted children. At the beginning of each
section the parent was requested to rate themselves along a continuum from very poorly informed to
very highly informed in regards to their knowledge of identification and characteristics of gifted
children, the educational planning and programming for gifted children and support services for
gifted children. This aspect provided a comparison of the perceived levels of knowledge of all
parents and was qualified by a question requesting information on how this may have been attained.
The researcher predicted that the level of experience of the parents would inform discussion in
relation to the influence this knowledge may have on the experiences of the gifted child. Following
the rating scale, parents were asked to tick and discuss further where they had gained their particular
level of knowledge in the related area. Open ended questions provided the opportunity for the
parents to elaborate on their child’s experiences by including more detailed personal examples and
explanations supporting their responses.
3.11.6 Phase 6: Parent Interviews

The parent interviews were designed to provide in-depth information on the specific experiences of gifted children and their families from the perspective of parents who were most intimately related to the gifted child. Each interview provided the researcher with an opportunity to request the parent elaborate and clarify information they had written in their pre-interview questionnaire. This process would contribute a meaningful and complementary view of the experiences of the gifted child through the ‘lens’ of the parent.

Following receipt of the pre-interview questionnaire, the parents who agreed to participate in the follow up interview were contacted by phone and given the opportunity to choose a time and date that would be most suitable. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the parent to encourage them to express themselves honestly and openly. It was anticipated that each interview would take approximately forty-five minutes; however, this would vary depending on the depth of information provided by the participants. All participants agreed to the interview recorded on an IC-recorder and understood that this would be transcribed. Transcriptions have provided an accurate account of the interviews and are the main source of data in this study and ready for analysis.

Interviews with the parents were designed to provide them with the opportunity to discuss in detail the experiences of their gifted child and family in relation to identification and characteristics, planning and programming of educational experiences, and the role of support services. During the interview the researcher regularly checked with the parent whether their ideas had been interpreted correctly by the researcher. After reviewing the responses from the parent pre-interview questionnaire, more specific questions in relation to these responses were prepared so as to provide opportunities for parents to explain in more depth or elaborate on their written response. The interviews also provided the opportunity for the researcher to clarify meaning of the parent’s written responses.
An interview guide consisting of both specific and open ended questions based on the information provided in the pre-interview questionnaire were related to the focus areas, particularly in relation to the parent’s perception of their child’s experience as a gifted child (see appendix 11). There were twenty eight open ended and specific questions included in the interview guide, however, not all questions were asked during the interviews when sufficient detail was provided by parents in the pre-interview questionnaire. The researcher predicted the interview questions would serve only as a ‘guide’ and therefore, the questions chosen would be in response to comments in the parent’s pre-interview questionnaire, areas of particular interest to the study, and responses that the researcher felt needed clarification when explaining the experiences of the gifted children in the case study.

The intention of the interview was to understand the parent’s perspective of their gifted child’s experiences, as well as the influence these experiences had on their family. It was predicted that the parents and their gifted children may provide both contrasting and supporting responses to these questions.

Prior to the interview, parents were also asked if they would be able to provide other evidence or supporting material that may assist the researcher in presenting a rich and detailed description of both the gifted children and their families’ experiences. Samples of work, approved photographs and educational or assessment records have been supplied by several of the participants.

3.11.7 Phase 7: Family Support Person or Specialist Pre-interview Questionnaires

The Family Support Person or Specialist pre-interview questionnaires were distributed to the participants nominated by the parents of the five case study children. A range of people were nominated by the parents of the case study child and included a grandmother, three family friends, a teacher, and a maternal health nurse. The pre-interview questionnaire was attached to a letter outlining the purpose of the study and also instructions to return the questionnaire in the stamped envelope provided within two weeks of receiving it. Reminder phone calls or emails were made to participants who had not returned the questionnaire in the two week period. Following receipt of the
completed pre-interview questionnaires, the researcher telephoned the participants to thank them for their detailed and informative responses and to make an interview that would be mutually convenient.

The Family Support Person or Specialist pre-interview questionnaire was designed to provide another perspective on the experiences of the gifted children in the study. The same questions were asked of the Family Support Person or Specialist that had been asked of the parents (see appendix 12). This was done to provide opportunities for validating information from several different sources and to help make it more manageable when comparing and analysing their responses. Attached to the pre-interview questionnaire was a letter outlining the purpose and intention of the pre-interview questionnaire so as to assist Family Support Persons and Specialists’ understanding of the purposes of the research and to assure them that there are no right or wrong answers (see appendix 7).

The pre-interview questionnaire consisted of a front cover requesting general details related to name, qualifications, occupation, and telephone number. It also requested the participant to tick the box indicating how many years they had been associating with the focus child and their family, and also whether they are a professional working with other age levels. As with the parent pre-interview questionnaire, it was divided into 3 sections – the first section related to identification and characteristics of the focus child and gifted children, the second section related to planning and programming of educational experiences of the focus child and gifted children, and the third section related to the support services for the focus child and other gifted children.

At the beginning of each section the Family Support Person or Specialist was requested to rate themselves along a continuum from very poorly informed to very highly informed in regards to their knowledge of these three focus areas. This aspect provided a comparison of the perceived levels of knowledge of all Family Support Persons or Specialists and was qualified by a question requesting information on how this may have been attained. The researcher predicted that the level of experience of the participants would inform discussion in relation to the influence this knowledge may have on the experiences of the gifted child. Following the rating scale, Family Support Persons
or Specialists were asked to tick and discuss further where they had gained their particular level of knowledge in the related area. Open ended questions provided the opportunity for the participants to elaborate on the focus child’s experiences by including more detailed personal examples and explanations supporting their responses.

3.11.8 Phase 8: Family Support Persons or Specialists Interviews

The Family Support Person or Specialist interviews were designed to provide in-depth information on the specific experiences of gifted children and their families from the perspective of individuals who were associated with the gifted child through a contrasting environment to that of the immediate family. Each interview provided the researcher with an opportunity to request the participant elaborate and clarify information they had written in their pre-interview questionnaire. This process would contribute a meaningful and complementary view of the experiences of the gifted child through the ‘lens’ of the Family Support Person or Specialist.

Following receipt of the pre-interview questionnaire, the participants who agreed to participate in the follow up interview were contacted by phone and given the opportunity to choose a time and date that would be most suitable. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the participant to encourage them to express themselves honestly and openly. It was anticipated that each interview would take approximately twenty to forty-five minutes, however, this would vary depending on the depth of information provided by the participants. All participants agreed to the interview being recorded on an IC-recorder and understood that this would be transcribed. During the interview the researcher regularly checked with the family support person or specialist whether their ideas had been interpreted correctly by the researcher. Transcriptions have provided an accurate account of the interviews and are the main source of data in this study and ready for analysis.

Interviews with the Family Support Persons or Specialists were designed to provide them with the opportunity to discuss in detail the experiences of the focus child and their family in relation to identification and characteristics, planning and programming of educational experiences, and the role
of support services. After reviewing the responses from the participants’ pre-interview questionnaire, more specific questions in relation to these responses were prepared so as to provide opportunities for them to explain in more depth or elaborate on their written response. The interviews also provided the opportunity for the researcher to clarify meaning of the participants’ written responses.

The same interview guide as was used for the parents which consisted of both specific and open ended questions based on the information provided in the pre-interview questionnaire and were related to the focus areas, particularly in relation to the participants’ perception of the focus child’s experience as a gifted child (see appendix 11).

The intention of the interview was to understand the perspective of an individual who was associated with the focus child and their family in a different setting outside of the home environment. This person would be able to provide complementary information about the gifted child’s experiences, as well as the influence they feel these experiences have on their family. It was predicted that the Family Support Person or Specialist may provide contrasting as well as supporting information to the parents and focus child when answering these questions.

Prior to the interview, Family Support Persons and Specialists were asked if they would be able to provide other evidence or supporting material that may assist the researcher in presenting a rich and detailed description of both the gifted children and their families’ experiences, however, this request was not fulfilled as they did not feel they had items to contribute which were representative of the child’s skills or abilities.

3.11.9 Phase 9: Teacher Pre-interview Questionnaires

The Teacher pre-interview questionnaires were distributed to the participants nominated by the parents of the five case study children. The pre-interview questionnaire was attached to a letter outlining the purpose of the study and also instructions to return the questionnaire in the stamped envelope provided within two weeks of receiving it. Reminder phone calls or emails were made to
participants who had not returned the questionnaire in the two week period. Following receipt of the completed pre-interview questionnaires, the researcher telephoned the participants to thank them for their detailed and informative responses and to make an interview that would be mutually convenient. The teacher pre-interview questionnaire was designed to provide another perspective on the experiences of the gifted children in the study. The same questions were asked of the Teacher that had been asked of the parents and family support person or specialist. This was done to provide opportunities for validating information from several different sources and to help make it more manageable when comparing and analysing their responses. Attached to the pre-interview questionnaire was a letter outlining the purpose and intention of the pre-interview questionnaire so as to assist the teacher’s understanding of the purposes of the research and to assure them that there are no right or wrong answers (see appendix 7).

The teacher questionnaire was similar to the family support person and specialist pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix 12) and consisted of three questions requesting them to rate their knowledge on a continuum focusing on the identification and characteristics of gifted children, planning and programming of educational experiences of gifted children, and support services for gifted children. Two questions required them to tick the box and comment on the activities they have attended in relation to the needs and experiences of the focus child and other gifted children, as well as the resources they had accessed in relation to identification of the focus child or other gifted children as gifted. The remaining 20 questions were open ended so as to provide a detailed perspective of the experiences of the gifted child and their family in relation to identification and characteristics of gifted children, planning and programming of educational experiences, and support services for the focus child and other gifted children.

The pre-interview questionnaire consisted of a front cover requesting general details related to name, qualifications, school, year level taught, focus child’s name, and telephone number. It also requested the participant to tick the box indicating how many years they had been teaching. The teacher questionnaire followed the format of the parent, family support person and specialist pre-interview
questionnaires. At the beginning of each section the teacher was requested to rate themselves along a continuum from very poorly informed to very highly informed in regards to their knowledge of these three focus areas. This aspect provided a comparison of the perceived levels of knowledge of all teachers and was qualified by a question requesting information on how this may have been attained. The researcher predicted that the level of experience of the teachers would inform discussion in relation to the influence this knowledge may have on the experiences of the gifted child. Following the rating scale, teachers were asked to tick and discuss further where they had gained their particular level of knowledge in the related area. Open ended questions provided the opportunity for the participants to elaborate on the focus child’s experiences by including more detailed personal examples and explanations supporting their responses.

3.11.10 Phase 10: Teacher Interviews

The teacher interviews were designed to provide in-depth information on the specific experiences of gifted children and their families from an educational and personal perspective. Each interview provided the researcher with an opportunity to request the participant elaborate and clarify information they had written in their pre-interview questionnaire. This process would contribute a meaningful and complementary view of the experiences of the gifted child through the ‘lens’ of the teacher.

Following receipt of the pre-interview questionnaire, the participants who agreed to participate in the follow up interview were contacted by phone and given the opportunity to choose a time and date that would be most suitable. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the participant to encourage them to express themselves honestly and openly. It was anticipated that each interview would take approximately 20-45 minutes, however, this would vary depending on the depth of information provided by the participants. During the interview the researcher regularly checked with the teacher whether their ideas had been interpreted correctly by the researcher. Four teachers agreed to participate in the interview, one teacher declined to be interviewed expressing that heavy work commitments prevented them from going further with the study. Of the participants who completed a
follow up interview, all agreed to the interview being recorded on an IC-recorder and understood that this would be transcribed.

Interviews with the teacher were designed to provide them with the opportunity to discuss in detail the experiences of the focus child and their family in relation to identification and characteristics, planning and programming of educational experiences, and the role of support services. After reviewing the responses from the participants’ pre-interview questionnaire, more specific questions in relation to these responses were prepared so as to provide opportunities for them to explain in more depth or elaborate on their written response. The interviews also provided the opportunity for the researcher to clarify meaning of the participants’ written responses. The same interview guide was used for the teachers as was the parents and family support persons or specialists.

The intention of the interview was to understand the perspective of an educational professional who had been, or was currently, associated with the focus child and their family on a regular basis. This person would be able to provide complementary information about the gifted child’s experiences, as well as the influence they feel these experiences have on their family. It was predicted that the teacher may provide contrasting as well as supporting information to the parents and focus child when answering these questions.

Prior to the interview, teachers were asked if they would be able to provide other evidence or supporting material that may assist the researcher in presenting a rich and detailed description of both the gifted children and their families’ experiences, however, this request was not fulfilled for unknown reasons – although the researcher posits that the teachers in this study may have felt that they were required to maintain confidentiality in regards to this request, and that parents would be able to provide appropriate items from school if necessary.
3.12 Analysis of Data

The researcher attempted to represent the perceptions of the lived experiences of gifted children and their families through the ‘lenses’ of their parents, family support persons, specialists, teachers and the children themselves. The researcher recognised the importance of empathy and attentiveness when communicating with each of the participants, and recorded their experiences ‘in their own words’ for five separate case studies in relation to the three focus areas including:

1. Identification and characteristics of gifted children
2. Planning and programming for the educational experiences of gifted children
3. Support services for gifted children.

Initially, the researcher reviewed the pre-interview questionnaire and interview transcripts seeking themes throughout the text. Key focus areas within the study assisted the researcher in developing a list of common themes. Using the data from checklists, pre-interview questionnaires, interviews, play sessions, work samples and parent records, the researcher was able to organise the responses from each of the participants under the common themes before contrasting, comparing, analysing and recognising patterns within the information provided.

This system of categorisation was trialled by using different coloured highlighters for each of the common themes on pre-interview questionnaires, interview transcripts and other available data. Like responses were highlighted in the same colour. This process continued until all responses were colour coded according to common recognised themes. Text that was not highlighted was analysed and a decision was made as to whether this represented an additional theme or checked that it could belong in one of the established themes. An accuracy check was carried out with a senior supervisor to ensure that key themes had not been excluded and that data was correctly categorised.

Following the coding process, the researcher organised each participant’s ‘own words’ so that each of their responses was transferred without editing to a separate file which listed nine common themes.
Every response was organised under each theme according to common events, experiences or topics, thereby creating a flowing monologue of the participant’s ‘own words’. When all responses had been transferred, the researcher was able to edit repetitive responses and also remove unnecessary speech such as ‘you know’, ‘umm…’ or ‘he is…he is…I don’t know…he is…’.

Therefore, the research themes became the subheadings under which to code the responses from the gifted children, parents, family support persons, specialist and teachers. Each case study was represented by the ‘lenses’ of between 3-5 different perspectives under the different themes. Comparisons were then made between the responses of each participant in each separate case study, and later, comparisons were made between the responses of participants in the other case studies.

The ‘voices’ of each participant in the study provided the researcher with the data to analyse responses and draw conclusions about the experiences of gifted children and their families according to the areas of identification, characteristics, educational experiences and support services. The new dimension of including the ‘voice’ of the child may lead to new discoveries or strategies which may extend upon current practices with gifted children or children who demonstrate similar characteristics. Furthermore, triangulation was achieved by combining information from children, parents, family support persons, specialists and teachers from the pre-interview questionnaires and interviews. This combined approach was used to strengthen the rigour of each of the independent approaches. By using the ‘voice’ of the children and their families, each case study represents a rich tapestry of the similarities and differences in the experiences of five gifted children and can be accurately described through the professional and personal ‘lens’ of the researcher.

3.12.1 Researcher’s analytical model

The researcher has utilised a range of ‘lenses’ when analysing the data recorded in this study. Firstly, one ‘lens’ clearly relates to the evidence within the available literature and emerges when comparing the experiences of the participants within this current study, with
participants reported in previous research studies. A second ‘lens’ emerges when the researcher utilises current perspectives of five gifted children, their parents, family support persons, specialists and teachers. Therefore, when analysing the results of this study, it will be possible for the researcher to view the text from a range of different perspectives. Consequently, this analytical model will recognise a wide range of experiences and understandings represented by several ‘voices’ within the field of gifted education.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

4.1 Introduction
In this chapter, the results will be presented for each of the five case study children in the following way. The cases of the children will be presented firstly, examining the voices of the preschool children followed by the primary age children.

Each child will have their voices presented in the following sequence:

1. Child’s voice from their perspective
2. Parent’s voice
3. Family and Support Person’s voice
4. Teacher’s or Specialist’s voice

The order of presentation is significant in that it begins with those who have the most regular interaction with the participant and moves to those with the least contact. The responses of each participant will contribute a unique and personal perspective to the ‘lived’ experiences of the gifted child.

The sequence of each story follows nine common themes that emerged from the research namely:

1. Behavioural Characteristics
2. Personal Interests
3. Experiences and feelings of ‘others’
4. Social interaction experiences
5. Educational experiences
6. Teacher attitudes and feelings
7. Available support services
8. Identification
9. Educational and personal advice

The voices were created from a combination of the participant’s responses as expressed in the pre-interview questionnaire, interview transcript, checklists, parent records, work samples and assessment records. This combination of responses form separate monologues for each participant in the five case studies and use their exact words from all data sources in order to accurately represent the views and experiences of each participant at that particular time.
The case study children will have the information from all the participants contributing to their experiences summarised in the form of a table highlighting each of the common themes of interest to the study. These tables will form the basis for discussion of each of the cases. Similarities and differences of the two preschoolers and three primary age children will be discussed using the data presented in the tables as well as direct quotes from the participants.
Introduction to Case Study One: Lucy

Lucy is a four year old preschool child who at the time of the study was attending a three year old kindergarten program at her local council kindergarten. She is the eldest child of two girls and lives with her family in a north-eastern suburb of Melbourne, Australia.

The other participants included in Lucy’s Case Study are her mother, grandmother and Maternal Health Nurse.

Case Study: Lucy’s Lens

I am really good at drawing and playing outside. I am most proudest of my drawing. I’m really good at writing (and) Cats. I always change my mind…because I just like to. Ah, my voice is different to other children. Well, my voice is the same as Jenny’s. Nothing much else is different. Well, Jenny, you could ask Jenny what I’m like if you wanted to know more about me.

My favourite things to do alone are painting, play dough and doing sticking. My favourite things to do with a friend are painting, play dough and playing in the home corner.

The most important thing in my life is work. I made this yesterday night. It’s like…a laptop…with all the patterns on the screen. I play mmmm…Arthur.

Well I’m just gonna make (a book)…and I’m gonna make you an even better one…a teddy bear. And that’s a rabbit, and a fish that’s dancing. Well, I can’t really explain them (what I draw). Well I can draw big trees. And I can draw a house…and I can draw a backyard.

It’s getting exciting for Christmas…that’s because I’m getting a spirit(?) car. I made a letter (to Santa) for me to ask. Well I’ve been to Ballarat though…my uncle was there.
I like The Magic Faraway Tree. My favourite character is Beth...because she has a purple dress. Favourite colour! And White...well we're playing with white paper. Purple or blue or pink or some other colours.

My sister wrecks my painted drawings. She scrunches them and chucks them in the bin. She scrunches them and makes like rocks. I look for Jenny, she plays with me a lot...that's how I know (she's a good friend). My friends most like my hair and they like my face and I like them. In no way am I like other children at kinder...no reason.

I'm special because of my friends...I'll do what they do. Jenny from Kinder...she's my friend...because she likes me. At home I just play with my sister. Well my friend Cindy (is my friend), because I have much toys, but she doesn't and she wants more. She's twelve. Well, she likes to do so many things like painting, and things like that.

(I play) Clip clop, clip clop, a sea horse. Oh, I like it because Jenny plays with me a lot. Seahorses (...are my favourite animal) and...ah, bear...and I said bear, but I've changed my mind again.

At preschool I most like doing painting and dancing. Painting...Well, not really anything else. I find play dough the hardest.

Lucy’s Parents

Parents Occupations: Teacher and Police Officer

Lucy has an amazing memory. She has quick accurate recall of information...a drive past a park (which we had only visited once), Lucy said, ‘Remember we went to that park one day (almost a year earlier!) and I played with a boy called Dalah in the boat. He did the steering wheel. They had a circle sitting on swings too. In April, Lucy was listening to a family conversation about “Uncle Ray” (we have two Rays in the family). She asked, ‘Do you mean the Ray who wore the blue shirt for Christmas or the other one?’

Lucy has highly developed literacy and mathematical skills. She makes sure she knows ages and birthdates of all members of our playgroup. There are 4 mums, 4 children her age and 4 younger siblings. She memorises phone numbers and asks to dial them when ringing home, my husband, my mobile or grandma’s. She can count beyond 100, has a good knowledge of order of numbers, for example, 20 is less than 29 but more than 15, can read 2 digit numbers, has excellent recognition of number of objects without having to point to count, can add and subtract numbers well, and works out, then confirms with me, how old her sister will be when she is certain ages.

Lucy had 47 words by 1st birthday. She had 45 words recorded before she was 11 months. She spoke very clear full sentences by 2 years including reasoning. I distinctly recall a couple of weeks before her 2nd birthday, Lucy standing in her cot at night complaining ‘Mum, I don’t want to sleep in this cot, cots are for babies, I’m too big now, I want a big girl’s bed.’ She was so verbal and so insistent we wheeled the cot out within the week and she slept on a mattress on the floor until the new bed arrived! As soon as she is aware of the next step, or more grown up way of doing things, then this is what she wants to do.

Lucy understood phrases or brief sentences as an infant. At approximately 10 months she would ‘clap’, ‘wave’, when I said these words and point to body parts. She lifted her arms up to be lifted when I said ‘up’. Lucy knew the alphabet – phonetics for each letter and could recite the alphabet before 1 ½. She wrote her name before 4. Now attempts to write any words phonetically and reads simple words, for example, 3 letter words, uses book picture cues, beginning letter sounds to guess
meaning.  Also has knowledge of some rules, for example, T and h say ‘th’, sometimes G says a j sound (gives examples), there are 2 Cs (says sound) then names C and K.  Talking about spelling, she wanted to send a card to her cousin Jasper and she’d write J-A-S-P – Jasper.  And I said, ‘Is that alright?’ And she looked at me and said ‘that’s not those words, is it Mum?’ And I said, ‘Really tricky words.  English is so hopeless…it sounds exactly like Jasper – but when you write, it’s J-A-S-P-E-R – PER.  It’s one of those ones that you have to learn.  That’s how it’s spelt.’  She likes that sort of conversation.  From then on she’ll write.

Lucy gets frustrated sometimes with things – she'll be writing and all of a sudden she'll go ‘Arrrrrrrr’ and scribble it and screw it up.  Then I’d say, ‘You’ve done enough.’  It’s not that she hasn’t enjoyed it.  Lucy was writing Christmas cards at a hundred miles and hour, and (I was) just letting her do it.  ‘You know you can have the real Christmas cards, you don’t have to have…crappy old junk things.  She had the special gold stickers that you can put on the back of your envelope and I let her do the stamps, and she just loves all that real stuff.

Lucy has a long attention span.  She listens for long periods of time to stories and conversations.  She retells events and stories in great detail.  Lucy was given a new book from Grandma for Easter.  After only one reading she saw grandma and when asked if she liked the book, Lucy re-told the whole story with amazing details including feelings of main character.  Now at 4 years she uses more specific vocabulary to speak even more clearly…words such as ‘articulate’, ‘appropriate’, ‘briskly’ or ‘nervous’.  Lucy has an advanced sense of humour.  The latest funny things include changing words
in songs. Especially if including words like ‘poo’! Include rhyme, for example, “I can sing a rainbow too, poo’! She finds shoes on the electric wire (outside kinder) hilarious.

Early motor development included being very visually attentive during the first 6 months, watched people carefully, followed movement intently, and active use of toys and puzzles. She could do 20 piece wooden puzzles straight onto floor (no picture or board) by 3 years. After doing puzzles a couple of times can do them so easily, they are boring. At home she’s actually putting her shoes and socks on—she’s never needed help—all those independent things.

Lucy uses imaginative methods to accomplish tasks. For example, if wanting some food she will say, ‘I really need another muesli bar or biscuit so I can get some more energy, I need them before kinder starts’. If she doesn’t want something she says she is feeling sick, allergic or forgot she needed to eat some vegetables.

Lucy is working beyond her peers in everything she does – very obvious comparison. She understands things well enough to teach others. For example, she tells children at the beach about jellyfish if she sees them playing near them or touching them. When she asks children facts about them (she) can’t believe they don’t know, for example, their birthdates, addresses and parent’s ages.

Lucy is good at reading nonverbal cues to feelings of others. She is very sad if she thinks or knows someone else is hurt or sad. Lucy was very upset over mild ‘lost’ issue in Piglet movie – so much so that she hid the DVD so she wouldn’t see it again.

I guess the main way I would describe her is extreme. She can be very anxious, and she can be very, very confident, and there’s not much in-between ground. If she’s in any environment where she’s feeling confident—you’ll see her potential…whereas if she’s in a situation where she’s feeling anxious…she usually decides that’s how she’s going to be for this situation, and stays like that. And you don’t see who she is at all. Lucy still has situations where she gets…very anxious. She’s fully aware of what’s going on, so she likes to suss everything out and…be very cautious before she decides to contribute. Other times when you think that she doesn’t necessarily know someone…she can have a full conversation with the person behind the counter.

(One example was) we went to a festival…a few weeks ago, and there was loud music, and Lucy hung on to Mum… (even though) it was kids music. She was totally freaked out, and she was (saying), ‘No, I’m going, I’m going now, I’m going.’ You just never expect a reaction like that…she really hated that. It seemed really extreme.

(Another one was when) we had a…Kinder break-up party in the evening. It wasn’t particularly late…it was for all the three year olds, so the two sessions, not just hers. Half of them were unknown (but) we knew the place, knew the teachers, every child had one adult who took them, so we didn’t know half of the adults. It was very much as you walk in, all the adults standing, kids were sort of running off playing, and it was very ad hoc. She had been insecure, like very upset because it was the end of Kinder. Today was the last day she was doing three year old, and she said to me, ‘I want to be at three year old Kinder again, I want three year old, I don’t really want to go to four year Kinder.’ She knew that it was possibly the last time she would be with these teachers, and she really loved them, and she was even going up to the teachers. One of the teachers said ‘I’m going to miss you too Lucy’ and she said, ‘But don’t worry, because I’ll see you when (my sister) comes to Kinder.’ She was trying to make everything a happy ending…and was trying to make a happy thing of it…‘I know I’m not going to see you, and I’ll miss you, but I’ll see you when (my sister) comes.’ I don’t know whether she had a conversation like that with the other teacher, but when she was leaving afterwards, the teacher had said, ‘I’ll still see you sometimes, I’ll be in the office and you’ll be able to say, ‘Hi’ to me.’ So I think she either picked up on it, or if she had a conversation with her, but she held on to me the whole time. Even after an hour and a half, she was the only one who even though I was standing right behind her seat eating at the table; she didn’t want to sit for very long time. We had to move her spot to someone else’s, because they were named spots…and she was hanging on to me the whole time. She was quietly saying to me, ‘Who’s going to be in my group next year? Is that girl going to
be in my section?’…‘They’re going to be in the other group, aren’t they?’ ‘Ah, no, that girl…oh she’s going to a new Kinder.’ ‘Ah, this one’s going to be in my group.’…‘I don’t know her, and she’s with her Mum, and not sure whether I would touch her or not.’ So I think it was just probably a culmination of all those things actually. I’m trying to suss it out, and I’m feeling anxious, and I know this isn’t just a party where I think a lot of kids just went in and ran around, without thinking of those things.

Lucy is one hundred percent on the go, from the second she wakes up in the morning until last thing at night. So much so that she doesn’t go to sleep, not that it’s a big issue, but last night it was 10 o’clock. She cannot go to sleep. She cannot lie down. I have tried everything. Like lately I do the washing in the night for the washing machine noise…it’s like (a) baby strategy…with the quite noisy background to calm her down. She…will be working out mathematical equations. ‘Now when I’m eighty four, does that mean (my sister) will be eighty one?’ ‘Will she be eighty one? How old would you be?’…And then she’ll, you know, yell out to me ‘Mum, will you be…?’ And I’m like ‘it’s quiet time, you know, time to go to sleep. We’ll talk about it tomorrow.’ Or if we’ve been reading a chapter in the book she’ll be saying ‘oh, book.’ You know, reading native poetry, she’ll say ‘I think Joe must be the one’ (because it doesn’t have any cut pictures), and she’d say ‘I think he’s the one on the cover who’s got the brown hair, because it sounds like he’s older than the bronzy one. I think he’s younger…’ She cannot wind down, because we’re still going through all of this. So books aren’t really wind down for her. They are a waste of stories, because they are stimulation.

(For example) she’d point out with the spelling of one of the names. She’d say, ‘Why are the words …with a ‘c’ and a ‘k’, and sometimes it’s a ‘ker’ with a ‘c’ and sometimes it’s a ‘ker’ like (Kate) with a ‘k’. And he’s got the ‘c’ and the ‘k’. She’ll just be…writing it all out like a nutter, doing nutty things. Or it will be singing and working out the words in the song. It will just be a constant crowing…never before nine o’clock. It hasn’t been for months. Then we’ll have extreme exhaustion.

(Lately) her dad will wind her down usually at five thirty, and she has her bath, and she has the whole routine, and she knows what happens and what order, and that’s all fine, and she has her books. But she’s just in bed tossing and turning and chatting. She often just comes out to see her dad asleep. She’ll spy on him. I sometimes stretch it, ‘Come away, Daddy’s asleep. It’s past adult bedtime, and you’re still awake now.’

Lucy loves board games and knowing the rules. Her favourite is ‘Adopt-a-dog’ - she particularly loves dogs! There are 3 levels in the game and has quite complex ways to collect cards to be able to adopt a dog. She ensures she plays the bigger kids version - and correctly! Lucy is particularly interested in ‘fairies’. She spends time looking for fairies, playing with fairy toys, making fairy rings – all in the hope that fairies will visit. She plays barbies for a long time - up to ½ hour - dressing them, making up conversations between them, relationships, where they are going, what they are doing – detailed play.

From a very young age Lucy decided she wanted to do dancing, and I didn’t want to push it too much…she wasn’t even quite three. I even said to her, ‘I’m sure you have to be three.’ And she said, ‘Well, I’m nearly three now!’ It was the beginning of the year when the kids start their activities. So I said, ‘Well, we’ll go and have a look.’ I went up and was looking up the brochures just from the front of the counter and she went up to the counter and said to the lady, ‘I’m very interested in dancing. Have you got dancing and how old you have to be?’ She basically enrolled herself in dancing ‘pre’ the age of three. Then she said, ‘My Mum’s got the card’, like the credit card to pay the fee. Like obviously I’ve brought Mum along to pay the money! I think that was such a big thing for her that she had decided that’s what she wanted to do, it was her idea, and she’s stuck with it for two years now, and absolutely loves it.

I think so much of it is to let her do what it is that she wants to do. She’d do a hundred activities, if we’d let her. She’s interested in a lot of things and we just let her follow her interests and guide what
she wants to do. I never want to put pressure or try to hurry her up doing anything. Just let her do what she’s comfortable doing.

Lucy’s been interested in the houses being built - she wants to be the builder. She says, ‘Oh, can you drive through Springfield, because I want to be a builder, and my sister and I will be builders together, and we’ll have a house together when we’re older’. Yesterday she said to me, ‘I’m going to get us the land at the front near the letterbox…we’ll have our house just there…I won’t be that far away, I’m going to be right there.’ She’s interested in the building and what sorts of tools - it’s not like she’s particularly into trucks or building tools, but the process of…a house being constructed.

Our Maternal Health Nurse had always been amazed at what Lucy was doing at her age and that was just through seeing her in the short health centre appointments. She was quite blown away by all the responses. She was really positive. I think family and friends admire being able to have such mature conversations with her. But it’s taken quite awhile for them to see the side that I see all the time. She’s always been comfortable with family, she still always has that comfort level - ‘I know they’re family and they’re people that I like.’ But there’s been very few situations where they’ve ever seen her anxious. I think they didn’t ever understand how extreme that was…any time she’s able to display things that they don’t know of – ‘Oh, my goodness!’ they can’t believe that someone who is so confident, so verbal, would then hang on to you.

Probably the biggest thing has been this year at Kinder. All the parents…whoever was on duty would come up to me at the end and say, ‘Oh, my goodness, Lucy is so amazing.’ They’d actually comment on things like what were only really only basic. I almost felt like saying, ‘Oh that’s just minor compared to what she can…’ Things like, ‘Oh she writes her name on her work.’ In conversations they’d say, ‘Oh, she speaks like an adult.’ ‘I can’t believe when I asked how old she was, she was able to tell me exactly how old, and when her birthday was’, lots of…elaborated things like that.

I think a lot of parents…are looking at me like as if (to say) in Kinder, ‘Why is she still hanging on to you?’ It certainly made me feel that I then couldn’t mingle, because I was attached to her. And she didn’t want to join in, so we were sort of trying to go from different activity to different activity…and she just sort of let go a little bit, would run off to do something, and then come straight back. Or she’d talk to someone she knew and then she’d be straight back. But that took awhile. …I’d think ‘oh, my goodness, she’s being so comfortable, and then you suddenly do this.’…there’s not always logic, but then it can be a mixture of all those things.

So many people say to me, ‘Oh, you’re a teacher. You’ll teach her.’ You know you can’t write it down and say, ‘Here you go, this is right, this is how you do it.’ Lucy does it all herself. I think that’s why it’s really hard to provide. I’ve never intentionally ever tried to do anything.

Lucy prefers older siblings to the friends her own age - usually older. If we’re at the park it would be someone who looks like an attractive big girl. I’d actually organized a park day for children to get-together, who would be in the same four year old group next year. I thought it’s a nice chance…to have a casual play at the park. She played with all these other children that were at the park but weren’t in our group. The whole point was defeated! There were other little Christmas parties and things at which bigger kids came, and (she would say) ‘I’m playing with that eight year old. I’m playing with that six year old.’ Also Lucy takes on leader roles and bosses or arranges others. She is more recently confident to use stronger verbal skills to resolve conflict.

Lucy is a friend to all, but does prefer the company of other girls. …she’s very particular in who she picks. She loves big girls. She’s very much a girl. She pretty much only plays with girls. She likes pretty girls – if they’ve got a pretty dress, or if they’ve got long hair, or…she hones in on what they look like.

At Kinder I had expected from the beginning of the year for her to be on her own. She’s very, very rarely separated and had been very cautious about it all. She’d known one little boy that she went
with, who she wasn’t necessarily best friends with, but it was the security of ‘I’ve got someone I know.’ This little boy…lives nearby and he’s Japanese and so Lucy speaks just a very little Japanese to him.

Lucy will secure her friendships with the kinds of children that will chat to her. She’s got a lot of children at Kinder that have been very young, or perhaps the same age as her, but very mature. And yet when she speaks…they barely answer her, if at all, and she looks at them like, ‘I’ve asked you a question and you haven’t even answered.’ So she’s got to a point where she’s just given up on them. Lucy has one best friend at Kinder and the two of them will just chat. They’ll talk the whole time. They will sit down and talk about what they were doing. That’s what she likes, someone she can feed off and chat with constantly.

I was expecting all sorts of ‘thing’ issues (but) right from day one she decided, ‘This is fine, I’ll be confident’ and walked in. It was towards the end of the year when the teacher was doing further studies and left, and another teacher came in for a little while, and all of a sudden we had hysteria. This was the last week of term three and now we’ve turned four, but you’d think, ‘She’s known the whole situation, and everything else was the same.’ It was the same teacher who is actually going to be one of her four year old teachers, a consistent person, but still it was the change of routine. I wasn’t sure whether it was related to jealousy (about the baby) or what it was. A tantrum could last well up to an hour or two hours. I was tearing my hair out. I was looking up the computer about all sorts of syndromes. I would say something to her and she’d come back straight away - I could never win. I never won with her.

I would consider myself ‘very well informed’ on the educational needs of gifted children. I don’t believe that the preschool Lucy attends has a gifted policy or programme but I haven’t asked. I believe open-ended activities and new experiences are most important for planning and programming for Lucy’s educational experiences and the kinder provides for this. They’ve got a ‘home corner’ that’s a very set home corner that always looks the same. They don’t ever have areas that they turn into a shop, or turn into a restaurant, or turn into something.

Often it would be a cutting and pasting table, and there would not be a pencil. The parent helpers would come and write everyone’s names on their work. If the pencils were on the table, Lucy would have written her own name on her work (but) often the pencils are not there and she’s always given up. But…the parent helpers quickly race up and write their names on before the kids take off and do something else, almost in a bit of a frantic, ‘Quick, get all the names on the work!’ So Lucy gives up a bit (like), ‘I’m not going to get up and search for a pencil to write my name’ or have to say to every parent helper, because its different ones every time ‘I can write my own name!’ It’s just such a boring thing, if she can do it. If someone comes and writes her name, she’s almost given up a little bit doing it sometimes, and knew they could.

Lucy really has done very little writing at Kinder just because the teacher is really open-ended, and she hasn’t got other peers who are doing what she’s able to, so she doesn’t really (demonstrate) her potential. She puts her name on her work or recognizes her name, I think she’s done that for well over a year, and that was the beginning of three year old Kinder. She just operates a lot beyond that.

I would love the activities to be more open-ended and…where she can do what she wants to do. At home…one of her favourite things is…a little set of art drawers around the corner…with…paper and scissors and sticky tape and bits and pieces. It’s totally self-directed play. She does her own thing, she does it at her level and I think, ‘Why doesn’t she do that at Kinder?’ But it’s a bit like, ‘On this table this is what you do’ - very structured.

At the end of year, we were given…their three year old Kinder file. It looked to me like they collected the same things from all the children and put that in. I don’t think they were particular things that they said, ‘Oh, Lucy did a great job. We’ll put that in Lucy’s file.’ I flicked through and thought, ‘Oh yeah, there’s some more art things.’ There was nothing like…even a couple of things with writing on it. There was not much at all…and I wasn’t even sure if they’d looked into detail.
One of them was a family tree that they’d actually done on Grandparents’ Day. And Lucy had put in her tree all the people on my side of the family in age order, from my Grandma all the way through to her sister at the bottom. Her sister was holding her favourite pink teddy, she’d named all the people, and I thought perhaps she thinks because it was Grandparents’ Day that Mum had said, ‘So who’s the oldest?’ and had actually structured it for her, or told her how to spell it. But she actually had done her own inventive spelling, and things that clearly hadn’t been, she knew all the names off by heart. But in her writing you can tell that no-one had dictated it, because it’s her own spelling. There weren’t any examples of that continuum of where she’s going.

I’ve been disappointed in that part of it, but I think she’s had so much from the whole experience. With two, two and a half hours I felt I provide for where she’s at every other hour, every other day. Whereas I think next year is going to be a half day and a whole day…at the same Kinder with new teachers and mostly a new group. I’m really going to need to have more input into what happens. I’ve been very helpful this year and very nice and friendly to everyone. I thought, I’m not arriving as a new person and saying, ‘This is what I think’ and expecting them to do all sorts of things just for her. I’m being nice and friendly helping her, and I’m very happy to help…so that I feel like I can in a nice way suggest some things.

All I really wanted, and I’ve felt that I’ve got totally from Kinder is, Lucy being comfortable to the core. She’s known friends, she’s used to a different routine, she has been able to develop honestly with new people, and knows that she can do that now. She’s got so much out of the difference, that I haven’t got any challenges from Kinder, which I haven’t really minded, because she’s got all of these other things. To have a different routine, and feel like she was growing up, to do all of that.

As I am at home with Lucy, I feel that the environment and experiences I provide her with are the most critical for continuing her stimulation. I anticipate this to change when Lucy enters school, particularly if teachers are not able to cater for her needs. I think ‘Oh, I just want her provided for’ because I can’t have her sitting there and doing…some of the Prep progress, doing an alphabet a week and a number a week or whatever.

We’ve been looking at schools and I’ve been not necessarily anxious for her at this pin point in time. I started looking at schools a long time ago. When I’ve been to schools…I didn’t want to give my teaching any credit. I’d say ‘tell me about your program. Tell me about what goes on.’ I like to…hear from them how they describe it and what they’d tell parents.

One of the Principals at (a local) Primary School was very good, and said to me, ‘Is there any special needs or anything that you need to tell me about your child?’ Firstly, how is she going at
Kindergarten? How has the year been? How old she was, because she could have gone to school this year, and...learning, special needs. I was at the point in the year where I felt like I needed to say, 'Some special things are going to need to be done.' I kind of really wanted the school to be up-front in saying whether they really do think they can provide or not. I’m sure probably most schools would say, ‘Of course we can!’ But I was thinking these are the things that she is doing. I had quite a good conversation with him about what sort of things she was able to do and where I felt she had her strengths...what needed providing for. He was very good. They actually have got a policy in the school...Something like providing for individual differences – which I really like the sound of - a lot of open-ended type activities. I was interested when I looked around the school, that the classrooms had...‘thinker’s keys’ and ‘multiple intelligences’ and a lot of really different structures, where they really weren’t sitting down doing traditional structured...sort of lessons. A lot of young staff as well, which doesn’t necessarily mean they’re doing the latest things. There were lots of things that made me think that, ‘Yes, I think they were a bit more able to provide.’

I came out of there with such a nice feel about it. He was telling me about the School Entry Assessment, which I absolutely hate. He was saying to me that testing is only a snap, a pin-point in time and it was really good the way he described it to me. He said they go as far as the child can go. He said, ‘I wouldn’t want to hurry into anything, because being brand new there will be a lot of new things anyway.’ For Lucy I’d want to give her at least a term of this – a new teacher. There’ll be specialists who will be coming in and out, and there’ll be so many new things...having a library book, your bags have your books, and all that sort of thing. I think that would be enough for her. The Principal said ‘let her settle down and I think we’ll have extended conversations with you once we’ve seen results of testing, and we’re sitting down and actually looking at programs, and the next stage.’ I thought, ‘Yeah, you’re really right, that’s exactly the approach that I would want’. I thought it was done in a really nice balanced way. Let her see, let her be comfortable and see the real Lucy.

That’s the same as what I do at home, because so much of it is just go with the flow of what she’s at. A lot of it is being there and knowing intimately where she’s at, what she can do, and where the next step is...its scaffolding. I know intimately what she can do...And have a good knowledge of what the next step is.

We’ve always been open. We’ve always talked non-stop, ever since the day she was born. We’ve always had lots of books, and I think she gets a lot of her language from there. We always follow up her interests. If there’s something she’s interested in, and I don’t know about, we always get books from the library, or we say we’d look it up on the internet. Like the topic on dinosaurs at Kinder. I was aware that...they had a lot of dinosaur style activities (so) I mentioned something to Lucy, ‘Oh, you’re learning about dinosaurs at Kinder?’ and she said to me, ‘Mum we’re not learning about dinosaurs. See they’re just dinosaur pictures and dinosaur things, but we’re not learning anything about them. They haven’t told me anything about dinosaurs, they haven’t told me any facts about them, so I don’t know anything about them. We’re not learning about them.’ I thought ‘yeah, that’s right’, and not that she needs to be sitting down and told all the time, but she was really interested, she would love to find out some facts about the dinosaurs.

They had one hopeless activity - they had a photocopied picture of one skeleton of a dinosaur, there were multiple copies provided, but you couldn’t even pick which one you wanted. The parent helper was going to staple that one picture to a black sheet of paper, and every child then had a white pencil or crayon, and tried to copy that picture. Anyway Lucy copied it, and this is typical of Lucy’s style though, ‘I don’t want that dinosaur I’m going to draw my own.’ So I said, ‘Sure, you draw whichever one you like.’ I’m not going to say ‘draw what they want you to draw, draw this one’ because they photocopied to see how clever you are at drawing the same thing. So she drew her own and she wanted a dinosaur with legs and horns all around the head. And she said, ‘Where is the umbilical cord?’, and I said, ‘I’m not sure, do you have a book or posters of dinosaurs around?’ I was looking around, at Kinder they would at least have a poster that has the name, so we could find it and look...No, nothing around at all. Even on the photo she asked, ‘Well, what’s this one?’ and no-one knew what that one was called, even the one they’d designed for that table. I said ‘we’ll look it up when we get home.’ Anyway, her motivation all day was to come home to look it up. Lucy said,
‘We’ll do a Google search.’ We just typed in dinosaurs and it came up with all the names of dinosaurs. They had beautiful open-ended activities, like it’s all given to you…they could have gone on to one website and had a beautiful activity about dinosaurs, with a bit of built in facts and things. Lucy’s just craving to do that.

I would love Lucy to…be able to show what she can do. The teachers have seen things that impress, but they’ve (only) seen the tip of the iceberg really. I haven’t ever wanted in the beginning…to say to them, ‘This is what my child can do. Do you realize she can do tada tada tadaa?’ I guess I saw the first priority for her…was to separate, and be part of the group…And I thought that that would be drawing attention to the differences, rather than letting her arrive and letting them find out what she was like themselves. I just really thought that was the important thing for the teachers to be able to discover what she could do, rather than have a pre-conceived idea of, ‘This neurotic mother has already come up and told me she can do ta diddle diddle da, and is expecting something of us, and we need to look at that.’ I thought, ‘Oh, I’ll let it go and then see how the year progresses.’ Probably if term four wasn’t term four, I would have felt that I really needed to start to take a look. I would have given lots of advice on what they can do to regulate their programs. But I didn’t want to be doing that.

I had a few conversations with her dad, and I said, ‘Oh, I really would love to be able to just give some suggestions of what they could do’, even some of the most basic. Look, the teachers are all lovely, and I think they have some lovely experiences, but they were definitely not opening to (Lucy’s needs). They certainly did look at interests…but…I wouldn’t say they were good at catering for the needs generally…for her or for anyone else. The teacher even said ‘I don’t usually like to say this, but she is highly intelligent.’ She didn’t like to normally comment on that sort of thing (but) she said, ‘Look, she’s very intelligent. She’s seeing what’s going on. She knows all this.’ This teacher…was very in tune to what was going on generally that could have affected things…but…had no idea…of a lot of the things she was doing. They did cater for…almost all of the children…they probably were very appropriate for the majority. (But) they didn’t see Lucy’s potential…at all.

The four year old teacher is also the director…and has a little bit more ‘oomph’. I discovered throughout the year that the three year old teacher…has actually moved in to train more this year to
become qualified to do four year olds. I’m guessing perhaps that when she did her training it was like a three year, and now she’s doing her fourth. I (don’t know) the difference between the Director’s (qualifications), who is a four year old teacher, and what (the three year old teacher) has, I’m hoping quite significant. If not, then we’ll have to have a big discussion about it, which is totally the opposite of what I was going to do.

I would consider myself ‘somewhat informed’ on support services for gifted children, but we have not utilised any for Lucy’s needs

I would consider myself ‘very well informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children. I have attended a conference, information evening, had discussions with teachers and professionals in the field of gifted education, and read books and journals. These have been in my role as a teacher prior to having Lucy. I have not done anything to identify Lucy as gifted. A comparison of what I know of Lucy and my knowledge of ‘giftedness’ from teaching have confirmed that she is a gifted child

The areas of development and learning demonstrated by Lucy that I have valued as the most important indicators of giftedness have been language – spoken as well as reading and writing; mathematical skills; and memory. I particularly did not want to pre-empt the teacher at the beginning of the year when we met. I would prefer the teachers to observe and make their own judgements about Lucy’s abilities. We have not had conversations about ‘giftedness’.

Discussions have been held with the Maternal Child Health Nurse. She has noticed many aspects of development in Lucy that she has remarked upon. The Health Nurse said she could refer me to an identification service if I am interested. At this stage, I do not feel that any formal identification is necessary. Lucy continues to be stimulated and is very happy in her current activities without formal identification.

- On the ‘Characteristics of Giftedness Scale’ by Silverman and Maxwell, Lucy’s parents marked 25 out of 25 characteristics as ‘very true’.

- On the ‘Introversion/Extraversion Continuum’ by Silverman, Lucy demonstrates a considerable balance for both introversion and extraversion characteristics – although a slightly more likelihood of introversion characteristics

(Educational advice I would give when planning for needs of children like Lucy would be), from the Kinder side first…the minor little things – oh, not minor, they’re major things – like saying, ‘Can you please make sure there are a handful of pencils on every single table, whether it’s a table to be doing written things or not.’ If they (could have) a trolley of more materials, where they were allowed to help themselves…instead of them all being pre-set lengths of string on the table with the threading and the knots tied in the end…she might have decided to create something totally different …if she could on her own do that.

Go with interest things…like paper and envelopes…if the Kinder had something that looked like a ‘writing (table)’. I’ve never been one to push the writing, but when Lucy writes I’d like her to feel like she can, if she wants to. There’s a lot of types of activities that the Kinder could…build a huge amount of literacy and numeracy - I wouldn’t expect them to sit down and teach them and give them lessons. If they had a shop or a restaurant or something like that, they could build it. Not that it has to be for literacy and numeracy, but they could easily build in things there. They could have a menu, and write the food, or even have little magnetic pictures of the food and put the prices…play money, and they could have done shopping.

(Advice to parents) Probably number one is to follow their instincts, and listen to what they are interested in. Let them always guide what they want to do, but let (them) know there are all different activities, and (they) could pick an activity.
Lucy’s Family Support Person

Occupation: University Lecturer
Qualification: PhD

As an infant Lucy was very alert and interested in the world, very big and wide eyed...took in everything that went on. She was a contented infant. She took the world quite seriously though, by that stage. She wasn’t a child that laughed a lot. She was a contented child, but she took the world very, very seriously. You could tell from a very young age that she was a very deep thinker.

Lucy’s a mixture. She’s very capable and confident in all the areas, and has a wide range of interests. Lucy has exceptional language skills. By one, she was speaking very well, so I guess language skills showed up in the first year. She was communicating in full sentences. We knew she was good language-wise, and now at age four...her reading just seems to be flowing. Don’t know where it’s coming from, no-one’s teaching her, she’s just picking it up, and picking it up, picking it up.
By age 3, excellent number concepts. Of late, Lucy’s also liking things with maths content. She’s very, very interested in numbers, and things related to a lot of maths concepts. She’s got a terrific understanding of seasons, and seasons in different parts of the world. She’s got a great understanding of calendars and orders of birthdays...very quick to compute how old one person is in relation to another person, without appearing to count on any fingers or anything - she can get the idea, “That means that you are twenty years older than that person”. Lucy’s very, very quick to do maths things...a lot of maths concepts that are very, very strong. About six months ago she was given an old computer...which had maths on it. That was the first time she’d ever been exposed to the opportunity. She wasn’t taught how to use this program, she just did it. She knew what she was doing...she knew every number...she knew associations between numbers in their twenties...she could recognize them...then subtract or add.

Lucy has amazing memory and recall. Excellent recall of events and specific details associated with these. For example, number plate recognition at 1. Lucy has excellent task commitment and concentration.

Lucy wasn’t particularly ahead of other children physically; in fact, she was probably a little bit slower to walk than some children, I think it was at fourteen months that she was walking.

Lucy’s interest in the world is quite contagious. She saves questions up, and asks the appropriate person the appropriate question. My husband is a vet, so if she’s got a question in relation to animals, she always waits. The last question was, “Pop I’ve got a question for you, and I know you’re the most appropriate person to ask – Why can birds stand on electric wires and not get electrocuted, and why is that?” And he explained...that the wires are insulated, and that...if the wire was exposed, then they would get electrocuted, but if it’s covered then it’s alright. And she said “Oh Pop I think you’re wrong.” She said “No, I’ve been thinking about it, and I think it’s because birds can fly, and people can’t.” Although she listened carefully, and I know she believed him, she thought, I don’t want to think of them actually being able to get electrocuted, if the wires were exposed...if you asked her why birds don’t get electrocuted, I’m sure she’ll tell you the real reason.

Lucy displays great sensitivity at home – with ‘anxiety’. However, there was also a new baby who is now one year old. She has very high expectations of herself, and she gets frustrated, very, very easily. It’s taken a little while for her to be able to self-regulate that frustration. She’s getting much, much better at it now, than she was six months ago, and...we weren’t sure how much the new baby had to do with it. Her sister has just turned one, so all of this happened at the same time as the new baby, so what pushed what button we are not quite sure. Lucy had always had some difficulty with self-regulation in some ways...it was like she seemed to have another big growth spurt in intelligence, and in what she was able to do, and that seemed to have increased the problems with frustration.

Lucy’s a very feminine child. She’s always been interested in clothes...she cares a lot...that she looks right. That’s important to her. She’s very energetic. Her sense of humour is starting to come out now. She’s understanding how to be funny, how to crack jokes and ‘what’ can be funny - it’s nice to see that side having just developed. Lucy’s a very warm, loving, caring, innovative child.

Lucy has a strong interest in everything around her and would ask questions, where she didn’t know about something. Her perception of the world around her, and her interest in books, as an infant for age one, was very, very high. She particularly loves language things. She’s loved books always, and loves reading, and she certainly loves letter writing. Lucy certainly knows every breed of dog. She knows a lot of information about the different breeds...she’s got a poster board with dog breeds on the wall.

My mother used to say, “Oh, they’re going to be in trouble later on”. I remember her saying she could see that she was a bit different and a bit brighter and they wondered how they were handling it. Other family members...are also aware of how bright that they worry. An aunt and uncle worry a little bit that...being out of kilter is going to be a disadvantage for her. They think she is a delightful
little girl, and they worry that she is just different enough that it might be a problem to her. They just love her to bits, but they do worry that she’s just different enough. They’ve got other children they know of, who are bright, and see them being socially…different…just different. They’ve often said, “Oh, we hope she’s alright…that the brightness is not going to be a disadvantage.”

I think it will be very, very interesting to see how Lucy’s intelligence changes and presents itself at the different stages. At the moment I’d say that the intelligence isn’t a problem of any sort. But I’d also say that it’s not recognized overtly because of her personality, and because of the environment she’s in. I’m sure that in a couple of years that’s when I might answer many of these questions differently, because in a different context there are different responses. You’ve got so many things to weigh up in making these decisions, of what’s best for everyone. It no longer becomes what’s best for one child, it’s how it’s manageable for family as well as the child.

Lucy’s got several very, very close girlfriends, and they are really, really special friends to her…she’s got a strong empathy towards them. She cares about them, like other people would care about a family member. For example, a little friend just recently, her grandmother died, and Lucy took it on board so much, like she was just devastated for her friend, and went and picked flowers, and lent her her dog, which was just about the best thing you could ever do to anyone, and then explained to me. She told me she had Russell back, and that she had lent it to Ruby, because Ruby had this very sad thing – and you would understand how sad this is Grandma, because her Grandma had died. So she’s a very good friend to her friends.

All her friends are outside Kinder, they’re not in Kinder. They are children who were born in a month of each other, and they’ve remained friends since they were born. The Kinder children appear a bit young for her within the group. She says she likes one girl, but I think it’s just that she might be a pretty girl, I don’t think she’s actually a friend. She hasn’t really got a close friend. She’s never really invited anyone home, or gone to anyone’s house…from Kinder. Whereas with her other friends, she’ll say “Will you come to my place?” It’s quite a different relationship.

Lucy writes to those four friends. She posts letters to them regularly, writes proper letters to them. She always says, “Make up more envelopes”…and then she can do her letters to her friends, and write their addresses. She knows all their birthdays in her head and everything.

I would consider myself ‘very well informed’ on planning and programming for gifted children. I have had informal discussions on appropriate experiences to challenge Lucy. The area of development I believe is most important when planning and programming Lucy’s educational experiences includes awareness of current skills and abilities so these can be built on.

Prior to pre-school Lucy was very ‘attached’ to her parents. Now coping with separation without any ‘issues’. The good thing was that from day one she’d attend without tears or any worry. She was very, very proud of herself for doing that, and was aware…in self-reflection, that that was very good for her. She could explain that it was very hard, but she knew it was important…no-one else would have known the agony it was for her to do it. She’d say afterwards “I really missed you Mum, but I didn’t cry.”

Lucy does not show her talents at preschool but rather ‘fits in with the group’. She has only been at 3 year old kindergarten for 2 mornings per week for less than 6 months. I will watch the next 6 months with interest. I’ve taken her a few times. She goes happily, but I wouldn’t say she has a real big passion for it, but I’m not sure that I know enough from seeing her come home afterwards, to hear it…certainly after attending I hear stories about it. It was a big thing for her to go happily and to have her own social place to go, because she hadn’t been good at separating, and she hadn’t been good at having that. So I think the biggest thing for her was the fact that she is confident, and feels good about being confident and going and attending. I don’t think that she’s getting a huge amount of knowledge in any other way, other than the social. She writes up the children’s names on a paper…but I don’t think there’s anything happening there that’s challenging or extending her. I don’t think people would have the knowledge of what she could or couldn’t do.
The centre that she now attends has what I call table top activities. There’s a range of things that are set out, and the children select from that range of things. The things that are out for her to do, she just does so easily, that there wouldn’t be anything that they’d see her doing, that they’d get a surprise at. If she was allowed to do a computer game, then they’d see she could do that. She’d probably choose things that are a bit messy, or a bit fun, so therefore she’d look like a messy child having fun, so that nothing would put anyone’s antenna’s up, and possibly, because she’s a little bit shy they may not hear the language, that’s really quite mature language for her age. As she’s getting more confident…I’m sure that over the next six months…they will hear the way that she speaks when she speaks confidently, the questions she asks, and the things that she involves herself in. But…because she’s a shy little girl, it will take them a long time to know her.

I’ve seen the paintings come home…and she’s not a child that paints, but you’d notice a great deal of difference. You’d notice if it was…pen and paper in hand. Her painting is like everyone else’s, quite messy, and it doesn’t really show you much. But I’ve seen beautiful writing…with pen and paper it’s quite a different skill.

What does Lucy enjoy most at Kinder? It’s a very hard one to answer because often children will choose things in a Pre-School that are different to the things that are provided at home. Now I know the things that she loves to do at home and many of those things are not in the Pre-School. It doesn’t mean to say that if they were that she would choose them. She might actually like the lack of pressure of any sort of freedom to just fit in with everyone else.

Lucy gets a lot of stimulation at home with the range of materials that they have. She’s probably getting what she needs out of Kinder. Kinder is actually providing…a social setting for her to go to on her own, which she doesn’t do anywhere else…rather than it being a place that is an exciting educational place, or a place where she’s forming strong friendships or connections. It’s more about independence.

I think (by) recognizing Lucy’s strong language ability earlier on we were all mindful of the importance of making sure she had a wide range of literature that was going to extend her with her interest in language. We were always very careful to make sure we were picking appropriate stories. I remember buying her poetry books earlier on, knowing that that was a new way of thinking about language that I knew she was ready for and able to understand. I guess it’s once you realize that it’s a strength and it’s an interest, and it’s a passion for them, then you look at then saying, “That’s great, now let’s provide in a way that’s appropriately applicable…don’t worry about the age, just worry about the level.” We wouldn’t have found that if we hadn’t seen what she could do.

I think her mum and dad have done it recently. Since she’s had the computer they’ve realized that she works on that on her own for…quite a reasonable length of time, and can now do Maths and Reading programs and things like that. They will now borrow things from the library…to extend those interests, and to give her others. I guess what it means is we now are able to make sure that there are some things that we are catering for, for the things that she enjoys doing…extending that…knowing that there are things that she’s capable of.

I became involved with Lucy in a Grandparent role. I would consider myself ‘somewhat informed’ on support services for gifted children. I remember suggesting to Lucy’s mother some places where there were some very good programs. The problem was that the drive was such a long way. If there had been a nearby centre that was going to offer a program that was most stimulating, then certainly she’d be there. Certainly the best was chosen out of the centres in the local area.

I’m not sure the sort of support that people could give to a Pre-School child or family. Lucy’s mother has an education background and is fairly tuned into what’s required. She’s actually doing a pretty good job…they have the resources themselves to be able to buy books, buy computer games, outdoor play things, there’s a very good range of things.
I would consider myself as ‘well informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children. I have engaged in professional development, had discussions with teachers and completed a Masters Degree in New Zealand with the ‘Gifted and Talented Education’ as one of the coursework components.

In relation to Lucy, I have recognised ‘above average’ skills in several domains of development. With a background of study in the area of gifted education there were specific skills that appeared to be more than a ‘bright child’. Through informal discussions, we have talked about Lucy having a range of skills that put her in a different category to peers that she associates with. The areas of development and learning demonstrated by Lucy that I value as important indicators of ‘giftedness’ are excellent language skills, excellent memory, very good concentration, a clear understanding of sequences of events (eg. calendars, seasons – in different countries), a clear understanding of many maths concepts, and interesting questions asked.

At this very young age, I don’t think that the label is important. I think that the most important thing is to just watch the interest, the capability, provide and extend for them in every way possible, in just a very fun, play-based way, and keep monitoring it, so that there might be times later that the identification might be helpful in something else.

I think rather than the identification, every child has got abilities, and inabilities and what you’re doing always is supporting every child to the maximum of their ability. I think with children that are gifted, you’ve just got to have a lot more strategies and supports in place. It’s just being particularly tuned in, so that you’re getting the opportunity to see the things she’s able to do. She might be able to do things that you haven’t actually provided the opportunity to see.

(Also) helping parents tune into children’s interests so you could provide the right resources related to that. A support person could offer to help parents identify those things…help them identify what those strengths were, and the types of things that would help extend those areas.

A way the preschool could improve is if they hooked into her interests and provided stories and things related to quite a sophisticated level rather than a fairly basic level. If people picked up on things like that then she could be extended. She’d need to have some nice strong engaged conversations with people, and then they’d find out a lot. That’s what I think she needs - for someone to take the time to know her, so they can know what she likes. Also, to provide a setting where there’s a lot of exciting things happening all the time is very important.

The centres that would have been more suitable would have been the centres that follow children’s interests and had children engaged in projects that were open-ended enough that they would really have the opportunity to get involved deeply, and engage in those experiences. A very, very rich Early Childhood Centre, where children have the opportunity to engage in their play and their learning, in a very meaningful way. That would have been fabulous…she’s got to do four year old Kinder next year, so particularly then…it would be very, very helpful, if that was an option. You want it to be a happy but a stimulating environment where the children are co-constructing their learning. It’s not just someone offering what they think the child likes, but it’s actually really related to the child having a voice and input into the things that they’re very interested in doing and learning about.

Be very careful!

Lucy’s Specialist
Occupation: Maternal and Child Health Nurse

Lucy was really vital, alert, one of those little babies that’s almost having a bit of a look around at things, from my earliest memories. She was always visually very insatiable…checking things out. Lucy has accelerated use of language. For example, at 12 months she had 47 words when the average is 1.3 words for this age. As we got to…more formal assessments…she was saying about
forty eight single words - that was obviously a huge acceleration. It was really in her language area that it was very obvious that she was way beyond anyone that I had ever come across...her early development of sentences. She’s bi-lingual.

Lucy’s physical skills were appropriate for her development. Nothing...stood out as being advanced in those areas. (In) her gross motor and her cognitive skills...just very quick to grasp whatever activity she was participating in.

There was just the maturational aspect. At three and a half...there’s often a degree of frustration...when children have such an acceleration - (I) often find in one area they can be frustrated...as toddlers. At three and a half...she was very knowing...participating easily...exceptional skills.

I would consider myself to be ‘very poorly informed’ on programming and planning for gifted children. My involvement has been in providing early parenting advice and infant to pre-school age developmental assessments. Lucy’s mother...is terrific at...providing such a lovely rich...home environment. Her mother brings that skill...being a teacher. It’s always difficult when it’s your own child...but I do think she does very well at that.

I have been Lucy’s MCH Nurse since discharge from hospital. I would consider myself to be ‘somewhat informed’ about support services for gifted children. I have not used resources specifically catering for the needs of gifted children but discussed with Lucy’s mum possible options. I have recommended the CHIP foundation to Lucy’s family. In the past I’ve referred families to the CHIP Foundation...so they can get with people who know where their child is headed, because I certainly don’t just assume their expertise. Mine is sort of really just looking at the development and trying to landmark where they’re at, and make sure that they’re actually age-appropriate.

It’s difficult to know exactly where to go, especially when you can see that the development is advanced from an early age...apart from...the available resources in the community...the libraries, the reading sessions that are offered, the different specialized play groups. Then I move into something a bit more formalized, like the CHIP Foundation. I don’t know of any other place where they would do that sort of testing.

I would consider myself ‘somewhat informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children. With general nurse, mid-wife, maternal Child Health qualifications, we do an area of normal child development and then deviations either way. In combination with...the years of experience...developmental assessments...at two weeks...to three and a half years...ten in total...that range of experience allows me to...see deviations of children that are performing well and above what I would expect them to be performing, and also at the other end of the spectrum, where they are not meeting those targets.

I have engaged in professional development in Maternal Child Health which considers the age appropriateness of behaviours and development in infants through to pre-schoolers. I have completed Key Developmental Assessments since birth and Lucy’s parent was present at all of these. Lucy participated in activities at key developmental assessments. Language development has been the key marker and Lucy has always exceeded language markers. I believe that exceptional language skill is an important indicator of ‘giftedness’.

As far as identification...Lucy’s mother...is absolutely switched on to where Lucy is at. In other cases...families have a certain sense of relief...that they...can then move forward with...exploring certain ways to stimulate further those abilities in the child.

In other families I might have...said, “Well look, we need to look at all the facets...that the child needs to explore and be enriched in...things they can provide at home, and look outside for resources as well.” Depending on the age that they’re at...I’d be...working through the other professionals that are involved, and finding out what they can access. Many children are moving into Early Years
Centre type environments where…they might be able to tap into more formal ways of being able to assess and provide that stimulation.

I would advise that parents have the conversations…with other professionals and…more formal organizations. The CHIP Foundation may provide…more formalized developmental assessment…where they need more input…so the parents actually know exactly where their child’s at.
Introduction to Case Study Two: Harry

Harry is a five year old preschool child who at the time of the study was attending a four year old kindergarten program at his local council kindergarten. He is the younger of two boys and lives with his family in a south-eastern suburb of Melbourne, Australia.

The other participants included in Harry’s Case Study are his mother, a family friend, three year old kindergarten teacher and four year old kindergarten teacher.

Case Study: Harry (4 years)

I don’t like being away from people. Some people (are important to me). Ken and Matty (kinder boys) Henry. (kinder boy)...Maybe Mikhala. (researcher’s daughter)...Teagan (girl).

(I’m really good at) Football...and...and tennis. I like writing words. (When I’m an adult, I’ll be good at...) driving my own car. A black hot wheels car.

(If people want to know more about me they would need to ask...) if I have a computer? I play games. It’s called Club Penguin...Hmm...on the internet. You have to actually write your name in...hmmm...yeah, but Mum, you have to spell it on the computer first, and...then you have to press it.

(Another question people would have to ask me would be...) umm...where do I get the notes? From my computer. Writing notes. They say some stuff about people...Matty, Ken, Henry, and my Mum. (I write emails) Yeah. (I write about...) umm...about Cup England. Yeah, Matty and Ken do. They’re going to my new school. That’s where the yellow T-shirts go.

I have two balls, and the other one is a flat one, and it isn’t even working...Mum, I want to shoot that one (basketball) up there. (There’s a spider) I actually keep them...on the steps. (I like to go on...) my slide. (Talking about the tyres near his slide) Oh, I’ve already done this (moved the tyres), but it would be dangerous...yeah, really dangerous.

Puff the Magic Dragon (is my best song). I play umm...in a little forest. It’s been here for a long time. And here’s a bug. I can see some mushrooms...they are poison. I think it’s a dead spider. They’re magic keys! We’ve got pebbles out there.

Matthew...(he’s) ah, five. Then I also play with Marc. (He’s)...ah, eight. (I’m the same as kids at kinder because)...I like playing with them... (on the) Pirate ship. Playing in the pirate ship...and kids that go on the slide...And Ken only likes going on the slide.

I’ve got different colour hair. I wear different clothes. I have different kind of shoes. (I’m)...Stumped. (about how else I’m different to other children). Ben is my best friend, and he’s in grade one...because he’s really smart. He talks to me about stuff...and I’m smart too.

(My favourite thing to do at kinder is ) Playing in the sandpit. I don’t know what I find hard at kinder. Hard puzzles. (At school, I’ll be really good at) Writing... I don’t know...playing football.
Harry’s Parent
Occupation: not stated

As an infant Harry was a very placid baby really. He cried a bit to start off, but he was very routine...he would never sleep unless he was actually in his cot. He was quite a placid child until he was about two. Then he became a little bit demanding. It’s been a lot more...in the last couple of years, and he’s just completely changed. He’s gone from this very placid little boy to this kid who seems to be almost uncontrollable at times, very badly.

Everything he did, all his milestones... seemed to be at normal stages. He didn’t walk anywhere nearly as early as his brother or anything like that. He had a dummy for a long time...he would do anything for that dummy. He had his dummy until he was four and he would sleep three hours a day, providing he got to go to bed with that dummy. When we weaned it off him during the day, he would put himself to bed at ten o’clock in the morning, so he could go to be with that dummy, which was strange behaviour. He was just sort of regimented in that respect.

Harry loves to make people laugh, he will retell jokes that he has heard over and over. He’s very funny now. He’s really, really funny, and he remembers jokes...that he tries to get off his brother. He’ll crack himself up. He’ll be sitting in the back of the car, and he’s obviously thinking of something, and he’ll have this big belly laugh, and he’ll just point out things. Things that he thinks are funny aren’t always funny to us, but he really does make himself laugh.
Harry likes to explain things that he knows how to do. He will explain to adults and wants them to agree that he is right even if he is wrong. Harry seems to be thinking a lot about what’s happening. He is starting to come back with, “Oh, but you mean this.” Actually keeping what you’ve just told him, but re-arranging it in a way that sort of makes sense to him, but still means exactly the same thing. Harry brought home the Human Body book, and he was just so intent on where did he come from. Then...one day we were driving back after he’d got this book out, and I’d read it to him once...skimming over some details, and he said, “How did I come out?” And I said, “With the cut and stuff.” And he said, “Did it hurt?” And I said, “Oh, it hurts a bit, but they give you medication.” And he was crying in the back seat of the car, thinking that me having him, had actually hurt me.

Harry can’t keep quiet while reading – he is always too busy asking questions and trying to get to the next part in the story. He can retell stories. (He) seems to understand stories quite well. If Harry is doing something that he is interested in he can concentrate for longer periods of time. Since Harry has shown an interest in numbers he seems to be counting all the time. He seemed to do puzzles at a normal rate but once he became interested in them he loved them and picked them up easily.

Harry’s very inquisitive now. He’s into a lot of things. Harry’s the biggest messy child ever...he’s quite creative. We came out one morning and he’s got the paints out, and he’s trying to let us have a sleep-in and done the right thing. He’s had a big roll of wrapping paper on the table, and he’s painted it all. Sometimes he certainly will sit there and do it, but then...he hasn’t got the patience or he gets frustrated or annoyed at the fact that he can’t do it to how he wants it.

I think he is a perfectionist in regards to some things because if he can’t get something the way he likes it he really gets upset or mad. For example, when he is lying down watching TV he will sometimes have a pillow and blanket and he likes the blanket to be smoothed down in a certain way. He likes things the way he likes things...you can’t go to bed, you’ve got to read him a book, and you’ve got to do this and this. You’ve got to do it like that. If I take him to bed now, no matter what the time of night it is, I always read him a story, because...he’ll just go off for not having it. So it’s easier to read just a little story.

Harry’s a real Jekyl and Hyde. It’s like he’s two kids in this one body, or many more. He does seem to worry when other people are doing the wrong thing (this doesn’t always apply to himself). Certainly in recent times...he’s...becoming more sensitive...but he offsets that by the anger that he has. In one breath he’ll tell you that he loves you, and the next minute...he’s been naughty when we’d been out, and when we’d come home...he played nice. He said “I love you Mummy, and I’m sorry that I was naughty.” The next minute I’m trying to get a jumper on him, and just, that’s it! He’s temperamental...he’s like an elastic band, sometimes its ready to snap and it just snaps all the time.

Harry’s very headstrong, and he’s got a lot of go in him. He’s not a bully, but he’ll certainly get in there and he whacks his brother more than his brother would ever hit him. He’s just got that...full-on personality. He doesn’t have patience at all. He asks for something, and if it’s not done right there...I can actually be in the shower, and he can be in there wanting something, and he will continue to scream until I come back in, not mattering where I actually am. It makes no difference to him...and you can get out and say, “I’m in the shower.” And he’ll say, “Well come and do this for me now.” Like instantly, he wants it. Harry’s changed a lot.

At home, Harry seems to need to control everything but when he is out (at friend’s or kinder) he can be happy to go with the flow. He’s so shy on one hand and yet he’s so capable and that on the other hand. Harry can be quite outgoing but can be shy in new environments or around new people.

Harry’s really lovely, he’s a lovely little kid, but at this point in time he’s just very hard to manage. He’s got such a strong personality and I mean when he’s been loving and nice and that to you he’s just wonderful.
Harry really does enjoy making people laugh. He enjoys laughing himself. He likes to try and create stuff. He’ll sit and watch TV…but he likes being outside and he likes to get into things. Harry just likes to get into everything.

Harry likes to have the upper hand - certainly in bedtime routine - I’ve noticed…he doesn’t like the change in that. He likes the girls.

Harry really likes…his grandfather. He likes that boys…type thing. He likes to sit there (with his grandfather) and thinks he can be a little bit naughty, and not get into trouble for it, because he’s in a ‘boys group’. He does identify really well with that kind of thing. He takes all his books over, so they sit there, and…he loves to tell stories…with him.

At the moment…we don’t know whether we’re Arthur or Martha. Last term for weeks…he was just an absolute angel, and I thought “Oh, what’s going on here?” Harry’s never been one to sit there and be cuddly…he’s not cuddly. But he really started to settle down and he was…talking very well, and making…proper questions…and then all of a sudden I don’t know what happened, then bang, just changed. And for a few weeks now he’s just been this nightmare. Now that he’s half way between four year old kinder and school…I’m worried that he’s bored. I don’t know what’s changed him…if it’s partly to do with the fact that…he’s bored and he needs more?

At the moment I can’t see past the angry part of it. Obviously his dad being away has got to be a big factor. I think it certainly has to do with a controlling issue as well, “This is attention and I’ll get it no matter what.” He can cause as much havoc as possible. A lot of the anger he has, if he gets in trouble, he wants to take it out on his brother. We’ve had a lot of dealings…last year with counselling with his brother, (so) whether he’s sitting back now and thinking, “Well alright, I’m going to get in there and have that.”

When Harry’s brother was this age…everyone would say, “Oh, he’s been here before” because there was just something about his mannerisms, you knew he…really connected with things…whereas with Harry I haven’t really found that so much. Your second child…just tends to be dragged along…and I think that’s why he just…got moved around to whatever we were doing.

I suppose I missed out on quite a bit of those couple of years there (with Harry) because his brother was starting school…so we focused a bit on that. His brother will be nine in September, so (there is) nearly four, three and a half years between them. When Harry’s brother went to Prep…he couldn’t read or write or anything, and by the end of it…he was far beyond where he should have been. With his brother…you have to micro-manage him…because teachers are not picking up on enough. I’ve just found if I didn’t instigate it, then they’re quite happy to leave it. Then when they did testing for reading, they found that he’d gone up four or five levels.

His brother would throw tantrums over pictures - he throws them. He can throw a tantrum by himself. He’ll be in a room, and he’d start an argument with himself, so it’s quite funny. He’ll be in a room, and he’ll be trying to draw something, and if something’s not going to plan…he’ll sit there and he’ll be screaming basically...he just gets that angry with the situation that he just blows up all the time…we don’t even have to actually to be in a room. So it’s not necessarily at someone, but at himself, that he gets really aggravated at a lot of things. He has got a real foul temper, and if he does get angry, he just wants to throw stuff. Or if he’s working on something, he’ll just screw it up. Doesn’t matter how long he’s been working on it, if he gets really frustrated with it, he’ll sit there and just screw it into a ball, and (say), “Oh I don’t like it”. He just doesn’t care what he’s doing. It will be as simple as, “Oh, the texta wouldn’t work” or “This fell off”…its not even major things, its just little things.

I am starting to feel like there is something (in)...Harry that really just needs to be unlocked. I’m wondering whether now as he’s getting a bit older…it’s all starting to come through. I always saw the perfectionist in his brother. Would I have missed it in Harry? He’s showing signs of it. You get two really different views…people who don’t…see him in home…think…‘Butter wouldn’t melt in
your mouth’…and quite shy person. But…family, are amazed at the personality change. I suppose what they all see is that he’s never going to be walked over. They all…say that he’s going to ‘run the joint’

I know at stages I don’t parent consistently, I was going to say, not well, but its not that, it’s not consistent. I’m sort of hoping that it’s going to turn on like a light bulb one day, and I’ll know exactly what do…whereas at this point I don’t know what to do. I haven’t really had…the time to…step back and figure out where it all is going. I don’t even know the basic questions that I should know about him. I think the hardest part is the realization that I actually don’t know who he is as a child. I haven’t really picked up on his personality at all. Being a second child, he sort of slotted in. And then his dad, when he was only a few months old, his dad started his own business and so you sort of get busy. I just think he sort of slipped through the cracks.

Harry mixes well within groups but does seem to make one good friend in each group. Harry tends to…pick an older kid in the group to…become close to. Harry’s best friend is about seven, although they are the same height. They’ve been good friends for a long time. His best friend is completely different to Harry, in that he’s quiet…just so quiet, and he never does anything wrong. He has some similar interests to Harry. They seem to complement (each other) and it’s fine for Harry because he can be a leader.

At Kinder he’s got Matty and Ken and they seem to be the ones that they alternate as to who he’s guided towards. Mostly it is Matty. That was the same when he was at three year old, there was one, and they were inseparable.

Harry loves girls. The assistant’s daughter was at Kinder…and he was telling me how much he loved her. He kind of attaches himself to a girl in whatever groups we’ve got. Wherever we go there’ll always be a girl that he likes. When he’s around a girl he’s always shy…maybe he thinks that they’re really cute (or)…the fact that the girls are a little bit more mothering to him. The last couple of times we’ve seen some friends with girls, he wants to take them gifts. He’s chosen chocolates for one, and the other one he’ll…want me to buy a bracelet.

Harry sometimes finds kids’ personalities challenging. How to deal with (the), ‘I’m your friend this week…’ thing he finds quite challenging. But I suppose he seems to kind of mix quite well with a lot of kids.

Like any three year old Kinder, Harry did nearly two years there…nothing really…made him stand out. He really enjoyed being there. He got involved in his activities. He always enjoyed going there. He never wanted me to leave. He was always coming home with heaps of craft stuff, so he was interested in attempting things. He was certainly one to participate. The people were nice…so I suppose at that age he was quite happy and he joined in. About the last month of his proper three year old Kinder, (however), the teacher rang me and wanted me to come and pick him up, because he was just crying the whole time. This was around about the time when we were going through stuff with his brother. Harry was very cluey because we would drop him off at Kinder and he would say things…about not crying like his brother.

I am unsure if the preschool Harry attends have a gifted policy or programme. I know that on staff one of the teachers is studying in gifted children. I know that they (the preschool) use individual programming to help identify each child’s needs. There has been a questionnaire about what our children’s likes or dislikes, what we think they are good or bad at, or need more attention on. Harry has kind of been involved in the programming and planning of his educational experiences. They were asked what they would like to learn at kinder.

With this six months of Kinder…Harry’s gone from not being able to count, to being able to count to a hundred. He’s recognizing letters…and I know that’s a normal kid thing, but for him it went from nothing to there! I don’t know whether…the routine aspect of Kinder…is actually bringing the stuff out. He’s seems to thrive in that very controlled environment. Harry’s getting the best chance. All
the different processes that you go through to do their planning program...that is really building him up. I suppose helping him get involved in different bits and pieces. There have been changes or updates to his IPP (Individual Program Plan) to help increase areas that he needs to develop.

At his 4 year old kinder he’s learned a lot. Not that he always tells me. He seems to be wanting to get in there and do stuff, but in funny ways. He’s enjoying the kids there. I think he likes...the set up with the games – there are different bits that...keep them interested. He always likes going outside. He likes library. He loves doing...his puzzles.

Looking at the portfolios...with all the information in there, I don’t think there’s any way that he could actually be better catered for within a Kinder. Other than starting to bring in actual Prep work...I don’t think there’s any way that they...could be expanding. There’s so many specific tasks built up around all...different learning capabilities. They seem to take the Kinder to an extra level...like...heading into Prep...because they’re extending them. They’re getting them to count to a hundred, not just to twenty. You haven’t got your basic stuff there anymore. I think that’s how he’s being challenged. I just find that he is more challenged...being able to do paintings...but (he) can build and create stuff -the way that the studying is actually planned out. I’ve said to other people, “I think he’s at the best Kinder he can be at for his age”. That child who didn’t quite make it into Prep this year, but who certainly seems to be beyond just the normal basics, “Oh you can play outside”, that’s what we want.

The teacher and co-teacher at 4 year old kinder, just seem to know exactly what’s going on with all the kids. That’s what I said, “You tend to know my kids better than I do!”

In relation to the needs and experiences of my gifted child I have attended an information evening and read newspaper articles. I have only just started finding out about gifted children and where I can go to find out more. I have been recommended to attend the Gifted Network Parents Support Group.

I would consider myself to be ‘poorly informed’ on support services for gifted children. Through the schools...you don’t really get a lot of support with it. It is very hard to find answers to questions...because I mean even though we’ve had his brother tested you know at school...they don’t notice everything. I don’t really know what I’m looking for. It’s just really being able to have someone who sits there and listens and to get...constructive comments.

On the characteristics and identification of gifted children)...I would rate myself as ‘poorly informed’. At this stage I am unsure as to whether Harry ‘is’ or ‘is not’ gifted. Harry’s older brother (who is 9) has been tested and he is gifted. I have been made aware that giftedness will sometimes run in families. At this stage we have done no testing to see if Harry is gifted.

Harry’s preschool teacher is at this point currently assessing Harry to see if there are any indications that Harry may be gifted. She is aware that Harry has an older brother who has been tested with the results of being gifted. I am very interested to find out how at this age you can find out if a child is gifted or what the child’s abilities are. I would like to find out more about giving Harry the best chance to learn to the best of his abilities no matter what his tested abilities are.

One of the things that I find helpful with finding out (whether they are gifted) is that it sometimes explains some of their little idiosyncrasies. They go to bed with their heat packs and...they still have their fluffy blanket in the middle of summer...what once seemed like a problem and annoying, is just simple basic facts...although it may not be actual normal behaviour for other children, for them it’s totally acceptable...to be like that...it...just gives you a little bit of direction, and kind of makes you think a lot more about the way that you need to speak to him.

I suppose my problem with Harry is that I haven’t got to that point yet. I’m probably misjudging him quite a lot, and therefore that’s probably why I’m getting some of the backlash that I do (from) him. I haven’t quite figured out where he fits into place at the minute. It would be really good to have an understanding of how do I identify, and then what you’re actually identifying after that, and what it
all means. I’ve had the first process of…identifying, but it happened by accident basically. It would be really nice to have on hand all your next phases…to have something like that through schools.

The testing…it’s just so expensive. Certainly some people need to have it available…because some people just can’t afford it. It would be interesting…to have Harry tested…but we’d probably wait until grade one…see how he goes at school next year, and see whether that’s reflective.

- On the introversion/Extraversion Continuum by Linda Silverman, Harry demonstrates significantly higher tendency towards extraversion characteristics
- On the ‘Characteristics of Giftedness scale” by Silverman and Maxwell, Harry’s parent marked 1 out of 25 characteristics as ‘very true’, 17 characteristics as ‘true’, 4 characteristics as ‘unsure’ and 1 characteristic as ‘sometimes’

The advice I would give to parents who are wondering whether their child may be gifted would include…trying to find out helpful resources. You’ve really got to speak to people…and just see what people say. The internet has got a lot to help you with…and counselling services.

You really have to be interactive with wherever you are. It’s about getting in there and having a look. You’ve got to be in there and say, “Can you test him for this? When is he going to be tested for that?” It’s not about feeling like you know more than the teachers, because you don’t, but you just want to let them know that you’re willing to do whatever they need to do to help with your child.

Depending on the age of the child…I’d certainly suggest going for…testing…because I’ve just found that…it does certainly (shed) some light on them. Their little brains are just working a hundred miles an hour and they’re not always capable of actually deciphering everything that they say. I know that can probably be said of a child whose not, but it just helps. It makes you feel better as a parent, because at points…you can really feel completely out of your depth.

Harry’s Family Support Person

Occupation: Home Duties
Qualifications: None

I cannot think of anything that suggests to me that Harry is different from other children. He speaks as I would expect a 5 year old to speak. He is always well behaved and cooperative whenever I have looked after him.

Harry is excellent at putting together jigsaw puzzles. He is also an excellent swimmer. A very busy boy. Very active physically and mentally…always needing something to keep him occupied. Fairly outgoing…but…he doesn’t like it when the action stops…he’d just ask for more action.

I most admire…his honesty. He’s very loveable, he’d come up and give you a hug or something…he’s really sweet.

Harry enjoys playing with age appropriate toys in a fairly typical way. He likes to play simple board games or…trucks, or cars he’s into, quite a lot of different things. He likes to do puzzles. He likes to do more complicated things…mainly those puzzles and board games.

(I have gained my knowledge regarding the characteristics of gifted children)...through reading parenting books, and…I have a nephew who is eight years old, who is gifted, what I would term as gifted. He’s quite obviously gifted. He’s been identified at school. He hasn’t had a formal testing process. But it was very, very obvious earlier on, like from the time when he was three years old he could tell the time in an analogue digital twenty-four hour clock. He could read, he could write. It was just so obvious to anyone that met him that he was gifted. I’m quite close to my sister and him, and just from my interaction with him, that’s probably just one form of being gifted. I realize that they’re not all like that.
My Mum…thinks Harry’s really cute…that he’s a really lovely little boy. I think he’s grown up a lot this year. I…have noticed…a big change in him…the things that he likes to do. I know my sister did… (her son is)…very, very gifted, but he’s also very, very naughty. And that might be why he is, because he’s…so smart. But there could also be other reasons, like he’s having a bad day, or…you can’t always blame it on that.

Harry plays a lot with my son, and they like to play outside a lot. (He prefers) probably boys, definitely more than girls. I know sometimes…my little daughter…she’s nearly three and a half…he won’t want to know about her. It’s not a naughty thing, it’s just that she doesn’t interest him, the things that she does. He’s more into things that my son is doing. My son is seven - probably because they are more physically active - and probably having the older brother, he’s not so used to girls. Just that age when they think that girls…are like aliens. (Harry likes playing with) definitely boys, and busy boys. I think he’s at the age making friendships…would probably be the most (important thing to Harry).

I would rate myself as ‘very poorly informed’ on planning and programming for gifted children. I believe the most important areas of development and learning when planning and programming for Harry are providing a variety of experiences so that the child does not become bored. Also I feel that the social development of a child should be just as important as the academic. For example, turn taking, tolerance of others and manners.

I know he loves going to kinder, because I’ve taken him once, and he couldn’t wait to get there. I think he’s made some friendships there…he’s grown up so much this year. (He most enjoys his)...play with the children, and going outside. I’d say seeing his friends and going outside. I don’t think at Pre-school it could be much better, because I know his mother just speaks so highly about that. I don’t think that there could be any improvements there. Keeping him occupied would be the challenge…it just would be a challenge to keep him busy all the time.

I have been a family support person to Harry and his family for the last years. I would rate myself as ‘somewhat informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children. I would rate myself ‘very poorly informed’ on the support services for gifted children. (Areas of support that would assist families of gifted children would include)…someone to talk to, like a counsellor...because…it’s hard. Different issues come up with school…Whether you were doing the right thing? Should you put them in a program?

Harry is excellent at putting together jigsaw puzzles. He is also an excellent swimmer. I am not sure if these two areas of strength suggest giftedness or not. The areas of development and learning demonstrated by Harry that I value as important indicators of giftedness are problem solving skills and social understanding.

My advice to parents of gifted children would be not to just focus that they’re gifted….to concentrate on the whole child rather than just that little part. Concentrate on them being a good person, and nice person. Make sure that every part of them was looked at. Concentrate on making sure that he’s polite.

**Harry’s 3 year old Kindergarten Teacher**

*Qualifications: Diploma (Community Services) (Children’s Services)*

*Years of Teaching: Less than 5*

I’d describe Harry’s nature as more quiet. Not a Mummy’s boy, but quite content to be with his Mum. He never went outside, rough and tumble, kicking the footy or wrestling, I never saw that side of him…I wouldn’t describe him as a rough and tumble boy. He didn’t really get hands-on dirty.
Harry was a highly sensitive, quiet boy, quite content to be inside…as against outside. He was quite content to do artwork. He showed pride in his art work. Harry wasn’t a loud…talkative boy, wasn’t sort of in your face the whole time. A pleasant and happy lad.

Harry learnt words to songs quickly. I did not notice an intense curiosity. Harry seemed a mature boy for his age. Harry did not seem grumpy when stressed or tired. He did not spend long periods of time learning about new topics, but did sit patiently during mat and story time. During the last 18 months of 3 year old Kinder, I observed Harry as being within the ‘normal average’ range for the five areas of development. I did not observe him as being different from his peers. Harry just appeared to be just a normal everyday average boy just doing what he was told to do.

(I most admired)…Harry’s manners…and the way he was groomed. I know…his mum had a lot to do with that. If I asked him, “Harry please stay and pick up the toys,” he wouldn’t hesitate.

(Harry most enjoyed)…table top activities. Maybe he was good at them, or maybe he felt comfortable, or maybe it was the playing.

I’ve had another little boy last year…who I’d say if anybody was going to be gifted, I’d say (he) would be. I didn’t know a thing about Harry. He just came fresh. I started off cold. His brother was a complete opposite to Harry. Rough and tumble. If there was chaos going on outside, his brother would be in the absolute thick of it.

Harry seemed to enjoy spending time with carers and talking to them, especially during indoor play. Harry used parallel play most of the session. He had one special friend whom he used to play with constantly, and when Jacob wasn’t there he just always seemed to be here, just right beside me. Whether it’s…opposites attract, or that he liked that rough and tumble and couldn’t do it himself…they were inseparable, like chalk and cheese…Harry looked for Jacob the whole time. He’d wander in at the start, and hang around with the staff. He tended to be comfortable with Jacob.

When I got Harry and Jacob settled at the table together, he’d sort of come back to my assistant or myself…and look for guidance. Mainly outside, he’d look for Jacob. If Jacob was down on the floor, he’d get down on the floor.

Inside he just appeared to be either quite content by himself, or just working alongside one of us. Whether he just enjoyed us because of the company, or whether he just felt safe with us…he wanted to be near us.

As Harry attended occasional care sessions of 2.5 hours twice weekly only, he was included in the entire group programme plan and not observed as a focus child at any great length. There were no changes to the planning and programming of the educational experiences for Harry – not as an individual. Harry used Lego (and) building blocks in an age appropriate manner.

We went through quite a bit of an awkward stage. I think his brother was having trouble going to school. We went through many weeks of separation problems with his mum towards the middle of the year. I’d say that would be his most challenging time. I think that Dad was overseas at the time too. I loved him dearly, and I know you shouldn’t have soft spots for children, but it just about broke my heart to see him so sad, because I knew what he was like and what he was capable of. But he just sort of lost all his stuffing, and just sort of bit of flavour. But then he came good, and was fine towards the end.

If Harry wanted a type of challenge, or a different puzzle…to build a puzzle, or something else, I would have got it down. Maybe I could have given him harder puzzles, or more challenging activities. He appeared to be content with whatever we offered.
I did not see any display of giftedness during his time at 3 year old Kinder. He just sort of blended in beautifully. I think children who are sort of really underdone or overdone tend to get the comments. He was just a delight to have…I’d have eighteen Harry’s.

I would consider myself ‘very poorly informed’ on planning and programming for gifted children. The areas of development and learning I believe are the most important when planning and programming for the educational experiences of Harry are to plan around the child’s interest at the time. We don’t do individual program planning here…we just do it as a group, because the occasion is not there…we’ve got a balanced program…a bit of sensory, puzzles, free drawing, play. There’s a variety of activities. I’m not qualified, or I don’t feel confident to extend him or give what he needs. I think that’s up to the professionals. So whether it’s right or wrong, I think for that twelve months, I did the best I could, and that’s what my plan of attack would be.

Harry’s just a delightful little boy and he didn’t give me a minute’s trouble. I didn’t notice anything different, he just seemed to be like any ordinary everyday little boy.

I consider myself to be ‘very poorly informed’ on support services for gifted children. I’d never know where…to refer them on to a Paediatrician, or I don’t know…I’d refer them somewhere. I’d have to do my homework and find out first. I would have had to ring up my Council, or the local doctor, or Human Services, and try to work out and refer him on.

- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Harry consistently:
  - is a perfectionist
  - has strong moral values and a keen sense of justice
  - is persistent – spends much longer time than expected on things of interest
  - is sensitive
  - is able to carry out complex instructions
  - is very aware of environment and immediately notices changes
- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Harry often:
  - learns rapidly and easily
  - has wide vocabulary and uses advanced vocabulary correctly
  - enjoys complicated games
  - has a keen sense of humour
  - shows understanding of abstract concepts
- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Harry occasionally:
  - displays intense interest in print and /or numbers
  - continually asks questions and frames additional questions based on answers received
  - has heightened awareness of the wider world
  - is intense
- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Harry seldom:
  - exhibits unevenness in development (eg. Advanced cognitive development with poor to average fine motor coordination)
- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Harry never:
  - does not ‘fit in’ socially with other children in group
  - has tendency to put things or ideas together in different or unusual ways
  - can be uncooperative in the preschool setting

I would consider myself to be ‘very poorly informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children. I have never attended professional development on the characteristics and identification of gifted children. (If a parent was unsure as to whether their child was a gifted
child)...it’s never come across, until I met you, and just our little boy from last year, it’s never crossed my path. But Harry is my first little sort of taste of what may be.

The advice I would give parents of gifted children would be to do your homework, and talk to the people who are…qualified in that area. Listen to them. Or there might be a support group of other parents…to mix with, and have morning tea.

**Harry’s 4 year old Kindergarten Teacher**

*Qualifications: Dip.T (Early Childhood), B.Ed (Early Childhood)*

*Years of Teaching: 11-20*

Harry can be shy and nervous. He has high expectations of self. He has developed mature relationships with (his) peers and teachers. Harry demonstrates hypersensitivity such as his awareness of emotions…and difficulty with separating. He is very aware of what is fair or right and his own feelings are hurt very easily. Harry can make excuses for his own behaviour and can be distracted easily when in a large group setting.

Harry is an extremely sensitive individual in regards to changes in his environment. He is quite sensitive to separation from parent and adapting to new situations. Probably the most significant thing would have been that he finds change really difficult. He’s quite clingy to Mum. He can get quite upset when he has to be separated from her, particularly in a new environment.

Harry has well developed problem-solving strategies, persistence, asking direct and in depth questions. He has a really good concentration span at home. Remaining task focussed for long periods. Harry has the ability to self-direct and remain focused independently for long periods. Just being able to work for long periods of time, intense in that he is very focused in what he does.

Harry’s sensitive. He’s quite affectionate, particularly with his friends, like lots of hand-holding with his friends and hugging and wanting to be close to them, sitting beside them on the mat. Harry was really affectionate. He was a lovely sweet little boy who was openly affectionate to adults and to children.

Harry is very aware of other people. He is very, very aware of other people and their feelings and if they’re upset, and why they might be upset, and how he can help them. Outside there was an occasion that someone had been left out of a game, and he was quite concerned about that, and came and said, ‘Someone’s saying that this person can’t play in the game.’ That upset him, he was quite distressed by that and wanted some help to be able to solve that situation for his friend.

(I admire) his sensitivity to others and just being able to empathize with others who are feeling sad…being aware of other children’s feelings and needs. He was so mature in his approach in that he could be collaborative when he was building or working with other children. Some children…will take over and want to be just the boss on their own and give everybody else direction, whereas he was quite open to other people’s ideas. So I think it demonstrated that he was aware of how other people were thinking and feeling and that it was important to include their ideas as well.

Harry is beginning to ‘read’ words and understanding phonetics. He has advanced numeracy skills and interest in counting beyond 100. Harry has the ability to speak about his knowledge on a wide range of topics. He will ask how or why something works as it does (and) understands very quickly. Harry has extremely well-developed visual-spatial intelligence…visual-spatial relationships, particularly design, construction and block building. He is very creative visually – building and construction.

Harry has a strong interest in writing, recognising letters, signs and numbers. He likes to speak in detail for long periods about events and experiences he has been involved in. He likes to tell jokes.
Harry is an extremely sensitive individual in regards to relationships with family, teachers and peers. He is affectionate towards friends – such as hugging and hand holding. Harry can be frustrated when others do not play fairly or listen to what is being said or explained. He’s really interested in numbers and building and plays cooperatively with peers for extended periods in ‘constructive’ experiences.

Photo 9: One of Harry’s block constructions at four year old kindergarten.

Harry has a good friend at kinder, so building with him, and (they) can work together for longer periods of time. He likes to be with quieter children. Harry can get really overwhelmed by children that are boisterous or that are too physical with him. He really stands back from that, he doesn’t like it. He does like to play with children who have similar interests to him…particularly those children who are into constructive work…so building, particularly with blocks, manipulative materials, sand, anybody that could work with him for a long period of time.

Harry is quite collaborative in his approach when he is building. He would allow others to contribute to what they were building and they would work together for long, long periods of time - quite detailed. He could explain what it was they built, why they built it that way and how it works. So (he preferred playing with) children who could work for longer periods of time and who he could collaborate with.

Photo 10: Work sample presented in Harry’s four year old kindergarten portfolio showing him working on four layer
Harry is a competent leader. He explains ideas and (the) direction of play. He is not bossy, very collaborative in his leadership. Harry plays well with older children.

Well before coming to Kindergarten here, he went to a three year old Kindergarten. I think it was more of an occasional care type situation. It was the same group of children that went together twice a week, however, I don’t think that he particularly enjoyed that experience. He did have some separation difficulties with Mum, and it wasn’t something that he was really, really keen about going to each week. Some weeks he was happy to go, other weeks he would have been happy not to go. As far as the program I think it was probably really just activity based and more of a social group for children, just to go and meet other children and be with other children. I think that was the purpose of the group.
In 4 year old Kinder, Harry’s planning and programming aimed to assist and support his development of relationships with peers and adults, to assist his sense of security and self confidence, to be able to separate from his parent happily, and to extend and challenge problem-solving and visual-spatial intelligence. Harry’s family have been involved in the planning and programming of educational experiences by ongoing discussions about his ability to settle independently, and written information including Individual Program Plan, Portfolio observations and documentation detailing goals, strategies and outcomes regularly. Harry was asked to describe what his strengths were and what he would like to learn at kindergarten. A psychologist has made suggestions regarding strategies to learn new skills.

There have been changes to planning and programming so as to improve the educational experiences for Harry. Being aware of emotional needs has changed my focus and increased importance of ongoing discussions with parents. It has been important to know what Harry’s current interests are so as to extend his skills, learning and motivation. The social aspect was really important to him. He had his two or three very, very close friends. He did mix with all of the children in the group but he had two friends that were really his best buddies, that he looked for all the time, and if for whatever reason they weren’t here he did find that difficult. So I think that was really important to him. And also the consistency of the group, having the same group of children, the same staff, the same rules, the same routine, knowing what to expect, I think he enjoyed that.

Sometimes when we came back to Kinder after term break, he found that difficult again to re-settle. So whether it was because of the break or because perhaps when he came back things were a little bit different – there were new programs or the room looked different, but there were aspects of that that he found challenging. I think probably the social aspect for him and just the opportunity to be able to play and, in particular, to build. He just loved to build and construct. He was always doing it whether it was in the sandpit, whether it was with the blocks outside at their posting table, he was always constructing. I think it gave him an opportunity to be able to express himself creatively.

The only other time I ever had to address Harry was we had our group time when we were together in a large group, and somebody else was speaking. He could be distracted very, very easily, and would start talking to his friends all the time. He found it…either boring to listen to somebody else or…what he had to say to his friends was more important. But quite often I would have to say to him, ‘You either need to listen to the person that’s speaking, because that’s respectful, or you need to move from your friends.’ And most of the time he would choose to stay with his friends and he would re-focus again, but occasionally I would still have to remind him that it was not his turn to speak.
Photo 12: An Individual Program Plan as designed by Harry’s four year old kindergarten teacher in consultation with his parent.
Probably another challenge of his would be just his speech. Sometimes I found him difficult to understand. He spoke very quickly, and he didn’t open his mouth wide enough when he’s speaking, so sometimes he sounded quite mumbled, and he’d be difficult to understand, so that was a bit of a challenge. Because he spoke quietly he would need to repeat himself a couple of times. So I think that unsettled him and may have affected his confidence some of the time, and yet other times he was more than happy to come and tell you long-winded stories about things that had happened or experiences that he had.

(When planning and programming for Harry it was important) probably just challenging him with his building and things like that because that was obviously his area of strengths and his area of interest. (Asking him) what he was building, how he was going to do it and how it would apply in the real world? Getting him to perhaps draw what it was he’d built, or later in the year getting him to design what it was he was about to build, thinking about it prior to having done it.

Photo 13: Self Portrait and description of Harry’s personal strengths and goals for learning recorded at the beginning of the four year old kindergarten year.
Giving Harry some more leadership was important, getting him to give some direction to other children as well. Getting him to listen for longer periods of time, getting him to come and speak in front of the group, which he quite often liked to do but he could get a little bit self-conscious at times - challenging him with those sorts of things. I think the other thing that helped too in terms of challenging and catering for his next specific needs, when something different was going to happen in the program, just re-enforcing with him that tomorrow this is going to happen, it will be different, is it something you need to be worried about, or when we’ve thought about it ‘no, it’s not, because its safe at Kinder.’ I think they were some of the ways in which his needs were catered for.

I suppose you can always extend children a bit further, and it’s having the resources and the time probably to do that. If there were more adults in the room you could work with smaller groups of children. If you had more resources you could use different materials. Probably having more time would have made a difference to Harry.

In talking to Mum I think Harry feeling secure in his environment and just having friends who he would feel comfortable with, I think for him that’s more important than any sort of academic interest...at the moment. I think it’s really important that he feels secure, that he becomes familiar with his environment, that he knows what’s expected of him. I think once he feels secure then the academic stuff will come for him and he will be able to engage himself more in those experiences...once he feels that he belongs and that he is comfortable in separating from his Mum, I think that’s important.

I would consider myself to be ‘well informed’ on planning and programming for gifted children. (At our Kinder) further knowledge for staff is required to develop ‘gifted’ policies. The areas of development and learning demonstrated by Harry that I value as important indicators of giftedness during the identification experience are emotional development and ability to form relationships,
development of self-confidence, adapting to change and new environments, and strong visual-spatial intelligence, numeracy and problem-solving abilities.

I would rate myself ‘well informed’ on support services for gifted children. Harry’s mother has attended a “Gifted Network Support Group” meeting. The ‘Gifted Network Support Group’ has helped the parents identify that Harry may be gifted and has given ideas regarding strategies to deal with challenging issues. So the Gifted Network Support Group, I was looking into that for Harry and his family… just as a means of support. Finding out that their child is similar to lots of other children and that their challenges as a family are similar to lots of other families… working out, finding out strategies, and just talking and feeling like you can share your experiences with other people. I think feedback from parents of other families is very helpful. Also it’s been an avenue for people to get some more expert advice as well. Experts provided knowledge and information about specific characteristics and behaviours, and I think that’s been really, really helpful. In terms of other services I haven’t really recommended any other services. I usually follow from what they have suggested. An educational psychologist has assessed Harry and had discussions with his parents.

I would consider myself to be ‘well informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children. I have engaged in professional development and had discussions with other teachers about the characteristics and identification of gifted children. I have recently become more informed and aware of the characteristics of gifted children through discussions with a colleague, however, I do feel I have a lot more to learn. Most of my knowledge has come from this colleague and she was quite informed with studying in the area, and so she has been able to give me lots of information checklists, and just ongoing discussions about what to look for. I’ve been able to discuss with her children who I may have suspected may have been gifted, and she’s been able to reinforce what I’ve seen with my observations, or to say, ‘Mmmm, perhaps not.’ Most of my knowledge has come from discussing issues with a colleague.

We do not have a policy related to the identification of gifted children at my preschool. More training for all staff is necessary before policies on gifted children can be written and implemented. The use of checklists was very helpful in identifying Harry as a gifted child, as were discussions with a very well informed colleague.

- On the ‘Characteristics of Giftedness scale” by Silverman and Maxwell, Harry’s 4 year old teacher marked 17 out of 25 characteristics as ‘very true’, 7 characteristics as ‘true’ and 1 characteristic as ‘unsure’.
- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Harry consistently:
  - learns rapidly
  - has tendency to put things or ideas together in different or unusual ways
  - is a perfectionist
  - has heightened awareness of the wider world
  - has strong moral values and a keen sense of justice
  - is persistent – spends much longer time than expected on things of interest
  - is sensitive
  - is intense
  - shows understanding of abstract concepts
  - is able to carry out complex instructions
  - is very aware of environment and immediately notices changes
- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Harry often:
  - has wide vocabulary and uses vocabulary correctly
  - displays intense interest in print and/or numbers
  - continually asks questions and frames additional questions based on answers received
  - enjoys complicated games
  - has keen sense of humour
- seeks interaction with adults
- exhibits unevenness in development (eg. Advanced cognitive development with poor to average fine motor coordination)
- can be uncooperative in preschool setting

• On the ‘Introversion/Extraversion Continuum’ by Silverman, Harry demonstrates significantly greater tendency for introversion.

Harry’s parents have been involved in the identification experience. They have filled out checklists, discussed their observations with staff, attended a network meeting supporting families of gifted children and sought formal assessment from a psychologist. Harry has participated in a formal psychological assessment over 2 sessions.

The process of identifying a child who ‘may be gifted’, discussions with parents and accessing formal identification is quite a lengthy process. I think probably one of the things is finding out more about him. So, getting to know him on a personal level, getting to know his family on a more personal level, and also taking into account all other experiences…their own experiences of what they have observed, and thinking, ‘Well maybe that’s why he can cope that way’ or ‘Maybe that’s why he behaves that way.’ A better understanding of the child as to why he may behave in certain ways…that’s been positive. And I think that a family going through the assessment procedure and finding out that he does have some traits that indicate that he could be gifted. I think that’s been positive for the family in terms of looking for schools that are suitable, and just finding out more information about their child, has been positive.

It’s a long process. I suppose that’s a challenge. And having the information then knowing what to do with it. Well because Harry does have these characteristics then…is it more important to find the right school for him? So I suppose that’s been a challenge for his parents, particularly, being undecided about the school, because with that information you think, ‘Well this is really, really important that we get it right.’ So that’s probably been the biggest challenge for the family. I don’t know if there’s been any other challenges.

(My advice would include) early identification (before Kindergarten) which would allow preschool staff to have expert information to assist programming for the gifted child.

(For parents) getting as much information as possible, speaking to people…who have knowledge in that area. I think that’s the most important thing. Just for them to take it on board and just to see it as another area of strength. That it’s not a deficit or it doesn’t mean that their child is better than anybody else’s child. It’s just identifying that that is their strength area and that’s something they should investigate further.

Research. Have a look and see what programs are out there…find out as much about your own child and how their needs can best be reached. Talking to other parents, I think that’s been really valuable. The network group and letting people access that.

(There is) lots of information about where to refer children if they have special difficulties, or where to refer children if they have physical disabilities or whatever. But we don’t have a lot of information about where to refer children if they present as gifted or if they may have characteristics. It would be good to have some more information about services that would help families access assessments. Perhaps…within our own department…having…advisors and Pre-school field officers that do have knowledge and expertise in that area, that could give guidance to teachers and supporters as to whether they’re on the right track, or where they would go to from there. Also just being able to speak to parents and reinforcing what you’ve observed of their kid. Having someone within our own Pre-school department or Shire or whatever, that would be helpful.

(For parents seeking support services) Probably just to go for it. To be open minded, because not everybody has the same attitude towards children who may be gifted. To be open to, and just to take on board the information and take it as that, that it is information and that you need to just keep
gathering in…it’s just one piece…one piece of the puzzle at this stage and then it might change later on. But definitely…getting some support, getting other family members on board and even just other people within the community, getting to know them and sharing your experiences with them. I think that’s really important.

I suppose when children come into Kinder there are some children that come in with identification of different traits and characteristics. So we may know of a child that comes in who has autism, or we may know of a child that comes in who has speech delay. So it would be really helpful if we had that information about gifted children before they came in so then we can put programs in place for those children and those families, rather than going through the process and then finding at the end of the year that, ‘Yes, we are on the right track’ or ‘No, we weren’t on the right track.’ Not that that alters the way you program anyway, but we’re still trying to program to cater for that child’s individual needs while they’re at Kinder. It would just be helpful to have that prior knowledge, and then you can have some dialogue with whoever has assessed that child and get some information as to how best you can program for them. So having some professional advice from other colleagues would be helpful.

I think probably the biggest thing is that we’ve all got lots to learn. Most teachers I think…find it difficult to identify children who are gifted and I think it would probably be helpful if we all had more information enough to really find out more.

Photo 15: A work sample completed by Harry. Harry was often observed choosing to complete more structured ‘school-based’ numeracy experiences.
Photo 16: A work sample completed at the end of Harry’s four year old kindergarten year which recorded his thoughts and ideas about his past, present and future.
Introduction to Case Study Three: Kate

Kate is a six year old primary school child who at the time of the study was entering year one at her local state primary school. She is an only child and lives with her parents in a south-eastern suburb of Melbourne, Australia.

The other participants included in Kate’s Case Study are her parents, a family friend, and her year one primary school teacher.

Case Study: Kate (6 years)

I am aged 6 and in Grade Prep. I am very good at reading, drawing, lifting kids off the ground and sums at home. I’m really good at writing, and I can read hard words, and I can spell hard words. And I can even spell ‘ROUGH’. I can hold my pencil right. It helps me write properly. And I’m not very good at writing with my left hand. My left is my holding hand. I always write lots. I’m most proudest of my running in the cross country and when I got a gold sticker from the principal on my report. The most important thing to me at this time in my life is that my mum and dad love me very much because it makes me happy. If people wanted to learn more about me they would need to ask ‘What are my hobbies? What do I like doing? And What do I love? I can read a lot; I love animals and nature; and my feelings get hurt easily. I’m smart. I’ve practised for two years.

Once I caught a moth, and saved him from a bird and put him in a tree, and the bird couldn’t fly, and the bird flew straight past him, the moth, and the moth was just staring at the bird, and the bird flew straight past him. And the bird was looking for him to eat him, and the bird flew away, real far away from my house, and luckily he lost my house. I scare the cat away when he was going to step on a bug. I put the bug in the garden, then I put the cat back where he was going to step on the bug. I put the bug in the garden. And I made a beautiful grave for my little bug outside. And his name is Chrissy, because he’s a beetle. And it was a boy. Any animals, even wild animals are safe, I try and keep them safe. When my Max is going to run after a bird, I just go ‘stop, you’re not chasing after that bird, you’re going to scare it.’ And my dog chases birds, that’s who I tell this to.

I always run off and play with my imaginary friends if I’m lonely. But I never bring them to school. They’re very friendly. Their names are “Cheeky” the yellow chicken, “Thunder” the black golden retriever, “Cassie” the cockatoo, and “Skip” the kangaroo. They are very cheeky and very funny.

I enjoy going on my bed and cuddling my toys, reading lots of books and drawing. My favourite things are animals, so I always go to find my toy animals or my pet animals. I like to play with ants. I used to play with a moth who liked to be in my bedroom. He crawled up my sleeve, and he was in my clothes and I was giggling. And my Mum was saying ‘gross!’ And the moth was really, really, really, really happy. And then he flew off, and I put him out on the balcony because he started to get scared because my cat was coming in, and I put him out on the balcony, and the cat didn’t get him. And the moth flew away.

I like friends who make me happy because they are nice to be around. I like to do anything with a friend - except typing. My ‘bestest’ friend is very nice and she always lets me do stuff that I need to do and she’s so nice. Like she let’s me take a break for running. She lets me quit the game for a little bit if I feel sick and other stuff. She doesn’t care if I quit the game and want to play another game. I have a ‘bestest’ friend and we call each other twins because we like all the same things and we look like twins. And we are always crazy together, like when we squealed. We always burst into…we always pop in a laugh and burst into laughter when we are playing with our doll house. A good friend is always nice, they always do nice stuff for you and they never care…if you are not their friend anymore and you’ve got a new ‘bestest’ friend – they always care for you. When I play with friends (my) parents listen to other people. My friends like that I’m very nice to them and I do nice things for them and I care for them. And I always smile at them and I never frown.
I made lots of friends at school which is good. I am like other children in my class because we act funny together and I am part of a group. I am different to others in my class because I can read well and because everyone likes me. I am different to others because I’m smart and some aren’t. Some of the kids in my class can only read the word ‘A’ and ‘I’ — they can’t even read the word ‘AND’. And someone who goes to the discovery centre says Ha-P-P-E because there are two P’s. They are trying to sound it out.

If I could make my own club at school I would call it ‘CLUB FRIENDS’. I would do all sorts of things that we all wanted to do. Or we could all go on a treasure hunt, and we could play our own games, and partners. And we’d have a silent vote of who wanted to play what. And we would play in the playground. I usually go on the oval, but…the meanest person always makes me spoil all my club. She tries to steal people from my club. I don’t like her. She makes me cry. I tell the teacher but it keeps happening every day. I run away, into the oval. She never finds me. She never finds me, she’s topsy turvy, she never finds me. Even when I’m in the front of the oval, she walks straight past me. She’s looking for me. I run away from her, because she’s the meanest kid in my class.

Ned. is in my class and he’s my friend. When I say the word chocolate or cheekilet, mmmmmm. He’s the craziest kid in the class. He runs after me, and I run off and squeal. And when I say ‘no chocky’ he goes ‘ooooh.’ He runs off and then I come and say ‘chocolate.’ And I say ‘no chocky’ and he goes ‘eeeh.’

At school, I like writing about the weekend and holidays because I have lots to write about and I enjoy writing’. I find writing straight on the lines is most challenging at school because sometimes my writing goes crooked. We get to do writing in the middle of the afternoon, just before lunchtime and after play lunch. I’m the second person who writes most writing — I’m in fourth. The first person is Henry. Henry writes...he even takes up a story that takes three pages of his book. I always write them about animals — and when I have to write about transport I don’t feel happy because I really want to write about animals. My (grade 1) teacher is nice because she is friendly to me. She likes me the most. My teacher doesn’t care if I get stuff wrong. It makes me happy. Nothings the hardest part about school this year (Grade 1). I go to the discovery centre to learn more. We read chapter books. There are often very hard words that no-one else can read at the discovery centre and that makes me feel happy. I always go running off at school — far away.

Photo 17: A work sample chosen by Kate to show the researcher what she can do. Her parents were surprised that she chose an item of work that did not reflect her ‘best work’ in comparison to other items she could have chosen.
The red pandas.

The red pandas lived in a big pile of sunflower petals. They loved to search for food dropped by peapels and made fire from sticks in a triangle to keep them warm. The mummy panda was teaching the baby pandas to climb bamboo. By the next night they were good at it. They tried to climb the bamboo but one got stuck because he was only three years old. They said goodnight to their friends the grass hoppers and went to bed and dreamed about chasing rainbows and butterflies in a field of glitter. They woke up happy. The end.
Kate’s Parents

Occupations: Home Duties and Automotive Refinisher

I think it started from the day she was born…she was quiet…She didn’t cry, she was just like observant. Right from the word ‘go’ there was none of the norm as I expected as a first time father. And her ability just to take things in…to be able to, at three years of age, remember the Latin names of twenty plus dinosaurs, and know them all…She could pronounce all the names, the long Latin names. Kate continually asks questions and is quite often not satisfied with the answers we give her and pushes for more detail or information

Probably from two we realized that there was something a little bit out of the ordinary. Kate has talked well beyond her years from age 2. Kate has had a very extensive vocabulary from a very early age. Kate began reading well at age 4. We feel that she may have been reading for some time before that but hid it until she felt she could do it well. She has an extremely high level of reading ability. Kate has the ability to identify sentences and break large words into syllables.

(When Kate was younger) I could hold the cards up and she could just say them… she could say them all, and knew what they meant. We had sort of really an accelerated learning curve from two to four. She was asking how you spell things, and she was trying to, you know, recognize words, and she was…She would read the signposts when we were driving in the car, wouldn’t she? At three, two and a half, three. She’d say all the words…We were going past the shop and she said ‘oh dad, that’s open all day Sunday.’ And then we realized well she can actually read. She’d kind of hidden it. And then when she saw something, she said ‘I can recognize that.’ She was willing to tell us that she could read it. It wasn’t until she knew that she got things exactly right. And then that was a bit of a light bulb! And I thought, she knows a lot more than I think she does. And that’s when she one day just picked up a book and just started reading it. If Kate becomes bored with a book she will sometimes speed read, read every second line or sings the words.

Kate was receptive to information and ideas from a very early age. She has a great memory for fine detail regarding topics of interest and the ability at 3 years of age to memorise a wide range of scientific names of dinosaurs and identify each individual by its distinguishing characteristics. Kate is continually making unusual projects from the most unlikely materials. She sees most things as ‘treasures’ and are always of some use to her. Kate is very excitable, like she gets very passionate and excited about things.

Kate likes to be in charge for most games and activities and enjoys making the rules. But she gets confused as to why she gets sort of classed as being…bossy and …she gets very confused by that and doesn’t understand it – why, they just don’t get her. She seems to have a higher level of sensitivity towards older people.

Following identification, we found the changes observed in Kate’s behaviour to be settling and calming as perhaps she was now getting the mental stimulation she needed prior to identification.

Kate became interested in dinosaurs at age 3. She studied them intently until she could name and recognise a very large number of them perfectly. She had unusual interests and an early interest in numeracy and pronunciation.

Kate prefers adult music to children’s music. She likes to understand the lyrics and remember the exact words to songs. Kate enjoys socializing and has a love of books. At school, she enjoys her lessons, but she’s not inspired by them. She likes going off and doing things like computers and German, but she’s more fascinated with the teachers.

Friends I know that have known Kate since birth, mainly adults, absolutely love her warmth towards them, and her happy nature…her sense of fun and happiness and her energy. My Mum admires her zest for life. My Mum finds her intelligence fascinating, and her ability to communicate with her on the level she does, and her sensitivity…
As early as crèche, from about eighteen months, two onwards…people commented all the time how well developed her speech was, and her good vocabulary, and her ability to recognize certain words…she could already recognize words at that age.

We have been told on numerous occasions that Kate is very bossy. (Adults would say) just that the children are put off by her naughty behaviour. I’ve been told…at Kinder she was too loud. That’s at three year old Kinder, where you don’t get any feedback. For most of…four year old…too loud…and strangely so. A lot of people seem to take almost the negative dislike to a child like that. If they have a child that’s a plodder…they almost seem to find it offensive. While to see your child who is doing so well, is almost an incrimination on their child. So they tend to try and put your child down in other ways…

I remember a woman at school saying about Kate – she was going to be at a party, and she was playing with all the boys, and they were all playing, and she said ‘she’s going to be a real little miss, isn’t she?’ Well, almost implying that my daughter was going to be, how would you say?...promiscuous. I think we both found it very offensive. And it was a classic example of someone that had a child that was, dare I say it, perhaps an under-achiever, or not meeting the standard a child of that age should, who found it almost offensive to see our daughter that was a hundred and eighty degrees the other way…and could only justify the situation by doing things like that.

At the end of the day when you say to Kate ‘what did you do at school today?’ …the answer is far too often…’nothing.’ But it shouldn’t be. A child of that age should be just bursting with…the experiences of the day and the excitement of what they’ve learnt. And she’s not! It’s just that it’s falling short of what she is…But then at six she doesn’t understand what’s not being provided. She’s happy enough to go and play and do the things she does, but she doesn’t understand our expectation of what it should be, and then nor should she, I guess, at six. She’d be a genius if she could do that…But we’ve said that for the last three years…we’ve had such a bad experience…I think that’s part of having a child…whose needs are above average…It shouldn’t be…For other parents it’s alright. For parents whose kids just plod along and bang two blocks together or do whatever, that would be fine. But for anyone who has a child that has capabilities greater than that, maybe it falls short.

We know we need to be doing more and are constantly seeking advice on where we need to go from here…(But) we as parents feel the failure here not lies with the teacher but the Department of Education…I don’t believe you can rely on the public, or quite obviously…even the private education system, to identify your child, and support your child’s learning needs…Public and Private schools are catering for the mid-stream. They are not catering for the below-average child, they are not catering for the above-average child. Those far reaching parameters get nothing, more than a joke, whereas the other middle, and that’s what they are teaching to.

I don’t know. I don’t know how much we should expect them (the school) to be doing and what exactly we should be asking for. I don’t see how we as lay people can identify this, and the education department can’t…are these the people who can go on to find a cure for cancer, or whatever it may be. These are the most important of our young people, ones that should be nurtured I think.

Well look, having the experiences that we’ve had, it leaves us both many nights sitting over dinner saying to each other ‘well where do we go from here?’ Do we go back? Do we try again?...Do we change?...Did they misunderstand us the first time, or were they just not listening?...Go back to the school. Do I make another appointment to speak to the Principal? Do we change schools? Do we…and I think a lot of parents are probably in this position...But we know that something’s terribly wrong, because we both feel really strongly…You know your own child, and you know their capabilities. It’s a bit like, they just try to overwhelm you and baffle you with a bit of bulldust really…It’s almost as if he was trying to justify the fact that he wasn’t going to do anything…every time I’ve seen someone I’ve just walked out and thought ‘wow’…the conversation that they have
whilst cutting and pasting is important – but, is it quality or quantity? They have three hours of jibber jabber, or they have fifteen minutes of intelligent learning conversation. And I think I would prefer the latter for my daughter. But she doesn’t seem to subscribe to that. And I think that’s mainstream. As a parent, I know nothing about it, but that’s just going down the middle of the road, keeping everyone happy, and making it easy for the teacher.

We find it very hard to advise anybody else, and we’re far from experts too…that would be very difficult…we’re thus far into the system ourselves, and haven’t been able to obtain what we need, how can we possibly advise someone else on where to go and where to look. It’s not available. It’s all very well I think for all of us to sit around and say, even though we do feel and believe that the education system is letting them down, it’s not going to change overnight.

I think the main thing we wanted to probably express is our frustration at the moment…the disappointment…It’s more even than disappoint, its surprise…And a little bit of anger…It’s just not what we expected at all. To find that you’ve got to go no better than all of a sudden a dollar’s worth, a dollar twenty a kilo. It’s like dropping a fifty dollar note and finding a five dollar note.

We’re starting to realize that if you have a child that is (developmentally advanced), it seems to be everybody’s job on some level to sort of knock that down a bit. And especially it’s surprising to us, because we aren’t parents that are out there…like even bragging about it. We are just so subtle about everything…It’s almost like they are second guessing your belief in your own child. You go in and say ‘look, my child can do this and this and this.’ And they go ‘oh yes, that’s all very well but…’ And you come away sort of thinking, well gosh…maybe we have completely got it wrong. Maybe she’s not gifted at all…Maybe she’s just run of the mill…I’ve been thinking that a lot…especially when she’s going downhill in the class…maybe she just was a quick starter. But then I see her do things that are just mind blowing, and that brings me back to…It’s almost like they want to do that…I just think, have we just completely got it wrong.

It’s nearly like you’re better off to be below average and disruptive and naughty, because it’s easier to deal with. We can give you detention, we can do all sorts of stuff with that. But if you are up there, you’re in the too hard basket. We don’t want to know about that stuff. That’s really the way it is. I’ve seen that already in the first year. It hasn’t given us much hope for the coming years. And it’s probably because we’ve been unlucky with our experience too in the Kinder years. So we had high hopes for school, and that sort of has been even more disappointing. So… it doesn’t inspire us at all.

Kate likes to have lots of adults as friends as much as she enjoys friendships with other children. She loves, she really enjoys adult company. She’d be very happy now just sitting down with us, and just observing and taking everything in. Kate’s got some really close friends in adults…they just have this relationship that’s probably different to what they have with other children. She just…communicates with them on a different level, and they all feel quite close to her.

Kate likes children that are a few years older than her. She enjoys their company. I think maybe she doesn’t get as frustrated with older kids than she does with those children her own age. She doesn’t seem to mix as well with children her own age. She tends to get frustrated with them, and they get a bit intimidated by her…she finds it a little difficult with kids her own age, unless it’s perhaps a particular child with a personality that can cope with her.

Kate sometimes displays frustration towards other children when they don’t understand things as well as her. She struggles to communicate a lot with some of the kids in her class, because they don’t get her at all. A lot of children get a bit confused by her passion about some things. There was no other child in (kindergarten) that could read, she was sitting there like reading stories to the kids at one stage.

Kate’s always wanted to spend a lot of time with other children, now she gets to do that every day. She…comes home and…tells me how fabulous the teachers are and…she just likes…meeting
different people. We think she would benefit greatly from some regular time spent with like-minded children offered by support services for gifted children.

Crèche constantly brought to my attention her language skills. She probably wasn’t in there enough for them...because some of the time when she was in, like for a year when she was in crèche we had...a family crisis, so...her behaviour went a bit haywire. We had a year where she (had) a few behavioural problems. At three year old Kinder she still had the separation anxiety, and basically nothing was ever brought to our attention about her abilities, because they were more concerned about the fact that she was loud, and easily upset, and (they) kept bringing my attention to ‘she’s too loud’ and...’she needs to use her words.’ So because of that...I pulled her out and put her back into crèche where she was comfortable, or where she was...really loved. Then they started saying to me again ‘she’s starting to settle down, and her vocabulary is fantastic’.

In four year old Kinder, unfortunately, we had a teacher who in three terms never actually communicated with the parents ever, and made herself very unavailable to communicate. Then in the last term (we had) somebody who was an expert on gifted children, basically cemented what we suspected, because it was really in four year old Kinder that we really realized that. We were starting to get really worried, because we knew we needed to speak to someone before she started school, because...we...compared what she was doing, compared to the other children in Kinder. There was no other child in that class that could read.

Kate’s school does have a gifted policy, however,...more could be done to act out the policy. Kate’s school boasts a strong gifted policy but so far we have been disappointed in the program which to us has been quite minimal. They have put together an individual learning plan which we believe does not realistically address the needs of our above average child. We organised a meeting with Kate’s teacher and specialist/gifted teacher to express our concerns regarding the significant individual needs of our child. To our disappointment finding the specialist teacher to incorrectly identify our daughter’s needs and attempt to mainstream her with all other students.

(We believe Kate could have benefited in planning and programming of her educational experiences), but unfortunately our child was given no say or consultation in her own needs. She would have benefited because of her ability to identify areas of interest and to initiate a course and direction for her own development. As well as the individual learning plan, she was given her own box of readers, which was neither monitored nor mentored. This was meant to supply her with a higher level of reading material but is still well below the level of books that she enjoys reading. I’m finding it harder to gauge now (her reading ability) because of the fact that we’re not really getting, especially at the moment we’re not getting any feedback from school. She’s not getting challenged in any way.

Kate at times appears bored and frustrated with the lack of stimulation in class. Her behaviour is sometimes disruptive and sometimes silly behaviour. She sees school as a place more for fun and play and is much more interested in challenging herself at home instead. She’s not going forward, like she did before she went to school. We used to...spend a lot of time with her trying to stimulate her mentally, and doing all sorts of things. At about two and a half I made a big tub of cards, and wrote words on them, and just taught her the words. So I could hold the cards up and she could just say them. But now that we’ve gone to school, and she’s out of our hands and we don’t get to spend that time with her. We actually thought she’d soar ahead in school, because she’s basically in a faster mode. Any extra stuff they were giving her has stopped – for reasons unknown to us, completely stopped. And so, she’s not getting anything at all. We used to get piles of books from the library...I’ve read to her every night. I’ve read a story, sometimes two or three...And she’d follow along with that. Quite often I would put something extra in to spice up the story, and she’d go ‘it doesn’t say that Dad.’ Or if I’d say mis-pronounce something, she’d pick that up.

I feel she’s a little frustrated. She’s a little confused I think as to what she’s meant to be doing. It’s chopping and changing in class...she doesn’t really know whether she’s supposed to be doing different work. She said to me the other day ‘I think I’ll just have to just sit there and do what the other kids do.’ Her behaviour has changed a lot in the classroom. She’s become disruptive...calling
out…showing off, which understandably, when they were giving her extra work, wasn’t happening as much. She was one of the better behaved children, she’s now become probably as disruptive as some of the others. But that also could be because…she’s in a class that has a lot of disruptive children in it…she’s just kind of joined in now. I’d say a lot of that would be to do with the lack of stimulation. It’s just very frustrating.

When Kate first went to school…they said they’d never had a Prep read at the start of the year, at the level she has and, as parents, we were like proud and hoping and looking…Excited for her…Excited for her, and thinking ‘crikey…they’ve identified this, these people, this is going to be fantastic.’ And then two weeks ago here I was with the Principal, going in to bat for her, to try and get something to happen. And now even less is happening. And I said to my wife last night, I need to go again and not perhaps be quite so polite next time about what I want. Because I think I was a little bit too subservient to the system…I need to go in there and be more assertive about what I expect. We’re disappointed the system hasn’t delivered what we want, as we see that it’s just plateaued.

(At a parent-teacher meeting) it was basically brought to our attention what an extremely high level her assessment was, but there was no offer of what would actually happen. And the more I tried to fish it out, the less I got. So, I walked out of there thinking, well should I have not been told…this is what will happen. I thought maybe it will come in time, but…after that we still got nothing, so we really had to start to push to see the Principal and the Vice Principal, and this has gone on from then to get worse really.

After even showing the principal Kate’s workbook the other day…he said ‘look that’s great, she reads fantastically, she does this and that, but we need to look at the richness of the language.’ (But…it’s not just ‘my cat is this and I love him, and he does this’, but ‘my cat is smoky grey.’ And I said ‘we’ve only been here for five minutes, she’s six years of age.’ And he kept harping at that, this richness of the language thing. And I was just surprised. I thought, this isn’t right, we’ve only been in school five minutes. The thing that concerns us is…you go in and you speak and…express your concerns, but then it seems to go against you. She gets less now. We tend to have been…given the brush off now completely. Nothing has happened at all. We went there because things had stopped, now she’s getting even less. She’s not even getting separate work in the classroom. We were promised that she would spend time with a gifted education teacher…that she would be given separate projects and tasks, that she would be put with likeminded kids and groups. None of that has happened. I may as well have gone and talked to the Proprietor of Melbourne’s Cheapest Cars, for my daughter’s education, than talk to the Principal at her Primary School. It’s just gone in one ear and out the other, and he’s just a salesman to me. He took me in the front door, kept me happy, and sent me out the side door.

They just lob them in together. I’m surprised at this stage of our third term almost, that they haven’t started moving likeminded kids together. And they have no desire to do that. The methodology here seems to be that it’s more important the chat-chat that they have while they’re cutting and pasting. The teacher said ‘oh she’s not even trying with her writing, she’s not writing properly and, you know, she’s not…’ So we bought a writing book the other day, because I kept thinking there must be a problem that she’s not just catching on with the writing. She’s done everything in the book like with perfect writing, but when she does it at school it’s just scrawl over the page, like she couldn’t care less…Then I find something with her school writing and it’s like Pre-school writing. And I just can’t understand why she’s writing like that at school.

They said they were going to assess where she is at Maths, (but) when we had the meeting with the so-called gifted teacher and the normal teacher they had no clue about anything to do with her level. I can’t see why they can’t give her work that’s moving her on up from where she’s at.

The overall stuff they do in the normal classroom, she doesn’t seem very interested in at all…I’d say it’s probably why she’s playing up so much. She just sees it as more time just to socialize, because what they are doing is stuff she already knows. I think she’s happy enough there…the children are kept happy and entertained…so it fills in six hours day for her. And it is her first year. We say to
each other now, ‘this is the first year. They’ve got twenty two children in a class from silence to clever, from somebody extremely disruptive, who has a bad home life, and all the negative things that a small child of that age can have. And the teacher has to deal with that problem, and try and nurture that child and bring them up.

I feel like we’re getting too many negative comments from teachers. It’s more about…her bossiness or her over-excitability. I feel…they don’t fully understand the gifted thing, that they misconstrue some of her behaviour, which I don’t see as actually naughty behaviour…just like passionate about the things that are going on around her. It’s almost like she keeps getting told negative stuff. I said to a parent today… ‘never once has the teacher ever said, ever given me feedback on her reading, not from the day she had her assessment, she’s never mentioned it, she never tells me where she’s at with it. I’ve never had any feedback on the fact that she is bright.’ I’ve only ever been told negative stuff – be it with her behaviour, be it with her personality, be it with her habit of…collecting sticks and rocks, because that’s…messy. The teacher sees her interest in nature, which we think is the most fantastic thing, as an annoying messy habit. Also, she tends to get frustrated with her (same age peers), and they get a bit intimidated by her. What the teacher says is bossiness! It’s so disappointing for me to hear that constantly about my child, and I shudder to think what it must do to her confidence.

I think her teacher is…nurturing enough in a motherly sort of role…our daughter really likes her and feels akin to her. But, I don’t think the teacher has the time to administer and mould her and mentor her. It’s probably more important…to worry more about that child that is lagging behind, and give them something extra and get them up to the other kids than you would to a child that’s right ahead.

The teachers were involved in the identification (of Kate as gifted) by reinforcing our belief in our daughter’s above average abilities, (but) to have the Principal of a school tell you…that ‘she’s doing well in one area, but children aren’t gifted across the board, are not intelligent across the board, they just have a particular area where they’re good.’ I honestly looked at him and wondered what he was doing there, and wondered how he got there, and thought perhaps he should be somewhere else. Perhaps I should have said it.

I tend to listen a lot to people who have gifted children…especially in a group situation and I just learn from their knowledge and their experiences. I think that’s a good way to learn, because they’ve actually experienced. Speaking to people who have gifted children, who…know my child as well, also helps us.

The things I’ve used really are reading things on the internet, I get books from the library on gifted children. Websites and checklists were utilised in the identification process and in relation to Kate’s educational needs and they identified and reinforced what we already thought to be true giving a sound platform for us to investigate further the abilities of our child. I was given websites to look up, and…associations…the ones I looked up…seemed to be interesting and…could be quite beneficial, (but) were just…financially too expensive for us. I wondered how people go with gifted children who aren’t able to afford them, they were quite costly. I thought maybe that’s something we could look at further down the track. But I thought… I will use their information, and maybe subscribe to newsletters and things like that and get as much information as I can.

Our family support person who has gifted children herself suggested having Kate formally assessed. Our family support person suggested organisations such as GERRIC, AGTC and CHIP. These were also recommended to us by Kate’s kindergarten teacher.

We knew…we needed to talk to school before she started. (But) Who do we speak to? We had no idea. It was quite frustrating to have no-one to speak to, and of course I knew I couldn’t speak to other parents. The lack of services…the lack of support we’ve received from school. (We) just had a friend of gifted children who (we)…spoke to, but because…her…experiences in school weren’t really too encouraging…we were just thinking ‘gee, what’s going to happen here?’
I sort of identified my daughter’s reading and comprehension ability to be out of the ordinary. For example, the way she took things in and understood stuff, at such an early age, her ability to read beyond her age group, and her interest in topics foreign to children of similar age. Kate’s reading, reasoning and numeracy skills, we had personally never seen these skills in a child her age before. (It was) after talking to somebody who had highly gifted children who…pointed out to me that…she was showing the characteristics of a gifted child. We had not, however, at that stage sought a formal assessment of Kate’s abilities.

Teachers were involved in the identification process by reinforcing our belief in our daughter’s above average abilities. Her kindergarten teacher confirmed our belief that Kate was gifted. Teachers at her primary school have also confirmed her giftedness. Now that Kate has started school we are more aware of her level of giftedness. Her school organised to have her formally assessed. They said they were going to assess where she is at Maths (but) when we had the meeting with the so-called gifted teacher and the normal teacher, they had no clue about anything to do with her level.

I don’t see why they can’t have an entry level test for these Pre-schoolers, so they can just get an idea of what they can do… I think it’s a must. It could be made up of basic numeracy, comprehension, basic understanding of just everyday life. It needs to be set for children of their age obviously, but when you’re talking about a child like Kate to a child…the other end of the scale…They should be able to identify between the two.

***Kate has been assessed on the Weschler Scale of Intelligence – IV (WISC-IV) over several sessions in conditions in which she apparently did not feel at ease, however, these results were presented to Kate’s parents

***Checklists completed as part of the study produced the following results:

On the ‘Characteristics of Giftedness scale” by Silverman and Maxwell, Kate’s parents marked 21 out of 25 characteristics as ‘very true’.

• On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Kate consistently:
  - learns rapidly and easily
  - has wide vocabulary and uses advanced vocabulary correctly
  - displays intense interest in print and/or numbers
  - enjoys complicated games
  - has a tendency to put things or ideas together in different or unusual ways
  - has a keen sense of humour
  - is a perfectionist
  - has a heightened awareness of the wider world
  - is persistent – spends much longer time than expected on things of interest
  - seeks interaction with adults
  - is sensitive
  - is intense
  - can be uncooperative in preschool setting
  - is able to carry out complex instructions
  - is very aware of environment and immediately notices changes

• On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Kate often:
  - asks questions and frames additional questions based on answers received
  - has strong moral values and a keen sense of justice
  - shows understanding of abstract concepts

• On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Kate seldom:
  - does not ‘fit in’ socially with other children in group
- exhibits unevenness in development (e.g., advanced cognitive development with poor to average fine motor coordination)

- On the ‘Introversion/Extraversion Continuum’ by Silverman, Kate demonstrates a considerable balance for both introversion and extraversion characteristics – a slightly more likelihood of introversion characteristics

In May 2007 Kate was assessed on the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI). Kate’s abilities across the WASI test impressed at a level not reached by most gifted students, but rather extended right up to the highly gifted level only attained by about 4 students per 10,000. Total scores on both scales reached the 99.9th percentile, and all four subtests were scored at the highly superior level expected of an average student at least three years older.

Kate was assessed on the South Australian Spelling Test and reached the level of nine years and four months. On the Edwards Quick Word Reading Test Kate demonstrated competence at an instructional mid grade 4 level. On the PROBE Reading Assessment Kate gained mastery level for higher-order comprehension questions requiring inference, re-organisation and evaluation of material, two years above her age level. On selected items from the Diagnostic Mathematical Profiles the extent of her responses were restricted to about an 8 year old level, at which point the processes required were beyond those to which she has been formally exposed.

All areas of development and learning aside, we believe as parents of a gifted child that planning and development needs to start with identification in teachers training to ensure their ability to be able to identify and cater to individual needs and think ‘outside the square’ when it comes to the needs of the gifted or above average children. We believe on enrolment of any child in the Education system there should be an appropriate document outlining skills and abilities of the new student which could be reasonably expected of a child from an average family at commencement of the first school year. This document should also identify and outline any skills and abilities said to be above average or indicating a child to be gifted in any area.

Have a formal assessment but don’t believe what you’re told. Most importantly, don’t believe the propaganda you’re fed. Nobody knows your child like you do, and don’t let somebody else tell you ‘yes, your child is this or that.’ If you’re not happy with what they say, do the extra work yourself. And if the school they’re in is no good, go somewhere else. At the end of the day, you’ve got to….because…there’s two or three hundred of them, but there’s only one of your child, or two. You’ve got to do the best for them. It’s up to you. It’s up to the parents. So it’s up to us to do something about it. Be that you move your child, or have private tuition, or do the extra curricula things, whatever it may be. But it’s up to you at the end of the day.

Talk to someone…who’s got knowledge about (gifted children)…say ‘well, this is what he can do, where do you think I should take him?’ Should I pursue this, or is he just bright?’ Maybe go to your child’s school. Plead your child’s case. Try and give supporting evidence of what your child can do. (For example) Kate’s educational psychologist reported that she clearly requires a curriculum that is markedly accelerated and differentiated from that appropriate for her age peers.

I think you need to do as much as you can yourself, what you can at home, enrol your children in outside things, because their needs aren’t going to be catered for. So you need to pick up the ball and run with it. I don’t think you can afford to just sit back and put this on other people. You need to do the extra with your child. Do what we do…enrol her in things like athletics, little league…Joeys…You need to do that, because no-one else is going to do it for you.

These kids need to be identified and put in groups together…because if you just leave them in the normality of the classroom, they’re not going to get that…maybe in another Prep class or maybe to a school that doesn’t believe you should separate those children…Perhaps they could take them one hour a day, or two hours a day, and put them into a group and take them with a gifted education teacher and do some numeracy or some language or something else. And above all else be able to
initiate flexibility into any given daily teaching plan to address the needs of above, below and average students.

I think Kate should be spending more time with like-minded children. It would be really good for her confidence to be able to spend some time with some kids that maybe understood where she was coming from a little bit. Not just academically, but also to help with their confidence. Opportunity to show what she can do, to be put with other kids that are like herself…To be rewarded for being bright, and not…put down because of it…Just to give those kids opportunity, put them together in a forum where they can show what they can do…Great, kids that are falling behind, give them what they need as well. Separate them off, and give them what they need.

Kate needs to be taught the richness of the language, not just to go on to say words and identify them. We’d like to see numeracy…We’d just like to see her being taught, like other children being taught from the level they are…to move on up, to keep moving. (To) have someone constantly encouraging her to read. She should be assessed at some stage, like other children are. The Principal said that they were going to get a computer in…that would be fantastic, because when they’re doing stuff that she already knows, she (could work on the) computers.

I think, just go with your own gut instincts about some things as well. Seek information…about websites available for different associations. Maybe look for…support groups of parents of gifted children. That would be a really beneficial thing.

Kate’s Family Support Person
Qualifications: B.A., LLB (Solicitor)

Kate didn’t look very different at the crèche where I first saw her. Her deep knowledge and interest in dinosaurs was one difference, another was her dramatic emotional intensity. Her passionate search for more knowledge was very different from the interest of most preschoolers. In the absence of the interest in dinosaurs…her depth of interest in dinosaurs…I might have taken her emotional state to be a sign of immaturity or emotional disturbance, but when seen along with other characteristics, I recognised it as ‘emotional over excitability’. I also recognised signs of perfectionism. Intense interest in various subjects. Passionate interest in learning and books. Early and swift ability in reading.

She’s probably as highly gifted a child as I’ve ever seen. In terms of her language, her intensity about everything, the intensity of her interests in things, and also her emotional intensity, which is always very obvious. Very curious, eager to learn, but also very eager to do absolutely everything, not just learning in a bookish sort of way. She’s particularly outgoing and communicative. She does like attention!

I admire her energy, her high level of energy. I admire her, the way she enjoys life, she enjoys everything. She can be tiring at times, but as long as she’s occupied, she’s absolutely fine. I’ve never found her to be a problem in terms of being hyperactive or anything. She is very active and very energetic. She’s very physically active, so she enjoys the running around things…as well as the more quiet or passive play. I enjoy her sense of humour. I enjoy talking to her, because you can talk to her like you can to lots of these kids, who are interesting and humorous. She’s just got a wonderful personality.

As a mother of 3 gifted children, I have attempted to educate myself on all matters relating to parenting and education of gifted children. I have had to do this in order to protect the interests of my children and to ensure their survival in the school system because of the inability of most teachers to meet their needs. I could see who Kate was. I was confident in telling her mother that there was nothing ‘wrong’ with her daughter, quite the opposite. I probably had to repeat that many times to reassure her. Kate’s educational experience duplicates the experience of my children and the
experience of most gifted children when they go to school. I also think that Kate’s family are expecting school to meet Kate’s learning needs. I don’t think this will happen.

I’ve heard a lot of comments that would indicate to me that most people wouldn’t understand where she is, and why she behaves in the way that she behaves. A lot of the adults that knew her in her younger days, but particularly in the time when her mother was sick, would have thought that she had some emotional problems. I’ve heard a lot of comments acknowledging that she’s extremely bright, and there are a lot of people around, who even if they don’t really understand her fully, they understand that she’s extremely bright, and they appreciate that. What I’ve heard probably is a little bit one-sided towards the positive. I sense that at times people have thought that she was quite spoilt, because as an only child - most only children probably get that flung at them at some stage - that she’s rather bossy. I sense that people think that rather than having heard it.

I think Kate’s probably subconsciously experiencing some disappointment. I don’t know whether her expectations were very high in the first place, in terms of “what am I going to learn?” But I suspect that she expected that she would be learning stuff. I think that she still regards the time when her dad walks in the door at the end of the day as her learning time. I think boredom would probably be most challenging for Kate at school.

Kate’s probably learning and developing her understanding of the social rules of school situations, and how kids behave en masse. She’s probably learning some more social skills in terms of how kids behave in a school environment, and a little bit about selecting companions, and why she might find it more satisfying to play with one of her ‘gifted’ friends…than to play with other children, who she might have initially seen and thought “Oh yes, she looks like a nice girl, I’ll be friends with.” So she’s probably learning to become a little bit more understanding…But the fact that…you might want to select people to play with for particular reasons, or maybe for particular kinds of play.

I think Kate would be very difficult to cater for in the average classroom. And it’s worried me for a long time, knowing what I know about the school system. And I used to say to Kate’s mum “Okay, she’s going to Prep next year, what do you think she’s going to learn in Prep?” Because I know that you don’t learn a lot in Prep, in terms of the sort of learning that Kate is capable of. At this stage I haven’t found any school that’s able or prepared to do it, without being forced to do it, by parents. …I feel, with my children, if I hadn’t intervened in what the schools were prepared to offer them, if I hadn’t intervened fairly radically…I would have feared for the sanity of them. It’s not just that they should be academically progressing, but I actually think that there is great danger of permanent psychological damage being done.

Probably the most helpful has been using our Educational Psychologist, using organizations like Gateways, I have found to be life savers at times. My son tells me now his only happy memory of Primary School is the Gateways Workshops he went to. And I’ve now started taking my daughter to one, now that I’ve got the school to say “Yes, she can do that.” And it’s just the very most brightest spot in her school week. So that’s been very good. GERRIC’s fantastic, you know, for the school’s holidays program that we’ve used, and also just the information that they make available. Couple of times I’ve just rung them and said “What should I do?” And whoever I’ve managed to get on the phone has told me what she thought. So they’ve been fantastic as well. But again, both GERRIC and Gateways, they both charge for what they do or what they sell. So again it’s been an expensive, accessing with the useful stuff has been expensive.

Kate has very obvious needs, and…those needs are being completely ignored. Unfortunately I’m not surprised. I guess I hoped that it would work out, but I thought that her parents were burying their heads in the sand before they sent her to school. And if they’re relying on the school system to provide her with what she needs, then I just think that it’s not going to happen. Well because, like many parents, they totally hand over their child, they don’t have the confidence or the educational background themselves to make decisions, or to want to make decisions about her education. And they are believing, and I guess all parents do believe that when you send your first child to school, they believe the school system will know what to do, and be able to do it. And so in that sense they
are not burying their heads in the sand, but to the extent that Kate’s mother knows what my children have been through, I think she’s avoiding the issue, or she’s been avoiding the issue. Some people would probably think I’m grossly exaggerating, but I just see horrible things happening to them psychologically, both in terms of what the academic program doesn’t give them, and in terms of the way they’re treated by their teachers and by their age peers.

Kate and my daughter became friends through the contact of Kate’s mum and myself at the community centre. Kate is lucky in that she mixes well with age-peers. I also noted her liking of contact with adults. Kate was a good friend to my daughter who, although 2 years older, gets on extremely well with Kate. Many parents seek out support groups in a desperate attempt to find a friend. She loves to have strong relationships with people. And I think those relationships are very important to her, friends, and a lot of the people that she calls friends are adults, her mother’s friends, and she’s very comfortable and really needs that companionship. She’s, I think looking for communication on a higher level, than maybe she gets from a lot of kids. She’s looking for friendship. More an adult level of friendship. She’s looking for people that understand what she’s talking about, people that give her some positive feedback. She gets very positive responses from adults she knows outside of school, as in non-teacher adults. And obviously that’s very rewarding for her, because she almost always gets a positive response even if she just chats with complete strangers. But, with people like her mother’s friends for instance, she does probably get a little spoilt, and obviously any child enjoys the attention.

I think she would find the company of other gifted kids very stimulating and enjoyable, because they play games that she would enjoy playing, and their language would be more matched to her own, and their interests might be more like her own. She’s very sociable, and has always been very sociable, and she’s particularly lucky in that she’s been able to mix well with all sorts of kids, and her play a lot of the time is just completely normal. She’ll join in, she seems to have always joined in with various things when she was in Crèche.

Apparantly Kate’s primary school has a gifted policy. I don’t know what it says. Regardless of the policy, the school appears to have no idea what to do with Kate, who is totally wasting her time in prep. There is no plan or program in place for her. I think the family has been waiting for the school’s guidance in programming and planning for Kate. I don’t believe the school has undertaken any serious, considered planning of Kate’s education. I don’t think the school have any idea of what to do. Kate obviously needs a very different program from that of most other preps, but nothing has been put in place. There is a gifted education coordinator at the school who appears to have done nothing. No planning and program changes have occurred at school. Programming and planning, in Kate’s case, has been appalling quality or non-existent. I am disappointed but not surprised that the school’s promises have come to nothing. Kate appears to be going to school to socialise and is learning nothing. Her learning will continue to take place at home. With the exception of Kate’s kindergarten teacher, the teachers are totally unprepared and unable to provide and appropriate educational program. They have no understanding or appreciation of giftedness who how to cope with a child like Kate.

Kate’s kindergarten teacher also recognised her giftedness through observation. Kate’s kindergarten teacher was involved, unfortunately for a short time only, in the planning and programming for Kate. At kindergarten, there were some changes to planning and programming for Kate’s needs. Earlier kindergarten teachers were oblivious. (I have been Kate’s family) Support person for less than 5 years. (I am) very well informed about identification, programming and available support structures for gifted after having attended conferences, had discussions with teachers, read books and journals and regular discussions with an educational psychologist.

I met Kate’s mother through a local community centre and became very interested in Kate. Kate’s mother and I had a great deal in common because we could understand each other’s concerns with our children, which cannot be shared with many other parents. I suggested websites, books and professionals for Kate’s mother which I hoped she found useful in assuring her Kate was gifted. I have personally used CHIP, GERRIC, AGTC, my own Educational Psychologist, books and the
internet extensively. However, this has been very expensive, which has prevented Kate’s mother
from doing the same. All of these would have been beneficial but they are all expensive. The
problem is that support services are all privately provided and could be beyond the financial means of
Kate’s family. I don’t believe schools, or kinders, steer gifted children to these support services
sufficiently. Generally, we parents find them ourselves when we become desperate at the school’s
inability to provide our children with like-minded friends and appropriate teaching.

The identification process so far has been purely informal. However, Kate is the most obviously
gifted child I have ever met. Her deep knowledge and interest in dinosaurs was one difference,
another was her dramatic emotional intensity. And, although many small children are interested in
dinosaurs, the depth of her interest and her knowledge and her drive to find out more, and more, and
more; sending her mother hither and thither looking for more and more books, and remembering
what she found in those books, and what her father told her too. Her passionate search for more
knowledge was very different from the interest of most preschoolers.

In the absence of the interest in dinosaurs, I might have taken her emotional state to be a sign of
immaturity or emotional disturbance, but when seen along with other characteristics, I recognised it
as ‘emotional over excitability’. I also recognised signs of perfectionism. I also noted her liking of
contact with adults…intense interest in various subjects, passionate interest in learning and books,
early and swift ability in reading. I only used informal observation as an approach – I am not
qualified to make a formal assessment. I also talked frequently with Kate’s mum, who felt
comfortable telling me things Kate did because she couldn’t tell most people. Knowing the child for
a period of time means I have observed her development and observed her reactions to many
situations.

Kate’s parents were involved in the identification process with me by telling me of the many things
that Kate did which struck them as unusual or advanced, or odd. Kate was involved in the
identification process by being a willing conversationalist. Kate’s kindergarten teacher also
recognised her giftedness through observation. I suggested that Kate be formally assessed prior to
starting school. However this was too expensive for Kate’s family. Kate still has not had a formal
assessment.

(Researchers note: a formal assessment was completed several months following the interview)

I gave Kate’s mother resource information about websites, books and the name and number of an
educational psychologist. I think that an assessment would have been helpful and advice from an
educational psychologist would have been useful. My advice hasn’t been specifically sought. I have
suggested to Kate’s parents that Kate should be learning according to a thoughtful plan, possibly
following Kate’s own interest areas.

I believe strongly that subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration be utilised. I believe Kate
should be involved to the extent that she could have input in selecting subjects for special learning
projects. I believe an external specialist will have to get involved if anything is to happen.
Unfortunately, Kate’s mother would probably have to pay for this, so it probably won’t happen. Kate
needs a detailed educational plan which includes planning for academic progress, plus social and
psychological support, and remediation of any areas where Kate needs support. Out of class
enrichment programs such as those offered by CHIP or by GATEWAYS - a favourite of mine -
would be excellent. Kate is not going to learn much locked in with mixed ability age peers, other
than that the school is not where she learns, but is a good place to play.

The advice I would give to parents who are unsure as to whether their child should be identified as
gifted is, go and get a proper assessment done. I think they all should. And I think all schools should
make sure that that is done. Either get it done themselves, or make sure that the parents get it done.
Because not many of them are as easy or straightforward to identify as Kate. Her teacher in her
classroom needs to radically differentiate what’s happening in her classroom, or …she should be in
an environment where a group of children, like herself, have been gathered together so that she’s
learning the same as any other child expects to learn when they get to school. I think...she requires a fairly radical program...one that should be worked out with the help of a specialist definitely...a radically accelerated program, and when I say accelerated, I don’t just mean grade-skipping, I mean accelerated in all directions. Radically differentiated...program worked out by somebody who’s got some experience and expertise in the area. I think she needs something challenging, so that her attitude to school doesn’t completely disintegrate, in terms of her understanding that school is a place where you learn, and where you are rewarded for learning. I think that needs to happen, so that she doesn’t become a behaviour problem, or just lose interest, switch off. So she needs something challenging; both in terms of her own learning experience, so that she learns a little bit about what it is to be academically challenged, and how you cope with that, and how you face up to a challenging piece of work. She needs that experience, because at the moment I think she probably thinks it’s all a bit of a joke.

I would not accept what is offered by almost all schools, and almost all teachers. You need to inform yourself, and work out what it is you know about your child, and what you want for your child, what you would expect for your child, and then go and try and get somebody to provide it. But you have to inform yourself, as that Karen Roger’s book says (See Karen Roger’s book, “Reforming Gifted Education”), you know she says in the introduction...that this is a book which all parents should read to empower themselves, so that you can go out to the school system and tell them what you want, and how you expect them to provide it. Because they will not provide it. So to inform yourself about the characteristics of your child, to understand how your child functions and what they need, both for their own psychological safety, as well as making any sort of academic progress.

Number one would be a proper formal assessment, which probably should have been carried out by the school, as soon as they got the slightest indication that that was the case. That has not been done, and they haven’t really even apparently shown much inclination to get it done. So, in a situation where the family aren’t prepared to go and get it done, the school should do it, or kindergarten, either by recommending, telling the parents they should, or must, or you know maybe being able to access a specialist themselves, that they could just call in. Because it has such huge implications for what’s going to happen to that child when she hits school. That should just be done. The second thing which should be done, which isn’t, is the provision of an appropriately qualified person to set up a program for her. However that’s done, I don’t know, it’s up to the school system. But it’s not done. I don’t know whether each region should have an expert on hand who, if they can’t have one per school, at least they should have one maybe shared with schools, or shared between a whole region. But somehow the school system, and it should be followed through by the Education Department itself. The school system should be aware of who those children are, and somehow someone out there with expertise should be tracking what’s happening to them, and making sure. As they do with disabled children, making sure that that child’s needs are being met adequately. And the school should be accountable to make sure that, it should be answerable to somebody.

I think every gifted child, if not every child, needs a program which addresses their needs and abilities and disabilities. And it just doesn’t happen at the moment.

Kate’s Teacher
Qualifications: Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Education
Years Teaching: Less than 5

Kate has higher order thinking and evaluating ability, retention of interesting facts and information and above average reading and comprehension skills. Kate falls within my higher target groups across all curriculum areas (although not my highest mathematics group). Kate is definitely under-achieving at this point. She is unwilling to try things for fear of failure.

Kate has trouble relating to other students her own age. She doesn’t always choose the best way to communicate her thoughts and feelings – this sometimes presents herself in a way that makes other children upset.
It is difficult to assess Kate’s ability within the classroom as she does present as a child often ‘unwilling’ to extend herself. Kate will often participate in a willing manner when working one on one and verbally, however is not so willing when required to work independently or record her ideas. We have ‘Discovery Learning’ sessions each week which Kate participates in. Kate is also involved in all writing/reading related Whiz Kids sessions.

Currently ‘higher target groups’ are included in all facets of my planning. Kate falls within these across all curriculum areas (although not my highest mathematics group). I have an overall Higher Target Learning Plan (H.T.L.P) for Kate to help establish goals and areas to work on within the classroom. I have not given Kate the opportunity to help plan her learning experiences – perhaps this is something that may prove beneficial. I have linked Kate with ‘similar’ ability children within the grade. I have developed a H.T.L.P (Higher Target Learning Plan). I attempt to provide Kate with stimulating work and encourage her to take risks and have ago. We have also planned this term with a little more understanding of some of the needs of higher achievers.

(Kate needs to develop) confidence to have go – understand that learning occurs through trial and error. (Also) research skills – to allow her to work independently and on a project of interest. (When planning) group work – I think about collaborative projects and tasks to assist Kate to work and discuss with others. (Also to use her) passions, for example, Joeys, so writing is about that.

I feel somewhat informed about the characteristics and identification of gifted children and programming and planning for gifted children, (however), I feel very poorly informed about support services for gifted children. I am finding it is a fine line between concentrating on her social needs and educational needs. I’m trying to develop my skills as a better informed teacher.

(I have) attended an in-service, engaged in professional development, and had discussions with other teachers (about identification of gifted and talented children). (At my school) a Gifted and Talented Coordinator is in charge of specific testing within the school related to ‘gifted’. (We also have) Discovery Learning.

(When planning for Kate’s educational needs) I have not utilised Kate’s mother in this way however we do regularly discuss Kate’s needs – although more often this is her social and behavioural needs. (I also have discussions with) the Gifted and Talented Coordinator and suggestions taken on board from other colleagues have been used when planning and programming for Kate. Support services for the gifted have not played a role in the provision of educational experiences for Kate - none that I can think of.

I have attended a couple of PD’s on Gifted Education this year. One of which I found relevant to recognising gifted children and the other was helpful to assist in meeting the needs of high achievers. I think we are in the process of developing…a policy related to identification of gifted children. (But) the Gifted and Talented Coordinator is in charge of specific testing within the school related to ‘gifted’.

I know of several tests that have been undertaken (with Kate); Psycho-Educational Testing, a Psychological Assessment, Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children. I obviously also have my relevant assessment of spelling, writing samples, reading, comprehension, number work, and space reasoning. (Kate’s) parents have been involved in the formal assessment process outside of school through a private psychologist (and there has been) formal testing by a DE&T Psychologist at school.
Introduction to Case Study Four: Matthew

Matthew is a six year old primary age child who at the time of the study was entering year two at his local state primary school. He is the younger of two boys and lives with his family in a south-eastern suburb of Melbourne, Australia.

The other participants included in Matthew’s Case Study are his parents and his former Grade Prep Teacher who has also been nominated as a Family Support Person.

Case Study: Matthew (6 years)

I’m really good at maths. I’m proud of my maths. I’m the only people in the grade that knows seven times tables, seven times eight – fifty six, three times ninety seven – two hundred and ninety one. I’m sort of best at pluses but it turns a little around for times. So I’m thinking it’s times, like ninety seven plus three, and I’m like you might need to add up three ninety seven’s and stuff.

I’m really good at some sports. I’m proud of… I’m getting better at swimming because I’m improving a lot. I have done pretty well at all sports. I’m really proud of myself for all of those things…I play T-ball. I don’t know why I’m supposed to be good at it, but I’m really good at it for some reason.

I’m good at planting things. Someone just told me how to plant then I just… do tu do tu do and I’m planting. I’m thinking… races (but some people think I’m slow). I really think I am good at… do well in races, but some people don’t think I do well in races.

I’m good at helping other people. I’m good at doing jobs. I’m like Natty because he is sensible like me. I’m similar to Murray because…not just that he likes me…he is smart and knows lots of stuff, same as John. I’m like children that are not in my class – like Ray (Grade 2) – we are the same in maths games. I finish my work quickly. I always stick to the class rules. I’m good at ‘Brain Gym’, other kids don’t like it.

If someone wanted to learn more about me they would need to ask ‘Are you good at work?’ and ‘Do you like your school work?’. (I choose to work on a computer on my own because)… okay, say I’m on the computer, and I’m playing this game called beach cricket, a game called beach cricket… and then what happens is, you then click somewhere, then you click it a few times, and then you hit the bat, and swing, and then you press it, and then they say ‘Matthew, Matthew, we need you for something here’ and then I muck it up. Then they don’t really need me for anything.

I don’t give up… It’s just in me. I learnt my times tables first, but my brother taught me. So I went in athletics, and they said ‘okay.’ And then I went into level five in athletics… Yeah, and then they gave me times tables, and I said ‘what’s this for Sir?’ And then he said ‘its times.’ And I said ‘what’s times?’ And he said ‘times is groups of.’ So then it was easy.

I’m gonna play cricket when I grow up. They wouldn’t drive me out, they wouldn’t get me, because… they wouldn’t kick me out because they wouldn’t think I’m so good because I’m so tall. I reckon I’ll be really tall when I grow up… so they’ll think I’m too tall, and I can’t operate the bat to the ground, when the ball is going really low to hit the stumps.

My favourite things to do alone are practice sports like hitting the ball into the net, practicing pitching in softball, practice other sports, footy games by myself and play games on the computer. The most important things to me at this time in my life are my parents, because they look after me, so I won’t be lonely, my brother, because I do lots of things with him, to stay healthy, get lots of sleep, people at school, and my peers, they help me.
I like sports. I like family – auntie Margaret, uncle Nathan, dad, mum, my brother, myself, nanna, uncle Jason, auntie Bea, and Uncle David. I like TV, books and reading. I love food. I don’t like mushrooms and olives.

I had to do something in the talent quest… and I did jokes. This one that I’ve got in the newspaper is ‘When do you put a frog in your sister’s bed?… When you can’t catch a mouse.’ I’ve got a new favourite thing now… I’ve gone into AFL world. I went into AFL world… AFL world is, you know where Federation Square is?… You just walk about two kilometres forward, and you’re there… and when I was about maybe, say this is the road here, I was like here, and I was like ‘Dad where’s AFL world?’ And he said ‘take a step closer, look up, that’s AFL world.’ We had to go downstairs, get lunch, then back up to AFL world.

(Showing newspaper article) This is me in the newspaper with my other friend Murray. It says ‘(we) have the audience and themselves in fits of laughter with their stand-up act’. This award is for being the best in the school. In a way it has a reason for something. Always doing his best work at helping others. Matthew always has a lovely smile and a hug.

(My family members think that the greatest thing about me is)… I behave really well, and I don’t give up and stuff. When like say I’m playing footy for Victoria or something, and we’re losing seventy two to eighteen or something. So all I do is, just I don’t give up… Even if it was something like the grand finals or something.

My favourite things to do with a friend are playing running games, having races, playing on the monkey bars, playing cricket, footy, soccer sometimes with my brother and other people, watching movies, and playing board games. I choose to play board games (with friends) because you can’t really play on your own. When you play on your own you get confused who you are and stuff. The running games, I love doing that with a friend because when you say ‘oh, I’m racing myself’ you don’t really know if you’re racing… and then if you count the seconds you’re racing, you might be counting faster one, slower one. So one that’s slower wins.

When choosing a friend I look for people who’ve got lots of friends because so then their best friends can play with him and then I can join in whenever I want. I like lonely people because they don’t have any friends and they don’t have much people to play with. I know Colin likes me because he plays with me and likes all my games. I do like playing with people, but somebody in my grade always goes to play with me, and then they say they’re the boss… and like people say ‘oh don’t let him play, even though he’s my friend.’ And the person isn’t his friend, or something like that. But I don’t let Dan play, because he’s a slug… No. He’s not sort of my friend, Dan.

I know Matty likes me, I don’t know how we got to be friends, but we’ve stayed friends and stay near each other all the time. Murray likes me because I can help him at work and sometimes I go to play at his house. My friend Murray is a good friend because he is kind to people. He always shows my stuff to people… things I’ve already bought, and he knows that other people don’t know about it. So he says ‘oh, yeah that’ and he says like ‘that’s Matthew’s dinosaur that roars’ or something. He always tells the truth and he is always a good boy in class.

(I choose people who have lots of friends because)… oh, I don’t know. It’s just that I don’t have many friends to play with, because I don’t have many friends to play with. Even though they’ve got lots of friends, some people say ‘no I’m playing that’ and they might not be your friend.

Helping others is hard (at school) because sometimes they don’t understand what I’m asking them to do. For example, if I say “write ‘there’”, they don’t spell the right word. I have trouble getting the grade 1 children to follow the rules when we pick teams at lunchtime because they just want to be with good players only and not have even teams. They like things about me because I do fair stuff. Like other people don’t really do that… even with sides at footy. All the fair things that I do is I let people choose people at footy, instead of just saying ‘you’re in that team, you’re in that team, you’re in that team, you’re in that team… they like choosing it… lots of people like being
on someone’s team. Like there’s a kid called Steve and he likes not to be on Jay’s team. He’s getting better… I don’t really care whose team I’m on.

I’m different…to some people because, we can’t get along with each other. People who are really sensible get along with each other. They don’t like swear…they don’t, we’ve got strikes like warnings. Each strike four you’re out, into the Principal’s office…strike four Principal’s office. They don’t touch the board. See, people can, people like you. And that puts strikes on people.

People in my grade are at my age…..it’s very hard. People in my grade just learn stuff from me, lots of stuff. I learn my times tables from my brother. I was the first one in the whole grade to learn times. I say to Murray, because he knows a lot of stuff, ‘What’s one times one’ and I didn’t know what ‘times’ was yet…and he said ‘I don’t know, because I don’t know times’…and then I said ‘its groups of.’ Then I asked him the next day, ‘What’s two times two?’ And he said ‘I don’t know what ‘times’ is.’ Then when Mrs B explained it to him, he understands. (Researcher: So it gets a bit frustrating for you, does it, when you’re trying to teach someone, and they just don’t understand what you’re trying to say?)…Yeah.

(If I was going to organise a special club at the school)…the special club would be called The Mighty Nine Players. I’d call it that because I can’t think of much other names…Brooder Balmy Army! Yeah, I’d name it that. And then we’d like, every day we’d go around the city, and we’d see around the place if there’s a big plasma screen, and we’d watch the plasma screen, and we’d say ‘Brooder Balmy Army, Brooder Balmy Army’…and we’d like call out, and have things together and all that.

At school I like P.E. – it makes you fit. I like Maths – it makes you smarter. I go to Mrs J’s room for maths. I get invited into to Mrs J’s grade 2 for maths – not because I’ve been naughty. I like Art – you get to paint. I like L.O.T.E. – because you get to learn a different language. I like other stuff – swimming. I like writing stories – made up stories – because you can make the ending whatever you want. Like in the story ‘Rapunzel’, you can make her with no hair (like in the joke Joe said at the Talent Quest). I like making up fake stories…like Little Red Riding Hood – Little Bad Riding Hood, and the Good Wolf. We did buddies. In the buddies we do, the people from four five did a story…like one of my buddies did Jack and the Beanstalk, Jack and the Beanstalk. And then I’m like ‘he was looking for weetbix.’ Instead of trading a cow for money, he traded it for weetbix…and my other buddy did The Three Little Bears, and it was like, The Three Little Bears instead of smelling porridge, instead of Goldilocks smelling porridge, she smelt coco pops…and did you like that thing? ‘Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair.’ ‘I don’t have any hair.’ Because I’m, you know, bald!

I like how the playground and courtyard is set up. I like lots of things about my school. I like how teachers set up their plans, how and where they go out. Some teachers are really kind. I like to work by myself. I like it when the work is really easy because when it’s hard, my teacher makes me help Susie and she is really annoying because she can’t even write ‘there’.

Skipping monkey bars is hard. My teacher uses me for lots of jobs – especially if children are naughty, she gets me to take them to another room. This (award) is for being best in your class and this is for bring an excellent presentation for the news telling and for being an excellent helper in the classroom. I’ve got awards for Star student award, Best in the grade, Chess Club, Calli sports, Helping hands where you clean up, Teddy Bear reading award, Good Attitude award, Good work award, Froggy…Award – that means best in telling the truth, Super writer.

Case Study: Matthew’s Parents

Occupations: Primary School Teachers

Matthew was very different. When Matthew was born, the nurse handed him to me and said ‘I think he’s already three months old’ because he was big, he was ten and a half pounds. But when you pick a new born baby up – he just stood up, he stood up on my legs, and he held his neck up, and he was ready. I reckon when he was about a week old he laughed, and they reckon kids that age don’t laugh.
but it was no doubt at the time that he laughed. All the way through he’s just always assumed that he could do what his big brother does…and he could.

Its things like crawling…Matthew just went…he took one step back…and said, ‘That’s not working’ and did it again, until about two weeks and he could do it. He didn’t have to ‘trial’, he didn’t have to wait for that approval. He doesn’t have to revise things. He doesn’t have to test it. Matthew walked at 12 months.

Matthew had whole conversations with himself and others by 2½. He could recite all the Collingwood football player’s names and their corresponding numbers at age 2 years. He could sing the Collingwood theme song at 2 years. Matthew would sing all the football theme songs basically at two. He watched others intently in early years. At 3-4 years, Matthew listened to my reading of the ‘Harry Potter’ series while we were travelling around Europe. He had the ability to follow the story and remember pertinent details from one book to the other without picture cues. He learned to read from Gravestones in England in 2003-2004 at age 3½ - 4 years.

Matthew has got very high oral language, terrific oral language. He gives detailed explanations of events in his day. Matthew remembers fine detail of events. Matthew comprehends advanced vocabulary when reading. He is very much the entertainer. Matthew always listens attentively and worships his older brother (still) so seemed to be able to communicate very early. He tells animated stories. Matthew can give a commentary of whole slabs of AFL football matches. He can play a whole football match by himself – role playing the players, commenting out loud, calling umpires decisions, signalling goals or points and doing after-match interviews with the players. Matthew understands things well enough to teach others, particularly in regard to sports – especially football.

Matthew has really good…rhythm and eye-hand coordination. He started playing cricket, and he’s just got a natural swing. The tennis coach said…he just has this really natural ability to the rhythm. Matthew learns by watching. If you put him with the best cricketer in the world he would copy them and do a terrific job. He mirrors what he sees. Matthew is actually a brilliant cricketer, he just has this really lovely flight, and he’s a great bat in softball too.

Matthew’s got very, very high mathematical pattern and order and awareness. When he was 4½ …he wanted to play tennis at this place…and he goes fifteen --love, thirty --fifteen, and he goes forty-five--thirty, then he got up to a hundred and ninety-five, and went up to two hundred and ten--a hundred and ninety-five. I’m going ‘he’s typically not a 4 year old, he’s organizing two people’s score in his head, counting by fifteens, and he’s four and half years old. He was working at two things at once. Matthew uses a variety of strategies to achieve tasks – and often uses unusual methods to compute answers. For example, I asked him what 13 x 6 would be. He quickly answered 78 and explained that he knew 15 goals was 90 points and just subtracted 12 from 90. Matthew can already do fractions to eights. He developed number and computational skills quickly once formal learning began when aged 5.

Matthew’s handwriting is quite beautiful…and his teacher has often shown me his diary. There’ll be a full account of what we did on the weekend. And you know sometimes that’s getting fairly scratchy, because his brain is going so fast. His drawings are quite immature. You will still need to tell him ‘Is this person going to have any arms? or ‘Does it have any fingers?’ Things like that. He’s actually very immature in those sorts of things. Matthew’s very good with the computer, working the mouse around. He can do whole slide shows. Matthew’s very musical. He sat down at the keyboard the other day and worked out the Collingwood theme song just by ear, just working out the notes. He learns songs very quickly.

Matthew is very considerate of the feelings of others and seeks to help those in need. He just shows initiative in those sorts of things, he’s just a leader in that respect. Matthew doesn’t like to let family, friends or teachers down… he loves to please. I remember when he was little, the way that you could really get to him is if Nanna would be disappointed in him. If Nanna was going to be disappointed, that was the worst punishment that you could possibly do. He also (has) terrific empathy…very
moral as far as…what’s expected…and he will get quite huffy if kids are not doing the right thing. Matthew will tell on people, if they don’t do the right thing.

Matthew’s got…terrific inter-personal skills. As an example, last Friday night we went to a pub for dinner, and when we were in the pub his mum said ‘Would you guys like and ice-cream on the way home? Apparently on a previous time when I wasn’t there they had bought three ice-creams and one of them fell to the ground and his mum said ‘Well I won’t have it.’ Well the very first thing Matthew said was, ‘I wouldn’t be having an ice-cream at this time of night. You won’t miss out.’ Well it had been months since we had an icecream, but actually to have that…stick in his mind…that his mum won’t miss out this time, she’s got to have one. Also, that time when his brother went away, it was like ‘When do you think (my brother) will ring us?’ and ‘Check in and make sure that he’s okay’, ‘Check that what we are doing and stuff.’ And then they get on the phone and chat away.

Matthew is pretty easy going, he’s fairly resilient. He (is) really…capable of looking after himself, and doing things by himself. It was quite funny because in the initial question in his (pre-) interview, it was ‘What would you do if you were alone?’ ‘Well, if I was alone, I would get some help, I would go to the office, I would…’ He focused on this alone aspect, he couldn’t actually see what the question was asking. It was more about the safety aspect of that, wasn’t it?

Matthew is a very vibrant little character. He has a very positive spin on life and always wakes up happy. He’s also incredibly flexible. Matthew has an attitude of getting up and doing something, rather than sitting back. He’s good fun to be around. Matthew enjoys being witness to other people’s accomplishments.

Matthew does use his intellect to invite himself in to or absent himself from tasks. He does occasionally get a bit funny if he can’t do something. Not often…Oh, he’d get teary…but he won’t necessarily verbalize it. There are times…when you realize, he’s just a real little boy. And even though he doesn’t think he’s a little boy, he’ll get the weeps or…when he was fighting with his brother before, it wasn’t a big deal, but it suddenly became a big deal, because he’s only six.

Matthew’s got about four or five very, very strong points and I wouldn’t say another one is higher.

When aged 2, Matthew enjoyed going to visit when his brother was at Kinder and communicated well. He enjoyed puzzles and toys with lots of buttons and levers when an infant. Matthew enjoys TV ads that utilise humour. He loves board games and card games. Matthew loves singing, movement, sport and performing – often playing out scenes from movies or TV ads to entertain others.

Matthew sees how language can be used in varying ways and loves riddle and joke books. He has a basic perform mechanism in him. He loves to perform. When he was little, he used to love saying, ‘Go on ask me what player is this or whatever’ or ‘I’ll tell you about the game that was on the weekend’ or ‘Who do you barrack for? I want to talk to you about when my team played your team in this round’.

Matthew loves school. He will tell you he loves school. He loves PE. That was the thing that he said he liked the most. He loves computer. (His teacher) does relaxation, he loves relaxation and (his teacher) does brain gym, he really likes that. Matthew loves PMP. He he just loves the activities…there’s lots of things like memory math…where he could be challenged to do six and seven and eight things in a row. Or because of his size some things are quite complex – he would find a forward roll pretty tricky…He’s good at it. This week we did monkey barring across the bars and then going through an obstacle course. He loves all that. Although last year I remember…he had blisters on his hand, because he was so desperate to get it right. Matthew…loves challenges - to be stretched intellectually, not to breaking point, but to be stretched and have things open-ended.

I suppose he’s the second one (child in the family) and you’re always a bit paranoid with the first one, aren’t you? None of them come with an instruction manual. It didn’t dawn on us until we were
writing…that he shouldn’t have actually known what twenty eight was at two, should he? And he shouldn’t have known the symbols, and known the sequence of them. But we never really even noted that. As a toddler… we knew he was sharp but, he’s always sort of thought that he could do what his brother could do. Matthew as a two year old was just assuming that he would always be able to do that.

I guess the passion is something that people talk about. How passionate he is about things, things that he loves, his Collingwood Football club or just footy in general or sport in general, whatever. I have never heard a negative that I can recall. At the school (the teacher will) say ‘it’s good fun…hearing Matthew read, (because) he has comments about the book.’ And he’ll pick it up and go, ‘What’s the pretty good book I’m going to read to you today? I don’t know if this is related to really what happened, but I’ll read it anyway.’ People…talk about how quick he is to do things. We have friend’s who ran a drama school for awhile, and their eyes just lit up when they saw him. He learns things that quickly you can imagine him being in a drama group. They talk about his ability to remember things….they are quite fascinated by his memory, and particularly when he was little. They would talk about…how well behaved they are…they make a comment about the fact that they follow the rules, and they do the right thing, and they’ll pull other kids up if they are not doing the right thing.

I think some people have a really closed idea of what intelligence is. The one thing that I am really anti as a school teacher is this - Matthew goes to my school and is really clever doing his tables - and trying to explain to people, that isn’t clever, that’s just parrot… it made me really understand the fact that unless kids truly understand what they were doing, that parrot fashion is pointless. Every kid has strength in something and unless you actually do that original stuff, you may never find out what their strength is. It’s just about making that really balanced. One of the value s that I’ve put into action is that things don’t just come for nothing. You have to work hard. If you’re gifted, you don’t necessarily have to work hard to get stuff…that’s why we’ve tried to enrich the other aspects…there is a bit of give and take here, and it’s not all about you.

Our experience has been that gifted kids have usually had an arrogant attitude and immature attitude. In the case (of a friend of ours) it almost became an excuse for why she doesn’t do things. ‘Oh this is so boring, because I already know all this’, whereas my kids would never say that. They’d be saying, ‘What else could I find out to give to the class?’ Now my kids would be going, ‘Oh I read something in this book, and I’ll bring it in and show it.’ Whereas it isn’t about demeaning what everyone else does.

I suppose philosophically we decided to try to broaden their appetites. They still have their idiosyncrasies, but you can probably go to a restaurant, and there’ll be quite a number of things on the menu that they will eat… they are unusual in that way, but that has been our deliberate training. Even the fact that we can just say to them, ‘Okay, it’s time to go off and have your bath’, whereas we have friends whose kids just hover around you the whole time and you just want to go, ‘Nick off, please.’

(Just recently) it was really nice to see him as an only child, which we’d never seen before. The things you do with your first (child), that you just don’t get time to do with your second…you have a lot less time. I think of the things like (when) his brother went to speech therapy and he went to occupational therapy. His brother had me in Mum’s group, every week we’d sit with all the new babies. Poor Matthew missed out on all that.

Matthew’s brother was (also) sharp for a four year old.

I don’t think our kids actually had big issues. All kids have issues. I don’t think their giftedness has really caused any issues. I think we caused an issue, because his brother desperately wanted to invite his friend Anthony over for play, and I said ‘Okay you can invite him.’ And then I didn’t hear anything for a month, and I asked him ‘did you actually ask his friend to come over?’ And he said, ‘Ah yeah.’ And I said, ‘What did he say?’ And he said, ‘Oh, have you got a play station?’ And I
said, ‘No,’ ‘Have you got a DVD player?’ And I said, ‘No,’ ‘Have you got a PSB player?’, ‘No.’ ‘Oh well then I won’t come.’ And I said to Matthew’s brother, ‘Did you tell him that we have every sporting piece of equipment known to man?’ And he said, ‘No, but he didn’t want to do it.’ And I think on that occasion it sort of came right at him, the fact that it was our fault, because we had advised not to do that with our kids…and our kids have accepted it because that’s the way it is.

Matthew is called on to mentor others in his class. He likes to talk to adults and older children. Most of our friends…like spending time with him. They like chatting. They’ll sit and have whole conversations, and they’ll just be cackling themselves under their breath…the more they egg him on, the more he’ll go talk to them. Matthew’s also really good with younger, little babies. He’s got a lot of empathy… with little children. He would spend hours entertaining them and stuff like that.

Matthew adapts language and expectations to the skill level of playmates. He is quick to make friends and become involved in activities

Matthew takes the lead in public speaking such as when he introduced a group performance at church when none of the teenagers stepped forward. He was the driving force in getting the Nativity Play at pre-school organised. He gave a ‘rousing’ speech to his peers about wanting to make their parent’s proud of the production. He knew all the songs after hearing them only a couple of times – and helped as stage-hand to get characters in position during the production. He (also) took sessions of singing and cultural studies (about Australia) at preschool when he was 3 ½ years – to share his knowledge with the teachers and peers at the English pre-school.

He idolizes his big brother. He has an absolute adoration of his older brother, and we’ve actually heard both of them say, ‘Well you know there’s not really any point in finding anyone else, I just want to spend time with (my) brother…anyway.’ What we invariably find happen is if we go into a social situation, particularly where the boys don’t know anyone, Matthew will go in first, suss out the friendship group, suss out what’s going on. He’ll make connections with everyone, and then when everyone’s kind of attracted to him, he’ll turn around to his brother and go, ‘What game should we play now?’ And then his brother becomes the social director. Matthew has actually formed the group and got everybody sort of spellbound, and then he hands over to his brother…He’s become the front man, and the social organizer.

Matthew and his brother also discuss things…together. They look for patterns together, they play these games in the backyard and they challenge one other, and they’re constantly adding in their head. His brother has actually explained little strategies to him. They do each other’s sports, because they love to be together…but we actually do two sports, because we know one’s actually better at the one, and one’s (better) at the other. His brother is a really good strategic thinker in softball…but he’s not necessarily a very great hit. Matthew’s got that, if Matthew gets behind a ball, wow.

I’m not sure why, but he in some ways hasn’t jelled with his peer group at school. He’s got sort of half mates, but they’re not really. It’s not that he doesn’t know how to make friends…he doesn’t see the point in making friends with dills, quite frankly. Matthew would love a group of kids that were really interested in stuff. I think he’s a kid who older kids could really attach themselves to, but they haven’t. He does get on particularly well with older people. Matthew would want an equal, an intellectual equal…I guess that’s one of the reasons in the Prep/One that he got on quite well, and he thrived. They were all pretty pleasant kids. That was a different group…a nicer group.

I’ve seen him in a situation where we’ve been out to a BBQ with everyone, and if he susses that there’s nothing really there for him, he’ll actually go off and start playing by himself. If kids don’t do the right thing, he’ll feel that it’s his duty to have to go and tell on someone. Which I think probably loses him a few friends…but dobbing on them.

I think he finds play times a bit difficult because he really likes formal games – like he loves football, soccer, cricket, whatever. Those kids that he’s with are so immature and so ditzy and so uncoordinated, and so unintelligent, that they don’t see the point in playing a game of cricket, or the point in playing a game of soccer. He’s just that bit too little…to join up with the next grade, so
sometimes he’s in a little bit of a no-man’s land at play time. I noticed this week he was playing chassey with my Prep girls, because he was entertaining them. He was making them laugh…and they were going ‘oh Mrs ****, he’s so funny.’ Matthew was running in and running out…and disappearing and popping up, so it was all kind of an entertainment type thing there.

I think it’s mainly the cohort of kids (in his class). You don’t get the terrific work you (get) when kids feed off each other – ‘Gosh, I can do that, or you can do that.’ You don’t get any great product, and you won’t get any I suppose advance discussion. You can’t get any advanced ideas…because the kids don’t sit still long enough. If the group of kids are the bright kids in the class, they’d feed ideas and feed quality work off each other. Matthew doesn’t have anything to compare himself to. He knows he’s better than the other kids, but if he was with another kid he could actually look at that and go, ‘I could probably do better than this.’ Like he doesn’t have any understanding of what excellence, what his excellence could be.

We’ve made Matthew feel as normal as possible, because to us he is normal, and compared to his brother he is normal. I guess it’s only when you compare them to other kids that you realize there’s that difference. If we could tap into a group of kids that were actually on Matthew’s level that would be fantastic.

We would rate ourselves to be ‘somewhat informed’ on the educational needs of gifted children. The educational experiences or strategies that have been utilised or suggested to meet Matthew’s needs have been to extend his breadth of interests. Matthew’s been overseas, and I think that’s been really positive with his educational experiences. We worked in England for 12 months and travelled throughout Europe for a further 4 months – thereby exposing Matthew to many varied learning opportunities whilst on our holiday. He would listen to information while we were planning our European holiday, and suggest where or what he would like to go or see.

We have not tried…to concentrate on what the narrow definition of education is. We (have) spent time talking, explaining. We have worked a fair bit at trying to teach them…life skill. The thing that we’ve really pushed with our kids (is) trying to take the mathematical understanding they have…and…to say ‘okay now we’re going to apply that in real life’. Our kids have a set routine. We do have rules, but they certainly are within parameters.

Something else we’ve spent a lot of time on doing is making kids understand the value of things. We constantly encourage Matthew to be independent, show initiative and solve problems creatively. Each day they have some jobs to do - they have to make their bed, they have to put their lunch box on the table at the end of the day, they have to put all their dishes away, and they have to take all their clothes up off the floor, and they have to put their dirty clothes in the wash basket. They have a real understanding of what it is to be part of a community. I guess that’s something that we’ve tried to explain, not just to friends who think their kids are gifted, but just kids in general.

Matthew participates in Sunday school activities and chess club. There’s quite a few things we haven’t managed to get them keen on…music, maybe building, a lot of the hands on things. They have these wonderful sets of Lego and they just have no interest in doing them. Maybe we’ve just not modelled it, or got involved, or they are obsessed with sport.

Last year, in Prep, Matthew just glowed. He just absolutely glowed. His prep teacher was just wonderful for him. He was with grade one-two kids, and he was often encouraged to do the grade one work. He would often say ‘I’m allowed to do the Prep work, and as soon as I finish it I’m allowed to go on to the grade one work.’ Occasionally she would actually start him on the grade one work, but she didn’t make a big fuss about that. He loved the challenges. If he got this done, he would go on to that. Matthew was very keen to learn during Prep. (However), his interest in writing and drawing has diminished this year (Grade 1). He was an avid reader in Prep but only chooses to read items of interest rather than set texts.
Last year when he was in the Prep one composite, he tacked on to a number of the older kids in that group, so he enjoys that. His teacher did ask us if we wanted to upgrade him to grade two, instead of doing grade one. We didn’t understand the underlying of what she was trying to tell us. I wish she had actually been more specific about it. But the thing that kept coming back to our mind is the fact that he’s a January baby, and he could have deferred from that grade, let alone be put up to another grade. So for that reason, and because the school had catered so beautifully for him last year, I think he came out at about level 18 in his reading last year. We just feel, they were catering for him in Prep, and we had no doubt that they would be fine. He was very happy.

…we had the option to skip Matthew a grade last year, and we didn’t take it.

Matthew’s prep teacher spoke of wanting to monitor his talents for future extension. He was encouraged to extend. She actually encouraged excellence from him, and he lifted to that. The more she encouraged it, the more he would do it. It was interesting when I spoke to her last week, to ask her if she would do this, and she just said, ‘Look you have such a home environment. We know how much you value the learning and discussions. So I have no problem with the fact that Matthew will progress because he has such a supportive home base.’ Now that’s her perception of us.

Matthew’s with a very unfortunate group of children. In that last year when they did their bench mark testing on that grade, fifty two percent of them didn’t make the Prep bench mark. So he’s with a group of children that are very low academically. He’s also with a group of children that’s got…lots of behavioural problems, specifically ADHD kids. He’s got two with basically Oppositional Defiance Disorder, four of them have actually got really bad hearing problems, which leads to all sorts of other social things, where they don’t hear cues and things like that. He only has four girls in his grade two, which has a dynamic in the room. It’s (now) down to eighteen. It started at about twenty four, but they’ve lost a lot…parents have been taking their kids out. I’ve never seen a grade like this. I’ve been teaching for like a hundred years…they’ve lost twenty five percent of the grade this year, from parents being absolutely cross with what’s been going on there…I’m just close to taking…Matthew out, because he’s just getting nothing.

This year Matthew would say, ‘If only the kids were more quiet, and listened to what Mrs *** said, then it would be much better.’ He’s frustrated in that he doesn’t get through nearly as much as what he used to. He’s frustrated by the behaviour of others. He just sees it as a real waste of an opportunity…he…says…things like, ‘I just don’t get it, if they just sat and be quiet, they’d learn so much more.’ And he actually sees the loss of that opportunity.

Matthew is sometimes invited to the Grade 2 room for Maths lessons. (Also) at the moment they’ve got a teacher helping out with his classroom teacher, and she’s already sort of picked him. He does all the little jobs and things like that. He just loves that. That’s what he likes to do. And like I said, he just loves to please. She is going in (his) room for the rest of the year, to support…in behavioural modification plans. This teacher…calls him her slave. But Matthew likes to do the horrible jobs, like if someone has been naughty in the bag room, he has to tell her and things like that. He loves all that. Matthew’s given responsibility in being monitor, and taking people here and there, and taking messages.

Matthew has become a mentor for a couple of kids in his class…after he finishes his work, that’s his job then to go and check on them. But he’s only six, and I think he’s got to the stage where he gets really cross with a couple of them because…he’ll say, ‘Now come on you need to write the word them, to fill in that gap, and they won’t do it’. And then he gets cross and he says, ‘I don’t understand why when I ask them to do it, they won’t do it.’ But that’s a maturity thing, he’s only six.

I think really standard good teaching in a good grade would have him. Matthew probably hasn’t had the opportunity to see what he’s challenged at this year. But the fact that he’s so happy there, and he’s doing relaxation, and he’s doing brain gym, and all this stuff that he’s never done before. He’s still learning something new and benefiting from it. I’m really against the ‘teacher bashing’ stuff,
and this is why it’s been really tricky for us, because I know his teacher has not really been coping. She has been really honest with me in saying, ‘I’m not catering for Matthew at this stage.’

The areas of development and learning we believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of Matthew include application of maths concepts in problem solving tasks, developing his abilities through his interests in current affairs and sports, personal learning, setting goals, organisation, and achieving to a standard of excellence. The school does provide some programs – such as “Challenge of the Minds”, Grade 4 and 6 Theatrical Production, elite sports participation to cater for children with special talents – no formal program for educational programs in Key Learning area. We are not aware of a school gifted policy or programme.

The only thing I’ve ever done (in gifted education) was as part of my fourth year study…at Burwood State College. Basically it was just on strategies in any classroom and how you would deal with that. It was very much about just good teaching practices, with lots of open-ended things, looking at kids’ actual interests and things that they had a passion for, and following that, and trying to guide your important questions so that they would have a venue and a vehicle to go and look at that. I’ve worked with gifted and talented - what we’d call Talented Enrichments ICT classes - but I think it’s pretty unsophisticated. We worked with some smart kids but not with any depth of knowledge other than giving them some level of empowerment and some high level of instruction. But I don’t think I’ve ever in my twenty three years of teaching ever looked at my class and thought, ‘Here’s this really extraordinary child.’ I’ve never had one like that that I’ve thought, ‘Wow, how do I handle that?’

We would rate ourselves as ‘poorly informed’ on support services for gifted children. The boys have both joined chess club this year, which they thought was fantastic. That just filled a void for them because it was all that strategic thinking, and in a game situation where it kind of didn’t matter, and they got to mix with kids from grade six or five or whatever. They really enjoyed that.

We had a music school at our school…But they haven’t been able to cater for us. They felt we were really finicky, because we wanted a group situation for our kids to learn in, rather than an individual situation - sort of mathematical and artistic and creative. It was going to build on the strength that he had, in that mathematical understanding, and a love of music that he had, and it was going marry the two together and this particular Yamaha program had four aspects to it. It was the singing, the solfege hand signs. It was a broad program. It was reading the notes off the music sheet, and it was actually playing. It had four aspects that I would have thought would have been a stimulation (but) the school weren’t prepared to open a new class with only four people.

We would rate ourselves to be ‘somewhat informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children. (We have), …had discussions with teachers or professionals in the field of gifted education. We have both done a little work in the area of gifted and talented children – primarily, though, in providing rich open-ended educational experiences to assist in catering for the needs of talented children within the mainstream classroom.

Characteristics Matthew presented with that suggested to us that he was different or that they may be gifted included:

- a very good memory
- interested in the world around him
- great social interaction with both children and adults
- can learn in a variety of ways – visually, orally, kinaesthetically
- ability to learn common vocabulary of different languages during our Europe travel in 2003-2004
- ability to apply learning to different situations
- great empathy for others, and the ability to look at circumstances from many different perspectives
- he can contribute to conversations with a range of people on many different subjects
He easily completed work tasks that I was generating for grades at higher levels. The most important indicators of 'giftedness' throughout the identification process…with no formal identification – would relate back to his broad knowledge and confidence to speak to groups, ability to calculate mentally real world problems and interest in current affairs.

Matthew’s nomination has been by friends.

- On the 'Introversion/Extraversion Continuum' by Linda Silverman, Matthew demonstrates a significantly high tendency towards extraversion characteristics.
- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development by Karin Morrison, Matthew consistently:
  - learns rapidly and easily
  - displays intense interest in print and/or numbers
  - has tendency to put things or ideas together in different or unusual ways
  - has a keen sense of humour
  - seeks interaction with adults
  - is sensitive

- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development by Karin Morrison, Matthew often:
  - has a wide vocabulary and uses advanced vocabulary correctly
  - continually asks questions and frames additional questions based on answers received
  - has heightened awareness of the wider world
  - is persistent – spends much longer time than expected on things of interest
  - shows understanding of abstract concepts
  - is able to carry out complex instructions
  - is very aware of environment and immediately notices changes

- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development by Karin Morrison, Matthew occasionally:
  - is a perfectionist
  - is intense
  - exhibits unevenness in development (e.g., advanced cognitive development with poor to average fine motor coordination)

- On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development by Karin Morrison, Matthew never:
  - does not ‘fit in’ socially with other children in a group
  - can be uncooperative in the preschool setting

We would advise that parents broaden gifted children horizontally, rather than just keep driving them vertically. Get them interested in theatre, in music, in sport. Even to understand some of the current affairs stuff that’s happening all around you, that you can be quite insular to and not even be aware of, that’s the sort of stuff that I think enriches kids, and not necessarily skipping them a grade or whatever.

Gifted kids need to have that understanding that to be part of a community it is actually give and take. There rights and there’s responsibilities.

We’d encourage…sport…because…kids are becoming very self-absorbed. Trying to incorporate them in teams (where) they understand…different abilities and different strengths, (that) you’ll be
good at one thing and they’ll be good at another. Also, a good, warm, teachable environment where the kids (are) watched and listened to. Matthew would really benefit from that - that’s what really seems important. Good kids to model on, good kids to be with, good teaching.

One of the things…I’m always saying is, ‘Please don’t rely on the teacher to do this stuff. You need to take on board some of the stuff’. I’m really anti teacher bashing and that it’s got to be the teacher driving everything. Primarily it’s the responsibility and understanding of your one out of twenty five. You’ve got to actually produce, or prove before you get this. Everyone is judged on their capabilities, or you’re judged, like you judge people of their capabilities, it might be a drastically different from your performance, or your…demonstrated capabilities from your real capabilities.

The other thing we’ve always done with our kids is to say, ‘Okay, so you have this gift, you really understand it. How are you going to use it?’ And that’s the other thing we’ve talked a lot about. ‘Okay, you’re really good at maths and…sometimes you get to go into Mrs J’s grade and do all that and then what do you do with it? Do you come back and share it with someone else? Or do you come back and show Mrs P? Or do you come back and say, ‘Now that I can do that, I reckon I could bounce off and try something else.’ Try and look at it as an opportunity to go on, but there’s still some sort of element that you’ve got to give back. We’ve always said, ‘What are we going to do, and how can we use those gifts to actually benefit those around you?’ I think we’ve done that really well with our kids.

Matthew’s Teacher (Prep 2005) and Family Support Person

Occupation: Teacher
Qualifications: Diploma and Graduate Diploma in Language and Literacy
Years of Teaching: Less than 5 years

Matthew presented as a very bright, bubbly, interested little boy. He had very mature speech and ability to discuss concepts well beyond that of his peers. Matthew was very knowledgeable. He could tell all sorts of things about continents, and history, wars, land, and what do you call them, things like bridges and special land features. Matthew had an amazing memory of details related to his trip overseas. When he was talking about something that he loved, he would talk for a long time very happily. He loved telling the stories that he had to tell, and they were good ones, really good ones.

Matthew was always concerned to be good and do the right thing… He was very aware of what was right and wrong. He preferred to do the right thing. Matthew was kind. He actually didn’t put other children down, even though it was quite noticeable that he knew things that they didn’t. He was aware of not needing to point those things out.

Matthew was a good sportsman, so he was willing to play games by the rules, which was another part of his needing to do the right thing, I think. But it was also that he saw other children’s needs as well. So in that sense I think he was quite compassionate…for that age, because he was quite young. Matthew was really a very hands-on…kicking footy type kid. He loved talking about football – he loved talking about any sport really.

In his initial assessment (Early Numeracy Interview) and letter recognition (he could already read) showed he was well beyond entry level for preps. He quite enjoyed computers but…it was interesting to me that that was the only time he showed stress, with a parent in the room. I did see occasional frustrations that showed that he might be under pressure. And there were also elements of his development that I could see were very Prep still, in terms of motor control. He was great with footy and things like that, so I’d no concerns, but fine motor control was very laborious. His writing was very difficult to understand. Colouring and things like that, while they’re not everything, there were still many things, cutting and colouring and pasting and things that he didn’t have control over.
I know to begin with (Matthew’s challenges were)… things like fine motor control and stuff. I remember him being teary about something…it was in the early days…I suspect it would have been how do you handle naughty children…the other children being naughty. Matthew got stressed (when he knew) ‘that person is being really naughty, and I’m trying to do my work!’ I don’t think he enjoyed that sort of thing. Matthew was compliant.

Matthew quite enjoyed computers. He loved maths because it was a puzzle every time. I think that’s what he would have liked about that. It was different.

(Other adults would comment or observe that)… he’s very bright, he’s a good sport, he’s happy. Just…extremely clever…because that was very noticeable. I most admired…the fact that he did things so well, that he was quite caring about other children. And even (though) he was younger than many of the children in his class, he was compassionate and quite caring and protective.

Matthew saw other children’s needs. Anyone who was playing a good game of cricket, or footy, or something like that…he’d be keen to be with them. He probably veered away from children who were doing naughty things, because that concerned him, he didn’t want to be a part of that sort of group.

Matthew seemed to be very happy and enjoy school experiences. He was in a Prep/1 composite which made it easier to fulfil many of his academic needs, while at the same time just to settle – to find what school is all about. He would have been one of the youngest.

I endeavoured to start the preps in groups earlier than I normally would (in order to improve the educational experiences for Matthew).

I think there was so much good stuff happening…even though the Preps that he was with (were)…difficult ones. The grade One’s were very well established, good workers, quite mature, very happy for him to be in their groups, that…was very good, and it worked well.

For maths and literacy activities, Matthew was grouped with Grade 1 children. He would have been learning some new things. But some of it would have been about ‘How do I record these things that I already know in my head?’ But with mental maths, he was brilliant.

For handwriting and activities promoting fine motor control, Matthew still needed experience with preps. There were actually things that I could teach him about writing that he didn’t know. Where do you put the capitals?, Why do you do that?, Why didn’t we put a full stop?, Why do we need spaces? Teaching all those things in the context of these amazing stories that came out was wonderful. Sometimes you’d need to couch him within a group to slow down…to give someone else a turn. But he was always willing to do that as well. Parents used to come in and help with the computer group, and it was interesting to me that that was the only time he showed stress, with a parent in the room but generally he seemed quite proficient there.

Very informally (Matthew was involved in the programming and planning of his educational experiences). I made it very clear to Matthew that if he ever felt unable to complete any work that was too difficult or too great in quantity he could tell me straight away. I also gave him the choice at times so that if he felt he was missing out on ‘fun’ prep activities he could ask to join a different group for some things.

Discussion about whether to advance Matthew to the year ahead was covered early in the year. We both (parents and teacher) agreed that there were elements such as Matthew’s difficulty with handwriting that would make this very difficult. We agreed to include him in all grade 1 groupings that were appropriate and continue to observe him. I looked at Matthew and thought ‘ah, we have special needs here,’ and was able to meet a fair number of them. So that was good. But then nothing happened to coordinate that happening throughout. I feel like you almost need to allow children to settle a bit for Prep one’s and two’s, just to see where they’re at. A child might be really quite well
developed and ahead, and look quite gifted in some areas, but might plateau out and build on other areas in that Prep One-Two.

I would rate myself ‘poorly informed to somewhat informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children and planning and programming for gifted children. I think I’m poorly informed because probably my only written or professional information would have come from when I was in Uni, and that was very minimal. I guess I feel poorly informed because that would have been good to have read about, as you go through and start coming across children that might be categorized in that sense. (I have had discussions with teachers) and there was one other child that I had very early in my career, and…I was very aware that I didn’t have experience in knowing what level she really was at. I spoke a lot with my supervising teachers about…where she should be placed with those special needs.

I probably had very little information (about Matthew) because initially his brother was going to be in my class, and then they went overseas. So for that whole year, I never saw him, I met him once. I never even saw him playing or anything like that. To me, it was the question of…I don’t know what sort of input has been given in his family? I don’t know whether his parents had sat down with him and taken him through exercises to get him this far? I don’t know their ideas on whether they would like to accelerate him, or whether they want to go sideways to enrich him?

This is not to do with Matthew, but I’ve just seen other children, where they are gifted in academic areas, but terribly unable to work in with other children…and to me that’s…sad. The parent is so keen to continue and to ‘push’ - now I shouldn’t say ‘push’ because that’s very emotional – but…with a gifted child, gifted in every sense…can you still say that they are gifted, when they are gifted only in one or two areas? That was part of my challenge in understanding it. The challenge of what do I present to Matthew, and how do I involve him in day to day class work, that is actually going to meet him where he’s at? That was the biggest challenge. I did feel that despite his obvious giftedness, there were many reasons to allow Matthew to participate as fully as possible in the experience of being a prep without pushing him too far???

Perhaps it was wrong for me not to pursue formal ‘identification’ but I feel that the prep year is a year of great adjustment – socially and in many other ways. I think perhaps I would have gone further, because I wonder…if perhaps I’d made some ground work in sitting with his mum and saying, ‘I think we really need a bit more help here. We need a bigger picture for where he’s going after this.’

I would rate myself ‘poorly informed to somewhat informed’ on planning and programming for gifted children. I think literacy groups and maths groups are very suitable for meeting many different needs. (I believe)...continual observation and assessment to find where the point of need is and focused groups to meet individuals and small groups at this need.

I was very concerned sending Matthew into a straight grade 1 class for 2006 that his needs would be more difficult to meet within this context. There were a number of issues - one of them was that it was a very difficult group of children. I knew what the children were like, and I knew that there were a number of quite badly behaved children who, as much as they would be looked after and cared for in the class…it would put stress on Matthew…to be with all of those children. The other thing was that when he started and I found out where he was at with his Maths, I thought ‘Great, I’ve got a group that I can slot him in, where he will be understanding and enjoying.’ I had grade One’s…in the Prep/One class…so I was thinking ‘Well…that will mean that Matthew will be all by himself.’ To me that’s a really hard thing for a child to be in a group all by themselves. I would be concerned that either he would become proud or that he would become discouraged, because he was alone. Initially we thought we were going to have a grade one-two class, and I had his name on the top…Matthew would be very multi-aged until grade two. That would have been my ideal, where he had a chance to be with his own peers socially…and the team work and everything is just as much in your group work as…the actual group that you’re doing.
I think reading he took for granted, because he just…could do it so easily. It didn’t take a lot of effort really, he could just do it, so…it would have been one of those things he didn’t think about, he just did it…he would have easily been about twelve months or more ahead. (The most important educational experiences for Matthew was)...perhaps the writing, because initially it was difficult for the fine motor…but, there were actually things that I could teach him about writing that he didn’t know. He’d say, ‘Oh, yeah’ and pick it up really quickly, it didn’t slow him down….that might have been something that he would have been pretty proud of himself, and (on his) important list.

All these things I could have done better, when I look back. ‘Gee, why didn’t I do that?’ It’s reflecting in a way, and doing it again. I think where you’ve got additional support…its not like you’re side-stepping your professional obligation or your accountability or anything….it really does enrich the program if you have a teacher who is able to do specific programs for specific needs. It’s interesting, if you’ve got an autistic child in the class, then bang, there’s a PD for it. If you’ve got a child…with really intense physical needs, or if there was a child with haemophilia, bang. I was off to a PD…but a child who had special needs because of their giftedness or special talents, there was nothing. I guess because they think we are trained to meet children with their individual needs, so perhaps they figure we are doing okay, or that we’ll get by. I still just don’t know enough about what support is available. I think probably that would be a really good responsibility for someone at the school to be able to know…‘Who do we call on for that?’ because not everyone can be expert at everything.

My greatest source of knowledge came from discussions with other teachers and in particular perceptions and expectations that Matthew’s parents had for how we would best meet his needs. School funding has changed opportunities for teachers to have additional help in the classroom. Within 5 years the school has had to drop additional assistance to the teachers’ literacy programs (for above average children). There used to be regular withdrawal groups of children in the lower school who were well above the expected level. While there is still help in the form of ESL and Reading Recovery, it is the teacher’s full responsibility to meet other needs.

I would rate myself as ‘very poorly informed’ on support services for gifted children. There was a teacher who was in charge of (additional needs), and the children would be withdrawn for activities that involved a lot more problem-solving. It wasn’t just for gifted children…they just identified the top, probably the top thirty…just as the bottom thirty would be taken for reading recovery, they would also identify the top thirty. Now that was not in action when Matthew was there…it had been withdrawn…for a couple of years before then. The reason that was withdrawn was for money reasons. They didn’t have teachers who had extra time that they could use for that kind of program. Not only was it withdrawn, but no-one was actually made accountable for…any teacher that might have needs in that area to come and chat or to write. The teacher was gone, the person that understood it was gone from the school, and no-one had been replaced with that role.

Matthew was clearly well above the expected level for his age group. My observations and assessments suggested he was at least 12 months ahead of those of the same age in language, maths, social maturity and understandings of wider knowledge (science, history, etc.). (The areas of development and learning demonstrated by Matthew I valued as important indicators of his giftedness were)...Matthew’s mathematical knowledge, including ability to apply in problem solving situations; speaking and listening; reading; written expression; and a combination of excellence in all of these areas.

I guess it was consolidated a little for me (because) there was something very different about Matthew, when we did the interview. It’s about an hour’s interview with the children very early on in the year. On the Wednesdays I’d pull the children in and do some assessment…just talking and language assessment as well. That was positive in that I could actually place what things he was able to do, particularly in maths, we had a very effective Early Numeracy interview. It was great. I could…place him very confidently within groups where…that work was still interesting for him. The early numeracy interview assesses children at their growth points…in counting and place value, and actually right across mathematically applied as well. Matthew was very confident to answer the
questions, and the ones that he couldn’t answer, as soon as it was re-phrased, he knew exactly what
he was on about. The test is aimed at Prep, One and Two children, but there are elements of it that
are going into the grade Three level. In some of those areas Matthew was quite proficient…we didn’t
go right to the end, but quite near the end.

Benchmarking is a routine process where all children are assessed on their level of reading ability
using running records (Reading Recovery Teacher). We had to register all children who were above
or below expected level, with the strong expectation that our programme would meet their particular
needs. Prior to all planning came observation and assessment. Out of this would come ability
grouping of children and planning for each child’s needs as an individual and within small groups.

No formal identification strategies were used. (The role I have played in the identification of
Matthew as a gifted child was)…observation, assessment and consultation with teaching colleagues
and parents
(During the identification process)…with Matthew’s parents, we felt it was important to try to meet
his needs where he was at, and allow him time to fully enjoy being a prep (student). Although it
wasn’t a formal strategy, his parents were involved in interview nights where Matthew’s particular
skills were discussed and a strategy was decided on to best meet his needs.

I believe that there are gifted children’s associations and groups of people that (parents) can plug into
who will give you advice on how to encourage that giftedness. First try to find out what those
support services are. I would be looking for that and helping the parents, if they had no idea in that.
The other advice I would give would be to look at the child as a whole child and “never lose sight of
the child as a whole child”. Maintain that whole child view that they are…exceptional in some areas,
don’t forget the other areas.

I wish there was more chance also to just chat with the children. I think that would have been
something that would have been brilliant for Matthew, because he loved talking. Just talking time,
there’s not enough of it. We don’t get enough adults in the room for schools. I wish there was more
hands-on…being able to make things. Being able to go outside and make big things – cubbies, forts,
al that kind of thing. These are all general things that I’d do if I was anyone anyway. It would be
ideal to have had someone within the government system of education who would be able to
 coordinate some sort of professional development.

Choice of school would be important, because some schools are more open to treating children as
individuals than others. As much as we all have to do it, some schools are better at it than others. I
would suggest that (parents) really think very carefully about which school, and go and visit…get a
feel (as to whether) their child could suit that school. I know a lot of schools have systems where
they catch the children who are falling behind, and they regularly meet…like once a month or once a
term, or whatever they decide. Perhaps find a school where they’ll be happy enough to do that as
well. Look for a very rich environment where there’s all sorts of different input, not just the
educational stuff. The overall environment would be important.

The attitude of the teachers would be way up there. Just keep talking and meeting with teachers.
You’d need to sit down and talk with them and find out what their fears were. Open communication
would have to be important. Not that it’s all individual, because you want your child to be part of the
larger group as well at times, but that there is some sort of individual plan happening there for that
child. Don’t be afraid to talk to the school about your fears and concerns. Don’t be afraid to ask if
you can meet on a regular basis. Schools shouldn’t be threatened or challenged by that – ‘that’s our
business.’ Perhaps look for other ways to enrich them as well, rather than just school. Music is
always a wonderful thing, or sport.

Enjoy them! Love them! Don’t forget they’re still a little person in there.
Introduction to Case Study Five: David

David is a ten year old primary age child who at the time of the study was returning to home schooling having spent nearly 12 months in a year five class at a semi-private school within his local area. He is the eldest child of three children and lives with his family in a south-eastern suburb of Melbourne, Australia.

The other participants included in David’s Case Study are his parents, a family friend and his year five classroom teacher.

Case Study: David (9 years)

Things I do really well include academics, reading, speed-reading - I know that I can speed read, because sometimes Mummy even wonders if I’ve read a book completely. This is how fast I read it. And once I read a book which was like in the sticks, three times in an hour…that’s my speed reading. I do really well in spelling, Math, Science, learning new things, inventing things, Geography, History, dot to dots, Soccer and making new friends. I’m strong in Academics but not strong fortunately in PE. I might be playing in the under 11 soccer team this year!

I’m proud of skipping a grade because it meant that I was above my level. (I can do these things)…Probably because God has given me a talent for those. And also because when I was little…I had no idea, but…I just read my first book like when I was four – it was…‘Green Eggs and Ham’ by Theodor Geisel, otherwise known as Dr Seuss. I’m proud that I am giving my heart to Jesus because that made me a Christian and how I can spend all my time with Jesus up in heaven.

When I’m on my own I like to hop onto the internet, well, on the internet it’s a bit easier for me to play it on my own because, like it’s fun for me to play on it with friends, but though I mainly enjoy playing it on my own, because then I can get more time out of it. I like to read a book, TV, dice-rolling…because it’s pretty complex, and probably it would take somebody else a long time to understand it. It took me quite some time actually to work it up. And the ‘polar-hedro’ dice that we have also helped me…especially the ten-sided dice…It is a bit complex, because you have to use different dices for different games…for soccer I minus. At the moment I’m using the six-sided dice, because I can’t find the ten-sided one. And I’m minusing one off every number that I roll, because then it’s possible then to have nil-nil draws. Other things I do on my own are play games, play outside, Lego, Play-mobile, activity books and puzzles, dot to dot, mazes and crosswords.

My family is becoming more important to me because I love them…I like it because it’s fun for me to play on it with friends, but though I mainly enjoy playing it on my own, because then I can get more time out of it. I like to read a book, TV, dice-rolling…because it’s pretty complex, and probably it would take somebody else a long time to understand it. It took me quite some time actually to work it up. And the ‘polar-hedro’ dice that we have also helped me…especially the ten-sided dice…It is a bit complex, because you have to use different dices for different games…for soccer I minus. At the moment I’m using the six-sided dice, because I can’t find the ten-sided one. And I’m minusing one off every number that I roll, because then it’s possible then to have nil-nil draws. Other things I do on my own are play games, play outside, Lego, Play-mobile, activity books and puzzles, dot to dot, mazes and crosswords.

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I sort of like invent up little games for my own use. And I usually make them up from different games, especially board games I’ve heard about, or that I have. I even had to make my own board, because Mummy got mad with me…well it isn’t exactly a board game, but though it’s a game that I call dice rolling – where I roll the dice and then I write down the outcome. And I use that for sports.

My friends most admire my cheekiness, my funniness, just me, my kindness – I am just guessing, so I am not sure - well I know that they like my funniness because they usually laugh when I tell a funny joke. Especially it is my best friends the M’s…they’ve always laughed at my jokes. I’m pretty kind
to my friends usually, so I do know that they like that... And also sometimes I’m a bit cheeky, especially since they get me into stuff... Yeah. It isn’t usually me.

In Art, I just sort of like drawing around sketches of stuff, especially costumes of sports players... Especially sports where there’s like different teams, and like I know their costumes, and I just draw them down... just copying what they look like... football teams, soccer teams. Because you can find heaps of soccer stuff from the adult section of sport.

I got into the Olympics basically when I did an Olympics project for Activity Day... I decided I’d like to do a timeline of all the Aussie medal winners. And so then we went to the library and I got all the books, and then I started reading them. And then I started like going to the library to look for more books from that series, and then I found out it all. And then one day, and I wondered if they had soccer books. And I looked, and there they were. And then just above the soccer books were the football books.

My favourite things to do with a friend are run around, play outside, chat and have them over for a sleep-over. Usually we talk about what’s happened recently, and wherever we’ve been. We also talk about the newest games that we’ve heard of, especially if most of my friends like the computer games that we’ve heard of... because most of my friends are into computer games. That’s where I learnt about Ancient Empires, which I’ve now got... I learnt about it from the friend, who I’m sleeping over at tomorrow night. Other things I like to do with friends is play games with them, computer, table-soccer and just visit them or have them over to visit me.

I look for somebody who is really kind, but not just for one day, but whenever I see him. Someone who is friendly, otherwise we can be friendly but not friends. Somebody is around my own age. Usually my friends have some interest I have, but not all my interests. If they are kind towards their family is also important to me. I like them to be kind towards my siblings, otherwise it is hard to get along... because otherwise a feud might erupt. I would like them to be respectful towards my mummy and daddy. I do not like it if people do not respect them. I like it if they do respect them. And to be friendly towards my pets because I don’t want my animals to get hurt.

At school, well, I was like Aiden. - not the same age as everybody else. Aiden was 10, everyone else was 11 or 12 years. We all had a big interest in soccer. We were all in grade 5/6. At school, I was special or different from other children in my class because... I went to year 9 Science – which is 4 years above my grade. I could not really compare myself with them because if I am different from one person, then I am probably the same as someone else in another area. A friend that I have who is older than me, he used to play soccer, and then I then decided then to play goal-kick... So I played soccer for a local team... it’s sort of like learning stage... it’s called goal-kick... But also there is other names for it. That one’s only in our League. If I was given the job of planning and organising a special club at school... heaps of kids at my school love soccer, so I’d probably set up a club mainly for collecting soccer stats... We would also like to discuss about the latest soccer news and stuff.

At school, I most enjoy Mrs O. because she is the second best teacher I ever had... she was my classroom teacher, so that was one big reason... she taught me most of the big subjects. Also she was the one who introduced me to everybody at school... She’s actually my third best teacher. My second best teacher is Mummy, and my best teacher is God. God is the one who made me first of all. And also, all my talent actually came from Him, I even say... Except for what I’ve built up here on earth, He’s really the one who gave me all that. And also, He’s helped me through the tough times... that’s how He’s my number one teacher.

The schoolwork I most enjoy is P.E. because I always loved sport and typing on the computer and researching stuff. At school, I find ‘writing’ the most challenging because it makes my hand tired... I found writing really challenging... because I had to like write one and a half pages to two pages. It’s almost like torture for me. I would rather type out all that, than write it down. I found Art really challenging... because of the teacher... last year I had it really tough with the Art teacher... Because like, I was like doing an art project on geography, and she said like that we can only do the parts
turned up that we absolutely have to. And that’s what I did, but though she still got mad with me, and she said that I was really close to getting like a zero. But though luckily, believe it or not, I forgot to hand in my paper for her to give me the points, so luckily I didn’t even have to see a zero or a P on it. I competed at 2 athletics carnivals when I was in school…my best at athletics carnival is second last, in the eleven year old boys’ shuttle relay…we actually officially came last…but another team got disqualified, so I call it second last. A sneaky way to call it second last.

Since returning to ‘homeschooling’ in the last few months…the challenges are there’s not really too many kids to play with at recess. And I had heaps of recess, well I don’t anymore. But though that used to be my top point, like when people asked me ‘why do you like home schooling? Do you like home schooling better than school?’ And I said ‘yes.’ And they asked ‘why?’ ‘because there’s more recess.’ Now I have barely any recess. I have only like about two bits of recess a day. At school…the work was really easy work…Like I didn’t even have to work hard in Maths, I did year seven Maths, which finally actually four kids were doing – three other kids were doing with me. Spelling was on earth my best subject. At least at school it was, because I know that because I didn’t get a single word wrong in spelling tests. And I only did have seven. So it was very difficult not to get a word wrong… I only did one hundred and forty words at school for spelling… it’s sort of a bit difficult for me to grade myself.

I just wanted you to know that the grades I’m in this year are six, seven and eight…Because I’m doing grade six Science, and year eight Maths, and all the rest is in year seven. And probably by the time I finish school, believe it or not, by the time I finish in Maths high school, B. will only be in Kindergarten…If I don’t skip anymore grades…I’ll probably even be finishing off school at least by age eleven, fifteen I mean.

Case Study: David’s Parents

*Occupations: Mum at home (previous kindergarten teacher)/Sales Estimator*

David’s been very bubbly from the beginning… a very bubbly baby. He is very affectionate, always. David has a very sensitive heart, he really wants to please. He is very strong but at the same time incredibly gentle. (A) very soft heart.

Looking back I remember how David at under 6 months of age (approximately 3-4 months as I remember) showed an incredible sense of grasp of a situation and humour. At mother’s group, two other babies tried to get hold of his dummy, David held on to the ring and laughed several times as the other babies could not succeed.

Always from a very young age…you would explain something to him, it would make sense, he would take it on board…he was easy going… so very easy, directable. David…grasped new concepts and moved on to more advanced abilities. At 2 ½ he had kind of ‘done’ everything kindergarten children would do during that year. At the age of 1 year 7 months, David was completing 15 pieces interlocking puzzles… I remember by the time he was one and a half he went off on to 15 piece puzzles and…just before he turned two, we bought him two big book of puzzles with thirty five pieces…like the airport one and…he sat at your parents’ place and he emptied it out and did it once with them, and the second time he did it all himself. And I remember sitting there and going ‘wow!’ By 1 year 11 months after completing a 30 and 45 piece puzzles two times with us (on Christmas Day) then completed them on his own. He completed his puzzles back to front (grey side up) and at 2 ½ years was into 100 piece puzzles.

At 3 years of age, David read his first book, “Green Eggs and Ham” and within 6 months was reading at a very confident level (Grade 2)…he picked up a…Dr Seuss, and he said to me ‘what does the book say?’…he could have probably told me what it was. But he said ‘what did the book say?’ And it’s a book I always kept aside, because I thought it’s a good one to learn to read, and I don’t want him to know it off by heart. So…we never looked at it. And I said ‘Green Eggs and Ham.’ And he said ‘can you read it to me?’ And …without any obvious reason, I just said to him ‘what do you
think it says?’ And he read the whole book, and I went ‘oh!’…I had no reason to ask him the question…but within weeks he was at the grade two and then the grade four level. I have records of…when he was six, he was like in the ten year olds spelling age. A year ago, he was in a grade nine spelling age.

David is one who loves to discuss. He’s not afraid of a discussion, he’s not afraid of a debate, because he…comes…pre-armed… ‘Well this is what I believe. You can like it or lump it, but that’s because of who I am and, you want my answer, I give it to you.’ I’ve found him to be a lot more persuasive – very similar to my wife…It’s like you will ask him a question or say something, straightaway he’s got an answer…And I don’t know about other children with that sort of thing, but…you’re not sure what to do with that. I find him very easy because we always…speak the same language…very expressive in what we mean when we talk.

David’s been a very easy child to have always…an interesting combination…I just love him….he’s charming…he’s a treasure. He’s unique.

David always wanted to be a soccer player missionary. He still wants to be a missionary, but we said ‘you can go to the mission field after you learn.’ We were very strong…have a career…something to fall back on, because when he’s got a family, he might not be out on the mission field always. ‘You need to be able to feed your family.’ We’re just very, very strong on that. We said…once you’ve studied, it doesn’t matter, it doesn’t have to be university…that child might be more practical…it doesn’t really worry us, as long as they have something…there’s a lot of character development that happens when you have to work practically.

At the moment…he (has) a desire to do Journalism. He wants to be a Sports Commentator…because he loves sports. He is studying so much about it…he can tell you everything about the Olympics, from when they started and which countries did well, and who got gold, and about the history of different sportsman. David literally digests the books…t boggles the mind sometimes. He develops games as well. He thinks there’s no real good Olympic game out there. Children are missing out. So he’s developed a game with questions…where they can do different sport things on the answers. We think he’s working on a board with computer games…because there’s a real need…there is not enough games with sport.

It took me a while to come to terms with David’s giftedness. Having worked with children for almost 20 years I had a good understanding of the stages of child development. Still I questioned myself a lot – Do I make more out of this? I talked with former colleagues and teachers and got their input. I must say though when I did my studies nobody talked about ‘giftedness’. I remember one family, the mother came in, her child had quite a few problems…and she said ‘you know but he can do hundred piece puzzles.’ And I remember thinking ‘and so what?’ because…it just wasn’t really important to me in the light of everything else that was displayed, whereas now I would listen up, and I would go ‘okay, let’s find out more.’ There’s a lot of ignorance out there and, sadly to be said, I was one of them. You heard a lot about people who needed help and special needs children, but nothing in the gifted area. So from that point…it was very interesting having my own…I would look at it very differently today. The challenge for me…was at a professional level…having had parents who…tell you…how great their child is…I constantly check myself thinking am I going down that road. Am I making too much out of this?

It’s funny isn’t it, how we have these little hesitations? It’s so funny when they say that parents just feed their own ego. You go ‘you should know how much we check ourselves to make sure we don’t make more out of something than it really is.’ It’s funny how many times it was little snippets, and little snippets here and there. And when I heard more information it was more confirmation. I find…there (are) a few people out there whose children are gifted (and) their parents are still coming to terms with it.

I’ve come to the realization, even though (my 5 year old son) is so different I can certainly start to see the signs…But it’s taken me awhile because he’s just so different. So, so different. Chalk and
cheese......there’s no question about our second son, because he’s totally different and I kind of have to start all over again...I haven’t sorted him half out...So it’s really the practical things. How do we prepare him, especially with the realization that it might be only four years, it might be less. We could prolong it afterwards. But if we prolong it, in which way is the best?...because we haven’t gone down that road. So it would be great for others to have been down that road. And not...just one family, because every child is different, every family is different. For some...they’re just happy when they finish school. I want him to reach his potential, doesn’t matter in which way, whatever he wants to be. If an artist, we would be happy for him to be an artist...I don’t want him to be a doctor. I’m saying that because I read the biography of Albert Schweitzer, and I became very inspired. And I thought ‘oh, if he wants to be a doctor.’...So I was thinking, he wants to be a missionary, he has the brains, and that sounds good. Until he watched the documentary about blood, and he almost fainted. Our second son’s not like that. We asked him ‘what do you want to be?’...he loves operating people, and he has a real heart for sick people...but he goes between that and fire fighter. Actually everything he wants to do is helping people.

We always go through phases where we feel more confident and at times we would panic a little bit because...he’s making another giant leap, and we’re trying to catch up with where he is. There’s all sorts of different ways...it’s amazing how you get to a hurdle and then you either ask people, you wait for an answer...Why didn’t we think of that?...it’s amazing how you arrive at the hurdle, but you are able in time to actually make the jump. And...why did we really fuss over that? But you do when you’re in it. It (is) a discovery really. A discovery each day or each week, something else that you can use or slot in or decide or say ‘ah well, we could apply that.’

Coming from Europe children come home at lunchtime...and I saw my beautiful Kinder children go to school and be totally tired and exhausted at the end of the day. From a Mum’s perspective, and having grown up in a different culture, I wanted my children to have a childhood...I didn’t just want them to be three quarter’s of the day at school, and then come home tired. Having experienced other home schooled children, we always found that there was a special family connection...something very innocent about the children, because they weren’t exposed to the incredible peer pressure. (And yet) helping him to grow up in areas he actually doesn’t want to grow in...because in some areas I think he would like to stay really younger, because he’s very comfortable. Sometimes...he says he’s fine with being so bright...and he enjoys it...but...I think sometimes he must feel off at times....so we...just keep the communication opened...so they can say whatever they want to say.

I remember (when) he was really little and he would do...the really big puzzles. We’ve always taken toys to church and we were pastoring for awhile so...I had to sit in this one row with David. I had...my big basket of toys, (to) just keep him busy. We often would have people say...‘never seen children do stuff like that’...lots of strangers...like in the train sometimes...have approached me to say ‘you’ve got a very bright boy there.’ You know, just from seeing him for a few minutes, doing something. Others would say...How clever he is. How bright he is. Some wanted to use him to show him off...somebody would say ‘oh, do you know what David can do?’ And so we naturally put stops to that pretty quickly...especially when he started reading at three. I know one friend she just really admires...what a good friend he is to her son. And he’s a really good steady influence... Just how loving he is...how caring he is. ‘He’s a credit to you’ got that one time. A lot of children just think he’s really sweet.

I remember God one day saying to me ‘really help to take really good care of him, because if he’s pushed overboard...it will change him.’ At some point...they go ‘don’t push them.’ And you go ‘oh, excuse me, I’m not pushing.’...‘I’m trying to keep up!’ But...because there’s so many different...misconceptions out there....educating the education system I think is important as well. We rang up this one Principal, because we heard that they take home schoolers on a part time basis...and the first thing he said ‘all children are gifted.’ And I just (thought) ‘what?’

I think...there are people who can help them. I think even people out there who are dealing with gifted children from another school...their parents kept on pushing for their children to be identified. I have one friend whose son is in Prep...he would add up double and triple digit numbers in his
mind…and they literally made him wait two years to ever be tested, because he was too young. He was only in Prep…And then you look at the extension program of the school and you go ‘it’s pathetic.’ You think you’re doing such a great job, you’re just…putting the kids into another box…and you want them to be happy in it…and you go to the parents for extending them. You have to get to know gifted children, because they are so different. I don’t know how that’s achieved in the education system…I honestly haven’t thought much about it, because I’ve got so much else to think about anyway. Leave that up to people in that area.

I think from a father’s perspective, particularly one that doesn’t work from home – in other words he’s got a nine to five job, five days a week. To firstly (a) allow your wife to be at home twenty four-seven, and taking on literally between ninety five and up to between ninety eight percent of the workload of being the home schooling Mum/teacher. I think there needs to be more done, so that…fathers understand to a certain degree what their wives go through, and…I’m wondering whether or not there should be more done relating to fathers and particularly in a relationship…to giftedness of their children. What I know is that most gifted children are involved in some sort of area of home schooling. A good percentage anyway I would imagine. I don’t know. I just think that it would be good for fathers to have the opportunity to…understand gifted children in a better light. Most times it’s the wife…at home doing the bulk of the teaching of the gifted children.

Sometimes you find it a bit hard with David because, even (though) he is younger…it is challenging…it’s okay with a fifteen year old, because you know they are taller…I think as Mums, we’re not as easy challenged, because we are used to constantly talking and reasoning things out…if a son comes in and challenges that at a much earlier age than expected, I think there comes that little friction. But…because they are kind of like that taller person in a younger body…there’s certain challenges for Dads of gifted children.

There’s pride there…as a father I’m proud of him…it’s acknowledging the fact that that’s who he is. When we write newsletters…we do like a mail out to all our…family overseas and people like that. And that’s been a challenge…not to show off what he’s doing, because that might come across as boasting. David and I are very, very similar academically like. I topped one percent of the class in two hundred students for…three or so years. David, I can see that in him. The way he thinks. He probably actually thinks way beyond the way I think. And so that’s a challenge. I’m not challenged by my second son, but I know I am challenged by David…and I don’t think its too undermining, it’s simply that he wants to find out.

The kids’ transition to an older age…the Dad’s input is so important. Mum is still important, but they draw a lot of significance from Dad. Dads I think especially with the male children struggle. Males feel very easily challenged by their sons…particularly if they’re insecure in themselves.. My husband was obviously very gifted as a child, but there was no provision made for him. I think I’ve been gifted as well, but I would be told all day ‘oh, she would do well if she would concentrate.’ I would have been given more A’s…but I was mucking around and having fun in class and reading my book until I had to present a paper…Stuff like that was just boring to learn all the time because it didn’t really take that long. I always wanted to be a Kindergarten teacher, and I thought I would do it anyway…so there’s more to life than learning. Give me a good book. Coming from a generation where there was no awareness…we are the first generation who is aware of our children being gifted, and allowing them to grow up as that. If you think about it – either if we were outright gifted, and like my husband was always really nice and really pleasant…he was just the bright kid that was nice and pleasant, and I was the rebel that wasn’t nice and pleasant…I really think we’re making an in-road here as a generation.

But we have nothing really to draw from…And I think that’s why it’s important to draw from each other. What are we going through? How do we deal with it? How do we deal with it as a Mum? And even as a Mum sometimes we get so drained just working it all out. And we’re explaining constantly to our children, to our husbands, to everybody around us, you know…(to) contribute more, because they’re working out on their own as well, and they can give that feedback.
David’s got a lot of very strong friends. Very interesting…but they’re all very strong in character and very gentle at the same time. The friends that he’s developing have strong personalities…but the strong-personality type child is one who is willing to give their point of view. He had a friend over just recently and all that friend would talk about was what they wanted to do tomorrow…rather than discuss and talk about the here and now. David said ‘Mum, it’s boring because there’s nothing to talk about.’

When David was eight he started to…find it very hard that he couldn’t run as quick (as others). There came the time when he started to feel impacted by it…that’s when…we said ‘yes, they are very quick runners – but you are a very quick reader’. Until that age we never made a big deal out of it…we protected him from friends who wanted to use him as a showcase. We literally just didn’t allow that to happen. They are just children and…they need to feel comfortable in who they are.

David’s been through several experiences of ‘pulling’ with some friends. They’ve been wrestling…and David’s not always been like that…he’s never been the stronger one in that…physically. There’s a certain age where, probably around the age of six or seven, the boys feel if they’re stronger physically, they kind of get this, ‘I must be better’ thing. There were actually a few relationships from which we drew back, because we could see that the impact wasn’t really good. David really struggled with their incredible bossiness, and the bullying. But (later)…these two children…just treasured David…because of his gentleness, his steadfastness, he’s a friend anybody would be really blessed to have.

David would stand up for his friend. He actually had…two…friends (who) didn’t like each other…and he had one friend over, and then the other one came in and he left. This one friend said ‘I don’t like Daniel’ and he said ‘but he’s a really nice boy, he’s my friend.’ And that other boy said to David ‘no, if you’re his friend, then you can’t be my friend.’ And David said to him ‘but he is a really nice boy’ and left it at that. And he got months of…almost cruel, very cold treatment from that boy. But he stuck to his guns, and they’re all fine now. Even last year at school, for one friend…he stood up for him. He’s again older than him…and…much taller…and he got bullied at school. David was the one who stood up for him…and he was a grade six boy. He said to David ‘do you want me to hit you?’ And David said ‘go ahead.’ And the boy walked away.

David’s learning to stand up. He doesn’t like conflict…but he’s learning…to stand his ground. We are constantly encouraging him…we say ‘yes, you take turns’…when somebody comes, they can…have the first choice on what they want to play, and then you take it from there. But…you don’t just do what they want to do. It’s still your home. You know you’re still…controlling the home…you need to meet in the middle.

David is very loyal, he’s very strong, and he knows what he wants. He relates a lot to older children. Most of his friends are older. He actually just recently said that he wouldn’t mind having some younger friends too, I think because then he has a bit more of a say. We have a lot of contact…with other home schoolers…and you find most home schoolers are quite…positive. But they can also be negative, quite opinionated…they know exactly what they want, why they want it. They have very strong boundaries often. I think…home-schooled children grow up in their family world…they view it through different eyes, they don’t view it through eyes of what the peer is saying, they view it through eyes of what the values are at home.

David makes friends easily, but…over a long time you want to belong. That’s the important thing. And you need to be sure in yourself, because otherwise you become very, very easy influenced. He’s still dealing with some things, but…he’s much happier in himself and his relationship with his siblings. They’ve become much better again…much more accepting again…much more tolerant. (After David’s school experience we realised that)…in a real world we don’t live with peers, we live
with people of all ages. And nobody looks at what you know, it’s your character, it’s who you are as
a person, and what you can bring into the world.

(When David was younger) he lapped up all of our attention…because we had him for four and a half
years, just him. He was the ideal first child….We just spent heaps of time together. When he was
one, he really started to…like…puzzles…because I would spend a lot of time with him…and…being
a kinder teacher you did other things. We did everything in German ‘till that time, and I spoke 80%
of German in school…and he just picked up…I could just ask him ‘can you pick up…the blue
square, or whatever’ and he just very quickly did it. We did a lot of…reading…like little
words…and then we made stories out of it. We would go through a book, and then we would all
think of stories about it. We did a lot of imaginary stuff.

Looking back, the Kinder David went to wasn’t totally appropriate for him… when he was four he
actually did three year old Kinder. It was lovely (but) it wasn’t very challenging, it was only one day
a week. I thought that’s fine because next year he’ll have four year old Kinder… but by the time he
reached that age…I did the Readiness Test for him for Prep…and my boss (who was the principal of
the school) said to me ‘do you realize if you wait another year, the gap will become bigger and
bigger.’ He said ‘just let him go.’ One…part of me always regretted that he didn’t have the full year
of Kinder, because I’m very passionate about Kinder.

I had a lot of kids…who were always younger in Kinder…so when I was teaching, I was thinking
‘okay, now my child would be older when they go to Kinder’…just the readiness…I just think it’s an
incredibly important year. I think I didn’t realize that when they run ahead like that, you’ll need to go
with the pace that they have. We did so much at home. I should have just said ‘no, it’s not suitable.
It doesn’t extend him. It’s not really who he is. I don’t think I really had that confidence to just
make the decision. I was still coming to terms with it.

We home schooled him…for four and a half years…so when he went into school we had something
to compare. He never attended a school. We talked with each other, and…and both agreed that if he
would go to Prep he would be totally bored. He was only four, so we never considered sending him
just to grade five. We had access to all the Prep and grade one curriculum…I had a really positive
start…and also we happened to meet some other parents who were starting at the same time, and they
just said ‘oh you want to home school?’ And we said ‘yes.’ And before we knew it, we were in a
support group, because there were another two other Mums and they were so eager…then we started
it off formally…It’s been six years now.

When preparing David for school…we said…’how would you feel about just trying out school, not to
go for ever, but just as an experience?’ He was very positive…we had a lot of preparation. David
said ‘Yeah, I’m happy to go.’ Some of his friends were there as well…and it was positive in that
they let him go straight into grade five…even though he was only nine. His teacher was just
wonderful as a teacher…she put him into year seven Maths…and he had another two or three
children who did the same, because it was a composite five-six class.

At initial school meetings…I tried to provide…as much information as they needed, and David…has
the advantage that he is very obviously gifted…so people don’t wonder ‘oh yeah, it’s just Mum’. He
kind of makes a statement for himself. I always try to be very open…and talk a lot with her (the
teacher). I always try to ask her a lot of questions, even when I thought in my own mind I already
knew the answers, I never wanted to presume and I never wanted to come across as somebody who
had already made up her mind. I still came in from the point ‘how could we make it work?’…‘what
is your impression?’

I found in the beginning, in the change-over period…I talked with the teacher, and then the teacher
talked to the Principal. And then the Principal talked to me, and then I talked to the Principal, and the
Principal talked to the teacher, and then I talked to the teacher. And then I said to them ‘can we
please get all together,’ because I began to feel awkward. I thought I don’t want you to have the
feeling that I’m trying to get you at each other, but there’s some communication glitches here
happening. When we got all together…we talked about it, and…I knew I had her support…I think it helped the Principal understand more. I just re-assured the teacher, and…I think it probably helps if you’ve taught yourself, because…you don’t have these unreal expectations, but still bring across ‘I understand it all.’ But these are the difficulties…that are coming from my child. I tried to keep it always very positive. I never pretended something wasn’t happening when it was happening.

We still found that David was pretty bored. He enjoyed the social side very much. He loved all the sport outings...(but) there was a lot busy time…just wasted time. They say that a teacher in a given day has probably seven minutes one on one with a child. I was very surprised at the lack of standard of some of the work that he brought home, knowing what he could do. There were certain things said like…‘we will show you how to develop a computer website site’ - they were some of the things that we were looking forward to, but didn’t happen, out of logistic reasons. With the extension…the Principal was great…he let him go up to year nine Science. He loved the year nine Science. The year nine Science students were great to him. They were very well prepared. The Principal took him up there himself…it was like ‘oh sit next to me’ you know…and then when there were tests, ‘what did you get?’ ‘Oh great’…because he did really well in all the year nine tests as well in Science. But then I found…he could see that something exciting was happening in his class, and he wanted to go to Science but he had to leave his Maths.

At one point he came to melt down, and he literally was just crying and crying…he was doing a test. And I said ‘you don’t have to do the test.’ And he says ‘I want to do the test, but I’m not really sure I will be good enough.’ And we said to him ‘it doesn’t matter how good you are, even just that you want to do it.’ I said to him ‘I wouldn’t like to do it, if I would be in your place.’ And we said ‘you can say no, it’s totally fine.’ But he started to put himself under certain pressures. And from the moment on he had the melt down…and that’s how David is, he will cope very well, but if he gets pushed too far…I could see him emotionally he didn’t cope very well any more. The teachers wouldn’t pick it up…because they always said ‘oh he’s so friendly, he’s chatting with everybody, he will get along with everybody.’ And the teacher said ‘he will not have any problems whatever.’ But I could see it.

We were talking…about…letting him telescope…but I was concerned about that because he really is a ten year old…he is not advanced in his emotional development. I didn’t really feel comfortable, and the teacher very wisely said as well she doesn’t think that would be right for him. We were talking about…letting him jump again from year five to year seven…what academically would have been the better choice for him…he wasn’t worried to go ahead of the year sixes to the year sevens. But then watching them, it wasn’t the same connection…he was the younger one…there were certain things you could just see. We looked at getting him into year six, and…telescoping him in different areas. And that’s when I thought, we can’t have the same scenario again…he will feel ‘where do I really belong?’ ‘do I run into this class, or into the other class?’ My other concern…was ‘yes he will have exciting times when you get telescoped, but he will be bored in all the rest of the time’…because he was in a year seven level in all his Language parts and his Maths parts. Even the teacher said…he is probably year eight in all these areas, and some year nine. They said ‘you’re going to learn about the body.’ And it was like ‘yes, that’s great,’ but…but in his case he got tutored by a doctor for awhile…and they had fun learning about all the Latin times. Last year they did Geography, and David said, ‘can you do something…with the capital cities?’…but the teacher had to say for the benefit of the class ‘once we’ve learnt them.’

The thing that David enjoyed was the sport, and in the lunch times was the social. All the academics were easy for him. The harder area for him was Art. The teacher was incredibly inflexible…she didn’t even worry about talking to the classroom teacher and say ‘is this normal?’ He literally didn’t present anything. She said to him, ‘David, if you don’t give me anything, I’ll give you a zero.’ I met his classroom teacher because I said…’if he would have tried and missed, a normal teacher would have said ‘David, how can we help you?’ We tried and she became very unpleasant in Sport as well (because she was also the Sport teacher). She put him into competitions with eleven year olds, he was nine and not a strong nine…in Sports. Then the nine year olds, and the eleven year olds (were) going ‘oh we’re going to lose because of you.’ She was very unbiased, very inflexible. It added to
all the stress for him... because he felt under incredible pressure. He’s still building up slowly confidence again... and it’s not that he couldn’t do it. The one thing that she wanted him to do, he couldn’t do because he’s never done anything... so we said ‘what can we do at home?’ ‘Nothing! He has to do it at school.’ We said ‘how can we help him?’ ‘Nothing! He has to do it by himself.’ ...Just very, very rigid.

There have been significant changes in David’s behaviour since entering school. David has attended school for 4½ months. It has been a great experience for him. Socially he has had a great time. Academically he has found out ‘how smart’ he is which has led to a change in how he sees himself and others. The last 2½ weeks have been a distressing time for him and he is softening again. David has been involved in Grade 9 Science - he also sat the end of year exam and got 65% without attempting the math component. Even if he wanted to do it – slowly he went into overload as there was not enough time to study different areas and have time to finish work to his normal standards. He got frustrated and he started to question himself – blaming and insecurity started to creep in. He is much happier in himself again and more in tune with his family member.

According to David’s teacher there is no provision or programme for gifted children. For next year, it was suggested to let David do year 6 with extension in the higher grades. We declined as we thought it might be too much ‘chop’ and ‘change’ and might lead to David not feeling a part of the class or belonging to his classmates. To telescope him into year 7 was not endorsed by us or his teacher as we felt he was too young and the age group too wide.

But at the end of the day we began to see... that he wasn’t really receiving the benefit of perhaps what we were informed might happen. They tried very hard, but at the end of the day... we said ‘it’s time to pull him out.’ It’s been good. He’s seen what school’s like. He’s built some more friendships outside of home-schooling. And that’s all good. But at the end of the day his schooling prowess is back on home base. I felt that as far as the school was going all options were exhausted... nothing really led to a satisfactory resolution... where I thought this would be positive for David. We even tried to get to a part-time position... because... David really wanted to stay closer for the social, and for the sports... but they didn’t feel they could offer that. To be honest I think its better, because then otherwise they live in two worlds.

It actually took David almost a term to get back to being schooled at home... what really surprised me was his lack of motivation to learn. I really experienced that when he was going to school. In the beginning he was still coming home wanting to look things up. In the end he was constantly just saying ‘Mum I’m so tired, I can’t think anymore.’ I had to push him to do something. In the end I thought, ‘okay this is a home schooling phase’. And I just literally let him go. There was certain minimal, like his Maths and some other things, he had to do it. But otherwise I pretty much just let him ride, and I found it almost took a term for him to feel the love of learning to come back. He was only at school for six months, and it had an incredible impact! Now he wants to gain knowledge again. He wants to experiment. He’s not afraid of failing. Whereas when that fear of failing started to settle in... having incredibly high expectations of himself, not from anybody else... he’s quite a competitive boy now.

I actually think a lot of home schoolers don’t realize their children are gifted... they want more for their kids, or along the way they don’t really think that school suits them. A lot of children... and I think it’s just because they’ve been allowed to keep them going in their own pace... it doesn’t mean that they are more gifted than others. I have kids that are taught at Kinder who were really so far advanced. By the time they are in grade four... it’s lost and... they started to... go backwards, and it’s... heartbreaking... especially their love for learning, it’s destroyed.

I’m very thankful for the experience, but I’m totally sure we’ve made the right choice for him. You know, like you reflect when we had the difficulties at the beginning of the term... we were thinking ‘oh, was it the right decision?’ ‘... they have a sports program’... and we would really like that... because you want the best for them, you don’t want to hold anything back. But now on reflecting over the term and a lot of talks... he is himself again. He started to lose part of who he
was…it was actually quite sad to see. He’s much bubblier again. Before that he was bubbly on the outside…but he came home and he was grumpy, he was unsettled, he was very irritable.

As we are going back to home-schooling, we are able to let David investigate and explore areas of interest at a deeper level. As for Math, we let David accelerate according to his personal progress. I do a lot of testing with him. Probably not as much now, but in the Primary ages, especially his home schooling, I regularly tested him on his Maths skills…up to year seven…Maths tests from Australia. I do regularly…Spelling, Reading…just all the normal tests…so in my mind I know what his Spelling age is…that’s been very constant. I find they help me to then help him…as we go along I’d probably let him lead me more in it. And if he feels this study is boring, ‘okay, tell us why.’ And so we let him advance, and we widen him.

I would consider myself to be ‘somewhat informed’ to ‘well informed’ on the educational needs of gifted children. As home educators, programming and planning of David’s educational experiences have always been my and my husband’s department. At school the teacher and myself worked together – also the principal – we discussed options together. We always consult with David at home and at school. David plays an active part in his educational experiences and the planning. During David’s time at school, we were informed of changes to his programming such as year 9 Science experiences and Year 7 Maths. We believe the most important areas of development and learning when planning and programming for David’s educational experiences include providing David with a balanced education which extends him horizontally as well as letting him advance ahead and…to help him appreciate where he’s come from…where he’s going, and what can open up to him if he holds on to things and listens from the heart.

I can’t remember whether it was at a conference we heard it or from some friends…but they said – rather than necessarily getting all these programs and trying to put something together, so that he gets a bit of this and a bit of that, why don’t you find out what he’s interested in, and then build something around that. So…I said to him ‘what would you like to study this year?’ And he said ‘Roman History.’ And as a result…there’s language of Latin, there’s Italian as a language…the Geography and History with Italy…English…the Art and columns and paraphernalia…and although he has done a lot of his own research…via the internet, through reading…books…it’s been quite amazing…another way of learning for him.

For somebody who home schools, it took me awhile to realize that programs…didn’t have to follow something through (when) he was proficient in it. Like as an example, when he did his grade one Maths, we did the last half year which had speed drills…because I didn’t want him to have holes. I was too scared of just cutting it off…whereas now I don’t have any hesitation in jumping him a grade. And then just checking…quite systematically in one way, and letting him ‘chop’ something else again. Where at the beginning…we just need to make sure…that there is no holes at all. Probably like now even…how can we work towards…with him approaching…university age.

I’ve always felt if his English is right and his Math is right…everything else fits out of that. That’s why his dad…keeps a tab on all the Maths…and I keep it on the English…then we feel we can really keep his interest in the other areas. (We) let him direct in a lot, but still using boundaries…still guiding him and making him accountable…he’s not a twenty year old who knows how to study…he still needs that.

The other interesting hurdle…that we’ve had (is) where he’s ten, but he’s literally doing work of a fourteen year old. That…hit us between the eyeballs…when we thought ‘hang on a minute, if he’s doing work of a fourteen year old - that means he’s year eight. At this rate, in four more years he’s in his final year of Secondary School as a fourteen year old.’ At the rate that he’s going now…you couldn’t send a fourteen, fifteen year old to our university campuses, and expect them to be on that emotional level, that those sorts of students are. But this gentleman we spoke to said…he could do it via correspondence.
(We have a lot of questions like…) …what career paths? What possibilities are there? With which people do you talk? How do you prepare…the portfolios? What is necessary to give your child…the best chance…to go down their careers? What universities ask to even look at you? … How important are IQ tests, you know, and then all the other tests?...What is really necessary? (Therefore) one area of interest to us at this time has to do with his preparation for University Studies. Should we consider earlier entrance or wait? Have there been studies done to show how early University entrance impacts on younger students? What should we as parents and educators look out or be aware of as our son approaches adolescence? Acceleration without any gaps – what should we look out for? How can we get our hands on good ‘high school’ testing materials, as we have not found anything comprehensive as yet, especially to the VCE requirements?

David’s Grade 5 teacher has been great and tried to extend him with year 7 Maths and year 9 Science – even though he is only 9 years old. She has been instrumental in reassuring and making him feel part of the grade 5/6 composite class. His teacher was involved with ‘Tournament of the minds’. So she’s exposed to children like that…and they both clicked. They talked the other day on the phone and they just…have this rapport.

We are actually glad that David’s classroom teacher said to me, very honestly…I don’t think we are set up for it.’ She said ‘you’re better taking him out, and home schooling him. He won’t have any problems because he’s very well socialized, and he’s such a beautiful boy…I don’t have any queries, but to be honest we are not set up to cater for him.’ I thought that was a very honest and really, really valued.

I would consider myself ‘somewhat informed’ on support services for gifted children. When I was looking for help (David was approximately 2 years of age), nobody was available as he was not school age…when we needed it the most. At that time, Monash did only a study on very young siblings of older gifted children…I probably would have liked more input and couldn’t get it. I rang up Monash University back then, I spoke to colleagues. I rang up for help…and nobody was interested in that age group…at two and a half, he had done everything. I…went…‘what do I do now?’ I felt fine until then. But…what is the next step? I felt isolated, I had to go out of my depth. Telephone services for gifted children were not much help.

Just before we started home-schooling, I consulted with my former boss (Principal of a school) who encouraged us not to send him to kinder but to start schooling him. I’ve just been really thankful…for that advice. The Principal…was open enough to say ‘home schooling – start now, don’t wait, don’t worry about it.’

We are part of email newsletters and groups for gifted children. We have also been visiting a ‘Gifted Resources’ centre in the North-east region of Melbourne. Just this year we have linked with the Parent Support Group in our area. We have been recommended support services from the coordinator of the Parent Support Group in our area. Support services for gifted children have not played a big role. We are always reading up and gleaning from different sources. Besides short spurts of ‘panic’ we are quite happy with how things are. We are considering exploring this area more as David is getting older.

I constantly felt alone along the way. Even now…I go through stages. I’m going really fine. I’m really confident when we’re doing all the stuff, and then he makes a leap, and I go ‘great, that’s wonderful.’…And then I start to read again…I’m sporadically reading up. Whenever I go to the help stage…then I start to inform myself again. And I settle myself and I…try to figure out where he is. I looked up Helen T (?) I found her website very good…and it probably helped me to start (to think) that David might be actually not just gifted, but profoundly gifted. So that…was for me another step, to even consider it. I went to a few things from Luther College. That was good. It was more confirmation of what I already had discovered anyway.

One thing we have as support is…a Gifted Home School support network. I often post the questions there, and Mums of lots of gifted children just answer back. I found that often helped me to figure
out for myself. The lady heading it up...has three grown sons now who are all...profoundly gifted. That’s been a very safe place because everybody can...talk to other people...on the internet. I think probably just (having) people who can really talk...then you have some practical input. Somebody would say, ‘have you thought about looking at that?’ or I love when you (the interviewer) share and you say, ‘this is what research has shown.’

With some things I go ‘that’s great.’ And with other things I go ‘that’s great, but I can’t see that for him.’ It just widens your horizon...and with other things I go ‘oh fantastic, but I need to look more into that.’ Just being able to be yourself...to express your excitement, express your doubts. At times you’re on top of it and you don’t really need much questions. Other times you just feel like, ‘Help!’ I want to be able to say, ‘Help!’ and at the same time go ‘It’s not really a terrible life, it’s just, help!’

I think the parents and program (of the Parent Support Group) are actually looking forward to getting to know the Mums more. I really hope it goes beyond just schooling and not just because we home school but I feel like beyond the schooling we need to look at our children, as our children, with the challenges that they have. School is only part of that challenge that we face...we need to look outside of school, because school will never be able to fulfil all that. (At Parent Support Group) you just want to be able to be a Mum, and talk, and have...input and not be concerned about how it comes across. I find I’m constantly working it out. Some people formulate things in their head, and then they speak it or work it out as they talk...because somebody makes a comment, and that sets me off again. One thing that I found hard last time, (was that) I didn’t actually think that the Mums could really share. I really admired the Mums who spoke out because there was really no room to do that. It would have been really great if other Mums could then say ‘We feel the same way and it’s okay to feel different.’ Actually I found it very limiting.

One thing that’s...really good is...that we also get together as families (of gifted children)...that is so important. David is then able to catch up with other children...just to get to know other families, and the children playing. I know David really enjoyed it, because they feel like its okay to be different.

I’m happy with what I know for what we need now, doesn’t mean I wouldn’t like to know more for in the future.

I would rate myself as ‘somewhat informed’ to ‘well informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children...Somewhat informed – because...when you find that your child is gifted...I looked and talked with a lot of people, and I looked...on the internet...I looked into books as well. I have attended an information evening, enrolled in a parenting course (not specifically for gifted children), had discussions with teachers or professionals in the field of gifted education, read books and journals. We never officially confirmed that David was gifted – as it was clear to us. Probably when he was three one that stands out is beginning to read. At 4 years of age I gave David the Metr. Prep Entry test – he got 99%...he literally got one question wrong. It was actually a very constant flow. It wasn’t just one or the other. I could see such a rapid improvement in so many areas. I remember by the time he was two and a half he had actually done everything that normally four year olds were doing.

You need to trust your child. We are our children’s greatest advocate. If we know where they are standing, you will always come across people who do not understand, and others who will understand. Just trust the gut feeling...and overcome the fears of whether we’ve made too much out of it. I think very seldom we make too much out of it. If we make too much out of it then we know that it’s something that we need. Just embrace them how they are. Don’t worry too much about how far ahead they are to start of with. If they would struggle, we would cater for it, and so we need to cater for it when they are ahead.

If you see your child in a situation which really doesn’t cater for them, don’t try to fit the system...the system’s there to fit your child. If your child doesn’t fit the system, then I think it’s our responsibility as parents to do something about it, and not shy away, just because maybe another professional can’t see it. I think when you start off first, just somebody you can talk to, and they
totally understand where you come from. And you don’t feel you have to hold back. For somebody who doesn’t have any teaching background, probably giving them practical ideas for what they can do with their kids.

I’m thinking to myself, it would be very easy for someone to set up…a Gifted Children’s Advisory Service or Committee. But I think it would have to come from the viewpoint ‘well we…you don’t know everything.’ I think it would almost have to be somebody who is a parent, that has taken their children all the way through post-grad, post-university, that can then say ‘well look, this has been our experience’ and give them a range of options. What if something out there was actually set up?…it would need to be set up from the viewpoint – ‘well, no we don’t know everything, but our experience has been because too many things that were set up were ‘well, we’ve got it all together’ and ‘we did it like this’ and ‘you’ll do it like that’.

You can’t go with pre-conceived ideas. (A) comment that we’ve heard recently is ‘but every child’s a gifted child.’ Well, I think that you’ve got to look at what you mean by the word ‘gifted.’ If there was going to be something out there that you could work with or have answers. (Therefore) educating the education system I think is important as well.

It would be great to have high school teachers out there who are happy to talk with Mums like me, who home school their kids…and say, ‘Okay, these are the areas, this is the format they need to cover, you need to prepare them for.’ To have somebody who could say, ‘Look at this and this’ and ‘this is what you need to make sure’…and that there’s not gaps here and there,…because now it’s not just knowledge gap, it’s presentation…it’s all the different skills. And…and sometimes I just hope that we’re doing it alright.

It would be good to be able to speak to other professionals…and (not be taken) for a fool…because you’re home schooling. Some have real problems with that…but there is others who don’t. And it would be just great…to get (their input) and…not just feeling that in the end it’s the best thing for you to put your child into school. But actually realizing there’s many different ways. Because for some school it’s the right thing, for some it’s not…I would never keep anybody from sending their child to school, because not every Mum can do what we’re doing…because there’s a lot of sacrifices you bring in. You need to know it’s the right thing to do

Also…work experience. (Even though) they’re younger…it would be great to do work experience. But can they actually do work experience at such a young age? Who would take them? I think that’s probably for all gifted children. Do they have to wait until a certain grade to do work experience? Or can there be exemptions, where it doesn’t go by age? Like there may be thirty five people mentored in the area that they’re interested in. We looked at one school…and she works with gifted children, but its three hundred dollars for however long. I mean you only earn so much, and you have more than one child. You try to do as much as you can, but…but you need to…look…at your finances and know what is practical and what is not…what things are there…for your child…

One thing that is needed is an opportunity…where fathers of gifted children can actually get together and share resources and gain understanding and ask questions. At the moment I don’t think there’s that out there. I think there’s the opportunity for Mums with gifted children to get out there. We mentioned that before where we said maybe somebody who has gone through the whole thing, post-grad or whatever, and understood where particularly Mums are coming from with gifted children. But to balance that out…the fathers need to be on the same level with all the other males involved with gifted children, just have some sort of time where they say, ‘Ah, so that’s what you think?’ It’s a great plan. Why just have support groups for Mums? Why not get the Dads together? I think we will want to be careful that if we say that we’re going to put something on…there needs to be some people…who are the enablers who actually cause there to be a linking together.
David’s Family Support Person
Occupation: Kindergarten Teacher
Qualifications: Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Honours)
Years of Teaching: 5 – 10 years

David had the ability and interest to complete complex puzzles from an early age. He would use...advanced vocabulary, ask many questions at an advanced level (and had a) remarkable ability to retain and recall factual information. David had an apparent deeper knowledge than other children of the same age. He was reading confidently at age three and had an intense curiosity. He became totally absorbed in one kind of knowledge – sports statistics. David has an apparent preference for conversing with adults as opposed to his peers.

I would rate myself as ‘very poorly informed’ on planning and programming for gifted children. David is currently being home-schooled. During the one term where he did attend school he was subjected to bullying by his peers and treated ‘unprofessionally’ by one staff member. This experience caused him anxiety and led him to leaving the school.

I would consider myself to be ‘very poorly informed’ on support services for gifted children. I have been a family support person to David’s family for between 5-10 years, as David is my God child, but I have not been involved on a professional level with the family. I have engaged in professional development, had discussions with other teachers and read books or journals based on the experiences and needs of gifted children…the prime reason for my development activities has been to assist me in my teaching capacity.

I would consider myself as ‘somewhat informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children. I played a minor part in the initial identification experience with David through my discussions with the parents regarding mutual observations. The areas of development and learning demonstrated by David that I value as important indicators of giftedness include his vocabulary, reading ability, high functioning cognitive ability, curiosity, quick and accurate memory recall, ability to grasp complex concepts, and preference for adult interaction and dialogue.

Characteristics that David presented with that suggested he may be gifted were an apparent disparity between his social and emotional development in comparison with his cognitive abilities. Also, I observed him as being very self-confident, specifically regarding cognitive activities. He had apparent preference for conversing with adults as opposed to his peers and his demonstration of advanced skills when completing complex puzzles, use of vocabulary, questioning, ability to retain and recall factual information, deeper knowledge, reading at 3, intense curiosity in sports statistics. David’s parents sought professional advice and attended information sessions during the identification experience.

Case Study: David’s Teacher
Qualifications: Masters of Education
Years of Teaching: 11 -20 years

David’s…a beautiful boy. He’s very easily excited about learning…(he) got excited about everything. David’s…cheerful, greets everyone every morning, and…it was always done in such a loving way. He was quite a physical touch boy…he’d want the hug but in his own little way do nice sorts of things. David loved people. He loves life, and loves everything about it.

David wasn’t always great at the physical education, the coordination side of it, but he gave it a go. He was comfortable with who he was. If kids were laughing at him, it didn’t bother him. I loved that about him. He’s so happy in his own skin. David’s a very obedient little boy.

David tended to struggle socially because he thought quite differently to others. He was a little immature in his social skills…I don’t know if that’s because of his giftedness or because of his home
schooling…although his mother is brilliant at keeping up socially with others. David would laugh at things that my students wouldn’t laugh at…that you think ‘hang on, that would be a very young student sort of laughing at that.’ So…I spent a lot of time at the beginning saying to the class ‘…it’s okay, David’s allowed to laugh at those things’…I had grade sixes sniggering at the fact that he’s laughed at something quite silly…and saying things like ‘Mummy’…which for the grade sixes wasn’t (cool).

David loved being with a boy who is a home schooler, he’s actually gone back to home schooling. I think any student that just loved learning and loved…bouncing ideas back and forth with him. Anything to do with general knowledge, he sort of was drawn to those students. I think…students that…weren’t streetwise. At school…I think he most enjoyed (being) social…just learning to be with children of similar age…I think because of the home schooling more than the giftedness.

David was home schooled, so my experience of home schooled students in other years have been that they’re ahead…there are some that are not, but most have been ahead. So I started to think that (from the beginning)...he’s going to be a little ahead. Plus he was under the age for grade five, so it sort of clicked in there. And then his mum had said that he’d been assessed, but that was when David had arrived, that wasn’t prior to him coming. David’s standard of work was extremely higher than the other student. His general knowledge ability was far beyond his years. Knowing that he was gifted beforehand…helped so much…straightway I could get on to the fact that he needed to be doing higher order thinking…I was really into that Inquiry Learning. So, knowing that David really needed all that…I wasn’t restricting him with just my minor knowledge of things…I was able to give him the opportunities to run and find out more than what I could even provide for him.

I did teach thinking skills in my class such as graphic organisers (and) Six Thinking Hats. I also provided opportunities for David and other gifted or highly able students to be involved in higher order thinking activities. I also used Bloom’s Taxonomy, Multiple Intelligences cards in my literacy groups to provide for extension. David was given the opportunity to attend year 8 and year 9 Science classes. He was also given Year 7 Maths to work on. David was not involved in any stage of the programming and planning of his educational experiences

The most challenging part of school for David was…the Arts…and the Technology side for the hands-on. It was just trying to work out ‘where do I start?’ It took him forever to work that out. And then he couldn’t problem solve. ‘Now what am I going to need to put these pieces of paper together to make a square?’ He just had no idea… I think just lack of experience really. His mother did say that that was one area she hadn’t touched on at all. School sort of provides all that…from Prep onwards, we’re forever…making things out of next to nothing. I found…anything ‘hands on’ he couldn’t get his head around. If it was technology to build something, he couldn’t design it, he couldn’t put it together, he just had no idea. The Kinaesthetic type learning wasn’t his strength. But…everything else was incredible. I think too it was just learning what school was all about, because he’d be calling out and not putting hands up and things like that, which isn’t immaturity, it’s a lack of just knowing what the school’s rules are.

I sort of catered as best as I could. I know I didn’t cater very well for him. With my literacy groups I used the Multiple Intelligence Cards. I did…say to David…‘try and use the Kinaesthetic (card).’ I had to try and develop that, but it was hard for him….he did attempt it. I also gave time for students to…go on to their own project…of their own interest, and we used the whole Inquiry Learning through that as well. In the Maths area…I got him working in a group of boys…doing year seven Maths…they didn’t even go ahead with the five-six at all…he seemed to enjoy that, and to enjoy interaction with the others as well…in the classroom. So whenever we had Maths, they knew that was called the Year seven Maths book. David was going up to Endeavour Hills to do Year eight classes in Science, and…it was…mainly Science…although that meant he had to be off campus – so that didn’t help the social side of things.

I would rate myself as ‘poorly informed to somewhat informed’ on planning and programming for gifted children. When I did my Bachelor of Education I did a unit on ‘gifted education’ and we
looked at ways of identifying, and then ways of actually handling them through Bloom’s Taxonomy…I’ve done a fair bit of work on ‘multiple intelligence cards.’ I’m really into the Thinking Curriculum…I’m still learning.

The areas of development and learning I believe are most important when planning and programming for the educational experiences of David were to build on his knowledge, keeping his interest level high and to develop his ability to think laterally as he struggles in this area. I just love kids that are excited about every little thing that they learn. With twenty five other kids in the class…I got to a point where I couldn’t extend any more…and that was part of the reason why his mother ended up home schooling him again. The social aspect was great for David…in school but academically… this curriculum it’s stifling…for those sorts of students.

I think our school is really great, and it’s got great potential, but…we’re not resourced enough as a school. It would be so good…to have a teacher…for…the gifted. That’s my struggle with gifted students because I have a real heart for them, and I really hope that this is one of the areas that we can go down. I’ve got a boy with learning difficulties, and I’m sure they come across similar problems even though they can do the work that my son can’t…there’d be issues with that because they’re not fitting into just the normal curriculum, which would be really difficult.

The only thing I can think of is – Should have David been put in Year eight, even though he was only ten? I don’t know…because he was doing really well with that. Here I am saying the social side of things, but that probably wasn’t first in his mind. Personally I think…school must have been stifling for him…he probably would have loved that freedom of just exploring and finding out…what he wanted to find out about.

I would rate myself as ‘poorly informed’ on support service for gifted children – although I am a chief judge in Tournament of the Minds. Support services for the gifted have played no role in the provision of educational experiences for David. I don’t know of any, which is a shame.

I would rate myself as ‘somewhat informed’ on the characteristics and identification of gifted children. I have had discussions with other teachers about the needs and experiences of David. David’s mother had filled me in on his giftedness prior to coming. (But) my school does not have a policy or programme related to the identification of gifted children.

I’d like to see a class of gifted students…I’d like to see them in a class, with a teacher that’s vibrant, that loves learning and…runs with their whim as well. You know, ‘yeah, well let’s go. You’re interested in that, okay where can we go to extend this further?’ Even having…an aide to take those students to do further research…while I’ve still got the rest of the class…another way of managing it. I think…running enrichment programs, where they’re out for one hour a week…does nothing. It has to be a daily thing. It would be a benefit for teachers…to give lots of PD on it. Lots of information and…practical application, because…we can have it up here but…to actually apply it, would be fantastic.

(I think parents could) get an Educational Psychologist to assess and look through. Find schools that really catered for it…find a school where they really run with…it. I think to find a Support Group…where they could come together and talk through the issues…even if the school had similar parents and started their own support group……to get David (or other gifted children) into some sort of club (related to their interests). Find ways of ‘out of school extension’…so if the school’s not providing all that well, then they can have outside enrichment.
CHAPTER 5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction to analysis and discussion in relation to the aims of the study

By way of analysis I have graphed the voices of all participants within the five case studies under nine common themes that have emerged in the data. These include:

1. Behavioural characteristics of case study children
2. Personal interests of case study children
3. Opinions expressed regarding the case study children
4. Social experiences of case study children
5. Educational experiences of case study children
6. Teacher attitudes and feelings towards the case study children
7. Available support services for gifted children
8. Identification experiences with the case study children as gifted
9. Educational and personal advice in relation to identification, education and support services for gifted children

The nine common themes have been collated into nine separate tables for analysis. Participant’s responses and descriptions about the five case study children in relation to each theme were provided through a wide range of data collection methods including pre-interview questionnaires, checklists, and interviews, records of anecdotal observations, developmental milestones, assessment and work samples.

Following the collation of data into the nine tables I have discussed the commonalities and differences of each case study child in relation to the nine common themes and in relation to the research literature. Due to the richness of the data not every example could be discussed, however, as I have identified the voice from the stories the examples, in the stories can be easily identified. Therefore, the analysis and discussion of the data have been integrated so as to demonstrate the links to previous research, and highlight the contributions from this current research to the knowledge of gifted children’s lived experiences.
Table 1. Participants’ identification of behavioural characteristics of each of the case study children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioural Characteristics</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Harry</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>David</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
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<td>P</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Language &amp; Speaking skills &amp; abilities</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Problem solving &amp; ability</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme empathy &amp; sensitivity/Strong sense of justice</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working beyond peers in many areas of development</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long attention span/Excellent task commitment</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Numeracy skills &amp; abilities</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expresses frustration when performing tasks/Perfectionism</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>(school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level questioning/deep thinker</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm, loving, affectionate to others</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick learner</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>High intellectual energy</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to carry out complex instructions/understand abstract concepts</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazing memory – quick accurate recall &amp; in great detail</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced sense of humour</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High physical energy</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extroverted/passionate &amp; excited about learning</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibits unevenness in development</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>(gross motor)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme behaviours expressed when stressed</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>(fine motor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of environment immediately notices changes, heightened awareness of the world</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>(school)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:
- L: Lucy
- H: Harry
- K: Kate
- M: Matthew
- D: David
- P: Parent
- F: Family Support Person
- 4: Four year old kindergarten teacher
- S: Specialist
- T: Teacher
- T/F: Teacher and Family Support Person

* Denotes a response
5.1.1 Behavioural Characteristics of the case study children

The two main behavioural characteristics presented most significantly by all children in the study were ‘advanced language and speaking skills’, and ‘advanced literacy skills’, including ‘evidence of early reading’ in four out of five of the children. The research literature contains numerous references to unusually mature and sophisticated language of gifted children (Hollingworth, 1926; Hollingworth, 1942; Van Tassel-Baska, 1983; Gross, 1986; Gross, 1993; Porter, 1999; Hodge & Kemp, 2000), and recognises early reading as one of the most powerful indicators of extreme giftedness particularly when this skill is accompanied by advanced language and literacy abilities (Gross, 1999b). As this study has recognised the value of the children’s voices when contributing to the data, it was of particular interest to note that four out of five of the case study children identified themselves as having advanced literacy skills. However, there were some differences in the ages and levels at which early readers began reading, with David and Kate ‘presenting skills and abilities well beyond their same age peers’ significantly earlier than other case study children.

‘I’m really good at writing…’ (Lucy)

‘(At school, I’ll be really good at) Writing…’ (Harry)

‘I’m really good at writing, and I can read hard words, and I can spell hard words. And I can even spell ‘ROUGH’…’ (Kate)

‘Things I do really well include academics, reading, speed-reading - I know that I can speed read, because sometimes Mummy even wonders if I’ve read a book completely. This is how fast I read it. And once I read a book which was like in the sticks, three times in an hour…that’s my speed reading.’ (David)

Furthermore, as supported by this study, research recognises that gifted children can be as different to each other as they are to the average ability child (Department of Education and Training, 2005) and that intellectually gifted children demonstrate significant developmental differences in their abilities and experiences (Hollingworth, 1926; Gross, 1998).

‘At 3 years of age, David read his first book, “Green Eggs and Ham” and within 6 months was reading at a very confident level…within weeks he was at the grade two and then the grade four level. I have records of…when he was six, he was like in the ten year olds spelling age. A year ago, he was in a grade nine spelling age.’

(David’s parent)

‘Kate has talked well beyond her years from age 2. Kate has had a very extensive vocabulary from a very early age. Kate began reading well at age 4. We feel that she may have been reading for some time before that but hid it until she felt she could do it well.’

(Kate’s parent)
The children were also described as ‘working beyond their peers in many areas of development’. In particular, examples of advanced development for Lucy, Kate, Matthew and David were consistently recognised as obvious or clear indicators of giftedness.

‘Lucy is working beyond her peers in everything she does – very obvious comparison. She understands things well enough to teach others. For example, she tells children at the beach about jellyfish if she sees them playing near them or touching them. When she asks children facts about them (she) can’t believe they don’t know…their (own) birthdates, addresses and parent’s ages’.

(Lucy’s parent)

‘Matthew was very different. When Matthew was born, the nurse handed him to me and said ‘I think he’s already three months old’ because he was big, he was ten and a half pounds. But when you pick a new born baby up – he just stood up, he stood up on my legs, and he held his neck up, and he was ready. I reckon when he was about a week old he laughed, and they reckon kids that age don’t laugh but it was no doubt at the time that he laughed. All the way through he’s just always assumed that he could do what his big brother does…and he could’.

(Matthew’s parent)

In contrast, responses about Harry did not specifically state that he demonstrated advanced development in several domains of learning in comparison to his peers, however, descriptions did suggest that his skills and abilities were above average to his same age peers. The research literature recognises that it is difficult to assess giftedness, particularly in young children, as professional ability to identify abilities in certain areas such as high mathematical or creative talent may be less proficient in comparison to areas such as high verbal talent (Porter, 1999). Therefore, it is possible that, Harry’s skills and abilities are more difficult to identify in comparison to the other four children in the case study due to the nature of his individual abilities.

‘Harry is beginning to ‘read’ words and understanding phonetics. He has advanced numeracy skills and interest in counting beyond 100. Harry has the ability to speak about his knowledge on a wide range of topics. He will ask how or why something works as it does (and) understands very quickly. Harry has extremely well-developed visual-spatial intelligence…visual-spatial relationships, particularly design, construction and block building. He is very creative visually…’

(Harry’s four year old kindergarten teacher)

However, Harry’s example also highlighted several characteristics of giftedness which were evident in all children within the case study. These included ‘advanced numeracy skills and abilities’, ‘ability to carry out complex instructions or understand abstract concepts’ (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998), ‘high level questioning and deep thinking’ (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998), and ‘the ability to learn quickly’ (Hodge, 2006). All of these skills and abilities have also been recognised in the research literature as consistent indicators of giftedness.
'Lucy has highly developed literacy and mathematical skills. She makes sure she knows ages and birthdates of all members of our playgroup. There are 4 mums, 4 children her age and 4 younger siblings. She memorises phone numbers and asks to dial them when ringing home, my husband, my mobile or grandma’s. She can count beyond 100, has a good knowledge of order of numbers, for example, 20 is less than 29 but more than 15, can read 2 digit numbers, has excellent recognition of number of objects without having to point to count, can add and subtract numbers well, and works out, then confirms with me, how old her sister will be when she is certain ages.

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘Kate continually asks questions and is quite often not satisfied with the answers we give her and pushes for more detail or information.’

(Kate’s Parents)

‘Always from a very young age…you would explain something to him, it would make sense, he would take it on board…David…grasped new concepts and moved on to more advanced abilities. At 2½ he had kind of ‘done’ everything kindergarten children would do during that year.’

(David’s Parent)

“Its things like crawling…Matthew just went…he took one step back…and said, ‘That’s not working’ and did it again, until about two weeks and he could do it. He didn’t have to ‘trial’, he didn’t have to wait for that approval. He doesn’t have to revise things. He doesn’t have to test it. Matthew walked at 12 months.”

(Matthew’s Parents)

Behavioural characteristics associated with ‘extreme empathy’, ‘sensitivity’ and ‘a strong sense of justice’ was significantly common amongst all five children. These characteristics have been labelled in the research literature as ‘Dabrowski’s intellectual over-excitabilities’ and are described as behaviours that are experienced at high levels of intensity (Piechowski, 1999). The ‘voices’ of the case study children were essential when gathering a picture of these behavioural characteristics, and particularly with the primary age children who were more able to demonstrate these qualities when verbally expressing details of their experiences in their own stories.

‘Once I caught a moth, and saved him from a bird and put him in a tree, and the bird couldn’t fly, and the bird flew straight past him, the moth, and the moth was just staring at the bird, and the bird flew straight past him. And the bird was looking for him to eat him, and the bird flew away, real far away from my house, and luckily he lost my house. I scare the cat away when he was going to step on a bug. I put the bug in the garden, then I put the cat back where he was going to step on the bug. I put the bug in the garden. And I made a beautiful grave for my little bug outside. And his name is Chrissy, because he’s a beetle. And it was a boy. Any animals, even wild animals are safe, I try and keep them safe. When my Max is going to run after a bird, I just go ‘stop, you’re not chasing after that bird, you’re going to scare it’ …’

(Kate)
‘I like lonely people because they don’t have any friends and they don’t have much people to play with.’

(Matthew)

However, all children, including the preschoolers, were described by others as ‘highly sensitive’ and ‘concerned about the welfare of others’.

‘Harry is very aware of other people. He is very, very aware of other people and their feelings and if they’re upset, and why they might be upset, and how he can help them. Outside there was an occasion that someone had been left out of a game, and he was quite concerned about that, and came and said, ‘Someone’s saying that this person can’t play in the game.’ That upset him, he was quite distressed by that and wanted some help to be able to solve that situation for his friend.’

(Harry’s four year old teacher)

‘Lucy’s got several very, very close girlfriends, and they are really, really special friends to her…she’s got a strong empathy towards them. She cares about them, like other people would care about a family member. For example, a little friend just recently, her grandmother died, and Lucy took it on board so much, like she was just devastated for her friend, and went and picked flowers, and lent her dog, which was just about the best thing you could ever do to anyone, and then explained to me. She told me she had Russell back, and that she had lent it to Ruby, because Ruby had this very sad thing – and you would understand how sad this is Grandma, because her Grandma had died. So she’s a very good friend to her friends.’

(Lucy’s Family Support Person)

Other characteristics described by participants that were common for all children in the study and recognised by the research literature included ‘a long attention span with excellent task commitment’ (Hodge, 2006), ‘expression of frustration when performing tasks with a tendency to exhibit negative traits of perfectionism’ (Piechowski, 1997; Porter, 1999; White, 2007), ‘high intellectual energy’ (Schetky, 1981; Silverman, 1993) and ‘an advanced sense of humour’ (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998).

The research literature recognises these traits as a mixture of both consistent and possible indicators of giftedness.

‘Kate was receptive to information and ideas from a very early age. She has a great memory for fine detail regarding topics of interest and the ability at 3 years of age to memorise a wide range of scientific names of dinosaurs and identify each individual by its distinguishing characteristics. Kate is continually making unusual projects from the most unlikely materials. She sees most things as ‘treasures’ and are always of some use to her. Kate is very excitable, like she gets very passionate and excited about things.’

(Kate’s Parents)

‘Lucy gets frustrated sometimes with things – she’ll be writing and all of a sudden she’ll go ‘Arrrrrrrr’ and scribble it and screw it up. Then I’d say, ‘You’ve done enough.’ It’s not that she hasn’t enjoyed it. Lucy was writing Christmas cards at a hundred miles and hour, and (I was) just letting her do it. ‘You know you can have the real Christmas cards, you don’t have
to have...crappy old junk things. She had the special gold stickers that you can put on the back of your envelope and I let her do the stamps, and she just loves all that real stuff.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘I think he is a perfectionist in regards to some things because if he can’t get something the way he likes it he really gets upset or mad. For example, when he is lying down watching TV he will sometimes have a pillow and blanket and he likes the blanket to be smoothed down in a certain way. He likes things the way he likes things...you can’t go to bed, you’ve got to read him a book, and you’ve got to do this and this. You’ve got to do it like that. If I take him to bed now, no matter what the time of night it is, I always read him a story, because...he’ll just go off for not having it. So it’s easier to read just a little story.’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘Lucy is one hundred percent on the go, from the second she wakes up in the morning until last thing at night. So much so that she doesn’t go to sleep...last night it was 10 o’clock. She cannot go to sleep...She will be working out mathematical equations. ‘Now when I’m eighty four, does that mean (my sister) will be eighty one?’ ‘Will she be eighty one? How old would you be?’...And then she’ll, you know, yell out to me ‘Mum, will you be...?’ And I’m like ‘it’s quiet time, you know, time to go to sleep. We’ll talk about it tomorrow’...She cannot wind down...books aren’t really wind down for her...because they are stimulation.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘Looking back I remember how David at under 6 months of age (approximately 3-4 months as I remember) showed an incredible sense of grasp of a situation and humour. At mother’s group, two other babies tried to get hold of his dummy, David held on to the ring and laughed several times as the other babies could not succeed.’

(David’s Parent)

All five gifted children have been described as ‘warm, loving and affectionate to others’. In particular, as supported by Porter (1999), they appear to form strong connections with a select group of friends or family members and demonstrate a commitment and loyalty to the people they have formed these attachments.

‘Harry’s sensitive. He’s quite affectionate, particularly with his friends, like lots of hand-holding with his friends and hugging and wanting to be close to them, sitting beside them on the mat. Harry was really affectionate. He was a lovely sweet little boy who was openly affectionate to adults and to children.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

Another consistent behavioural characteristic recognised in all gifted children within the study, and evident in the research literature, included the ‘quick accurate recall of information in great detail’ or ‘an amazing memory’ (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998; Hodge, 2006).

Matthew had whole conversations with himself and others by 2½. He could recite all the Collingwood football player’s names and their corresponding numbers at age 2 years. He could sing the Collingwood theme song at 2 years. Matthew would sing all the football theme songs basically at two. He watched others intently in early years. At 3-4 years, Matthew listened to my reading of the ‘Harry Potter’ series while we were travelling around
Europe. He had the ability to follow the story and remember pertinent details from one book to the other without picture cues. He learned to read from Gravestones in England in 2003-2004 at age 3½ - 4 years.

(Matthew’s Parents)

‘He would use…advanced vocabulary, ask many questions at an advanced level (and had a) remarkable ability to retain and recall factual information. David had an apparent deeper knowledge than other children of the same age.’

(David’s Family Support Person)

Several other behavioural characteristics were common between several of the children in the study but not described within every case study. For example, the behavioural characteristic of ‘high physical energy’ was described for all children except for the eldest primary age child, David. This characteristic has been recognised in the research literature as a form of ‘over-excitability’ (Piechowski, 1997), however, research also states that gifted children who have high energy levels usually demonstrate this intensity both physically and psychologically (Schetky, 1991). The age and stage of David could explain why this was not a characteristic that participants would recognise, although it could also be a reflection of his ‘gentle’ nature as described by his parents. The other four case study children, on the other hand, were described as having ‘extremely high levels of physical energy’ – which may also be expected due to the ages and stages of these individuals.

‘I admire her energy, her high level of energy. I admire her, the way she enjoys life, she enjoys everything. She can be tiring at times, but as long as she’s occupied, she’s absolutely fine. I’ve never found her to be a problem in terms of being hyperactive or anything. She is very active and very energetic. She’s very physically active, so she enjoys the running around things…as well as the more quiet or passive play.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

Of the five case studies Lucy, Kate, Matthew and David were described as being ‘extremely passionate and excited about learning’. This trait has also been supported by the research literature which states that gifted children consistently demonstrate high levels of perseverance or motivation (Hodge, 2006).

‘Lucy has a strong interest in everything around her and would ask questions, where she didn’t know about something. Her perception of the world around her, and her interest in books, as an infant for age one, was very, very high.’

(Lucy’s Family Support Person)

Of the five case studies Lucy, Harry, Matthew and David were described as ‘exhibiting unevenness in development’. This characteristic, also known as ‘asynchrony’ is a common characteristic in all gifted children regardless of gender, culture or socio-economic class (Silverman, 1994; Morelock and Morrison, 1996; Winner, 1996; Morelock & Morrison, 1999). The research literature recognises this
factor as a ‘masking’ characteristic when identifying gifted children and is demonstrated by each of the case study children in different areas of development. For example, Lucy is described as having delayed gross motor skill development in comparison to her same age peers, but significantly advanced development in all other areas of development. Harry, Kate and Lucy are described as having difficulty with separation from a parent in a new environment or when there are changes in the environment, therefore, demonstrating an unevenness in their cognitive abilities and emotional reactions to change. It should also be noted that as asynchrony is larger than just one behaviour, it is possible that the clinging and dependency described in the case studies of these three children may have reflected their levels of independence more than an uneven development in their emotional and cognitive abilities. Matthew was also described as having some unevenness in fine motor skills abilities when writing or drawing which held him back from completing tasks at a level he was cognitively capable of. David was also described as demonstrating unevenness in his social and emotional development in comparison to his cognitive abilities. These masking behaviours may have a significant influence on the likelihood of some of the case study children being identified as gifted in comparison to others who present with more obvious behaviours associated with giftedness.

‘Lucy wasn’t particularly ahead of other children physically; in fact, she was probably a little bit slower to walk than some children, I think it was at fourteen months that she was walking.’

(Lucy’s Family Support Person)

‘Harry is an extremely sensitive individual in regards to changes in his environment. He is quite sensitive to separation from parent and adapting to new situations. Probably the most significant thing would have been that he finds change really difficult. He’s quite clingy to Mum. He can get quite upset when he has to be separated from her, particularly in a new environment.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘…there were also elements of his development that I could see were very Prep still, in terms of motor control. He was great with footy and things like that, so I’d no concerns, but fine motor control was very laborious. His writing was very difficult to understand. Colouring and things like that, while they’re not everything, there were still many things, cutting and colouring and pasting and things that he didn’t have control over.’

(Matthew’s Teacher/Family Support Person)

‘Characteristics that David presented with that suggested he may be gifted were an apparent disparity between his social and emotional development in comparison with his cognitive abilities.’

(David’s Family Support Person)

The research literature discusses recognises that many gifted children demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to their surroundings (Delisle, 1998). This problematic behaviour can be created in
environments where gifted children feel extreme personal and external pressures to achieve when unrealistic or unclear expectations are imposed on them from others or by themselves. Of the five case studies Lucy, Harry, Kate and David were described as presenting with ‘extreme behaviours when stressed’. Lucy and Harry’s parents describe each preschooler as demonstrating ‘extremes’ in behaviour which appear to contradict their abilities and responses to other situations or experiences. The preschoolers’ experiences appear to reflect findings from research that suggest they may feel stress from feelings about being different and self doubt. These extreme behaviours can create greater stress when also witnessed by others who can be judgemental, shocked or surprised by the differences each child presents.

‘I guess the main way I would describe her is extreme She can be very anxious, and she can be very, very confident, and there’s not much in-between ground. If she’s in any environment where she’s feeling confident…you’ll see her potential…whereas if she’s in a situation where she’s feeling anxious…she usually decides that’s how she’s going to be for this situation, and stays like that…we went to a festival…a few weeks ago, and there was loud music, and Lucy hung on to Mum…(even though) it was kids music. She was totally freaked out, and she was (saying), ‘No, I’m going, I’m going now, I’m going.’ You just never expect a reaction like that…she really hated that. It seemed really extreme.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘Harry’s a real Jekyll and Hyde. It’s like he’s two kids in this one body, or many more. He does seem to worry when other people are doing the wrong thing (this doesn’t always apply to himself). Certainly in recent times…he’s…becoming more sensitive…but he offsets that by the anger that he has. In one breath he’ll tell you that he loves you, and the next minute…he’s been naughty when we’d been out, and when we’d come home…he played nice. He said “I love you Mummy, and I’m sorry that I was naughty.” The next minute I’m trying to get a jumper on him, and just, that’s it! He’s temperamental…he’s like an elastic band, sometimes its ready to snap and it just snaps all the time.’

(Harry’s Parent)

The two primary age children, Kate and David, were also described as presenting with ‘extreme behaviours when stressed’. Kate’s extreme behaviours were described by her family support person who recognised extreme emotional reactions around the time one of her parents was suffering from illness.

‘I’ve heard a lot of comments that would indicate to me that most people wouldn’t understand where she is, and why she behaves in the way that she behaves. A lot of the adults that knew her in her younger days, but particularly in the time when her mother was sick, would have thought that she had some emotional problems.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

David’s extreme behaviours were witnessed by his parent when he was in the final weeks of his school experience, however, these behaviours were to cease after some time during his return to home-school. The research literature suggests that David’s experiences may have been related to
extreme personal pressures to excel as well as intellectual frustration and boredom (Delisle, 1998). David’s parents also describe several signs and symptoms of ‘burnout’ which has also been recognised as a common incidence in educational environments which do not recognise and implement developmentally appropriate practice for gifted children.

‘At one point he came to melt down, and he literally was just crying and crying...he was doing a test. And I said ‘you don’t have to do the test.’ And he says ‘I want to do the test, but I’m not really sure I will be good enough.’ And we said to him ‘it doesn’t matter how good you are, even just that you want to do it.’ I said to him ‘I wouldn’t like to do it, if I would be in your place.’ And we said ‘you can say no, it’s totally fine.’ But he started to put himself under certain pressures. And from the moment on he had the melt down...and that’s how David is, he will cope very well, but if he gets pushed too far...I could see him emotionally he didn’t cope very well any more. The teachers wouldn’t pick it up...because they always said ‘oh he’s so friendly, he’s chatting with everybody, he will get along with everybody.’ And the teacher said ‘he will not have any problems whatever.’ But I could see it.’

(David’s Parent)

The research literature recognises that gifted children are consistently described as keen observers who regularly notice subtle changes or details within their environment (Porter, 2005; Hodge, 2006). Therefore, a common characteristic supported by research and shared between the youngest children in the case studies - Lucy, Harry, Kate and Matthew, was described as ‘an awareness of environment’ or ‘immediately notices changes’.

‘(At Lucy’s three year old) Kinder break up party...She had been insecure, like very upset because it was the end of Kinder. She was quietly saying to me, ‘Who’s going to be in my group next year? Is that girl going to be in my section?’... ‘They’re going to be in the other group, aren’t they?’ ‘Ah, no, that girl...oh she’s going to a new Kinder.’ ‘Ah, this one’s going to be in my group.’... ‘I don’t know her, and she’s with her Mum, and not sure whether I would touch her or not.’ So I think it was just probably a culmination of all those things actually. I’m trying to suss it out, and I’m feeling anxious, and I know this isn’t just a party where I think a lot of kids just went in and ran around, without thinking of those things.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

A wide range of behavioural characteristics were recorded by the participants when describing each of the children in the study. Several characteristics, as already described, were shared between all or most of the five children; however, there were also unique combinations of characteristics that presented a picture of each child as significantly different from each other.

When comparing the behavioural characteristics of the preschooler participants, it was evident that Lucy and Harry shared the characteristics of ‘independence’, ‘self confidence’, ‘ability to use imaginative methods to complete tasks’, ‘typical motor development’, ‘highly creative with materials’, ‘separation anxiety at a later stage of three year old kindergarten’, and ‘initial shyness in unfamiliar situations’. However, there were also qualities or characteristics that were uniquely different in the descriptions provided.
Lucy was described as ‘an alert and visually attentive infant’, ‘often self taught herself skills’, ‘demonstrated early motor development when working with puzzles’, ‘was able to converse at a basic level in Japanese’, and ‘was good at reading non-verbal cues’. All of these characteristics were shared with at least one other primary age child. However, some of Lucy’s behavioural characteristics were not included in descriptions of the other four case study children and included being ‘a contented infant but serious’, ‘demonstrating delayed motor skills when walking at fourteen months old’, ‘always changing my mind’, and ‘having difficulty when getting to sleep due to her active mind’.

‘She…will be working out mathematical equations. ‘Now when I’m eighty four, does that mean (my sister) will be eighty one?’ ‘Will she be eighty one? How old would you be?’…And then she’ll, you know, yell out to me ‘Mum, will you be…?’ And I’m like ‘it’s quiet time, you know, time to go to sleep. We’ll talk about it tomorrow.’’

(Lucy’s Parent)

In comparison, Harry was also described as ‘intense’, ‘extroverted’, ‘extremely well behaved’, ‘a placid baby’, ‘having well developed problem-solving strategies’, ‘collaborative with others’, ‘an excellent swimmer’, ‘honest and polite’. These behavioural characteristics were also evident in descriptions of at least one other primary age child. However, there were behavioural characteristics that were unique to Harry and these included ‘an extreme reliance on routine’, ‘impatience’, ‘headstrong’, ‘controlling in his home environment’, ‘quiet natured’, ‘advanced visual-spatial and construction skills’, and ‘a significant tendency towards introversion’. Some of Harry’s unique characteristics were contradictory to descriptions from other participants in his case study, and support his parent’s comments that he was often like two children in one body. This also appears to suggest that several of his behaviours were ‘masking’ his abilities, and in conjunction with his parent’s, family support person’s and three year old teacher’s perceived lack of knowledge about gifted traits, made it unlikely that he would be identified as gifted.

‘Harry’s very headstrong, and he’s got a lot of go in him. He’s not a bully, but he’ll certainly get in there and he whacks his brother more than his brother would ever hit him. He’s just got that…full-on personality. He doesn’t have patience at all. He asks for something, and if it’s not done right there…I can actually be in the shower, and he can be in there wanting something, and he will continue to scream until I come back in, not mattering where I actually am. It makes no difference to him…and you can get out and say, “I’m in the shower.” And he’ll say, “Well come and do this for me now.” Like instantly, he wants it. Harry’s has changed a lot.’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘I cannot think of anything that suggests to me that Harry is different from other children. He speaks as I would expect a 5 year old to speak. He is always well behaved and cooperative whenever I have looked after him.’

(Harry’s Family Support Person)
The primary age children also presented with a range of common, different and unique behavioural characteristics. However, there was only one characteristic identified which was common between the primary age children and this was that they were all ‘placid babies’. Several other behaviour descriptions were shared with either preschoolers or at least one other primary age child. As with the preschoolers, the primary age children also presented with unique behaviours that were not identified by any other participants in other children.

The youngest primary aged children, Kate and Matthew, shared several common behavioural characteristics. These behavioural characteristics were described as being ‘placid’ and also ‘visually attentive as an infant’, ‘ability to self-teach skills’, ‘intense’, and ‘using imaginative methods to complete tasks’. One younger primary age child, Matthew, also shared common behavioural characteristics with the older primary age child David. These behaviours included being ‘extremely well behaved’, ‘extremely self confident and independent’, ‘early fine motor development when working with puzzles’, ‘ease of foreign language acquisition’, ‘vibrant and happy’, ‘well developed problem solving strategies’, ‘likes to please others’, ‘flexible’, and ‘fun to be around’. However, as with the preschoolers, all of the primary age children also presented with unique traits to other children in the study.

Kate was described as ‘having separation anxiety in her three year old kindergarten year’ and also ‘being highly creative with materials’. Both of these characteristics had been described for the preschoolers. Other behavioural characteristics described by participants that were unique to Kate included ‘excellent fine motor skills’, ‘the tendency to hide her abilities’, ‘underachieving’, and ‘keeping treasures’. The research literature discusses the characteristic described as ‘the tendency to hide her abilities’, and has labelled this the ‘forced-choice dilemma’ whereby gifted children develop a tendency to mask their abilities so as to gain peer acceptance, meet teacher expectations, or avoid demands by others for perfection (Gross, 1989; Hodge, 2006). Kate’s ‘masking’ behaviours appear to have had a profound effect on her likeliness of being identified as gifted by teachers as they were often presented with contradictory examples of her abilities when observing work at school compared to reports from her parents at home.

The teacher said ‘oh she’s not even trying with her writing, she’s not writing properly and, you know, she’s not…’ So we bought a writing book the other day, because I kept thinking there must be a problem that she’s not just catching on with the writing. She’s done everything in the book like with perfect writing, but when she does it at school it’s just scrawl over the page, like she couldn’t care less…Then I find something with her school writing and it’s like Pre-school writing. And I just can’t understand why she’s writing like that at school.’

(Kate’s Parents)
Matthew was described as being ‘good at reading nonverbal cues’ (a trait shared with the youngest preschooler, Lucy), ‘being collaborative with others’, ‘an excellent swimmer’, and ‘honest’ (traits also recorded for the preschooler, Harry). However, Matthew also presented with several unique behavioural characteristics including ‘highly developed motor skills when playing sport’, known for ‘sticking to the rules’, ‘helping others’, ‘sensible’, ‘musical’, and ‘self-driven’.

‘Matthew has really good…rhythm and eye-hand coordination. He started playing cricket, and he’s just got a natural swing. The tennis coach said…he just has this really natural ability to the rhythm. Matthew learns by watching. If you put him with the best cricketer in the world he would copy them and do a terrific job. He mirrors what he sees. Matthew is actually a brilliant cricketer, he just has this really lovely flight, and he’s a great bat in softball too.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

The eldest primary age child, David, was described as being ‘polite’ (a trait recorded for the preschooler, Harry), however, he also presented several characteristics that were unique to the other children in the study. These behavioural characteristics included ‘being challenged by physical education at school’, ‘unique’, ‘easy going and direct able’, ‘making leaps intellectually’, ‘loyal’, ‘happy in his own skin’, and ‘has difficulty with hands-on activities’.

David’s been a very easy child to have always…an interesting combination…I just love him….he’s charming…he’s a treasure. He’s unique.

(David’s Parents)

Therefore, the current study continues to support the research literature which states that there are a wide range of behaviours and characteristics which may be presented by young gifted children but are not typical for all gifted children (Hollingworth, 1926; Hollingworth, 1942; Schetky, 1981; Van Tassel-Baska, 1983; Gross, 1986; Silverman, 1986; Gross, 1989; Gross, 1993; Silverman, 1993; Silverman, 1994; Morelock & Morrison, 1996; Winner, 1996; Delisle, 1998; Van Tassel-Baska, 1998; Gross, 1999b; Morelock & Morrison, 1999; Piechowski, 1999; Porter, 1999; Hodge & Kemp, 2000; Department of Education & Training, 2005; Porter, 2005; Hodge, 2006; White, 2007).

Furthermore, the current study recognises that the behaviours and characteristics of a group of gifted children can be as different to each other as they are to the average ability child (Hollingworth, 1926; Hollingworth, 1942; Gross, 1993; Gross, 2004; Department of Education and Training, 2005).

However, it is also evident from the current research that the five gifted children studied demonstrated a unique combination of behaviours and characteristics, many of which were shared with at least one other preschool or primary age child, and that individual ‘masking’ behaviours had a more profound effect on the identification of Harry and Kate as gifted than in comparison to Lucy Matthew and David.
Table 2. Participants' identification of the personal interests of each of the case study children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Interests</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Harry</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>David</th>
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<td>Complicated board/card games</td>
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<td>Unusual topics studied in great detail</td>
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<td>Sports</td>
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<td>Playing outside</td>
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<td>Interested in a lot of things</td>
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<td>Telling jokes</td>
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<td>Drawing</td>
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<td>Writing</td>
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<td>Making friends</td>
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<td>Imaginative play</td>
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<td>Public speaking/Drama performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Past in-depth in dinosaurs</td>
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<td>Tell stories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music/Singing</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**
- L: Lucy
- H: Harry
- K: Kate
- M: Matthew
- D: David
- P: Parent
- F: Family Support Person
- S: Specialist
- T: Teacher
- T/F: Teacher and Family Support Person

* Denotes a response
5.1.2 Personal Interests of case study children

The current study has supported research literature that states that gifted children consistently present with wide ranging interests and knowledge and demonstrate advanced skills through their interests in comparison to same age peers (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998; Porter, 1999; Hodge, 2006). In addition, as suggested in the research literature, a valuable contribution to an understanding of the child’s personal interests in this study has been provided through the inclusion of the ‘voice’ of the child (Gross, 1996; Frasier, as cited in Martin, 2003; Harrison, 2003; Renzulli, 2004; Soto & Swadener, 2005).

Each of the five case study children demonstrates a range of common and unique personal interests. The most common personal interests shared between each of the five participants included ‘playing complicated board or card games’, ‘using the computer’, ‘numeracy or counting’, and ‘family and friends’. In several instances, the children were able to elaborate on their interests in greater detail.

‘(If people want to know more about me they would need to ask…) if I have a computer? I play games. It’s called Club Penguin…Hmm…on the internet. You have to actually write your name in…hmmm…yeah, but Mum, you have to spell it on the computer first, and…then you have to press it. (Another question people would have to ask me would be…) umm…where do I get the notes? From my computer. Writing notes. They say some stuff about people…Matty, Ken, Henry, and my Mum. (I write emails) Yeah. (I write about…) umm…about Cup England.’

(Harry)

‘The most important things to me at this time in my life are my parents, because they look after me, so I won’t be lonely, my brother, because I do lots of things with him, to stay healthy, get lots of sleep, people at school, and my peers, they help me.’

(Matthew)

However, there were several other interests expressed by the children and the participants in their case study which suggest that interests are linked with ages and stages of development, as well as unique personality characteristics and behaviours.

‘Reading’ was a common interest expressed between four out of five of the children in the study and, as was examined in Table 1 under the theme of behaviour characteristics, demonstrated a range of differences in the levels of reading ability and interest. The research literature recognises that, although many gifted children may not be reading before they enter formal education, advanced reading abilities and interest is a powerful indicator of giftedness particularly when in conjunction with early development of speech and mobility (Gross, 1999b).

‘I like The Magic Faraway Tree. My favourite character is Beth…because she has a purple dress. Favourite colour!’

(Lucy)
‘Harry can’t keep quiet while reading – he is always too busy asking questions and trying to get to the next part in the story. He can retell stories. (He) seems to understand stories quite well.’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘David literally digests the books…it boggles the mind sometimes.’

(David’s Parent)

Responses from the preschooler’s case studies highlighted common interests in activities such as ‘playing outside’, ‘a wide range of topics’, ‘telling jokes’, ‘writing’, ‘imaginative play’, and ‘craft construction’. These interests were not exclusive to the preschoolers and were also described for at least one other primary age child. Furthermore, some interests, although not common between the preschoolers, were only shared with at least one primary age child. For example, Lucy was described as having ‘unusual interest in topics studied in great detail’ – such as her interest in ‘dog breeds’, as demonstrating an interest in ‘drawing’, and as developing ‘an early, in-depth interest in dinosaurs’. Therefore, as demonstrated by children in the current research, the research literature also recognises that gifted children can concentrate on topics of interest for extended periods of time and are motivated by topics that involve challenge and complexity (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998; Hodge, 2006).

However, Lucy also presented with some unique interests as described by the participants in her case study which included ‘painting’, ‘play dough’, ‘dancing’ and ‘fashion’ or ‘looking right’.

‘Lucy’s a very feminine child. She’s always been interested in clothes…she cares a lot…that she looks right. That’s important to her.’

(Lucy’s Family Support Person)

Harry also shared some common interests with at least one other primary age child in the study. These interests included ‘sports’, ‘making friends’, ‘public speaking’ or ‘presenting information to an audience’, ‘telling stories’, ‘music and singing’, and ‘construction sets’. However, participants in Harry’s case study also described some unique interests which included ‘black hot wheels cars’, ‘puzzles’ and ‘girls’.

‘Harry enjoys playing with age appropriate toys in a fairly typical way. He likes to play simple board games or… trucks, or cars he’s into, quite a lot of different things. He likes to do puzzles. He likes to do more complicated things…mainly those puzzles and board games’.

(Harry’s Family Support Person)

As discussed with the preschoolers, the primary age children demonstrated interests that were common, as well as unique to each child in the case study. Responses from participants for the two youngest primary age children, Kate and Matthew, also described common interests in ‘a wide range of topics’, ‘running’ and ‘making friends’. Other common interests described for Kate and David,
the eldest primary age child, included ‘unusual topics studied in detail’, ‘drawing’ and ‘wildlife or animals’. In addition, Matthew and David appeared to share other common interests in ‘sports’, ‘playing outside’ and ‘public speaking and drama performance’. Furthermore, a pattern observed with the older two children was that they appeared to be more self-aware of their differences, as well as their abilities, in comparison to the younger children. However, several unique interests were described for each child that demonstrated the range of difference and developmental stages of the case study children.

Unique interests described by Kate and her case study participants included ‘imaginary friends’, ‘cuddly toys’, ‘an early interest in pronunciation’ and ‘adult music’. These descriptions present a complex mix of personal interests and suggest that gifted children like Kate demonstrate interests that span several developmental stages from age typical to adult.

‘I always run off and play with my imaginary friends if I’m lonely. But I never bring them to school. They’re very friendly. Their names are “Cheeky” the yellow chicken, “Thunder” the black golden retriever, “Cassie” the cockatoo, and “Skip” the kangaroo. They are very cheeky and very funny.’

‘I enjoy going on my bed and cuddling my toys, reading lots of books and drawing. My favourite things are animals, so I always go to find my toy animals or my pet animals. I like to play with ants. I used to play with a moth who liked to be in my bedroom. He crawled up my sleeve, and he was in my clothes and I was giggling. And my Mum was saying ‘gross!’ And the moth was really, really, really, really happy. And then he flew off, and I put him out on the balcony because he started to get scared because my cat was coming in, and I put him out on the balcony, and the cat didn’t get him. And the moth flew away.’

(Kate)

Unique interests described by Matthew and the participants in his case study included ‘food’, ‘television ads with humour’, ‘school’, ‘the perceptual motor program (PMP)’ at school, and ‘challenges’.

‘Matthew loves school. He will tell you he loves school. He loves PE. That was the thing that he said he liked the most. He loves computer. (His teacher) does relaxation, he loves relaxation and (his teacher) does brain gym, he really likes that. Matthew loves PMP. He he just loves the activities…there’s lots of things like memory math…where he could be challenged to do six and seven and eight things in a row. Or because of his size some things are quite complex – he would find a forward roll pretty tricky…He’s good at it. This week we did monkey barring across the bars and then going through an obstacle course. He loves all that. Although last year I remember…he had blisters on his hand, because he was so desperate to get it right. Matthew…loves challenges - to be stretched intellectually, not to breaking point, but to be stretched and have things open-ended.

(Matthew’s Parents)

Finally, unique interests described by the eldest primary age child, David and the participants in his case study included ‘God and Jesus’, discussions and debate’, ‘learning about others’, ‘television’, ‘activity books with games like dot to dot or crosswords’, ‘having more privileges because I am nearly ten’, ‘chatting with friends’, ‘having sleepovers’ and ‘visiting friends’. David was able to
express a greater number of interests to the researcher and it appears that his interests were also
typical of many other children who have entered their final years of primary age schooling.
However, David’s responses also highlight a maturity and level of development not typical of most
nine year old boys.

‘I like to read a book, TV, dice-rolling…because it’s pretty complex, and probably it would
take somebody else a long time to understand it. It took me quite some time actually to work it up. And the ‘polar-hedro’ dice that we have also helped me… especially the ten-sided
dice… It is a bit complex, because you have to use different dices for different games… for
soccer I minus. At the moment I’m using the six-sided dice, because I can’t find the ten-sided
one. And I’m minusing one off every number that I roll, because then it’s possible then to
have nil-nil draws. Other things I do on my own are play games, play outside, Lego, Play-
mobile, activity books and puzzles, dot to dot, mazes and crosswords.’

(David)

Furthermore, although ‘an interest in unusual topics’ was a common response from participants for
several of the case study children, David’s ‘unusual topics of interest’ also suggest significantly high
levels of ability and interest in comparison to his same age peers and the other children within the
study.

‘At the moment…he (has) a desire to do Journalism. He wants to be a Sports
Commentator…because he loves sports. He is studying so much about it…he can tell you
everything about the Olympics, from when they started and which countries did well, and
who got gold, and about the history of different sportsman. David literally digests the
books…it boggles the mind sometimes. He develops games as well. He thinks there’s no
real good Olympic game out there. Children are missing out. So he’s developed a game with
questions…where they can do different sport things on the answers. We think he’s working
on a board with computer games…because there’s a real need…there is not enough games
with sport.’

(David’s Parent)

Consequently, through the inclusion of the ‘voices’ of the case study children, and supported by the
responses of their case study participants, it was possible to create a clear picture of each child’s
individual interests. It is suggested, therefore, that when educational practices value the ‘voices’ of
children when planning for their interests they are best able to cater for young gifted children’s needs
and interests.
Table 3. The range of opinions expressed regarding the case study children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Others experiences and feelings</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Harry</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>David</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gifted child is well behaved</td>
<td>L P F S</td>
<td>H P F 3 4</td>
<td>K P F T</td>
<td>M P T/F</td>
<td>D P F T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sibling or other gifted child demonstrates challenging behaviours at different ages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amused by child's skills/abilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Absence of parent has created problems for child</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enjoy mature conversations with child</td>
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<tr>
<td>Love child's energy or passion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intelligence is not a problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifted child always expects to be able to do what older children or siblings can do</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child seeks attention through inappropriate behaviour at times</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Admire child's sensitivity/compassion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others feel the educational system is failing gifted children</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated/confused about what steps to take when seeking positive educational experiences</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Other people at school</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifted child will learn nothing new in current grade level</td>
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<td></td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comment about child being &quot;bright&quot; or &quot;clever&quot;</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:

L: Lucy  H: Harry  K: Kate  M: Matthew  D: David
P: Parent  F: Family Support Person  S: Specialist  T: Teacher
4: Four year old kindergarten teacher  3: Three year old kindergarten teacher
T/F: Teacher and Family Support Person

* Denotes a response
5.1.3 Opinions expressed regarding the case study children

As recognised in the research literature, the personal experiences of parents of gifted children are influenced by the quality of interactions with others who recognise and understand the nature of their children’s special needs (Solow, 2003; Wormald, 2004; Sanders, Turner, Ralph & McTaggart, 2008). An extensive range of opinions were expressed by all participants across the five case studies and provide further evidence that positive opinions are more probable when others have an appropriate understanding of the characteristics and needs of gifted children. However, a wide range of common and unique experiences have been reported by the participants of each of the case studies and will now be discussed.

In relation to the preschoolers, Lucy and Harry, there were no common responses recorded. However, as outlined in Table 3, several opinions expressed by participants in each of the preschoolers’ case studies were shared with at least one other primary age child. In Lucy’s case study, common statements with other primary age children included that people ‘were amazed at her skills and abilities’, that they ‘enjoy mature conversations with her’, that Lucy’s ‘intelligence is not a problem’ at this stage in her life, and that Lucy ‘always expects to be able to do what older children can do’. Several adult participants also alluded to the opinion that intelligence was a problem and not necessarily a good thing in the long run.

There were also some unique statements made by the participants in Lucy’s case study which included the views that ‘others were surprised or judgemental about her extreme behaviours’, ‘others thought that Lucy’s parents had taught her skills that she has taught herself’, ‘others were concerned about Lucy’s differences causing problems later in her life’, and ‘that intelligence will manifest differently at different stages’.

‘Probably the biggest thing has been this year at Kinder. All the parents…whoever was on duty would come up to me at the end and say, ‘Oh, my goodness, Lucy is so amazing.’ They’d actually comment on things like what were only really only basic. I almost felt like saying, ‘Oh that’s just minor compared to what she can…’ Things like, ‘Oh she writes her name on her work.’ In conversations they’d say, ‘Oh, she speaks like an adult.’ ‘I can’t believe when I asked how old she was, she was able to tell me exactly how old, and when her birthday was’, lots of…elaborated things like that.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

Harry also shares some common responses to some of the primary age children in relation to the opinions expressed by others. These common responses included statements that Harry ‘is well behaved’, ‘has a gifted sibling who demonstrates challenging or different behaviours’, ‘experienced problems due to the absence of one parent at one stage in his life’, and that he ‘seeks attention through inappropriate behaviours at times’.
‘When Harry’s brother was this age…everyone would say, “Oh, he’s been here before” because there was just something about his mannerisms, you knew he…really connected with things…whereas with Harry I haven’t really found that so much. Your second child…just tends to be dragged along…and I think that’s why he just…got moved around to whatever we were doing.’

(Harry’s Parent)

Unique responses were also provided for Harry including ‘his sibling has been assessed as gifted’, ‘a view that his parent is not parenting consistently’, and ‘an uncertainty as to his abilities and needs’.

‘I know at stages I don’t parent consistently. I was going to say, not well, but its not that, it’s not consistent. I’m sort of hoping that it’s going to turn on like a light bulb one day, and I’ll know exactly what do…whereas at this point I don’t know what to do. I haven’t really had…the time to…step back and figure out where it all is going. I don’t even know the basic questions that I should know about him. I think the hardest part is the realization that I actually don’t know who he is as a child. I haven’t really picked up on his personality at all. Being a second child, he sort of slotted in. And then his dad, when he was only a few months old, his dad started his own business and so you sort of get busy. I just think he sort of slipped through the cracks.’

(Harry’s Parent)

One other common statement made by three of the participants in Harry’s case study was that he ‘is not obviously gifted’. However, this statement was not supported by several of the comments and assessments made by the same participants or the observations and comments made by a more informed or experienced participant in regards to gifted children. Also, this supports earlier suggestions that Harry may be presenting with ‘masking’ behaviours that may make it difficult to identify him as gifted.

‘The use of checklists was very helpful in identifying Harry as a gifted child, as were discussions with a very well informed colleague.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

As previously stated, several responses in relation to the opinions expressed by the participants in the primary age children’s case studies were also shared with at least one of the preschoolers, however, there were also some common views shared with at least one other primary age child. All parents of the primary age children stated that others ‘were amazed by their child’s skills and abilities’.

‘People…talk about how quick he is to do things. We have friend’s who ran a drama school for awhile, and their eyes just lit up when they saw him. He learns things that quickly you can imagine him being in a drama group. They talk about his ability to remember things….they are quite fascinated by his memory, and particularly when he was little.’

(Matthew’s Parents)
Participants in Kate and Matthew’s case studies also stated that others ‘enjoy mature conversations with them’, ‘love their energy and passion’, and ‘admire their sensitivity and compassion’.

‘Friends I know that have known Kate since birth, mainly adults, absolutely love her warmth towards them, and her happy nature…her sense of fun and happiness and her energy. My Mum admires her zest for life. My Mum finds her intelligence fascinating, and her ability to communicate with her on the level she does, and her sensitivity…’

(Kate’s Parents)

Common opinions expressed for Kate and David included that ‘others feel the educational system is failing gifted children’, ‘others are confused and frustrated about what steps to take when seeking positive educational experiences’, and that ‘the gifted child will learn nothing new in their current grade level’. As all case studies were conducted in Victoria, these comments do raise questions as to the effectiveness and degree to which policies on gifted education in this state are influencing the personal and educational experiences of gifted children. The participants in Kate and David’s case studies clearly felt frustrated and unsure of the ability of the Victorian education system when seeking appropriate provisions for their gifted child.

‘We know we need to be doing more and are constantly seeking advice on where we need to go from here…(But) we as parents feel the failure here not lies with the teacher but the Department of Education…I don’t believe you can rely on the public, or quite obviously…even the private education system, to identify your child, and support your child’s learning needs…Public and Private schools are catering for the mid-stream. They are not catering for the below-average child, they are not catering for the above-average child.’

(Kate’s Parents)

A common statement made for Matthew and David about their experiences and feelings was that ‘others comment about their child being bright or clever’.

‘I remember (when) he was really little and he would do…the really big puzzles. We’ve always taken toys to church and we were pastoring for awhile so…I had to sit in this one row with David. I had…my big basket of toys, (to) just keep him busy. We often would have people say…’never seen children do stuff like that’…lots of strangers…like in the train sometimes…have approached me to say ‘you’ve got a very bright boy there.’ You know, just from seeing him for a few minutes, doing something. Others would say…’How clever he is. How bright he is. Some wanted to use him to show him off…somebody would say ‘oh, do you know what David can do?’ And so we naturally put stops to that pretty quickly…especially when he started reading at three.’

(David’s Parents)

Unique responses from participants in each of the primary age children’s case studies provided differing views depending on the main issues experienced by each child and their family. For example, the responses from participants in Kate’s case study stated that ‘others commented she was bossy’ and that ‘others described her as too loud’. In relation to the opinions expressed by Kate’s
parent’s, it was stated that ‘parents of underachieving children make the most negative or offensive comments’, ‘other people do not acknowledge her developed abilities’, and ‘their families experiences are common to other gifted families’. Kate’s Family Support Person stated that her family ‘has unrealistic expectations for school to meet Kate’s educational needs’, and that ‘permanent psychological damage is occurring when services do not cater for gifted children’. Again, this statement demonstrates a lack of confidence in the ability of the current educational system in Victoria to cater for a child who is gifted, as well as a serious concern that a lack of action in gifted education policy is causing psychological damage to many young gifted children.

‘I think Kate would be very difficult to cater for in the average classroom. And it’s worried me for a long time, knowing what I know about the school system. And I used to say to Kate’s mum “Okay, she’s going to Prep next year, what do you think she’s going to learn in Prep?” Because I know that you don’t learn a lot in Prep, in terms of the sort of learning that Kate is capable of. At this stage I haven’t found any school that’s able or prepared to do it, without being forced to do it, by parents. …I feel, with my children, if I hadn’t intervened in what the schools were prepared to offer them, if I hadn’t intervened fairly radically…I would have feared for the sanity of them. It’s not just that they should be academically progressing, but I actually think that there is great danger of permanent psychological damage being done.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

Unique responses in Matthew’s case study came from his parents. Their comments were that Matthew ‘is fun to be with’, ‘likes rules and sticks to them’ and ‘is normal in our opinion but very different to his same age group’. As Matthew’s parents are practicing teachers, they also had several other comments in regards to the opinions expressed about other gifted children as well as Matthew which included ‘being gifted still means the child needs to work hard to get things’, ‘gifted children can be arrogant and immature in our experience’, ‘gifted children, and all children, should be encouraged to look for learning and give back to others’, and ‘as teachers we have never come across a gifted child we couldn’t teach’.

‘One of the values that I’ve put into action is that things don’t just come for nothing. You have to work hard. If you’re gifted, you don’t necessarily have to work hard to get stuff…that’s why we’ve tried to enrich the other aspects…there is a bit of give and take here, and it’s not all about you.

Our experience has been that gifted kids have usually had an arrogant attitude and immature attitude. In the case (of a friend of ours) it almost became an excuse for why she doesn’t do things. ‘Oh this is so boring, because I already know all this’, whereas my kids would never say that. They’d be saying, ‘What else could I find out to give to the class?’ Now my kids would be going, ‘Oh I read something in this book, and I’ll bring it in and show it.’ Where as it isn’t about demeaning what everyone else does.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

There were numerous unique comments regarding the opinions expressed by the participants in David’s case study. As David is the eldest child in this case study, it is probable that the participants
were able to provide an extensive range of statements under this theme due to their broader range of experience and David’s age and stage of development. Two statements made by David included a strong belief that ‘God and Jesus made children gifted and talented’ and that ‘I will be finished school by the age of 15 at the latest’.

‘God is the one who made me first of all. And also, all my talent actually came from Him, I even say…Except for what I’ve built up here on earth, He’s really the one who gave me all that. And also, He’s helped me through the tough times…that’s how He’s my number one teacher.’

(David)

David’s parents provided several personal opinions and feelings about their experiences with a gifted child including ‘it took time to come to terms with David’s giftedness’, ‘we had misconceptions and myths about gifted children initially’, ‘we have mixed feelings of confidence then anxiety when David makes leaps in learning’, and ‘we regularly questioned whether David was gifted even though it is obvious now’. Therefore, myths and misconceptions were acknowledged by David’s parents themselves, and suggest that a general lack of knowledge in the area of giftedness can also influence the beliefs and actions of a gifted child’s parent. Myths and misconceptions were also evident in the comments made by friends and educational professionals and created frustration and feelings of being unsupported by the very people who usually provide support. In relation to the opinions of others about their gifted child, David’s parents stated that ‘some people wanted to show him off’, ‘others considered David to be a good friend to their children’, and that ‘some parents would suggest that David was being ‘pushed’ when we are just trying to keep up’.

‘I remember God one day saying to me ‘really help to take really good care of him, because if he’s pushed overboard…it will change him.’ At some point…they go ‘don’t push them.’ And you go ‘oh, excuse me, I’m not pushing.’…’I’m trying to keep up!’ But…because there’s so many different…misconceptions out there…educating the education system I think is important as well. We rang up this one Principal, because we heard that they take home schoolers on a part time basis…and the first thing he said ‘all children are gifted.’ And I just (thought) ‘what?’

(David’s Parent)

David’s parents also expressed opinions in relation to the education of gifted children and these included ‘home-schooling appears to be a common choice for families with gifted children’, ‘that following David’s school experience we realised that David will live and interact with all ages and not just their peer group’, and ‘there are lots of unanswered questions about David’s future education’.

‘I’m happy with what I know for what we need now, doesn’t mean I wouldn’t like to know more for in the future.’

(David’s Parents)
David’s teacher also expressed one opinion in regards to gifted children and this was that ‘the school environment is stifling for gifted children like David’.

‘Personally I think…school must have been stifling for him…he probably would have loved that freedom of just exploring and finding out…what he wanted to find out about.’

(David’s Teacher)

Consequently, it appears that, in relation to several of the case study children, many participants believed that current educational systems were not well equipped for catering for these gifted children and that educational alternatives such as homeschooling were more effective in providing for their needs. Furthermore, the most positive and informed examples reflected a sound understanding of gifted children’s characteristics and needs. In contrast, negative experiences or challenges raised by participants reflected dissatisfaction or frustration with professionals and education systems that demonstrated a lack of knowledge in the area of gifted education.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social experiences</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Harry</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>David</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prefers older children as friends</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefers a few close friends at educational setting</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends have similar interests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefers children enjoy discussion/conversation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enjoys of prefers adults company</td>
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<td>Chooses children who play outside</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shows strong empathy towards close friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is adherent to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes on leadership roles in groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chooses children who are 'smart'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chooses children who are well behaved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses stronger verbal skills to resolve conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends are mostly outside educational setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenged/Frustrated by inconsistency in 'friendship' relationships</td>
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<td>Has been bullied by other children at educational setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has difficulty mixing with the same aged peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mixes well with the same aged peers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**
- L: Lucy
- P: Parent
- F: Family Support Person
- S: Four year old Kindergarten Teacher
- K: Kate
- P: Parent
- S: Special Ed.
- T: Teacher
- M: Matthew
- D: David
- T/F: Teacher and Family Support Person

* Denotes a response
5.1.4 Social Experiences of case study children

As outlined in Table 4, the most common social experiences shared between each of the five participants included ‘preferring older children as friends’, ‘having friends with similar interests’, and ‘being different to others’. The research literature states that gifted children tend to prefer the companionship of others, enjoy interests that are typically enjoyed by children several years older, and often are faced with a ‘forced-choice’ dilemma when they recognise that they are different to others and yet desire the ability to ‘fit in’ (Gross, 1989; Gross, 1999b; Porter, 1999; Gross, 2002; Gross, 2004).

‘Well my friend Cindy (is my friend), because I have much toys, but she doesn’t and she wants more. She’s twelve. Well, she likes to do so many things like painting, and things like that.’

(Lucy)

‘Harry mixes well within groups but does seem to make one good friend each group. Harry tends to…pick an older kid in the group to…become close to. Harry’s best friend is about seven, although they are the same height. They’ve been good friends for a long time. His best friend is completely different to Harry, in that he’s quiet…just so quiet, and he never does anything wrong. He has some similar interests to Harry. They seem to complement (each other) and it’s fine for Harry because he can be a leader.’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘Kate was a good friend to my daughter who, although 2 years older, gets on extremely well with Kate.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

‘Matthew is called on to mentor others in his class. He likes to talk to adults and older children.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

‘David is very loyal, he’s very strong, and he knows what he wants. He relates a lot to older children. Most of his friends are older. He actually just recently said that he wouldn’t mind having some younger friends too, I think because then he has a bit more of a say.’

(David’s Parent, p.308)

However, there were individual differences in the descriptions of ‘how’ each child felt they were different from others with the preschoolers stating that they were different ‘physically’, and one primary age child stating they were different because they were ‘smart’. These individual differences suggest that there are developmental differences between the preschool children and the primary age child, with the primary age child demonstrating a higher level of cognition and understanding of her specific differences to her same age peers.

‘Ah, my voice is different to other children. Well, my voice is the same as Jenny’s. Nothing much else is different… In no way am I like other children at kinder…no reason.’

(Lucy)
I’ve got different colour hair. I wear different clothes. I have different kind of shoes. (I’m)…Stumped. (about how else I’m different to other children).

(Harry)

I am different to others in my class because I can read well and because everyone likes me. I am different to others because I’m smart and some aren’t.’

(Kate)

Responses from the preschooler’s case studies highlighted one common social experience which was that they both ‘prefer or like girls’. Studies have found that as highly gifted children demonstrate advanced conceptions of friendship – with girls significantly more advanced – it is possible that this may explain the tendency for highly gifted boys to sometimes prefer the company of girls (Gross, 2002). This may explain Harry’s interest in and preference for girls as described by his parent, or perhaps it is a reflection of his personal sensitivity and need for others to be fair. However, other descriptions were not exclusive to the preschoolers and were described by at least one other primary age child including ‘prefers a few close friends in their current educational setting’, ‘shows strong empathy towards close friends’, and ‘takes on leadership roles in groups’. Again, the research literature supports these descriptions and states that gifted children have an unusually well developed sense of justice and fairness and can become very upset if they feel others have been unfair (Lovecky, 1992; Porter, 1999).

(I admire) his sensitivity to others and just being able to empathize with others who are feeling sad…being aware of other children’s feelings and needs. He was so mature in his approach in that he could be collaborative when he was building or working with other children. Some children…will take over and want to be just the boss on their own and give everybody else direction, whereas he was quite open to other people’s ideas. So I think it demonstrated that he was aware of how other people were thinking and feeling and that it was important to include their ideas as well.

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘Matthew is very considerate of the feelings of others and seeks to help those in need. He just shows initiative in those sorts of things, he’s just a leader in that respect. Matthew doesn’t like to let family, friends or teachers down…he loves to please…He also (has) terrific empathy…very moral as far as…what’s expected…and he will get quite huffy if kids are not doing the right thing. Matthew will tell on people, if they don’t do the right thing.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

Furthermore, some social experiences, although not common between the preschoolers, were shared with at least one primary age child. For example Lucy, as well as all three primary age children, was described as ‘preferring children who enjoy discussion or conversation’. There were also common descriptions for Lucy, Matthew and David that stated they ‘were able to use stronger verbal skills to resolve conflict’ and ‘friends were mostly outside of their formal educational setting.'
‘Lucy prefers older siblings to the friends her own age - usually older. If we’re at the park it would be someone who looks like an attractive big girl. I’d actually organized a park day for children to get-together, who would be in the same four year old group next year. I thought it’s a nice chance...to have a casual play at the park. She played with all these other children that were at the park but weren’t in our group. The whole point was defeated! There were other little Christmas parties and things at which bigger kids came, and (she would say) ‘I’m playing with that eight year old. I’m playing with that six year old.’ Also Lucy takes on leader roles and bosses or arranges others. She is more recently confident to use stronger verbal skills to resolve conflict.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘David’s got a lot of very strong friends. Very interesting…but they’re all very strong in character and very gentle at the same time. The friends that he’s developing have strong personalities…but the strong-personality type child is one who is willing to give their point of view. He had a friend over just recently and all that friend would talk about was what they wanted to do tomorrow…rather than discuss and talk about the here and now. David said ‘Mum, it’s boring because there’s nothing to talk about.’

(David’s Parent)

However, Lucy also presented with some unique social experiences which included ‘being comfortable with extended family’ and ‘enjoying writing to her friends regularly’.

Harry also shared some common social experiences with at least one other primary age child. He was described as ‘enjoying children who like to play outside’ (as did Matthew and David), ‘chooses children who are smart’ (as did Kate and Matthew) and ‘was challenged or frustrated by inconsistency in friendship relationships’ (as was Matthew). Again, the inclusion of the case study children’s ‘voices’ provided valuable insight into their personal understandings in relation to their differences to others and it is suggested that this practice would be useful in assisting educators in further supporting and understanding the social experiences of other gifted children.

‘Ben is my best friend, and he’s in grade one…because he’s really smart. He talks to me about stuff…and I’m smart too.’

(Harry)

‘Harry sometimes finds kids’ personalities challenging. How to deal with (the), ‘I’m your friend this week...’ thing he finds quite challenging. But I suppose he seems to kind of mix quite well with a lot of kids.’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘When choosing a friend I look for people who’ve got lots of friends because so then their best friends can play with him and then I can join in whenever I want. I like lonely people because they don’t have any friends and they don’t have much people to play with. I know Colin likes me because he plays with me and likes all my games. I do like playing with people, but somebody in my grade always goes to play with me, and then they say they’re the boss…and like people say ‘oh don’t let him play, even though he’s my friend.’ And the person isn’t his friend, or something like that. But I don’t let Dan play, because he’s a slug.…No. He’s not sort of my friend, Dan.’

(Matthew)
However, Harry was also described as presenting with some unique social experiences by the participants in his case study. These descriptions included ‘buying or creating gifts for girls’, ‘preferring quieter children’, ‘preferring children who work for an extended period of time’, ‘open to others ideas and suggestions’, affectionate to adults and friends’, and ‘choosing friends who are opposite in personality’. One other statement contradicted other participant’s responses and stated that Harry ‘did not like girls’, however, this appears to have been an isolated case or may also be a reflection of Harry’s ‘dual personality’ as described by his parent earlier.

There were three common social experiences that were only described by the participants in the primary age children’s case studies, although not by all three. Common responses by Kate and David’s case study participants stated that each child ‘had been bullied by other children in their educational setting’ and that each child ‘mixes well with their same age peers’, however, David’s parent qualified that he had developed an interest lately in mixing with his same age peers. The experience of bullying was particularly clear when Kate expressed her experiences in the school playground. Although these statements appear to be contradictory to each other, it is probable that each child experiences positive or negative social interactions depending on the support available in the settings where the interactions are occurring.

‘If I could make my own club at school I would call it ‘CLUB FRIENDS’. I would do all sorts of things that we all wanted to do. Or we could all go on a treasure hunt, and we could play our own games, and partners. And we’d have a silent vote of who wanted to play what. And we would play in the playground. I usually go on the oval, but…the meanest person always makes me spoil all my club. She tries to steal people from my club. I don’t like her. She makes me cry. I tell the teacher but it keeps happening every day. I run away, into the oval. She never finds me. She never finds me, she’s topsy turvy, she never finds me. Even when I’m in the front of the oval, she walks straight past me. She’s looking for me. I run away from her, because she’s the meanest kid in my class.’

(Kate)

One common response by Kate and Matthew’s case study participants stated that each child ‘has difficulty mixing with same aged peers’. The statements by Kate’s Parents and Teacher are contradictory to statements made by her Family Support Person but appear to reflect observations in very different educational environments. Furthermore, Matthew’s parents also state that his difficulties with same age peers are also in relation to his social experiences in a formal educational setting. The research literature recognises that gifted children are often accused as being ‘social misfits’, however, it has been found that most gifted children experience social problems due to the lack of ‘true peers’ rather than a lack of social skills (Lovecky, 1992; Porter, 1999) and that gifted children demonstrate higher levels of social adjustment in classes where they are with likeminded peers (Silverman, 2002).
‘Kate likes children that are a few years older than her. She enjoys their company. I think maybe she doesn’t get as frustrated with older kids than she does with those children her own age. She doesn’t seem to mix as well with children her own age. She tends to get frustrated with them, and they get a bit intimidated by her…she finds it a little difficult with kids her own age, unless it’s perhaps a particular child with a personality that can cope with her.’

(Kate’s Parents)

‘Kate has trouble relating to other students her own age. She doesn’t always choose the best way to communicate her thoughts and feelings – this sometimes presents herself in a way that makes other children upset.’

(Kate’s Teacher)

‘I’m not sure why, but he in some ways hasn’t jelled with his peer group at school. He’s got sort of half mates, but they’re not really. It’s not that he doesn’t know how to make friends…he doesn’t see the point in making friends with dills, quite frankly. Matthew would love a group of kids that were really interested in stuff. I think he’s a kid who older kids could really attach themselves to, but they haven’t. He does get on particularly well with older people. Matthew would want an equal, an intellectual equal…I guess that’s one of the reasons in the Prep/One that he got on quite well, and he thrived. They were all pretty pleasant kids. That was a different group…a nicer group.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

As with Lucy and Harry, the three primary age children were also described as presenting with unique social experiences which highlight their individual personalities, skills and differences when interacting with others. Kate described her own social experiences and expressed that she ‘likes friends who always make her happy’, ‘looks for children who always care and understand her’, ‘has lots of friends at school’, and ‘likes others in her class because they are funny’.

‘I like friends who make me happy because they are nice to be around. I like to do anything with a friend - except typing. My “bestest” friend is very nice and she always lets me do stuff that I need to do and she’s so nice. Like she let’s me take a break for running. She lets me quit the game for a little bit if I feel sick and other stuff. She doesn’t care if I quit the game and want to play another game. I have a “bestest” friend and we call each other twins because we like all the same things and we look like twins. And we are always crazy together, like when we squealed. We always burst into…we always pop in a laugh and burst into laughter when we are playing with our doll house.’

(Kate)

‘I made lots of friends at school which is good. I am like other children in my class because we act funny together and I am part of a group.’

(Kate)

In contrast, Kate’s parents and teachers describe some different social experiences including the observations that ‘other children are intimidated by Kate’s abilities and behavioural characteristics’ and that ‘Kate upsets other children’. The research literature states that often the behaviour of gifted children is interpreted as ‘bossy’ or anti-social when in fact they are expressing their frustrations with relating to peers who are similar by age only (Lovecky, 1992; Gross, 1999b).
‘Kate sometimes displays frustration towards other children when they don’t understand things as well as her. She struggles to communicate a lot with some of the kids in her class, because they don’t get her at all. A lot of children get a bit confused by her passion about some things. There was no other child in (kindergarten) that could read she was sitting there like reading stories to the kids at one stage.’

(Kate’s Parents)

Research also recognises that gifted children often see the ‘truth’ or rules more clearly and have little tolerance for those who do not (Lovecky, 1992; Gross, 1999b). This was observed, and supported by other participants, when Matthew stated that he ‘chooses children who need help’, ‘chooses children who tell the truth’, and ‘has limited friendships’.

‘Murray likes me because I can help him at work and sometimes I go to play at his house. My friend Murray is a good friend because he is kind to people. He always shows my stuff to people…things I’ve already bought, and he knows that other people don’t know about it. So he says ‘oh, yeah that’ and he says like ‘that’s Matthew’s dinosaur that roars’ or something. He always tells the truth and he is always a good boy in class.

(I choose people who have lots of friends because)...oh, I don’t know. It’s just that I don’t have many friends to play with, because I don’t have many friends to play with. Even though they’ve got lots of friends, some people say ‘no I’m playing that’ and they might not be your friend.’

(Matthew)

Matthew also stated that ‘helping others can be hard because they don’t understand my instructions’ and that ‘kids like me because I’m fair’. Matthew’s parents provided several other comments about their child in relation to his social experiences including ‘he is open to others ideas and suggestions’, enjoys being witness to others’ accomplishments’, ‘he is often called on to mentor other less able children’, ‘has positive social and intellectual experiences in a mixed-age chess club’, and ‘has a strong relationship with his sibling’. These comments also support the research literature which recognises that some gifted children demonstrate advanced conceptions of friendship and yet are frustrated by others who are not at a similar intellectual or emotional level (Lovecky, 1992; Porter, 1999; Gross, 2002).

‘He idolizes his big brother. He has an absolute adoration of his older brother, and we’ve actually heard both of them say, ‘Well you know there’s not really any point in finding anyone else, I just want to spend time with (my) brother…anyway.’ What we invariably find happen is if we go into a social situation, particularly where the boys don’t know anyone, Matthew will go in first, suss out the friendship group, suss out what’s going on. He’ll make connections with everyone, and then when everyone’s kind of attracted to him, he’ll turn around to his brother and go, ‘What game should we play now?’ And then his brother becomes the social director. Matthew has actually formed the group and got everybody sort of spellbound, and then he hands over to his brother…He’s become the front man, and the social organizer.’

(Matthew’s Parents)
Finally, David and participants in his case study also described unique social experiences. David stated that he ‘chooses children who are respectful to his family and pets, as well as their own families’. He also expressed an interest in soccer statistics and stated that lots of kids at his school like soccer.

‘If I was given the job of planning and organising a special club at school…heaps of kids at my school love soccer, so I’d probably set up a club mainly for collecting soccer stats…We would also like to discuss about the latest soccer news and stuff.’

(David)

David’s parents described their child as ‘likely to choose friends who are opposite in personality’, ‘someone who stands up for his friends’, ‘has difficulty with his lack of ability in sport or running when compared to his grade peers’, ‘being supported by older students in his accelerated classes’, and ‘enjoying positive social interactions with other children from a gifted support group they attend.

‘David would stand up for his friend. He actually had…two…friends (who) didn’t like each other…and he had one friend over, and then the other one came in and he left. This one friend said ‘I don’t like Daniel’ and he said ‘but he’s a really nice boy, he’s my friend.’ And that other boy said to David ‘no, if you’re his friend, then you can’t be my friend.’ And David said to him ‘but he is a really nice boy’ and left it at that. And he got months of…almost cruel, very cold treatment from that boy. But he stuck to his guns, and they’re all fine now. Even last year at school, for one friend…he stood up for him. He’s again older than him…and…much taller…and he got bullied at school. David was the one who stood up for him…and he was a grade six boy. He said to David ‘do you want me to hit you?’ And David said ‘go ahead.’ And the boy walked away.’

(David’s Parents)

David’s teacher provided one other description of his social experiences when stating that he was ‘affectionate to other adults and children’.

‘David’s…a beautiful boy. He’s very easily excited about learning…(he) got excited about everything. David’s…cheerful, greets everyone every morning, and…it was always done in such a loving way. He was quite a physical touch boy…he’d want the hug but in his own little way do nice sorts of things. David loved people.’

(David’s Teacher)

Several of these descriptions highlight the positive interactions David experienced when interacting with other children who were more similar in ability or interest. However, they also reflect the challenges faced by David and his family when seeking a range of environments that would support the range of his unique talents and abilities positively.

Therefore, the current study continues to support the research literature which recognises that gifted children need opportunities to interact with other likeminded children regularly, and that positive or negative interactions with others can be significantly influenced by the level of experience and support by others who understand gifted children’s needs. It also recognises that the older children in
the case studies were slightly better served in relation to the social experiences they were provided than those experienced by the younger children.
Table 5. Participants' identification of the educational experiences of each of the case study children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational experiences</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Harry</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>David</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social experiences &amp; independence provision/Child enjoys social</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home environment considered more stimulating &amp; challenging/parent scaffolding learning</td>
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<td>Changes have been made in planning</td>
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<td>Program is high quality for gifted children's needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning based on child's interests</td>
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<td>Parent involved in planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experienced extreme separation anxiety during transition periods</td>
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<td>Subject acceleration provided</td>
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<td>Experiences structured but not challenging</td>
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<td>Investment in awareness of current skills &amp; abilities</td>
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<td>Disappointed with educational program</td>
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<td>Parents read a lot to child</td>
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<td>Participant rated as 'well informed'</td>
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<td>Program is low quality/low level content</td>
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<td>Parents and gifted children have open &amp; in-depth conversations</td>
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<td>No gifted policy</td>
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<td>Outreach reaching outside</td>
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<td>Individual program plan provided</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child involved in planning</td>
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<td>Positive experiences recognized child's abilities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Key:
- L: Lucy
- H: Harry
- K: Kate
- M: Matthew
- D: David
- P: Parent
- F: Family Support Person
- 4: Four year old kindergarten teacher
- S: Specialist
- T: Teacher
- T/F: Teacher and Family Support Person
- 3: Three year old kindergarten teacher
- 3YO: Three year old kindergarten
- prep: First year of formal schooling

* Denotes a response
5.1.5 Educational Experiences of each of the case study children

The responses, presented in Table 5 indicated that there were consistent similarities and differences between the case study children depending on the perceived quality and provision of educational services specifically catering for gifted children. As supported by research, many of the responses on the educational experiences of the gifted children in this study recognised that in order for each child’s social, emotional and cognitive needs to be met they would require an environment that values and understands the learning process and the child’s individual skills (Maker, 1986; Borland, 1988; Smutny & Blocksom, 1990; Harrison, 1995; Morelock & Morrison, 1996).

Each of the five case study children included in this study were at significantly different stages within their formal education journey. The youngest preschooler, Lucy, was completing her first year of preschool education in a council run three year old kindergarten program. The second preschooler, Harry, had completed a year of three year old kindergarten at a community based early childhood centre and was attending a parent managed four year old kindergarten program in a different early learning service. The youngest primary age child, Kate, had completed her Preparatory year (which is her first year of formal schooling) in a government public school and had entered year one by the commencement of the data collection. The second primary age child, Matthew, was completing year one (or the second year of formal schooling) in a government public school. Finally, the eldest primary age child, David, had just completed six months of formal schooling in a year 5 class in a private school (following six years of home schooling) and was re-entering a home schooling environment. Therefore, the wide range of examples reported in this study record each participant’s perceptions in relation to the theme of educational experiences at that particular time in the data collection phase. However, as the theme of ‘educational experiences’ received an extensive list of responses in comparison to all other themes, this analysis will discuss what are viewed as most pertinent responses in relation to the issues raised in this study.

One common perception in relation to the educational experiences reported for each of the case studies stated that ‘social experiences and independence was provided by the educational setting’ and that ‘the child enjoyed social experiences in this environment’. Several participants from the preschoolee case studies described their formal educational setting as providing positive social experiences. Participants in the primary age children’s case studies, however, reported positive social experiences in a wider range of educational environments and not necessarily in a formal educational setting.

‘She’s probably getting what she needs out of Kinder. Kinder is actually providing…a social setting for her to go to on her own, which she doesn’t do anywhere else…rather than it being a place that is an exciting educational place, or a place where she’s forming strong friendships or connections. It’s more about independence.’

(Lucy’s Family Support Person)
‘I know he loves going to kinder, because I’ve taken him once, and he couldn’t wait to get there. I think he’s made some friendships there…he’s grown up so much this year. (He most enjoys his)…play with the children, and going outside. I’d say seeing his friends and going outside. I don’t think at Pre-school it could be much better, because I know his mother just speaks so highly about that. I don’t think that there could be any improvements there. Keeping him occupied would be the challenge…it just would be a challenge to keep him busy all the time.’

(Harry’s Family Support Person)

‘The overall stuff they do in the normal classroom, she doesn’t seem very interested in at all…I’d say it’s probably why she’s playing up so much. She just sees it as more time just to socialize, because what they are doing is stuff she already knows. I think she’s happy enough there…the children are kept happy and entertained…so it fills in six hours day for her. And it is her first year. We say to each other now, ‘this is the first year’.’

(Kate’s Parents)

‘I have trouble getting the grade 1 children to follow the rules when we pick teams at lunchtime because they just want to be with good players only and not have even teams. They like things about me because I do fair stuff. Like other people don’t really do that…even with sides at footy. All the fair things that I do is I let people choose people at footy, instead of just saying ‘you’re in that team, you’re in that team, you’re in that team, you’re in that team, you’re in that team…they like choosing it…lots of people like being on someone’s team. Like there’s a kid called Steve and he likes not to be on Jay’s team. He’s getting better…I don’t really care whose team I’m on.’

(Matthew)

‘David loved being with a boy who is a home schooler, he’s actually gone back to home schooling. I think any student that just loved learning and loved…bouncing ideas back and forth with him. Anything to do with general knowledge, he sort of was drawn to those students. I think…students that…weren’t streetwise. At school…I think he most enjoyed (being) social…just learning to be with children of similar age…I think because of the home schooling more than the giftedness.’

(David’s Teacher)

The examples provided by the participants demonstrate how each child has different interests or issues in relation to their social experiences in a formal educational setting. All children appear to benefit from different aspects of their social interactions with others in the more formal educational settings but are perceived as lacking support or provision for other developmental learning areas. Therefore, although formal early childhood educational settings are recognised as having the potential to provide positive social experiences for the gifted case study children, they are also viewed as deficient in catering for their other academic and emotional needs. Consequently, it appears that state government policies in respect to the educational practices and needs of gifted preschoolers and primary age children have not been influential in the current case studies, with four out of five parents stating the need to seek additional educational experiences beyond their current formal educational environments.
The current study supports the research literature which states that a stimulating home environment is crucial if giftedness is to develop optimally, and yet, parents often report a wide range of challenges when attempting to provide positive personal and educational experiences for their gifted child (Silverman, 1986). A significant response recorded by participants in four of the five case studies was that the ‘home environment was considered more stimulating and challenging than formal educational environments’. Participants from Lucy, Kate, Matthew and David’s case studies expressed a belief that the child was assisted by their parents through a range of strategies or activities that ‘scaffold’ the learning process in a sensitive and meaningful way. This response may have been influenced by the fact that three of the five case study parents were in fact teachers and, therefore, were likely to be informed about educational practices and principles that recognise open ended, engaged learning experiences that are ongoing and cater for their gifted child’s interests, strengths and needs. Consequently, this study demonstrated the important role parents played in the development of their gifted child’s educational development. However, research also states that one of the most influential factors in relation to positive educational experiences is associated with the family circumstances into which the individual is born (Tannenbaum, 1997), and in relation to the five case study children, can be influenced by their birth order, parental attention and educational experience, financial resources and available support.

‘As I am at home with Lucy, I feel that the environment and experiences I provide her with are the most critical for continuing her stimulation…so much of it is just go with the flow of what she’s at. A lot of it is being there and knowing intimately where she’s at, what she can do, and where the next step is…its scaffolding. I know intimately what she can do…And have a good knowledge of what the next step is.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘I think Kate’s probably subconsciously experiencing some disappointment. I don’t know whether her expectations were very high in the first place, in terms of “what am I going to learn?” But I suspect that she expected that she would be learning stuff. I think that she still regards the time when her dad walks in the door at the end of the day as her learning time. I think boredom would probably be most challenging for Kate at school.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

‘The educational experiences or strategies that have been utilised or suggested to meet Matthew’s needs have been to extend his breadth of interests. Matthew’s been overseas, and I think that’s been really positive with his educational experiences. We worked in England for 12 months and travelled throughout Europe for a further 4 months – thereby exposing Matthew to many varied learning opportunities whilst on our holiday. He would listen to information while we were planning our European holiday, and suggest where or what he would like to go or see.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

‘Since returning to ‘home schooling’ in the last few months…the challenges are there’s not really too many kids to play with at recess. And I had heaps of recess, well I don’t anymore. But though that used to be my top point, like when people asked me ‘why do you like home schooling? Do you like home schooling better than school?’ And I said ‘yes.’ And they
asked ‘why?’ ‘because there’s more recess.’ Now I have barely any recess. I have only like about two bits of recess a day. At school… the work was really easy work… Like I didn’t even have to work hard in Maths, I did year seven Maths, which finally actually four kids were doing – three other kids were doing with me. Spelling was on earth my best subject. At least at school it was, because I know that because I didn’t get a single word wrong in spelling tests. And I only did have seven. So it was very difficult not to get a word wrong… I only did one hundred and forty words at school for spelling… it’s sort of a bit difficult for me to grade myself.’

(David)

Comparisons of the educational experiences between the preschoolers and primary age children in this study also supported the research literature in relation to factors that influence the success of education for gifted children. This study demonstrated that educational services which utilise the most current understandings of gifted children and programming for individual differences are the most positive.

Responses provided by the participants in the two preschooler case studies shared few similarities when describing their formal educational experiences. The most common similarities included ‘experiencing extreme separation anxiety during a transition period in three year old kindergarten’ and a belief by professional participants in their case studies that ‘it is important for services to have an awareness of the child’s current skills and abilities’.

‘I was expecting all sorts of ‘thing’ issues (but) right from day one she decided, ‘This is fine, I’ll be confident’ and walked in. It was towards the end of the year when the teacher was doing further studies and left, and another teacher came in for a little while, and all of a sudden we had hysteria. This was the last week of term three and now we’ve turned four, but you’d think, ‘She’s known the whole situation, and everything else was the same.’ It was the same teacher who is actually going to be one of her four year old teachers, a consistent person, but still it was the change of routine. I wasn’t sure whether it was related to jealousy (about the baby) or what it was. A tantrum could last well up to an hour or two hours. I was tearing my hair out. I was looking up the computer about all sorts of syndromes. I would say something to her and she’d come back straight away - I could never win. I never won with her.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘About the last month of his proper three year old Kinder the teacher rang me and wanted me to come and pick him up, because he was just crying the whole time. This was around about the time when we were going through stuff with his brother. Harry was very cluey because we would drop him off at Kinder and he would say things…about not crying like his brother.’

(Harry’s Parent)

Overall, however, the observations and perceptions of the educational experiences of the youngest preschooler, Lucy, were less positive than the elder preschooler, Harry.

As mentioned earlier, Lucy was attending a council run three year old kindergarten program and participants stated that ‘the program included structured experiences that were not challenging’, ‘the
program was of low level quality and low content’, ‘the program had no gifted policy’, and that the ‘parent was disappointed with the educational program provided’. These statements were also provided by at least one other primary age child.

‘I would love the activities to be more open-ended and…where she can do what she wants to do. At home…one of her favourite things is…a little set of art drawers around the corner…with…paper and scissors and sticky tape and bits and pieces. It’s totally self-directed play. She does her own thing, she does it at her level and I think, ‘Why doesn’t she do that at Kinder?’ But it’s a bit like, ‘On this table this is what you do’ - very structured.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

Lucy’s parent and family support person both rated themselves as ‘well informed’ in regards to programming and planning for educational experiences of gifted children and stated that positive educational experiences occurred when ‘parents read a lot to the child’ and ‘parents and child have open and in depth conversations’. As discussed earlier, these statements further support research which recognises the home environment as more stimulating than formal educational environments (Silverman, 1986). However, at three year old kindergarten, Lucy is described as ‘hiding her abilities’ and her parent states that ‘work samples in the form of an individual portfolio do not reflect her abilities or skills’, that ‘exceptional items of work are not acknowledged by staff’, and that ‘she is reluctant to inform staff of Lucy’s needs and abilities for fear of appearing pushy’.

‘At the end of year, we were given…their three year old kinder file. It looked to me like they collected the same things from all the children and put that in. I don’t think they were particular things that they said, ‘Oh, Lucy did a great job. We’ll put that in Lucy’s file.’ I flicked through and thought, ‘Oh yeah, there’s some more art things.’ There was nothing like…even a couple of things with writing on it. There was not much at all…and I wasn’t even sure if they’d looked into detail.

One of them was a family tree that they’d actually done on Grandparents’ Day. And Lucy had put in her tree all the people on my side of the family in age order, from my Grandma all the way through to her sister at the bottom. Her sister was holding her favourite pink teddy, she’d named all the people, and I thought perhaps she thinks because it was Grandparents’ Day that Mum had said, ‘So who’s the oldest?’ and had actually structured it for her, or told her how to spell it. But she actually had done her own inventive spelling, and things that clearly hadn’t been, she knew all the names off by heart. But in her writing you can tell that no-one had dictated it, because it’s her own spelling. There weren’t any examples of that continuum of where she’s going.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

These responses highlight issues raised in the research literature which recognise that gifted children are underachieving or masking their gifts (Gross, 1989), that gifted preschoolers are at risk of remaining unidentified as a result of inappropriate and ill informed assessment and program practices (Hodge & Kemp, 2002), and that there is a reluctance by parents to provide information on their children’s needs and abilities for fear of negative attitudes from others (Begin & Gagne, 1994; Carrington & Bailey, 2000; Callahan, Cooper & Glascock, 2003; Carnellor, 2003; Knopfelmacher &
Kronborg, 2003; Chipego, 2004; Woods, 2004). Furthermore, Lucy’s educational experiences highlight deficiencies in early childhood programs when catering for the needs of gifted children. In comparison, the preschool program attended by Harry appeared to reflect practices and principles similar to the Reggio Emilia philosophy (Barbour & Shalilee, 1998; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993) and was reported by participants as adequately meeting the needs of preschoolers.

Consequently, aside from the separation anxieties at three year old kindergarten in the previous year, perceptions and observations of Harry’s educational experiences were positive. Participants stated that the four year old kindergarten program ‘was of high quality for gifted children’s needs’, ‘planning was based on children’s interests’, ‘planning involved parents’, and ‘planning involved the child’. Furthermore, participants stated that Harry was provided with ‘an individual program plan’, ‘changes had been made in planning for the child’, and that ‘the teacher was well informed in planning for the educational needs of gifted children.’ These statements further support the research literature which recognises the value of parents, children and professionals working together to create and implement programs reflecting the child’s interests and needs (Barbour & Shalilee, 1998; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993), as well as the importance of positive teacher attitudes and experience within the area of gifted education (Begin & Gagné, 1994; Carrington & Bailey, 2000; Callahan, Cooper & Glascock, 2003; Carnellor, 2003; Knopfelmacher & Kronborg, 2003; Chipego, 2004; Woods, 2004).

‘I am unsure if the preschool Harry attends have a gifted policy or programme. I know that on staff one of the teachers is studying in gifted children. I know that they (the preschool) use individual programming to help identify each child’s needs. There has been a questionnaire about what our children’s likes or dislikes, what we think they are good or bad at, or need more attention on. Harry has kind of been involved in the programming and planning of his educational experiences. They were asked what they would like to learn at kinder.’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘With this six months of Kinder…Harry’s gone from not being able to count, to being able to count to a hundred. He’s recognizing letters…and I know that’s a normal kid thing, but for him it went from nothing to there! I don’t know whether…the routine aspect of Kinder…is actually bringing the stuff out. He’s seems to thrive in that very controlled environment. Harry’s getting the best chance. All the different processes that you go through to do their planning program…that is really building him up. I suppose helping him get involved in different bits and pieces. There have been changes or updates to his IPP (Individual Program Plan) to help increase areas that he needs to develop.’

(Harry’s Parent)

There were several unique comments made by participants in Harry’s case study in relation to his educational experiences. These comments included ‘portfolios and assessments are extensive and reflective of the child’s abilities’, ‘the program assists and supports the development of relationships with peers and adults’, and that ‘a psychologist has contributed strategies to be utilised at the service’.
‘Looking at the portfolios…with all the information in there, I don’t think there’s any way that he could actually be better catered for within a Kinder. Other than starting to bring in actual Prep work…I don’t think there’s any way that they…could be expanding. There’s so many specific tasks built up around all...different learning capabilities. They seem to take the Kinder to an extra level…like…heading into Prep…because they’re extending them. They’re getting them to count to a hundred, not just to twenty. You haven’t got your basic stuff there anymore. I think that’s how he’s being challenged. I just find that he is more challenged…being able to do paintings…but (he) can build and create stuff -the way that the studying is actually planned out. I’ve said to other people, “I think he’s at the best Kinder he can be at for his age”. That child who didn’t quite make it into Prep this year, but who certainly seems to be beyond just the normal basics, “Oh you can play outside”, that’s what we want.’

(Harry’s Parent)

Therefore, through the examples highlighted in Lucy and Harry’s case studies, it is proposed that appropriate programming for gifted preschoolers would implement essential curricula elements when planning for gifted children, encompass careful preparation of the learning environment, focus on the ‘relationships’ between parents, teachers and children, view education as an active process, insist that ‘reflection’ of practices and philosophies be ongoing, and develop a child-centred curriculum which recognises the value of ‘play’, as well as the ‘rights’ and ‘voices’ of the children themselves. Furthermore, as suggested by Hodge and Kemp (2002), the gifted preschoolers in this study would benefit from an ‘invitational curriculum’ which avoids placing a ceiling on the expectations of their ability and recognises unevenness in their development, thereby allowing the children to express their potential yet avoiding unfulfilling educational experiences.

Therefore, Harry’s positive educational experiences highlighted the influences of well informed practices in both early childhood and gifted education as found in the research literature (Maker, 1986; Parke & Ness, 1988; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993; Harrison, 1995; Morelock & Morrison, 1996; Barbour & Shalilee, 1998; Harrison, 2000; Hodge & Kemp, 2002; Robinson, 2002; Grant, 2004; Harrison, 2005; Cuikerkorn, Karnes, Manning & Besnoy, 2007), however, they are also reflective of programming guidelines that are considered appropriate for primary age children (Robinson, 2002).

When comparing the educational experiences of the three primary age children, several common statements were provided by participants in relation to each child’s educational program. Positive experiences reported in all primary age children’s case studies included descriptions of programs ‘that made changes in planning to cater for child’s needs’, ‘planned according to the children’s interests’, and ‘recognised the child’s abilities’.
‘Crèche constantly brought to my attention her language skills...In four year old Kinder...in the last term (we had) somebody who was an expert on gifted children, basically cemented what we suspected, because it was really in four year old Kinder that we really realized that.’

(Kate’s Parent)

‘Last year, in Prep, Matthew just glowed. He just absolutely glowed. His prep teacher was just wonderful for him. He was with grade one-two kids, and he was often encouraged to do the grade one work. He would often say ‘I’m allowed to do the Prep work, and as soon as I finish it I’m allowed to go on to the grade one work.’ Occasionally she would actually start him on the grade one work, but she didn’t make a big fuss about that. He loved the challenges. If he got this done, he would go on to that. Matthew was very keen to learn during Prep.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

‘When preparing David for school...we said...‘how would you feel about just trying out school, not to go for ever, but just as an experience?’ He was very positive...we had a lot of preparation. David said ‘Yeah, I’m happy to go.’ Some of his friends were there as well...and it was positive in that they let him go straight into grade five...even though he was only nine. His teacher was just wonderful as a teacher...she put him into year seven Maths...and he had another two or three children who did the same, because it was a composite five-six class.’

(David’s Parent)

The participants from the primary age children’s case studies also stated that the child ‘enjoyed specialist subjects the most’.

‘At school I like P.E. – it makes you fit. I like Maths – it makes you smarter. I go to Mrs J’s room for maths. I get invited into to Mrs J’s grade 2 for maths – not because I’ve been naughty. I like Art – you get to paint. I like L.O.T.E. – because you get to learn a different language. I like other stuff – swimming. I like writing stories – made up stories – because you can make the ending whatever you want. Like in the story ‘Rapunzel’, you can make her with no hair (like in the joke Joe said at the Talent Quest).’

(Matthew)

‘The schoolwork I most enjoy is P.E. because I always loved sport...’

(David)

Positive planning of educational experiences described by participants in Matthew and David’s case studies included ‘high quality programming for the gifted child’s needs’ in a previous educational setting (that is, Matthew’s Grade Prep; David’s Home schooling), ‘subject acceleration provided’, ‘an awareness of the child’s abilities when planning’, ‘parent involved in planning’ (that is, with Matthew’s previous Prep teacher), and the ‘child involved in planning for their educational program’ (that is, David during home school).

‘At initial school meetings...I tried to provide...as much information as they needed, and David...has the advantage that he is very obviously gifted...so people don’t wonder ‘oh yeah, it’s just Mum’. He kind of makes a statement for himself. I always try to be very open...and talk a lot with her (the teacher). I always try to ask her a lot of questions, even when I thought in my own mind I already knew the answers, I never wanted to presume and I
never wanted to come across as somebody who had already made up her mind. I still came in from the point ‘how could we make it work?’…what is your impression?’

(David’s Parent)

‘David was given the opportunity to attend year 8 and year 9 Science classes. He was also given Year 7 Maths to work on.’

(David’s Teacher)

Therefore, as suggested by Robinson (2002), positive educational experiences in these primary age children’s examples included practices that differentiate the curriculum so as to include pace and depth, establish prior knowledge so as to inform planning, integrate the child’s interests and knowledge across key learning areas, and provide extension of prior learning through acceleration. In addition, including the ‘voices’ of the primary age children when planning curriculum was also recognised as useful when setting goals and empowering children in the learning process.

As with the youngest preschooler, Lucy, other positive educational experiences reported by the primary age participants were in relation to the interactions between the parents and the children including ‘parents read a lot to the child’ and ‘parents and children having open and in depth conversations’.

‘We have not tried…to concentrate on what the narrow definition of education is. We (have) spent time talking, explaining. We have worked a fair bit at trying to teach them…life skill. The thing that we’ve really pushed with our kids (is) trying to take the mathematical understanding they have…and…to say ‘okay now we’re going to apply that in real life’. Our kids have a set routine. We do have rules, but they certainly are within parameters.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

However, there were also common educational experiences that were described as negative by the primary school participants and the youngest preschooler, Lucy. These comments included ‘feeling disappointed with the current educational program’, ‘rating the program as low quality and low level content’, and ‘educational setting has no gifted policy’. These responses are supported by the research literature which states that parents of gifted children feel disconnected and frustrated with their interactions and experiences within a range of early childhood and educational environments (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001; Kronborg & Meyland, 2003; Solow, 2003; Grant, 2004).

‘(We believe Kate could have benefited in planning and programming of her educational experiences), but unfortunately our child was given no say or consultation in her own needs. She would have benefited because of her ability to identify areas of interest and to initiate a course and direction for her own development. As well as the individual learning plan, she was given her own box of readers, which was neither monitored nor mentored. This was meant to supply her with a higher level of reading material but is still well below the level of books that she enjoys reading. I’m finding it harder to gauge now (her reading ability)
because of the fact that we’re not really getting, especially at the moment we’re not getting any feedback from school. She’s not getting challenged in any way.’

(Kate’s Parents)

‘Matthew’s with a very unfortunate group of children. In that last year when they did their benchmark testing on that grade, fifty two percent of them didn’t make the Prep benchmark. So he’s with a group of children that are very low academically. He’s also with a group of children that’s got…lots of behavioural problems, specifically ADHD kids. He’s got two with basically Oppositional Defiance Disorder, four of them have actually got really bad hearing problems, which leads to all sorts of other social things, where they don’t hear cues and things like that. He only has four girls in his grade two, which has a dynamic in the room. It’s (now) down to eighteen. It started at about twenty four, but they’ve lost a lot…parents have been taking their kids out. I’ve never seen a grade like this. I’ve been teaching for like a hundred years…they’ve lost twenty five percent of the grade this year, from parents being absolutely cross with what’s been going on there…I’m just close to taking…Matthew out, because he’s just getting nothing.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

‘We still found that David was pretty bored. He enjoyed the social side very much. He loved all the sport outings...(but) there was a lot busy time…just wasted time. They say that a teacher in a given day has probably seven minutes one on one with a child. I was very surprised at the lack of standard of some of the work that he brought home, knowing what he could do. There were certain things said like…’we will show you how to develop a computer website site’ - they were some of the things that we were looking forward to, but didn’t happen, out of logistic reasons.’

(David’s Parents)

A negative educational experience reported by Kate’s parents, and yet reported positively for David and Harry, was the ‘provision of an individual program plan’. David’s individual program plan had been created during his time in home schooling and, as discussed earlier, Harry’s four year old kindergarten teacher facilitated an appropriate individual program plan to meet his needs. However, Kate’s parent’s report that the individual learning plan that had been written for their daughter did not reflect her needs or abilities. As discussed earlier and in the research literature, the best practices in gifted education recognise the importance of the role in the child in curriculum making, the parent’s voice, and the responsibilities of the teacher (Barbour & Shalilee, 1998), however, in Kate’s experience it appears that these roles were either not consulted or poorly informed in the gifted educational practices.

‘They have put together an individual learning plan which we believe does not realistically address the needs of our above average child. We organised a meeting with Kate’s teacher and specialist/gifted teacher to express our concerns regarding the significant individual needs of our child, to our disappointment finding the specialist teacher to incorrectly identify our daughter’s needs and attempt to mainstream her with all other students.’

(Kate’s Parents)
Kate and Matthew also shared some common educational experiences that were not evident in other case studies. Some of the responses from participants in both case studies stated that ‘the child enjoyed writing at the educational setting’, ‘neat writing was the most challenging aspect of the program’, ‘the range of abilities in the child’s class was extensive’, and ‘there were extreme behaviour issues witnessed in the child’s class and not associated with the child’.

‘At school, I like writing about the weekend and holidays because I have lots to write about and I enjoy writing’. I find writing straight on the lines is most challenging at school because sometimes my writing goes crooked. We get to do writing in the middle of the afternoon, just before lunchtime and after play lunch. I’m the second person who writes most writing – I’m in fourth. The first person is Henry. Henry writes...he even takes up a story that takes three pages of his book. I always write them about animals – and when I have to write them about transport I don’t feel happy because I really want to write about animals.’

(Kate)

Kate and David shared several common educational experiences that were not evident in other case studies. These statements included ‘the child will learn nothing new in their current grade level’, ‘the child doesn’t fit the current educational system’, ‘the child is not involved in the planning of their educational experiences’, and ‘the child expresses that they are bored or disinterested with work at the educational service’. These examples further suggest that Victorian government policies on gifted education are not successfully reflected in the practices of the educational systems attended by these two gifted children, to the point that David’s parents recognised homeschooling as the most suitable alternative for catering for their child’s needs.

‘But at the end of the day we began to see... that he wasn’t really receiving the benefit of perhaps what we were informed might happen. They tried very hard, but at the end of the day... we said ‘it’s time to pull him out.’ It’s been good. He’s seen what school’s like. He’s built some more friendships outside of home-schooling. And that’s all good. But at the end of the day his schooling prowess is back on home base. I felt that as far as the school was going all options were exhausted... nothing really led to a satisfactory resolution... where I thought this would be positive for David. We even tried to get to a part-time position... because... David really wanted to stay closer for the social, and for the sports... but they didn’t feel they could offer that. To be honest I think its better, because then otherwise they live in two worlds.’

(David’s Parents)

Matthew and David also shared several common educational experiences as described by the participants in their case studies. These statements included ‘gifted children need rules at home’, ‘gifted children need open ended learning experiences’, ‘the child’s interests in some educational area have diminished since entering formal schooling’, ‘child was the youngest in their year level’, and ‘the option to grade accelerate had been offered but was declined’.
‘(His Prep teacher) did ask us if we wanted to upgrade him to grade two, instead of doing grade one. We didn’t understand the underlying of what she was trying to tell us. I wish she had actually been more specific about it. But the thing that kept coming back to our mind is the fact that he’s a January baby, and he could have deferred from that grade, let alone be put up to another grade. So for that reason, and because the school had catered so beautifully for him last year, I think he came out at about level 18 in his reading last year. So we just feel, they were catering for him like that in Prep, and we had no doubt that they would be fine. And he was very happy. (So) we had the option to skip Matthew a grade last year, and we didn’t take it.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

The most significant number of unique responses collected under the theme of ‘educational experiences’ were provided by participants from the primary age children’s case studies. Some of these responses will be now be discussed.

Although a gifted policy was apparent at Kate’s school, her parents stated that there were several actions taken by the school that did not assist in the appropriate education of their daughter. Unique comments provided by the participants in Kate’s case study included ‘low quality interactions and feedback with the teacher’, ‘the principal appears unsupportive of Kate’s needs even when evidence was provided’, and ‘gifted provisions had been stopped without explanation’.

‘The thing that concerns us is…you go in and you speak and…express your concerns, but then it seems to go against you. She gets less now. We tend to have been…given the brush off now completely. Nothing has happened at all. We went there because things had stopped, now she’s getting even less. She’s not even getting separate work in the classroom. We were promised that she would spend time with a gifted education teacher…that she would be given separate projects and tasks, that she would be put with likeminded kids and groups. None of that has happened. I may as well have gone and talked to the Proprietor of Melbourne’s Cheapest Cars, for my daughter’s education, than talk to the Principal at her Primary School. It’s just gone in one ear and out the other, and he’s just a salesman to me. He took me in the front door, kept me happy, and sent me out the side door.’

(Kate’s Parents)

Kate also provided statements that suggested she was unhappy with aspects of her educational experiences including ‘I always go running off at school – far away’ and ‘I am unsure of what to do in class’. Again, the ‘voice’ of Kate provided a significantly important perspective on the ‘reality’ of some of her experiences when attending school and reflect a sense of frustration and confusion that clearly requires intervention and support by understanding educators.

Kate’s grade one teacher was also able to provide unique comments on Kate’s educational experiences and stated that ‘Kate prefers one on one learning with the teacher’, ‘Kate is unwilling and difficult to assess’, ‘Kate attends an in-school program specifically catering for gifted children’, and ‘there is communication with parents about Kate’s social and behavioural development but not about her educational needs’. These comments suggest that Kate’s teacher is having difficulty with
understanding and catering for Kate’s educational needs and would benefit from expert advice and further support from professionals in the area of gifted education.

‘It is difficult to assess Kate’s ability within the classroom as she does present as a child often ‘unwilling’ to extend herself. Kate will often participate in a willing manner when working one on one and verbally, however is not so willing when required to work independently or record her ideas. We have ‘Discovery Learning’ sessions each week which Kate participates in. Kate is also involved in all writing/reading related Whiz Kids sessions.’

(Kate’s Grade One Teacher)

‘(When planning for Kate’s educational needs) I have not utilised Kate’s mother in this way however we do regularly discuss Kate’s needs – although more often this is her social and behavioural needs. (I also have discussions with) the Gifted and Talented Coordinator and suggestions taken on board from other colleagues have been used when planning and programming for Kate. Support services for the gifted have not played a role in the provision of educational experiences for Kate - none that I can think of.’

(Kate’s Grade One Teacher)

There were several unique comments made by the participants in Matthew’s case study in relation to his educational experiences. Several of these statements were provided by his parents and focus on the role of the parent in preparing their child with skills that will support their abilities such as ‘it is important to train gifted children in life skills, attitudes and values’, ‘it is important to use practical examples with the child’s learning experiences’, and ‘gifted children need to be taught to give back to society and help others’. Matthew’s parents express a strong view that parents must play a pivotal role in the education of their gifted child, particularly in relation to life skills and utilising individual gifts and talents practically.

‘Something else we’ve spent a lot of time on doing is making kids understand the value of things. We constantly encourage Matthew to be independent, show initiative and solve problems creatively. Each day they have some jobs to do - they have to make their bed, they have to put their lunch box on the table at the end of the day, they have to put all their dishes away, and they have to take all their clothes up off the floor, and they have to put their dirty clothes in the wash basket. They have a real understanding of what it is to be part of a community. I guess that’s something that we’ve tried to explain, not just to friends who think their kids are gifted, but just kids in general.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

Matthew’s parents also stated that extension of his skills, abilities and interests were provided outside of the classroom including ‘attending Sunday school activities’, ‘attending Chess Club’, and ‘attending several sporting activities’.

‘Matthew participates in Sunday school activities and chess club. There’s quite a few things we haven’t managed to get them keen on…music, maybe building, a lot of the hands on
things. They have these wonderful sets of Lego and they just have no interest in doing them. Maybe we’ve just not modelled it, or got involved, or they are obsessed with sport.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

In relation to provisions and services provided by the educational environment Matthew attended, participants stated that ‘Matthew was expected to tutor or mentor less able children in his class’, ‘multi-age grouping would be ideal for Matthew’, ‘a gifted program had been offered at the service but was either for older classes or withdrawn’, and ‘transitions between year levels had been ineffective’.

‘This year Matthew would say, ‘If only the kids were more quiet, and listened to what Mrs *** said, then it would be much better.’ He’s frustrated in that he doesn’t get through nearly as much as what he used to. He’s frustrated by the behaviour of others. He just sees it as a real waste of an opportunity…he…says…things like, ‘I just don’t get it, if they just sat and be quiet, they’d learn so much more.’ And he actually sees the loss of that opportunity.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

Although parents are recognised as valuable contributors to the educational experiences of their gifted children, it is critical that educational systems understand their responsibility and role in catering for the needs and abilities of gifted children whilst in their service. Government policy has recognised the specific needs of gifted children and yet, Matthew’s experiences reflect an inconsistent provision of appropriate educational services in the early primary years.

There were several unique comments made by the participants in David’s case study in relation to his educational experiences. Several of these statements were provided by his parents and focused on the effect of formal schooling in comparison to home schooling on their son. These statements included ‘David missed out on fun experiences in his grade level when subject accelerated at school’, ‘David demonstrated ‘stress’ when tested at school – even when performing at high levels’, ‘the academic experiences provided at school were negative in comparison to home school’, and ‘a part time position was requested by David’s parents but declined by the school’. As discussed earlier, problematic behaviours related to stress can result when a gifted child is placed in an educational environment that is unable to meet their social, emotional and cognitive needs (Delisle, 1998) and it is evident that several of David’s difficulties during his time in formal schooling were the result of this.

‘At school, I find ‘writing’ the most challenging because it makes my hand tired… I found writing really challenging…because I had to like write one and a half pages to two pages. It’s almost like torture for me. I would rather type out all that, than write it down. I found Art really challenging…because of the teacher… last year I had it really tough with the Art teacher…Because like, I was like doing an art project on geography, and she said like that we can only do the parts turned up that we absolutely have to. And that that’s what I did, but though she still got mad with me, and she said that I was really close to getting like a zero.
But though luckily, believe it or not, I forgot to hand in my paper for her to give me the points, so luckily I didn’t even have to see a zero or a P on it.’

(David)

‘At one point he came to melt down, and he literally was just crying and crying…he was doing a test. And I said ‘you don’t have to do the test.’ And he says ‘I want to do the test, but I’m not really sure I will be good enough.’ And we said to him ‘it doesn’t matter how good you are, even just that you want to do it.’ I said to him ‘I wouldn’t like to do it, if I would be in your place.’ And we said ‘you can say no, it’s totally fine.’ But he started to put himself under certain pressures. And from the moment on he had the melt down…and that’s how David is, he will cope very well, but if he gets pushed too far…I could see him emotionally he didn’t cope very well any more. The teachers wouldn’t pick it up…because they always said ‘oh he’s so friendly, he’s chatting with everybody, he will get along with everybody.’ And the teacher said ‘he will not have any problems whatever.’ But I could see it.’

(David’s Parent)

‘During the one term where he did attend school he was subjected to bullying by his peers and treated ‘unprofessionally’ by one staff member. This experience caused him anxiety and led him to leaving the school.’

(David’s Family Support Person)

Therefore, although subject and grade acceleration were clearly recognised as suitable academic options for David, it also added complication to his sense of belonging within his year group.

Following David’s formal schooling experience, his parents reported several unique behaviours including ‘David demonstrated significant lack of motivation immediately following formal schooling’, and that ‘David developed a ‘fear of failure’ following his school experience’. As supported by the research literature, it is evident that David was experiencing ‘burnout’ during his final months of formal schooling (Delisle, 1998) and had developed negative behaviours which were uncharacteristic whilst he was in a supportive home school environment.

‘It actually took David almost a term to get back to being schooled at home…what really surprised me was his lack of motivation to learn. I really experienced that when he was going to school. In the beginning he was still coming home wanting to look things up. In the end he was constantly just saying ‘Mum I’m so tired, I can’t think anymore.’ I had to push him to do something. In the end I thought, ‘okay this is a home schooling phase’. And I just literally let him go. There was certain minimal, like his Maths and some other things, he had to do it. But otherwise I pretty much just let him ride, and I found it almost took a term for him for the love of learning to come back. He was only at school for six months, and it had an incredible impact! Now he wants to gain knowledge again. He wants to experiment. He’s not afraid of failing. Whereas when that fear of failing started to settle in…having incredibly high expectations of himself, not from anybody else…he’s quite a competitive boy now.’

(David’s Parents)

Other unique statements provided by the participants in David’s case study focused on the educational experiences he is receiving through home schooling. These statements included ‘David
is now thriving in the home schooling environment’, ‘David learns best through projects or topics without the need of a sequential program’, and that ‘other home schooling parents often have gifted children who do not fit the educational system like David’. Homeschooling is a legal alternative for parents when seeking options for educating their gifted child (Department of Education and Early Childhood, 2008) and as described by David’s parents provides the opportunity to implement educational practices most suited to David’s individual abilities that were not provided during his formal schooling experience.

‘As we are going back to home-schooling, we are able to let David investigate and explore areas of interest at a deeper level…We always consult with David at home and at school. David plays an active part in his educational experiences and the planning…We believe the most important areas of development and learning when planning and programming for David’s educational experiences include providing David with a balanced education which extends him horizontally as well as letting him advance ahead.’

(David’s Parents)

‘I can’t remember whether it was at a conference we heard it or from some friends…but they said – rather than necessarily getting all these programs and trying to put something together, so that he gets a bit of this and a bit of that, why don’t you find out what he’s interested in, and then build something around that. So…I said to him “what would you like to study this year?” And he said ‘Roman History.’ And as a result…there’s language of Latin, there’s Italian as a language…the Geography and History with Italy…English…the Art and columns and paraphernalia…and although he has done a lot of his own research…via the internet, through reading…books…it’s been quite amazing…another way of learning for him.’

(David’s Parents)

Finally, David’s parents provided further comment on their concern for David’s educational experiences in the future now that he is demonstrating skills and abilities typical of students in senior levels of formal schooling. In particular they commented that they were contemplating correspondence programs of study to cater for David’s academic abilities.

‘The other interesting hurdle…that we’ve had (is) where he’s ten, but he’s literally doing work of a fourteen year old. That…hit us between the eyeballs…when we thought ‘hang on a minute, if he’s doing work of a fourteen year old - that means he’s year eight. At this rate, in four more years he’s in his final year of Secondary School as a fourteen year old.’ At the rate that he’s going now…you couldn’t send a fourteen, fifteen year old to our university campuses, and expect them to be on that emotional level, that those sorts of students are. But this gentleman we spoke to said…he could do it via correspondence.’

(David’s Parents)

In conclusion, all five case study children appear to present with a range of levels of giftedness which require educational environments and support services that will assist in the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices. Therefore, it is proposed that all of the children in this study required a program that planned for their mental age rather than their chronological age; pre-determined their prior knowledge so as planning for new learning built on existing knowledge;
utilised ‘strength-based’ practices which focus on their skills and abilities; recognised the importance of the ‘voices’ of the children, their parents and significant others; and were flexible when implementing a wide range of educational experiences to cater for their individual needs. In the case of the profoundly gifted children there is possibly a greater importance on the flexibility of the program and the number of resources provided to cater for their unique social, emotional and cognitive abilities. As stated in the research literature and supported by this current study, some of the most successful educational experiences for highly gifted children have been in services whereby the children are enrolled in fulltime programs with gifted peers, qualified teachers in gifted education and supported by an appropriately designed accelerated curriculum (Feldhusen, 1991) such as David’s homeschooling arrangement and Harry’s four year old kindergarten program. Furthermore, responses in relation to appropriate programming including open ended, engaging and ongoing experiences reflective of the strengths, interests and needs of the child are supported in the research literature and endorsed by well respected philosophies in early childhood education such as that from Reggio Emilia, Italy (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993). In conclusion, the current study continues to support the research literature which states that positive influences on educational programs and practices for gifted children occur when parents, teachers and support services are well informed in gifted education (Maker, 1986; Borland, 1988; Passow, 1988; Feldhusen, 1991; Benbow, 1997; Parke & Ness, 1998; Smutney & Blocksom, 1990; Van Tassel-Baska, 1992; Harrison, 1995; Morelock & Morrison, 1996; Gross, 1997; Kulik & Kulik, 1997; Barbour & Shalilee, 1998; Delisle, 1998; Gross, 1999b; Karnes, Lewis & Stephens, 1999; Neihart, 1999; Harrison, 2000; Diezmann, Watters & Fox, 2001; Cronin & Diezmann, 2002; Hodge & Kemp, 2002; Robinson, 2002; Van Tassel-Baska, 2003; Grant, 2004; Wellisch, 2004; Besnoy, 2005; Harrison, 2005; Kronberg & Plunkett, 2006; Cuikerkorn, Karnes, Manning, Houston & Besnoy, 2007; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2007).
# Table 6. Participants’ identification of the teacher attitudes and feelings towards the case study children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Attitude and Feelings</th>
<th>Lucy (L) P F S</th>
<th>Harry (H) P F 3 4</th>
<th>Kate (K) P F T</th>
<th>Matthew (M) P T/F</th>
<th>David (D) P F T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher highly aware of child’s interests &amp; abilities</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*prep</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher negative about child/often hostile and unsupportive of child</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
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<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Principal stated ‘Gifted children only gifted in one area &amp; not across the board’? ‘All children gifted’? ‘Only had one gifted child in my class before’</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher has qualifications or experience in gifted education</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher states that child can be uncooperative</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher suggested whole grade acceleration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* *prep</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher is liked by child</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher focusing on ‘fixing’ deficits and neglecting ‘strengths’ (more concerned about child’s challenges)</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher feels unqualified in extension of gifted</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher feels need to learn more about gifted</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher not coping with whole class behaviour &amp; struggling to plan for the gifted child</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**
- L: Lucy
- P: Parent
- F: Family Support Person
- 3: Four year old kindergartner teacher
- H: Harry
- S: Specialist
- 4: Teacher
- K: Kate
- T: Teacher
- M: Matthew
- D: David
- T/F: Teacher and Family Support Person

* Denotes a response
5.1.6 Teacher attitudes and feelings towards the case study children

The responses, presented in Table 6, support the research literature and indicate that similarities in teacher attitudes and feelings are most likely linked to their level of experience and qualifications in gifted education (Begin & Gagné, 1994; Carrington & Bailey, 2000; Callahan, Cooper & Glascock, 2003; Carnellor, 2003; Knopfelmacher & Kronborg, 2003; Chipego, 2004; Woods, 2004).

Teacher attitudes and feelings towards gifted education and the children in this study play an influential role in the quality of the interactions and educational service provided to meet their needs. The most common response in relation to teacher attitudes and feelings was recorded by participants in Harry, Matthew and David’s case studies and stated that ‘the teacher was highly aware of the child’s interests and abilities’.

‘The teacher and co-teacher at 4 year old kinder, just seem to know exactly what’s going on with all the kids. That’s what I said, “You tend to know my kids better than I do!”’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘(When planning and programming for Harry it was important) probably just challenging him with his building and things like that because that was obviously his area of strengths and his area of interest…Giving Harry some more leadership was important, getting him to give some direction to other children as well. Getting him to listen for longer periods of time, getting him to come and speak in front of the group, which he quite often liked to do but he could get a little bit self-conscious at times - challenging him with those sorts of things. I think the other thing that helped too in terms of challenging and catering for his next specific needs, when something different was going to happen in the program, just re-enforcing with him that tomorrow this is going to happen, it will be different, is it something you need to be worried about, or when we’ve thought about it ‘no, it’s not, because it’s safe at Kinder.’ I think they were some of the ways in which his needs were catered for.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘Last year, in Prep, Matthew just glowed. He just absolutely glowed. His prep teacher was just wonderful for him.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

‘David’s Grade 5 teacher has been great and tried to extend him with year 7 Maths and year 9 Science – even though he is only 9 years old. She has been instrumental in reassuring and making him feel part of the grade 5/6 composite class. His teacher was involved with ‘Tournament of the minds’. So she’s exposed to children like that…and they both clicked. They talked the other day on the phone and they just…have this rapport.’

(David’s Parents)

However, this study suggests that, although teachers may feel highly aware of the children’s abilities and needs, they have not always been able to provide a suitable learning program to match these needs. For example, the teachers in Harry and David’s case studies state that they ‘have
qualifications and experience in gifted education’, but they also state that they ‘need to learn more about gifted’ in order to be able to cater for them.

‘I would consider myself to be ‘well informed’ on planning and programming for gifted children.’

‘(I think probably the biggest thing is that we’ve all got lots to learn. Most teachers I think…find it difficult to identify children who are gifted and I think it would probably be helpful if we all had more information enough to really find out more.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘I would rate myself as ‘poorly informed to somewhat informed’ on planning and programming for gifted children. When I did my Bachelor of Education I did a unit on ‘gifted education’ and we looked at ways of identifying, and then ways of actually handling them through Bloom’s Taxonomy…I’ve done a fair bit of work on ‘multiple intelligence cards.’ I’m really into the Thinking Curriculum…I’m still learning.’

(David’s Teacher)

Furthermore, participants from Harry and Kate’s case studies who stated that ‘teachers feel unqualified in extension of gifted’ were able to provide descriptions as to how this may have impacted on the planning and programming for the children in the study.

‘I’m not qualified, or I don’t feel confident to extend him or give what he needs. I think that’s up to the professionals. So whether it’s right or wrong, I think for that twelve months, I did the best I could, and that’s what my plan of attack would be.’

(Harry’s Three Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘There is a gifted education coordinator at the school who appears to have done nothing. No planning and program changes have occurred at school. Programming and planning, in Kate’s case, has been appalling quality or non-existent…With the exception of Kate’s kindergarten teacher, the teachers are totally unprepared and unable to provide and appropriate educational program. They have no understanding or appreciation of giftedness or how to cope with a child like Kate.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

These responses support the research literature which states that there has been a lack of pre-service and post-service training when programming for gifted children which has resulted in a negative influence on the quality of the provisions catering for the child’s individual needs (Begin & Gagné, 1994; Carrington & Bailey, 2000; ; The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001; Callahan, Cooper & Glascock, 2003; Carnellor, 2003; Knopfelmacher & Kronborg, 2003; Chipego, 2004; Woods, 2004; Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, 2008).

Another comment provided by participants in Kate and Matthew’s case studies suggested that teachers’ attitudes and feelings in relation to the gifted child may have been affected by other
classroom issues. For example, the parents of Kate and Matthew stated that ‘teachers were not coping with whole classroom behaviour and were struggling to plan for their gifted child’.

“They’ve got twenty two children in a class from silence to clever, from somebody extremely disruptive, who has a bad home life, and all the negative things that a small child of that age can have. And the teacher has to deal with that problem, and try and nurture that child and bring them up.”

(Kate’s Parents)

“Matthew’s with a very unfortunate group of children. In that last year when they did their bench mark testing on that grade, fifty two percent of them didn’t make the Prep bench mark. So he’s with a group of children that are very low academically. He’s also with a group of children that’s got…lots of behavioural problems, specifically ADHD kids. He’s got two with basically Oppositional Defiance Disorder, four of them have actually got really bad hearing problems, which leads to all sorts of other social things, where they don’t hear cues and things like that. He only has four girls in his grade two, which has a dynamic in the room. It’s (now) down to eighteen. It started at about twenty four, but they’ve lost a lot…parents have been taking their kids out. I’ve never seen a grade like this. I’ve been teaching for like a hundred years…they’ve lost twenty five percent of the grade this year, from parents being absolutely cross with what’s been going on there…I’m just close to taking…Matthew out, because he’s just getting nothing.”

(Matthew’s Parents)

Myths and misconceptions about gifted children have also been reported or provided by participants in Harry, Kate and David’s case studies. The three statements made by either principals or teachers in these case studies included ‘gifted children are only gifted in one area and not across the board’, ‘all children are gifted’, and ‘I have only had one gifted child in my class before’.

“(Giftedness)...it’s never come across, until I met you, and just our little boy from last year, it’s never crossed my path. But Harry is my first little sort of taste of what may be.”

(Harry’s Three Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

“(Giftedness)...to have the Principal of a school tell you...that ‘she’s doing well in one area, but children aren’t gifted across the board, are not intelligent across the board, they just have a particular area where they’re good.’ I honestly looked at him and wondered what he was doing there, and wondered how he got there, and thought perhaps he should be somewhere else. Perhaps I should have said it.”

(Kate’s Parents)

“(Giftedness)...there’s so many different...misconceptions out there...educating the education system I think is important as well. We rang up this one Principal, because we heard that they take home schoolers on a part time basis...and the first thing he said ‘all children are gifted.’ And I just (thought) ‘what?'

(David’s Parents)

The negative impact of myths and misconceptions, even by well meaning professionals, is particularly significant in Kate’s case study as the experiences provided by her parents, her family
support person and Kate herself, suggest a high degree of frustration and dissatisfaction when discussing the perceived knowledge of the educational service and professionals responsible for her educational experiences.

The statements above provide evidence of the continuation of pervading myths and misconceptions experienced by several of the case study children and their families in formal educational settings. As recognised in the research literature, even though there has been extensive evidence provided to counter the myths that have been created in relation to giftedness (Terman & Oden, 1925; Terman & Oden, 1926; Hollingworth, 1926; Terman & Oden, 1947; Terman & Oden, 1959; Gross, 1986; Gross, 1993), educational professionals continue to perpetuate common misconceptions which play a negative and unsupportive role in the provision on appropriate services for gifted children. In particular, these examples highlight misconceptions about the definition of ‘giftedness’, the belief that parents overestimate their child’s abilities, and that teacher’s are more accurate in assessing the advanced development of a child.

Research literature recognises that gifted children are best served by teachers who have specific personality characteristics and professional competences in relation to their specific needs (Knopfelmacher & Kronborg, 2003; Woods, 2004). However, examples in this current study provide evidence of teacher attitudes and feelings that have a negative impact on the education of the gifted child. Common responses reported by participants in Kate and David’s case studies in relation to teacher attitudes and feelings stated that ‘teachers have been negative or openly hostile and unsupportive to the child’ and that the ‘teacher is focussed on fixing deficits and neglecting their strengths, or more concerned about the child’s challenges’.

‘I feel like we’re getting too many negative comments from teachers. It’s more about…her bossiness or her over-excitability. I feel…they don’t fully understand the gifted thing, that they misconstrue some of her behaviour, which I don’t see as actually naughty behaviour…just like passionate about the things that are going on around her. It’s almost like she keeps getting told negative stuff. I said to a parent today…‘never once has the (Grade Prep) teacher ever said, ever given me feedback on her reading, not from the day she had her assessment, she’s never mentioned it, she never tells me where she’s at with it. I’ve never had any feedback on the fact that she is bright.’ I’ve only ever been told negative stuff – be it with her behaviour, be it with her personality, be it with her habit of…collecting sticks and rocks, because that’s…messy. The teacher sees her interesting nature, which we think is the most fantastic thing, as an annoying messy habit.’

(Kate’s Parents)

‘I am finding it is a fine line between concentrating on her social needs and educational needs. I’m trying to develop my skills as a better informed teacher.’

(Kate’s Year One Teacher)

‘The harder area for him was Art. The teacher was incredibly inflexible…she didn’t even worry about talking to the classroom teacher and say ‘is this normal?’ He literally didn’t present anything. She said to him, ‘David, if you don’t give me anything, I’ll give you a
zero.’ I met his classroom teacher because I said…‘if he would have tried and missed, a
normal teacher would have said ‘David, how can we help you?’ We tried and she became
very unpleasant in Sport as well (because she was also the Sport teacher). She put him into
competitions with eleven year olds, he was nine and not a strong nine…in Sports. Then the
nine year olds, and the eleven year olds (were) going ‘oh we’re going to lose because of you.’
She was very unbiased, very inflexible. It added to all the stress for him…because he felt
under incredible pressure. He’s still building up slowly confidence again…and it’s not that
he couldn’t do it. The one thing that she wanted him to do, he couldn’t do because he’s never
done anything…so we said ‘what can we do at home?’ ‘Nothing! He has to do it at school.’
We said ‘how can we help him?’ ‘Nothing! He has to do it by himself.’…Just very, very
rigid.

(David’s Parents)

Some statements in relation to teacher attitudes and feelings focused on the direct experiences
teachers had with the children in the study. Teachers in Harry and Kate’s case studies reported that at
times ‘the child could be uncooperative’.

‘The only other time I ever had to address Harry was we had our group time when we were
together in a large group, and somebody else was speaking. He could be distracted very,
very easily, and would start talking to his friends all the time. He found it…either boring to
listen to somebody else or…what he had to say to his friends was more important. But quite
often I would have to say to him, ‘You either need to listen to the person that’s speaking,
because that’s respectful, or you need to move from your friends.’ And most of the time he
would choose to stay with his friends and he would re-focus again, but occasionally I would
still have to remind him that it was not his turn to speak.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘It is difficult to assess Kate’s ability within the classroom as she does present as a child often
‘unwilling’ to extend herself. Kate will often participate in a willing manner when working
one on one and verbally, however is not so willing when required to work independently or
record her ideas.’

(Kate’s Year One Teacher)

The children also were able to provide descriptions of their direct interactions with teachers. Both
Kate and David reported positive relationships with their teachers and their comments reflect the
values and qualities of the teachers which were most important to the child at that time.

‘My (grade 1) teacher is nice because she is friendly to me. She likes me the most. My
teacher doesn’t care if I get stuff wrong. It makes me happy.’

(Kate)

‘At school, I most enjoy Mrs O. because she is the second best teacher I ever had…she was
my classroom teacher, so that was one big reason…she taught me most of the big subjects.
Also she was the one who introduced me to everybody at school…She’s actually my third
best teacher. My second best teacher is Mummy, and my best teacher is God.’

(David)

Responses from two teachers in the study suggested they were open to strategies and program
adjustments such as acceleration when catering for the needs of the children in the study. The
research literature supports alternative approaches to modifications in gifted children’s learning environments, however, states that there should be a collaborative process between the key stakeholders as well as the use of multiple data sources to ensure issues are illuminated and planned for to ensure the greatest opportunity for success (Van Tassel-Baska, 2003). The teachers from Matthew and David’s case studies have ‘suggested subject and whole grade acceleration’ as a strategy to provide more appropriate learning experiences for both children. However, Matthew’s teacher and parents were concerned that he was lacking skills in some areas and decided it was best to remain with his same age peers.

‘I was very concerned sending Matthew into a straight grade 1 class for 2006 that his needs would be more difficult to meet within this context. There were a number of issues - one of them was that it was a very difficult group of children. I knew what the children were like, and I knew that there were a number of quite badly behaved children who, as much as they would be looked after and cared for in the class…it would put stress on Matthew…to be with all of those children. The other thing was that when he started and I found out where he was at with his Maths, I thought ‘Great, I’ve got a group that I can slot him in, where he will be understanding and enjoying.’ I had grade One’s…in the Prep/One class…so I was thinking ‘Well…that will mean that Matthew will be all by himself.’ To me that’s a really hard thing for a child to be in a group all by themselves. I would be concerned that either he would become proud or that he would become discouraged, because he was alone. Initially we thought we were going to have a grade one-two class, and I had his name on the top…Matthew would be very multi-aged until grade two. That would have been my ideal, where he had a chance to be with his own peers socially…and the team work and everything is just as much in your group work as…the actual group that you’re doing.’

(Matthew’s Prep Teacher/Family Support Person)

In contrast, David’s parents and teacher, provided both subject and whole grade acceleration but his parents still decided to remove him from formal schooling when it was identified that his levels of skills and abilities continued to be advanced even following the acceleration, and that it would complicate his sense of belonging within his class.

‘For next year, it was suggested to let David do year 6 with extension in the higher grades. We declined as we thought it might be too much ‘chop’ and ‘change’ and might lead to David not feeling a part of the class or belonging to his classmates. To telescope him into year 7 was not endorsed by us or his teacher as we felt he was too young and the age group too wide.’

(David’s Parents)

‘The only thing I can think of is – Should have David been put in Year eight, even though he was only ten? I don’t know…because he was doing really well with that. Here I am saying the social side of things, but that probably wasn’t first in his mind. Personally I think…school must have been stifling for him…he probably would have loved that freedom of just exploring and finding out…what he wanted to find out about.’

(David’s Teacher)

Therefore, Matthew and David’s case studies provide two separate examples of the issues associated with program modifications for gifted children. Although strongly supported by research, program
modifications such as acceleration may be avoided due to lack of support or understanding by the teacher about the characteristics of gifted learners such as presented in Matthew’s case (Neihart, 1999; Van Tassel-Baska, 2003), or ineffective due to a lack of teacher knowledge in relation to the level of giftedness and pace required to meet individual gifted children’s needs such as David (Passow, 1988; Feldhusen, 1991; Van Tassel-Baska, 2003).

As the children in this study are interacting with teachers at significantly different stages of the formal educational system, it could be predicted that the participants in each separate case study may also report uniquely different perceptions and experiences in relation to teacher attitudes and feelings. In particular, this has been evident in the case of the youngest preschooler, Lucy.

The youngest preschooler, Lucy, shared no common statements with any other children in the study. However, the statements provided by her parents about teacher attitudes and feelings included ‘the three year old preschool teacher was three year trained and therefore, was not fully qualified’, ‘the teacher was reluctant to recognise Lucy as highly intelligent’, and ‘there was concern about negative attitudes if ‘giftedness’ was raised with the teacher’.

‘I just really thought that was the important thing for the teachers to be able to discover what she could do, rather than have a pre-conceived idea of, ‘This neurotic mother has already come up and told me she can do ‘ta diddle diddle da’, and is expecting something of us, and we need to look at that.’ I thought, ‘Oh, I’ll let it go and then see how the year progresses.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘The teacher even said ‘I don’t usually like to say this, but she is highly intelligent.’ She didn’t like to normally comment on that sort of thing (but) she said, ‘Look, she’s very intelligent. She’s seeing what’s going on. She knows all this.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

Consequently, when comparing the experiences of the two preschoolers Harry and Lucy, the current study has supported the research literature which states that programming for preschoolers requires teachers to have an understanding of their unique educational needs and characteristics and then implement appropriate practices and assessment when programming (Maker, 1986; Parke & Ness, 1988; Harrison, 1995; Morelock & Morrison, 1996; Hodges & Kemp, 2002; Harrison, 2005; Cuikerkorn, Karnes, Manning, Houston & Besnoy, 2007). Furthermore, in relation to all case studies, teacher knowledge in gifted education, as well as individual teacher attitudes and feelings have been highly influential in the quality and provision of appropriate strategies and practices when catering for the needs of both preschoolers and primary age children.
Table 7. Participants’ identification of the available support structures for gifted children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Available Support Structures</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Harry</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>David</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant rated ‘poorly to very poorly informed’</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘somewhat informed’ to ‘well informed’</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals in gifted education helpful</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community services such as libraries/reading sessions</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent is recognised as an excellent resource</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance at gifted information evenings</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A gifted support group for parents</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations with other parents of gifted children beneficial</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended CHIP services</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools not supportive or gifted children’s issues</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet information useful</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A GTC</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment for extensions of gifted children</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**
- L: Lucy
- P: Parent
- F: Family Support Person
- H: Harry
- K: Kate
- M: Matthew
- S: Specialist
- D: David
- T: Teacher
- T/F: Teacher and Family Support Person

* Denotes a response
5.1.7 Available support structures for gifted children

The responses, presented in Table 7, indicate that participants who rated themselves as ‘somewhat informed to well informed’ in relation to support services for gifted children and their families were more likely to access these services or feel confident with their own resources when catering for their gifted child than those participants who had rated themselves as ‘poorly to very poorly informed’. Furthermore, it is evident that generally participants from the primary age children’s case studies offered significantly greater knowledge and access to support services for gifted children and their families. This factor appears to be related to the age differences and subsequent life experiences of each of the case study children, as well as the perceived need of each child as they progressed through their lifespan.

The research literature recognises a wide range of support services for gifted children and their families and several were recognised by participants from all five studies, although not by participants in all case studies (Australian Association of Education for the Gifted and Talented, 2008; CHIP Foundation, 2008; Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, 2008; Krongold Centre, 2008; Gifted Resources, 2008). The most frequently known or accessed support services named by participants in the study included ‘professionals in gifted education’, community services such as libraries’, ‘parents of gifted the children themselves as an excellent resource’, ‘information evenings discussing giftedness’, and ‘gifted support groups for parents’.

‘It’s difficult to know exactly where to go, especially when you can see that the development is advanced from an early age…apart from…the available resources in the community…the libraries, the reading sessions that are offered, the different specialized play groups.’

(Lucy’s Specialist)

‘In relation to the needs and experiences of my gifted child I have attended an information evening and read newspaper articles. I have only just started finding out about gifted children and where I can go to find out more. I have been recommended to attend the Gifted Network Parents Support Group.’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘Kate’s mother and I had a great deal in common because we could understand each other’s concerns with our children, which cannot be shared with many other parents. I suggested websites, books and professionals for Kate’s mother which I hoped she found useful in assuring her Kate was gifted.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

‘My greatest source of knowledge came from discussions with other teachers and in particular perceptions and expectations that Matthew’s parents had for how we would best meet his needs.’

(Matthew’s Family Support Person/Teacher)
‘We are part of email newsletters and groups for gifted children. We have also been visiting a ‘Gifted Resources’ centre in the North-east region of Melbourne. Just this year we have linked with the Parent Support Group in our area. We have been recommended support services from the coordinator of the Parent Support Group in our area. Support services for gifted children have not played a big role. We are always reading up and gleaning from different sources. Besides short spurts of ‘panic’ we are quite happy with how things are. We are considering exploring this area more as David is getting older.’

(David’s Parents)

Other less known and accessed support services named by participants in the study included ‘conversations with other parents of gifted children’, ‘the organisation Children with High Intellectual Potential (CHIP)’, ‘schools (although not recognised as supportive of gifted children’s issues)’, ‘internet information’, ‘the organisation Australian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (AAGTC)’, and ‘utilising equipment or practical resources for extension of gifted children’.

‘I’m not sure the sort of support that people could give to a Pre-School child or family. Lucy’s mother has an education background and is fairly tuned into what’s required. She’s actually doing a pretty good job…they have the resources themselves to be able to buy books, buy computer games, outdoor play things, there’s a very good range of things.’

(Lucy’s Family Support Person)

‘Through the schools…you don’t really get a lot of support with it. It is very hard to find answers to questions…because I mean even though we’ve had his brother tested you know at school…they don’t notice everything. I don’t really know what I’m looking for. It’s just really being able to have someone who sits there and listens and to get…constructive comments.’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘I tend to listen a lot to people who have gifted children…especially in a group situation and I just learn from their knowledge and their experiences. I think that’s a good way to learn, because they’ve actually experienced. Speaking to people who have gifted children, who…know my child as well, also helps us.’

(Kate’s Parents)

‘I have personally used CHIP, GERRIC, AGTC, my own Educational Psychologist, books and the internet extensively.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

‘One thing we have as support is…a Gifted Home School support network. I often post the questions there, and Mums of lots of gifted children just answer back. I found that often helped me to figure out for myself. The lady heading it up…has three grown sons now who are all…profoundly gifted. That’s been a very safe place because everybody can…talk to other people…on the internet. I think probably just (having) people who can really talk…then you have some practical input. Somebody would say, ‘have you thought about looking at that?’ or I love when you (the interviewer) share and you say, ‘this is what research has shown.’

(David’s Parents)
The preschoolers in this case study demonstrated significantly different experiences with support services in comparison to each other. The adult participants from Lucy’s case study, described themselves as ‘somewhat informed to well informed’ in relation to support services for gifted children, and therefore, reported a sense of confidence in available support services as well as their personal ability to appropriately cater for Lucy’s needs at the time of the study. However, the issue of ‘distance’ was mentioned by Lucy’s Family Support Person when initially seeking enrolment at a suitable early childhood program.

‘I would consider myself ‘somewhat informed’ on support services for gifted children, but we have not utilised any for Lucy’s needs.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘I remember suggesting to Lucy’s mother some places where there were some very good programs. The problem was that the drive was such a long way. If there had been a nearby centre that was going to offer a program that was most stimulating, then certainly she’d be there. Certainly the best was chosen out of the centres in the local area.’

(Lucy’s Family Support Person)

‘I have not used resources specifically catering for the needs of gifted children but discussed with Lucy’s mum possible options. I have recommended the CHIP foundation to Lucy’s family. In the past I’ve referred families to the CHIP Foundation…so they can get with people who know where their child is headed, because I certainly don’t just assume their expertise. Mine is sort of really just looking at the development and trying to landmark where they’re at, and make sure that they’re actually age-appropriate.’

(Lucy’s Specialist)

These statements would suggest that, although there may be numerous early childhood educational environments in the surrounding suburbs to Lucy’s home, there is a perception by the participants in her case study that there are limited services that could provide a developmentally appropriate service to meet her social, emotional and cognitive needs. However, due to the qualifications and experience of Lucy’s parents, it is felt that she is well catered for outside of her formal educational setting and her parents are not currently seeking additional support from other services in relation to her giftedness.

In contrast, three out of four adult participants in Harry’s case study rated themselves as ‘poorly to very poorly informed’ in relation to support services for gifted children and their families. Consequently, the knowledge and access to available services was limited, although a ‘well informed’ four year old teacher was able to provide significantly more information about the services Harry’s family could benefit.

‘I would consider myself to be ‘poorly informed’ on support services for gifted children…In relation to the needs and experiences of my gifted child I have attended an information
evening and read newspaper articles. I have only just started finding out about gifted children and where I can go to find out more.’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘I would rate myself ‘very poorly informed’ on the support services for gifted children. (Areas of support that would assist families of gifted children would include)...someone to talk to, like a counsellor...because...it’s hard. Different issues come up with school...Whether you were doing the right thing? Should you put them in a program?’

(Harry’s Family Support Person)

‘I consider myself to be ‘very poorly informed’ on support services for gifted children. I’d never know where...to refer them on to a Paediatrician, or I don’t know...I’d refer them somewhere. I’d have to do my homework and find out first. I would have had to ring up my Council, or the local doctor, or Human Services, and try to work out and refer him on.’

(Harry’s Three Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘I would rate myself ‘well informed’ on support services for gifted children. Harry’s mother has attended a “Gifted Network Support Group” meeting. The ‘Gifted Network Support Group’ has helped the parents identify that Harry may be gifted and has given ideas regarding strategies to deal with challenging issues...Finding out that their child is similar to lots of other children and that their challenges as a family are similar to lots of other families...finding out strategies, and just talking and feeling like you can share your experiences with other people. I think feedback from parents of other families is very helpful. Also it’s been an avenue for people to get some more expert advice as well. Experts provided knowledge and information about specific characteristics and behaviours, and I think that’s been really, really helpful. In terms of other services I haven’t really recommended any other services. I usually follow from what they have suggested. An educational psychologist has assessed Harry and had discussions with his parents.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

Participants across the three primary age children’s case studies provided an extensive list of support services for gifted children and their families. In particular, participants from Kate (the youngest primary age child) and David (the eldest primary age child), provided a detailed description of services available and the extent to which the family had accessed these services to assist in the education of their children.

The participants’ responses from Kate’s case study indicated that her family had sought knowledge and assistance from support services but that issues such as ‘financial costs’ and ‘overall lack of services for gifted children’ had influenced which services they could access.

‘The things I’ve used really are reading things on the internet, I get books from the library on gifted children. Websites and checklists were utilised in the identification process and in relation to Kate’s educational needs and they identified and reinforced what we already thought to be true giving a sound platform for us to investigate further the abilities of our child. I was given websites to look up, and...associations...the ones I looked up...seemed to be interesting and...could be quite beneficial, (but) were just...financially too expensive for...
us. I wondered how people go with gifted children who aren’t able to afford them, they were quite costly. I thought maybe that’s something we could look at further down the track. But I thought…I will use their information, and maybe subscribe to newsletters and things like that and get as much information as I can.’

(Kate’s Parents)

‘I don’t believe schools or kinders steer gifted children to these support services sufficiently. Generally, we parents find them ourselves when we become desperate at the school’s inability to provide our children with like-minded friends and appropriate teaching.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

In contrast, participants from Matthew’s case study rated themselves as ‘poorly to very poorly informed’ in relation to support services for gifted children and their families and identified no formal organisations or services when describing their experiences in this area. Matthew’s parents stated that he benefitted from his interactions in a ‘mixed age chess club’, and Matthew’s teacher stated that she felt there were ‘no professional development opportunities in regards to gifted education, unlike those provided for other special needs areas such as autism’.

‘We would rate ourselves as ‘poorly informed’ on support services for gifted children. The boys have both joined chess club this year, which they thought was fantastic. That just filled a void for them because it was all that strategic thinking, and in a game situation where it kind of didn’t matter, and they got to mix with kids from grade six or five or whatever. They really enjoyed that.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

‘It’s interesting, if you’ve got an autistic child in the class, then bang, there’s a PD for it. If you’ve got a child…with really intense physical needs, or if there was a child with haemophilia, bang, I was off to a PD…but a child who had special needs because of their giftedness or special talents, there was nothing. I guess because they think we are trained to meet children with their individual needs, so perhaps they figure we are doing okay, or that we’ll get by. I still just don’t know enough about what support is available.’

(Matthew’s Family Support Person/Teacher)

Different issues and comments were identified by participants in David’s case study in relation to support services for gifted children and their families. David’s age, home schooling environment and level of giftedness appear to have a significant influence on the type of services his family has sought in order to cater for his specific needs throughout various stages in his lifespan.

‘When I was looking for help (David was approximately 2 years of age), nobody was available as he was not school age…when we needed it the most. At that time, Monash did only a study on very young siblings of older gifted children…I probably would have liked more input and couldn’t get it. I rang up Monash University back then, I spoke to colleagues. I rang up for help…and nobody was interested in that age group…at two and a half, he had done everything. I…went…‘what do I do now?’ I felt fine until then. But…what is the next
step? I felt isolated - I had to go out of my depth. Telephone services for gifted children were not much help.’

‘Just before we started home-schooling, I consulted with my former boss (Principal of a school) who encouraged us not to send him to kinder but to start schooling him. I’ve just been really thankful…for that advice. The Principal…was open enough to say ‘home schooling – start now, don’t wait, don’t worry about it.’

‘I constantly felt alone along the way. Even now…I go through stages. I’m going really fine. I’m really confident when we’re doing all the stuff, and then he makes a leap, and I go ‘great, that’s wonderful.’ …And then I start to read again…I’m sporadically reading up. Whenever I go to the help stage…then I start to inform myself again. And I settle myself and I…try to figure out where he is. I looked up a…website…and it probably helped me to start (to think) that David might be actually not just gifted, but profoundly gifted. So that…was for me another step, to even consider it. I went to a few things from Luther College. That was good. It was more confirmation of what I already had discovered anyway.’

(David’s Parents)

Consequently, it is evident from the current research that several factors have influenced the degree of knowledge and access to support services for gifted children and their families in this study. These factors have included the families’ degree of experience or knowledge about available gifted support services; the level of perceived need or problems experienced by the gifted child and their family; the availability of support services for specific ages or stages of development; the proximity of support services to the gifted child’s family; and the financial accessibility when seeking appropriate support services. Therefore, although the preschoolers and primary age children’s experiences with support services for gifted children have been unique, there are several factors influencing the access to and perceived need for assistance of their gifted child’s personal, social and educational needs. In conclusion, this study has highlighted several issues related to a perceived lack of availability of support services for gifted preschoolers, in particular, and that the parents of the gifted children in the study expressed the need to seek support services independently, or utilise their own personal resources, as professional knowledge in this area was limited.
### Table 8. Participants' identification experiences with their case study child as gifted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification experiences</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Harry</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>David</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participated in workshops or seminars with other gifted children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended special events or conferences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged actively in the discussion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated exceptional problem-solving skills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was observed in action by a family support person</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented with information about giftedness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilised in-depth discussions with parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced mathematical ability as an indicator of giftedness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional identified child as gifted</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional memory as an indicator of giftedness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced social understanding as an indicator of giftedness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilised in depth discussions with colleagues or gifted experts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chitmas been formally assessed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed observation utilized</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy formally assessed as 2 or more years in advance of peers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy formally assessed as 2 or more years in advance of peers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**
- L: Lucy
- H: Harry
- K: Kate
- M: Matthew
- D: David
- P: Parent
- F: Family Support Person
- 3: Three year old kindergarten teacher
- T: Teacher
- S: Specialist
- T/F: Teacher and Family Support Person

* Denotes a response
5.1.8 Identification experiences with the case study child as gifted

The responses, presented in Table 8, indicate that a majority of adult participants across the five case studies rated themselves as ‘somewhat to well informed’ on identification of gifted children. Responses also provide evidence to support the research literature that states there is no single reliable method of identifying giftedness (Gross, 1993; Renzulli & Purcell, 1996; Silverman, 1996; Tannenbaum, 1997; Porter, 1999; Frydenburg & O’Mullane, 2000; Harrison, 2003) and therefore, demonstrates that several participants recognised a wide range of strategies and ‘indicators’ of giftedness when identifying each case study child as gifted.

The most frequently provided response across all five case studies identified a common ‘indicator’ of giftedness and stated that ‘the child was above average in several developmental domains’. The research literature recognises that, although this indicator is consistent when identifying giftedness in children, the professional ability when identifying giftedness may be better in some areas of development such as verbal talent (Porter, 1999). The examples from the five case studies demonstrate the areas of development most recognised for each individual child.

‘…I have recognised ‘above average’ skills in several domains of development. With a background of study in the area of gifted education there were specific skills that appeared to be more than a ‘bright child.’

(Lucy’s Family Support Person)

‘Harry is beginning to ‘read’ words and understanding phonetics. He has advanced numeracy skills and interest in counting beyond 100. Harry has the ability to speak about his knowledge on a wide range of topics. He will ask how or why something works as it does (and) understands very quickly. Harry has extremely well-developed visual-spatial intelligence…visual-spatial relationships, particularly design, construction and block building. He is very creative visually – building and construction.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘I sort of identified my daughter’s reading and comprehension ability to be out of the ordinary. For example, the way she took things in and understood stuff, at such an early age, her ability to read beyond her age group, and her interest in topics foreign to children of similar age. Kate’s reading, reasoning and numeracy skills, we had personally never seen these skills in a child her age before.’

(Kate’s Parents)

‘Matthew was clearly well above the expected level for his age group. My observations and assessments suggested he was at least 12 months ahead of those of the same age in language, maths, social maturity and understandings of wider knowledge (science, history, etc.).’

(Matthew’s Family Support Person/Teacher)

‘I could see such a rapid improvement in so many areas. I remember by the time he was two and a half he had actually done everything that normally four year olds were doing.’

(David’s Parents)
However, participants also reported several other ‘indicators’ of giftedness they considered important when identifying children from the five case studies. The most commonly reported indicators by adult participants and supported by the research literature included ‘advanced language’ (Hollingworth, 1926; Hollingworth, 1942; Van Tassel-Baska, 1983; Gross, 1986; Gross, 1993; Porter, 1999; Hodge & Kemp, 2000), ‘advanced mathematical ability’ (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998; Porter, 1999; Hodge & Kemp, 2002), ‘exceptional memory’ (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998), and ‘advanced social understanding’ (Gottman & Parker, 1986; Lovecky, 1992; Gross, 1999b; Gross, 2002; Silverman, 2002). Although all five case study children had been reported as demonstrating several of these indicators, not all participants recognised these as important when identifying giftedness.

‘I have engaged in professional development in Maternal Child Health which considers the age appropriateness of behaviours and development in infants through to pre-schoolers. I have completed Key Developmental Assessments since birth and Lucy’s parent was present at all of these. Lucy participated in activities at key developmental assessments. Language development has been the key marker and Lucy has always exceeded language markers. I believe that exceptional language skill is an important indicator of ‘giftedness’.’

(Lucy’s Specialist)

‘The areas of development and learning demonstrated by Harry that I value as important indicators of giftedness during the identification experience are emotional development and ability to form relationships, development of self-confidence, adapting to change and new environments, and strong visual-spatial intelligence, numeracy and problem-solving abilities.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘Her deep knowledge and interest in dinosaurs was one difference, another was her dramatic emotional intensity. And, although many small children are interested in dinosaurs, the depth of her interest and her knowledge and her drive to find out more, and more, and more; sending her mother hither and thither looking for more and more books, and remembering what she found in those books, and what her father told her too.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

‘(The areas of development and learning demonstrated by Matthew I valued as important indicators of his giftedness were)…Matthew’s mathematical knowledge, including ability to apply in problem solving situations; speaking and listening; reading; written expression; and a combination of excellence in all of these areas.’

(Matthew’s Family Support Person/Teacher)

‘The areas of development and learning demonstrated by David that I value as important indicators of giftedness include his vocabulary, reading ability, high functioning cognitive ability, curiosity, quick and accurate memory recall, ability to grasp complex concepts, and preference for adult interaction and dialogue.’

(David’s Family Support Person)
As discussed in the research literature giftedness is based on a number of contributing dimensions in comparison to a stable measure of intelligence through testing (Gagné, 1991; Gagné, 2003) and therefore, there are no single reliable methods of identifying giftedness (Gross, 1993; Renzulli & Purcell, 1996; Silverman, 1996; Tannenbaum, 1997; Porter, 1999; Frydenburg & O’Mullane, 2000; Harrison, 2003). In the current study, a wide range of strategies were recognised by participants from all five case studies, with participants in the primary age children’s case studies demonstrating a significantly greater number of strategies known or utilised. At the commencement of the study, all five children had not been formally identified as gifted, however, by the conclusion of data collection Harry was in the process of formal psychological assessment, Kate had completed formal assessment with a qualified psychologist experienced in gifted education, and David had completed several formal educational assessments.

‘Harry’s parents have been involved in the identification experience. They have filled out checklists, discussed their observations with staff, attended a network meeting supporting families of gifted children and sought formal assessment from a psychologist. Harry has participated in a formal psychological assessment over 2 sessions.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘In May 2007 Kate was assessed on the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI). Kate’s abilities across the WASI test impressed at a level not reached by most gifted students, but rather extended right up to the highly gifted level only attained by about 4 students per 10,000. Total scores on both scales reached the 99.9th percentile, and all four subtests were scored at the highly superior level expected of an average student at least three years older.

Kate was assessed on the South Australian Spelling Test and reached the level of nine years and four months. On the Edwards Quick Word Reading Test Kate demonstrated competence at an instructional mid grade 4 level. On the PROBE Reading Assessment Kate gained mastery level for higher-order comprehension questions requiring inference, re-organisation and evaluation of material, two years above her age level. On selected items from the Diagnostic Mathematical Profiles the extent of her responses were restricted to about an 8 year old level, at which point the processes required were beyond those to which she has been formally exposed.’

(Kate’s Parents)

‘We never officially confirmed that David was gifted – as it was clear to us. Probably when he was three one that stands out is beginning to read. At 4 years of age I gave David the Metriculation Prep Entry test – he got 99%...he literally got one question wrong. It was actually a very constant flow. It wasn’t just one or the other. I could see such a rapid improvement in so many areas. I remember by the time he was two and a half he had actually done everything that normally four year olds were doing.’

(David’s Parents)

The research literature has supported the validity and reliability of standardised testing when recognised for its strengths and limitations and also used in conjunction with other well respected methods (Porter, 1999). Research has also highlighted the importance of testing as an essential tool for understanding the significant differences between moderately and highly gifted children and
matching an appropriate curriculum and program according to their specific needs (Gross, 1993; Gross, 1998). However, David was a ‘highly gifted’ or ‘profoundly gifted’ child and this was easily recognisable without testing. Therefore, it is in the provision of suitable educational programs that the details of giftedness could be supportive of appropriate levels and interests.

Other strategies recognised by participants in the study when identifying giftedness in the case study children included ‘in-depth discussions with parents’, ‘in depth discussions with colleagues or gifted experts’, ‘identification by an early childhood or education professional’, ‘informal observation’, and ‘formal literacy and numeracy assessment’. These strategies were commonly reported by participants from all three primary age children’s case studies, whilst both preschoolers shared some of these strategies.

‘Discussions have been held with the Maternal Child Health Nurse. She has noticed many aspects of development in Lucy that she has remarked upon. The Health Nurse said she could refer me to an identification service if I am interested. At this stage, I do not feel that any formal identification is necessary. Lucy continues to be stimulated and is very happy in her current activities without formal identification.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘The process of identifying a child who ‘may be gifted’, discussions with parents and accessing formal identification is quite a lengthy process. I think probably one of the things is finding out more about him. So, getting to know him on a personal level, getting to know his family on a more personal level, and also taking into account all other experiences…their own experiences of what they have observed, and thinking, ‘Well maybe that’s why he can cope that way’ or ‘Maybe that’s why he behaves that way.’ A better understanding of the child as to why he may behave in certain ways…that’s been positive. And I think that a family going through the assessment procedure and finding out that he does have some traits that indicate that he could be gifted. I think that’s been positive for the family in terms of looking for schools that are suitable, and just finding out more information about their child, has been positive.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘Kate’s parents were involved in the identification process with me by telling me of the many things that Kate did which struck them as unusual or advanced, or odd. Kate was involved in the identification process by being a willing conversationalist. Kate’s kindergarten teacher also recognised her giftedness through observation. I suggested that Kate be formally assessed prior to staring school. However this was too expensive for Kate’s family.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

‘I guess it was consolidated a little for me (because) there was something very different about Matthew, when we did the interview. It’s about an hour’s interview with the children very early on in the year. On the Wednesdays I’d pull the children in and do some assessment…just talking and language assessment as well. That was positive in that I could actually place what things he was able to do, particularly in maths, we had a very effective Early Numeracy interview. It was great. I could…place him very confidently within groups where…that work was still interesting for him. The early numeracy interview assesses children at their growth points…in counting and place value, and actually right across mathematically applied as well. Matthew was very confident to answer the questions, and the ones that he couldn’t answer, as soon as it was re-phrased, he knew exactly what he was
on about. The test is aimed at Prep, One and Two children, but there are elements of it that are going into the grade Three level. In some of those areas Matthew was quite proficient...we didn’t go right to the end, but quite near the end.’

(Matthew’s Family Support Person/Teacher)

‘I have had discussions with other teachers about the needs and experiences of David. David’s mother had filled me in on his giftedness prior to coming. (But) my school does not have a policy or programme related to the identification of gifted children.’

(David’s Teacher)

These examples highlight several important aspects of identification as outlined in the research literature. These factors include the value of parent observation and information in respect to their child’s characteristics and abilities (Roedell, 1989; Louis & Louis, 1992), the reliability of teachers and other professionals when they are trained to recognise gifted children (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001), and the effectiveness and consideration of above-level testing when identifying extremes in ability (Stanley, 1990; Van Tassel-Baska, 1986; Hansen, 1992).

The research literature has supported several less common ‘indicators’ considered as important by participants when identifying giftedness. These included ‘excellent concentration’ (Piechowski, 1999), ‘problem-solving skills’ (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998), ‘emotional development’ (Piechowski, 1997), ‘high level questioning’ (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998; Porter, 1999; Hodge & Kemp, 2000), ‘ability to adapt to change’, ‘strong visual-spatial skills’ (Hodge & Kemp, 2000), ‘reading ability’ (Gross, 1999b), ‘curiosity’ (Piechowski, 1999), ‘ability to grasp complex concepts’ (Van Tassel-Baska, 1998; Porter, 1999), and ‘a preference for adult interaction and dialogue’ (Schmitz & Gailbraith, 1991; Davis & Rimm, 1994).

‘The areas of development and learning demonstrated by David that I value as important indicators of giftedness include his vocabulary, reading ability, high functioning cognitive ability, curiosity, quick and accurate memory recall, ability to grasp complex concepts, and preference for adult interaction and dialogue.’

(David’s Family Support Person)

The research literature also supported the use of several less common strategies for identification of gifted children provided by participants and included ‘checklists’ (Porter, 1999), ‘listening to the child’ (Gross, 1996; Frasier, as cited in Martin, 2003; Harrison, 2003; Renzulli, 2004; Soto & Swadener, 2005), and ‘nomination by a friend’ (Landvogt, 1997; The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001).

‘On the ‘Characteristics of Giftedness Scale’ by Silverman and Maxwell, Lucy’s parents marked 25 out of 25 characteristics as ‘very true’.’

(Lucy’s Parent)
‘On the Early Childhood Checklist for Gifted Development, Harry consistently:
- learns rapidly
- has tendency to put things or ideas together in different or unusual ways
- is a perfectionist
- has heightened awareness of the wider world
- has strong moral values and a keen sense of justice
- is persistent – spends much longer time than expected on things of interest
- is sensitive
- is intense
- shows understanding of abstract concepts
- is able to carry out complex instructions
- is very aware of environment and immediately notices changes’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘Kate was involved in the identification process by being a willing conversationalist.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

‘Matthew’s nomination has been by friends.’

(Matthew’s Parents)

Additional comments provided by participants were related to the identification experience but unrelated to ‘indicators’ and strategies when identifying the children in the study. Participants in Kate and David’s case studies stated that both children were ‘obviously gifted’, and that David was ‘profoundly’ gifted. In contrast, several participants in Harry’s case study stated that they ‘were unsure if he was gifted’.

‘She’s probably as highly gifted a child as I’ve ever seen.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)

‘...it probably helped me to start (to think) that David might be actually not just gifted, but profoundly gifted.’

(David’s Parents)

‘Harry is excellent at putting together jigsaw puzzles. He is also an excellent swimmer. I am not sure if these two areas of strength suggest giftedness or not.’

(Harry’s Family Support Person)

‘I did not see any display of giftedness during his time at 3 year old Kinder. He just sort of blended in beautifully. I think children who are sort of really underdone or overdone tend to get the comments. He was just a delight to have…I’d have eighteen Harry’s.’

(Harry’s Three Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

Furthermore, participants in Harry’s case study also commented that his ‘older brother had been formally assessed as gifted’ and that ‘the identification process has been viewed as helpful’.
‘At this stage I am unsure as to whether Harry ‘is’ or ‘is not’ gifted. Harry’s older brother (who is 9) has been tested and he is gifted. I have been made aware that giftedness will sometimes run in families. At this stage we have done no testing to see if Harry is gifted.

One of the things that I find helpful with finding out (whether they are gifted) is that it sometimes explains some of their little idiosyncrasies...it just gives you a little bit of direction, and kind of makes you think a lot more about the way that you need to speak to him.’

(Harry’s Parent)

The perceptions and descriptions of the children in this study as gifted support the research literature that states that children’s levels of giftedness recognise that a group of gifted children can be significantly different to each other (Feldhusen, 1993, cited in Department of Education and Training, 2005), that giftedness develops over the lifespan and therefore, some children will not be noticed as they should be (Gagné, 1991; Gagné, 2003), and that professional knowledge about giftedness significantly increases the success of identification in gifted children (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001).

In contrast, Matthew’s family support person and teacher expressed uncertainty as to ‘whether child’s skills had been taught by his parents’ and ‘whether formal identification would be appropriate in prep grade’.

‘To me, it was the question of…I don’t know what sort of input has been given in his family? I don’t know whether his parents had sat down with him and taken him through exercises to get him this far?’

‘Perhaps it was wrong for me not to pursue formal ‘identification’ but I feel that the prep year is a year of great adjustment – socially and in many other ways. I think perhaps I would have gone further, because I wonder...if perhaps I’d made some ground work in sitting with his mum and saying, ‘I think we really need a bit more help here. We need a bigger picture for where he’s going after this.’

(Matthew’s Family Support Person/Teacher)

The responses by Matthew’s Family Support and former Prep Teacher recognises a lack of knowledge about the ways in which Matthew had attained his skills and the value of formal assessment in conjunction with other methods of identification when planning an appropriate curriculum and program.

Consequently, without a clear understanding of the issues and benefits of a wide range of identification strategies and practices, children like Harry and Kate are particularly at risk of not being identified as they have been described as demonstrating behaviours which mask their abilities within their educational and social environments. Therefore, as outlined in the research literature and
supported by the current study, positive identification experiences of gifted children and their families have included an inclusive and comprehensive definition of giftedness, a well informed knowledge of a wide range of indicators and characteristics of gifted children, and the utilisation of a wide range of methods and strategies in the identification of the gifted child.
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<th>Educational and Personal advice from the participants</th>
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<td>Parents of gifted children should seek professional assistance when they feel that their child is not being provided with an appropriate level of educational services.</td>
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<td>Provision gifted children with experiences at a more sophisticated level.</td>
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<td>Be proactive in seeking services for gifted children in educational settings.</td>
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<td>Provision project based programs that are engaging &amp; meaningful to the child.</td>
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<td>Provision children with a wide range of activities &amp; experiences.</td>
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<td>Appoint gifted adviser for services as there are no eligibility services.</td>
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<td>Educational services need to provide a wide range of equipment &amp; resources.</td>
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<td>Gifted children would benefit from time with like minded peers.</td>
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<td>Early identification by staff &amp; parents is important for child's development.</td>
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<td>Choice of educational service is important - research policies, programs &amp; teacher attitudes.</td>
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**Key:**
- L: Lucy
- H: Harry
- K: Kate
- M: Matthew
- D: David
- P: Parent
- F: Family Support Person
- S: Specialist
- T: Teacher
- T/F: Teacher and Family Support Person

* Denotes a response
5.1.9 Educational and personal advice from the participants in relation to
text identification, education and support services for gifted children

Participants across the five case studies provided educational and personal advice in relation to
identification issues with gifted children which supported statements from the research literature.
Statements about identification included ‘provide support to parents when identifying their child’s
abilities’ (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001), ‘consider formal testing -
depending on the age of the child’ (Gross, 1993; Gross, 1998; Porter, 1999), and ‘early identification
by staff and parents is important for the child’s development’ (Hollingworth, 1926; Hollingworth,
1942; Gross, 1986; Feldman, 1980; Janos, 1983; Bloom, 1985; Gross, 1986; Senate Select
Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, 1988; Gross, 1999b; The Parliament of
the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2007).

‘I would advise that parents have the conversations…with other professionals and…more
formal organizations. The CHIP Foundation may provide…more formalized developmental
assessment…where they need more input…so the parents actually know exactly where their
child’s at.’

(Lucy’s Specialist)

‘Depending on the age of the child…I’d certainly suggest going for…testing…because I’ve
just found that…it does certainly (shed) some light on them. Their little brains are just
working a hundred miles an hour and they’re not always capable of actually deciphering
everything that they say. I know that can probably be said of a child whose not, but it just
helps. It makes you feel better as a parent, because at points…you can really feel completely
out of your depth.’

(Harry’s Parent)

‘I suppose when children come into Kinder there are some children that come in with
identification of different traits and characteristics. So we may know of a child that comes in
who has autism, or we may know of a child that comes in who has speech delay. So it would
be really helpful if we had that information about gifted children before they came in so then
we can put programs in place for those children and those families, rather than going through
the process and then finding at the end of the year that, ‘Yes, we are on the right track’ or
‘No, we weren’t on the right track.’ Not that that alters the way you program anyway, but
we’re still trying to program to cater for that child’s individual needs while they’re at Kinder.
It would just be helpful to have that prior knowledge, and then you can have some dialogue
with whoever has assessed that child and get some information as to how best you can
program for them. So having some professional advice from other colleagues would be
would be helpful.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)
are engaging and meaningful to the child’ (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993; Barbour & Shalilee, 1998), ‘provide gifted children with a wide range of activities and experiences’ (Hodge & Kemp, 2002; Robinson, 2002), and ‘gifted children would benefit from time with likeminded peers’ (Feldhusen, 1991; Benbow, 1997; Borland, 1988; Van Tassel-Baska, 1992; Gross, 1997; Kulik & Kulik, 1997).

‘Probably number one is to follow their instincts, and listen to what they are interested in. Let them always guide what they want to do, but let (them) know there are all different activities, and (they) could pick an activity.’

(Lucy’s Parent)

‘I wish there was more hands-on…being able to make things. Being able to go outside and make big things – cubbies, forts - all that kind of thing. These are all general things that I’d do if I was anyone anyway.’

(Matthew’s Family Support Person/Teacher)

‘I think Kate should be spending more time with like-minded children. It would be really good for her confidence to be able to spend some time with some kids that maybe understood where she was coming from a little bit. Not just academically, but also to help with their confidence. Opportunity to show what she can do, to be put with other kids that are like herself…To be rewarded for being bright, and not…put down because of it…Just to give those kids opportunity, put them together in a forum where they can show what they can do…Great, kids that are falling behind, give them what they need as well. Separate them off, and give them what they need.’

(Kate’s Parents)

Other educational advice provided by participants and supported by the research literature focused on additional services or resources in educational environments. This advice included ‘to be proactive in getting gifted services and programs in the educational setting’ (Karnes, Lewis & Stephens, 1999; Besnoy, 2005), ‘educational services need to provide a wide range of equipment and resources’ (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993), and that ‘the choice of educational service is important, research policies, programs and teacher attitudes’ (Begin & Gagné, 1994; Carrington & Bailey, 2000; Callahan, Cooper & Glascock, 2003; Carnellor, 2003; Knopfelmacher & Kronborg, 2003; Chipego, 2004; Woods, 2004).

‘Choice of school would be important, because some schools are more open to treating children as individuals than others. As much as we all have to do it, some schools are better at it than others. I would suggest that (parents) really think very carefully about which school, and go and visit…get a feel (as to whether) their child could suit that school. I know a lot of schools have systems where they catch the children who are falling behind, and they regularly meet…like once a month or once a term, or whatever they decide. Perhaps find a school where they’ll be happy enough to do that as well. Look for a very rich environment where there’s all sorts of different input, not just the educational stuff. The overall environment would be important…The attitude of the teachers would be way up there.’

(Matthew’s Family Support Person/Teacher)
Participants across the five case studies provided educational and personal advice in relation to available support services for gifted children. The research literature has discussed a wide range of gifted education organisations established in Australia to support the needs of gifted children (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2001), however, the degree to which participants described their familiarity, access and recommendations of these services was varied from case to case. The most common response provided by participants across the five case studies stated that ‘parents of gifted children should seek professional assistance when issues arise’.

‘I would advise that parents have the conversations…with other professionals and…more formal organizations.’

(Lucy’s Specialist)

‘The advice I would give parents of gifted children would be to do your homework, and talk to the people who are…qualified in that area. Listen to them.’

(Harry’s Three Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

‘Talk to someone…who’s got knowledge about (gifted children)…say ‘well, this is what he can do, where do you think I should take him? Should I pursue this, or is he just bright?’ Maybe go to your child’s school. Plead your child’s case. Try and give supporting evidence of what your child can do. (For example) Kate’s educational psychologist reported that she clearly requires a curriculum that is markedly accelerated and differentiated from that appropriate for her age peers.’

(Kate’s Parents)

Further advice to parents about support services for gifted children and their families included ‘utilise the internet for information’ and to ‘join a parent support group for gifted children’.

‘I think, just go with your own gut instincts about some things as well. Seek information…about websites available for different associations. Maybe look for…support groups of parents of gifted children. That would be a really beneficial thing.’

(Kate’s Parents)

Advice from participants about what support services would assist educational services included ‘appoint gifted advisors in educational environments as there are in disability services’, ‘more staff required when working and assisting teachers of gifted children’, and ‘increase professional development for teachers about gifted children’.

‘(There is) lots of information about where to refer children if they have special difficulties, or where to refer children if they have physical disabilities or whatever. But we don’t have a lot of information about where to refer children if they present as gifted or if they may have characteristics. It would be good to have some more information about services that would help families’ access assessments. Perhaps…within our own department…having…advisors and Pre-school field officers that do have knowledge and expertise in that area, that could
give guidance to teachers and supporters as to whether they’re on the right track, or where they would go to from there. Also just being able to speak to parents and reinforcing what you’ve observed of their kid. Having someone within our own Pre-school department or Shire or whatever, that would be helpful.’

(Harry’s Four Year Old Kindergarten Teacher)

In summary, the advice from participants across the five case studies appears to focus on the continued role of parents in advocating and researching the needs of their gifted child, and the implementation of additional professional development and gifted services for educational institutions and teachers.

Individual case study participants also provided unique comments and advice in relation to the identification, education and support services for gifted children. Participants from Lucy’s case study focused their advice on the provision of early childhood services for children in preschool. These statements included ‘early childhood services should provide practical and meaningful literacy and numeracy experiences’, ‘educators should co-construct learning experiences with the child’, and ‘early childhood services should provide extension of children’s abilities and interests through play’.

The research literature also recognises that play is an essential element of program planning for gifted children in early childhood environments (Wright, 1990; Foster, 1993; Harrison, 1995; Harrison, 2000; Hodge & Kemp, 2002; Grant, 2004) and should be utilised in conjunction with an emerging curriculum approach which builds on children’s interests and abilities (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993; Barbour & Shalilee, 1998).

‘The centres that would have been more suitable would have been the centres that follow children’s interests and had children engaged in projects that were open-ended enough that they would really have the opportunity to get involved deeply, and engage in those experiences. A very, very rich Early Childhood Centre, where children have the opportunity to engage in their play and their learning, in a very meaningful way... You want it to be a happy but a stimulating environment where the children are co-constructing their learning. It’s not just someone offering what they think the child likes, but it’s actually really related to the child having a voice and input into the things that they’re very interested in doing and learning about.’

(Lucy’s Family Support Person)

Participants from Lucy’s case study also added that ‘the gifted label is not important at preschool age’, ‘that it is important to monitor the child’s progress and the label may be helpful in later years’, and that ‘every child has abilities and inabilities, so support every child to their maximum potential’.

‘At this very young age, I don’t think that the label is important. I think that the most important thing is to just watch the interest, the capability, provide and extend for them in every way possible, in just a very fun, play-based way, and keep monitoring it, so that there might be times later that the identification might be helpful in something else.
I think rather than the identification, every child has got abilities, and inabilities and what you’re doing always is supporting every child to the maximum of their ability. I think with children that are gifted, you’ve just got to have a lot more strategies and supports in place. It’s just being particularly tuned in, so that you’re getting the opportunity to see the things she’s able to do. She might be able to do things that you haven’t actually provided the opportunity to see.’

(Lucy’s Family Support Person)

Participants from Harry’s case study also contributed unique comments and advice in relation to the social and emotional behaviour of gifted children. These statements included ‘giftedness is no excuse for bad behaviour, so focus on good behaviour and being polite’ and that ‘social and emotional development is just as important as academic abilities’. The research literature also recognises that the social and emotional behaviours and development of gifted children are important, however, there are often myths and misconceptions in relation to the social skills and abilities of all gifted children which incorrectly assess many gifted children as social misfits when this is often a symptom of a lack of intellectual peers (Lovecky, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde & Whalen, 1993; Porter, 2008)

‘My advice to parents of gifted children would be not to just focus that they’re gifted….to concentrate on the whole child rather than just that little part. Concentrate on them being a good person, and nice person. Make sure that every part of them was looked at. Concentrate on making sure that he’s polite.’

(Harry’s Family Support Person)

Participants from Kate’s case study contributed unique comments and advice on the assessment, identification and subsequent programming for gifted children. Several of these statements were also supported by the research literature and included ‘become informed about formal identification’, ‘educational services should formally assess all children so as to identify abilities’, ‘educational services should then teach children according to their assessed skills’ (Maker, 1986; Parke & Ness, 1988; Harrison, 1995; Morelock & Morrison, 1996; Hodges & Kemp, 2002; Robinson, 2002; Harrison, 2005; Cuikerkorn, Karnes, Manning, Houston & Besnoy, 2007), ‘that every child should have an individual program plan’, and that ‘subject and whole grade acceleration is needed’ (Borland, 1988; Benbow, 1997; Gross, 1997; Kulik & Kulik, 1997; Van Tassel-Baska, 1998; Neihart, 1999).

‘The advice I would give to parents who are unsure as to whether their child should be identified as gifted is, go and get a proper assessment done. I think they all should. And I think all schools should make sure that that is done. Either get it done themselves, or make sure that the parents get it done because not many of them are as easy or straightforward to identify as Kate.

Kate needs a detailed educational plan which includes planning for academic progress, plus social and psychological support, and remediation of any areas where Kate needs support… I believe strongly that subject acceleration and whole grade acceleration be utilised.’

(Kate’s Family Support Person)
Participants from Matthew’s case study contributed unique comments and advice about the role parents play in providing positive experiences in their gifted child’s life. These statements included ‘teach children to use their gifts practically and to help others’, ‘be proactive in identifying your child’s needs and don’t expect the teacher to do it all’, ‘don’t be afraid to communicate openly with teachers about your child’s needs’, and ‘Enjoy them! Love them!’

‘The other thing we’ve always done with our kids is to say, “Okay, so you have this gift, you really understand it. How are you going to use it?”’

(Matthew’s Parents)

‘Just keep talking and meeting with teachers. You’d need to sit down and talk with them and find out what their fears were.’

(Matthew’s Family Support Person/Teacher)

Finally, participants from David’s case study contributed unique comments and advice about the education system, alternative systems and strategies of education and establishment of additional support services. These statements included ‘educate the system about misconceptions in gifted education’, ‘don’t try to fit the child to the system – the system is there to fit your child’, ‘establish a gifted children’s advisory service to provide information on issues of gifted children’, and ‘give support and respect to the homeschooling option’.

‘If you see your child in a situation which really doesn’t cater for them, don’t try to fit the system…the system’s there to fit your child. If your child doesn’t fit the system, then I think it’s our responsibility as parents to do something about it, and not shy away, just because maybe another professional can’t see it.

…it would be very easy for someone to set up…a Gifted Children’s Advisory Service or Committee. But I think it would have to come from the viewpoint ‘well we…you don’t know everything.’ I think it would almost have to be somebody who is a parent, that has taken their children all the way through post-grad, post-university, that can then say ‘well look, this has been our experience’ and give them a range of options.

You can’t go with pre-conceived ideas…educating the education system I think is important as well.’

(David’s Parents)

In conclusion, the participants’ educational and personal advice in relation to identification, education and support services for gifted children included a range of statements supported by the research literature and remaining statements unique to the experiences of the individual case study children.

Overall, the present study has provided a rich source of evidence and support which will be utilised in the recommendations for future practices in identification, education and support services for gifted children.
5.1.10 Strengths and limitations of the study

The conclusions in this study have confirmed many aspects of the research literature. However, the researcher recognises that the main strength of this research is the detail and richness of the data that came from the use of a case study design which has utilised the ‘voices’ of the gifted children, their families and significant others. In addition, several other strengths related to this qualitative research approach and other aspects of the study have included:

- A more personal investigation into the similar and different perspectives viewed by all participants of the gifted child’s ‘lived’ experiences. The researcher has been able to record rich personal stories through several data sources including pre-interview questionnaires, interviews, anecdotal and assessment records, and work samples.

- Recognising the value of implementing a wide range of identification strategies in order to select and discuss child participants who may otherwise not be identified through formal standardised testing.

- The utilisation of pre-interview questionnaires prior to semi-structured interviews and play sessions as a method for enabling reflection of responses and opportunities to clarify understandings by both the participants and the researcher.

- The inclusion of the child’s ‘voice’ when gathering a picture of their lived experiences.

- The researcher was able to gather usable data from very young children. This is very difficult to do and yet, the researcher has achieved this effectively.

- The use of direct quotes from the participants ‘stories’ to support the research literature during the analysis and discussion of the data. In addition, the researcher was able to summarise the participants’ most frequent responses according to the emerging themes in the form of tables which enabled ease of comparison between all participants.

- Finally, the researcher has completed an extensive review of the research literature when analysing and discussing the results of the data.

However, the researcher also acknowledges that several limitations may have influenced the results of this study and consequent analysis and discussion. In relation to the research design, data collection and analysis, limitations included:
• The selection of only five child participants for the study. The researcher has recognised that a small sample of children does not generalise to the whole population of gifted children, however, due to the scope of the study the smaller sample has provided opportunities for rich, detailed description, analysis and discussion. Furthermore, with the support of the research literature, common themes and experiences have been recognised between the five case study children and previous case study designs and results.

• The researcher has not utilised formal identification of giftedness through standardised testing when selecting the five case study children. Although this identification strategy has been recognised as successful when identifying intellectual giftedness, the researcher sought to include a range of identification strategies in an effort to include young gifted children who may not have access to standardised testing or may be unreliably assessed through this method.

• The absence of a preschool child and teacher trial in the pilot study. In relation to the significant age and stage differences of preschoolers in comparison to primary age children, the researcher was mindful that the pre-interview questionnaires and play sessions would require specialised knowledge when administering the data collection methods and then interpreting the results. With respect to the qualifications and experience of the researcher, the absence of a preschooler pilot study appeared to produce a minimal disadvantage. Furthermore, as the completed pilot study included a six year old primary age child, it was felt that this child’s age was closest to both the preschoolers and other primary age children and the researcher could adapt data methods more effectively to suit the range of ages from this trial.

A teacher trial was also not available at the time the pilot study was being undertaken. However, as the remaining pilot study participants included a parent, and a family support person, the researcher decided that the data methods for the teacher participants would also be effectively adapted through the other adult trials.

• Following the completion of the pilot study, feedback from the participants resulted in a removal and shortening of questions set for both the adult pre-interview questionnaires and interview guide. As the original pilot study participants were later included in the main study, the alterations or shortening of the data collection methods may have resulted in a discrepancy between the quantity and detail of responses from participants in Kate’s case study (pilot study participant) in comparison to other case study children.
• The researcher recognises that due to the specific ages and stages of development of the youngest children in the case study, their responses may be limited or not fully reflective of their characteristics and experiences during the data collection phases. In order to address this issue the researcher utilised developmentally appropriate practices available when gathering data such as ‘play’ in interviewing, and in depth planning discussions with parents prior to the play sessions and semi-structured interviews. This strategy was utilised so as to represent the children’s experiences as accurately as possible.

• During the transcription of the interviews and play sessions, there was some difficulty expressed by the transcriber when recording the words of some participants. For example, at times the preschoolers had less clarity in their expressive language, or some adult participants could be difficult to understand. These incidences are recorded by the transcriber throughout the transcripts and yet, due to the detail within the transcripts as a whole, are unlikely to have a significant influence on the final results.

• Some participants did not partake in the follow up interviews and therefore, have been represented by the responses in their pre-interview questionnaire only. Therefore, Kate’s teacher and David’s family support person did not have an opportunity to elaborate and explain their comments in their pre-interview questionnaire.

• Finally, the researcher did not include sections in the child pre-interview questionnaires and interviews or play sessions focusing on ‘available support services’ or ‘educational and personal advice’ as was included in the adult pre-interview questionnaires and interviews. Therefore, responses have not been recorded under these themes by the child participants and yet could have provided supporting or unique perspectives on these topics.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Research questions revisited
This research set out to investigate the ‘lived’ experiences of five gifted preschool and primary age children with a view to informing practices focused on the issues of identification, education and support of gifted children and their families. Therefore, the two questions that framed the initial focus of the research included:

- Question 1: What are the experiences of two gifted preschoolers?
- Question 2: What are the experiences of three gifted primary age children?

In order to answer the above questions, the study recognised and supported findings from an extensive list of research in early childhood, primary and gifted education to date based on the issues of identification, education and support services for gifted children through the ‘Literature Review’. Secondly, the researcher utilised methodological practices which incorporated an intensive case study design, a broad range of complementary data collection methods, and a focus on the ‘voices’ of the participants as outlined in the ‘Methodology’. Thirdly, a series of individual monologues were constructed by recording the exact words from the voices of the participants, and therefore, providing rich examples or perspectives about the experiences of the gifted children by themselves and significant others in their lives as presented in the ‘Results’. Finally, the researcher provided a detailed analysis and discussion of the data collected, organised under common themes and supported by direct quotes from the participants. The participants’ responses were further presented in tables to show a visual representation of the contribution of each of the participants. This highlighted the similarities and differences between all five children in the ‘Analysis and Discussion’.

6.2 Conclusions
The current research has made a contribution to the research literature by providing rich detailed individual experiences from the perspectives of five young gifted children and their families. In particular, the richness of these stories was provided, firstly, through valuing the ‘voice’ of the child, and secondly, by the generosity of the participants when openly sharing their experiences. The stories showed clearly the real lives of young gifted children through their own perspectives and that of significant others in their lives. For the children it became apparent that their giftedness had added an extra stress or worry to their lives, be it in the form of pressure they put themselves under, difficulty belonging to a group of same age peers, frustration with lack of stimulation in their educational system, or through their out of sync development which made them feel ‘different’ or make others comment on their difference.
Clearly the children’s giftedness also presented itself in a form of concern for the children’s parents. The decision on what preschool or school became an important dilemma for all parents as they realised their children had different needs within the educational system than their same age peers. The fact that one child changed schools and resorted to home school shows the intensity of this. The major role that parents play in the education and support of their gifted children showed through in the research data. Parents took a more active role in extending their children’s abilities and interests. This keen commitment may have been through need because no one else was meeting the child’s needs. However, it may also have been influenced by the fact that three out of five parents were also teachers. This was quite coincidental as the case study children were selected, not their parents.

Many teachers, family support persons and specialists also presented a significant degree of concern and dissatisfaction with their individual levels of knowledge about giftedness in respect to the case study children and other gifted children. Frustration at the lack of support and understanding about gifted children within the educational system was often expressed, as well as a lack of provision of support services and resources viewed essential when meeting the needs of these young gifted children.

In conclusion, the results of this study have highlighted several common themes and unique descriptions of the ‘lived’ experiences of both the gifted preschoolers and primary age children. Furthermore, the case study experiences have provided detailed descriptions when responding to the two main research questions. In summary, the participants’ responses in relation to identification, education and support service experiences concluded that:

- A wide range of behaviours and characteristics were presented by the young gifted children in the study but may not be typical for all the gifted children in the study

- The behaviours and characteristics of this group of gifted children were as different to each other as they may be to the average ability child

- The gifted children in the study consistently presented with wide ranging interests and knowledge, and demonstrated advanced skills through their interests in comparison to same age peers

- A valuable contribution to the understanding of each of the children’s personal interests and experiences has been provided through the inclusion of the ‘voice’ of each of the children
• Positive experiences and feelings about identification, education and support were more likely to be present and recognised by the parents and their gifted children within the study when the professionals they interacted with had an understanding of the characteristics and needs of gifted children.

• Negative experiences and challenges raised by the case study participants reflected dissatisfaction or frustration with professionals and educational systems that demonstrated a lack of knowledge in the area of gifted education.

• The gifted children in the study were reported as needing opportunities to interact with other likeminded children regularly.

• Positive or negative social interactions were described as significantly influenced by the level of experience and support by others who understood the gifted children’s needs.

• In order for each of the case study child’s social, emotional and cognitive needs to be met, participant’s reported that they would require an environment that values and understands the learning process and the child’s individual skills.

• Some of the most successful educational experiences reported by the highly gifted children in the study were reported to be in services whereby the children were enrolled in full time programs with gifted peers, qualified teachers in gifted education and supported by an appropriately designed accelerated curriculum.

• Positive influences on educational programs and practices for the gifted children in the study occurred when parents, teachers and support services were well informed in gifted education.

• Teacher knowledge in gifted education, as well as individual teacher attitudes and feelings, were reported as highly influential in the quality and provision of appropriate strategies and practices when catering for the needs of both the gifted preschoolers and primary age children within the study.

• Several factors were reported as influencing the degree of knowledge and access to support services for the gifted children and their families in the study including perceived level of need, age and stage of development, proximity of services, and financial constraints.
• There was a perceived lack of availability of support services for the preschoolers in the study, in particular.

• Parents of the gifted children in the study expressed the need to independently seek support services, or use their own personal resources, as professional knowledge in this area was described as limited.

• Positive identification experiences of the gifted children in the study were reported as including an inclusive and comprehensive definition of giftedness, a well informed knowledge of a wide range of indicators and characteristics of the gifted children, and the utilisation of a wide range of methods and strategies in the identification of the case study children as gifted.

Therefore, it is evident from the current research that the ‘lived’ experiences of the gifted preschool children and primary age children were significantly influenced by the level of knowledge in gifted education of others who were largely responsible for their identification, education and support. These conclusions have been further supported by the research literature as well as provided opportunities for the researcher to suggest future recommendations and directions in gifted education.
CHAPTER 7. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

7.1 Introduction
As the work for this thesis progressed, a number of recommendations and suggestions for further research were revealed in relation to the identification, education and support of gifted preschoolers and primary age children and their families.

These recommendations reflect the conclusions from the current study. This study has contributed new information to previous research related to the experiences of gifted children. The detailed case studies have provided a richness of data gathered through the ‘voices’ of the children themselves and their significant others. The researcher believes that the resultant recommendations can be used to support gifted children and their families, as well as educators and policy makers, in their roles when working with and supporting children in their early childhood and primary education setting. However, the researcher also recognises that these recommendations are based on a sample of five gifted children and may not represent all preschool and primary age gifted children in Victoria, let alone Australia or the rest of the world.

7.2 Recommendations
There have been five key recommendations emerging from this study.

7.2.1 Utilise the ‘voices’ of children and parents in identification, education and as a support service to others in relation to gifted experiences

A valuable contribution to the understanding of a gifted child’s personal interests and experiences in this study has been provided through the inclusion of the ‘voice’ of the child. The children’s comments have provided unique insight into their thoughts in relation to their personalities, abilities, interests, interactions with others and educational experiences. When time was taken to listen to the perspectives of the young gifted children in a respectful and open way, it could be possible to discover information and solutions to specific issues by directly asking the children themselves. This strategy was particularly poignant as the children in the case study increased with age as they were usually able to express their ideas more succinctly and with greater detail. However, as with the preschool children in this study, the ‘voice’ of the child can be expressed through many other mediums such as drawing, painting, construction, and play. Therefore, the ‘voices’ of young gifted children should be strongly considered when parents, educators and administrators are seeking information in relation to gifted children’s identification and education in order to create a complete and detailed picture of the needs of the gifted child. Furthermore, it is suggested that gifted children
could even provide their personal perspectives on issues in gifted education that debate the notion of
giftedness.

The ‘voices’ of the parents of the gifted children in this study also provided a valuable contribution to
the understanding of their child’s personal and educational experiences. Consequently, it is
recommended that parents be recognised as partners in the planning and programming of the gifted
child’s personal and educational experiences. In fact, this study has highlighted the negative
consequences and issues raised when parents are not included in the planning of personal and
educational experiences of their gifted child. As parents in the study have been reported as usually
providing early and ongoing support and intellectual stimulation to their gifted child it naturally
makes sense that education systems design ways for parents to be involved in their child’s
educational planning. However, as the current study has demonstrated, three out of five case study
parents expressed a lack of involvement and consultation with educational professionals at some
stage in their child’s educational journey, even though they recognised the information they could
provide would be complementary to the planning for their gifted child.

Finally, the ‘voices’ of significant others - including teachers, specialists, family friends,
grandparents or individuals who have had a significant connection with the gifted child and their
family - have played an influential role in describing the personal and educational experiences of the
case study children’s lives. They have been able to contribute perspectives that are reflective of a
particular profession or level of expertise, such as those views expressed by teachers and specialists,
or from a more personal and emotional standpoint as they were connected intimately as family
members or friends. This study has demonstrated that significant others in the gifted child’s life
often confirmed the perspectives of the children and their parents, but could also provide useful
information which would assist with the development of positive personal and educational
experiences of the gifted child. Given the focus of community involvement in education, the ‘voices’
of significant others within this study provides a very real and worthwhile way that community can
contribute to the education system, be it within early childhood or primary education settings.

Therefore, the findings from this study recommend that the ‘voices’ of gifted children, in conjunction
with their parents and significant others, should be utilised in order to gather a detailed and
comprehensive understanding of the children, their abilities and interests in order to support the
planning of their personal and educational experiences.
7.2.2 Gifted preschool and primary age children should have their specific personal and educational needs catered for

This research has confirmed that the gifted preschoolers and primary age children studied have specific personal and educational requirements in order to meet their educational potential. Due to a lack of information on giftedness provided to the families in this study and the absence of appropriate programs provided or services offered for gifted children and their families within the study, the participants consistently reported frustration and confusion in relation to their gifted child’s personal and educational needs. The gifted children themselves, and in particular the older participants, were also able to elaborate on their personal difficulties and frustrations as a gifted child. Therefore, it is recommended that a collaborative partnership between the children, parents, educators and community be established when planning programs and strategies to support gifted children in their educational journey to have their unique needs met.

Furthermore, it was also recognised that a collaborative partnership would reduce the responsibility and reliance on families to personally provide the majority of resources to address their gifted child’s needs. Although families were encouraged to seek information and opportunities to extend their child’s advanced development and needs, they should not be expected to compensate for the deficiencies in their child’s formal education. In fact, gifted children themselves should not be expected to endure unchallenging and inappropriate curriculum experiences that do little, if anything, to extend their existing abilities or encourage the development of their potential.

7.2.3 Families of gifted preschool and primary age children should have access to information and support when seeking assistance for the personal and educational needs of their child

As previously discussed, this study found that there was a high reliance and expectation on parents to personally seek or research information on gifted issues in order to address the personal and educational needs of their gifted child. However, not all parents had an equal access to quality information or available support services for gifted children. In fact, this study recognised that there were several factors influencing the degree of knowledge and access to support services for gifted children. These factors included a families’ perceived level of need, age and stage of development of the gifted child, previous experience with gifted family members, proximity of services, professional qualifications of family members, and financial constraints. The issue of financial challenge when accessing several support services was raised by several participants and suggested that lower socio-economic families would be most disadvantaged when seeking services for their gifted child. In addition, it was found that families who actively sought assistance for the special needs of their gifted child reported little alternative but to independently seek support services, or use their own personal
resources, as professional knowledge in this area was limited. Therefore, the families in this study perceived a lack of availability of support services for their gifted children, with services for preschoolers reported as particularly limited. Finally, it is recommended that access to affordable, quality information and support for gifted preschoolers and primary age children and their families be provided within the community so as to better meet the needs of all children including those who may be disadvantaged.

Although this study has acknowledged an imbalance in the responsibility of parents to provide support and resources for their gifted child, it does recommend that parents continue to provide extension outside educational settings to broaden their children’s interests and abilities. This study also encourages parents to become informed and actively involved in local and state services for gifted children to enable the expansion of appropriate services for gifted children to be further developed. These activities may include parent support groups, presentation and forum groups for school communities and teacher professional development, children’s activity groups, gifted conference attendance and involvement. Furthermore, it is recommended that educational systems seek to implement shared decision-making practices with parents and experts in the community that recognise ongoing research within the field of gifted education for early childhood and primary children. The researcher suggests that the development of a ‘research culture’ within an educational community will ensure less resistance to change and greater support for information and practice based on the most current research.

Finally, this study has found that financial challenge has not only affected the ability of parents of the gifted children within the study to access services, but also the support organisations and educational programs available to service the needs of gifted children. Therefore, this study recommends that funding be made available for the development of not-for-profit support services that will specifically meet the special needs of gifted children and their families.

7.2.4 The Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations - Early Years Learning Framework (2008) will need to be inclusive of gifted children and their families and provide guidelines which inform parents, educators and administrators about the
(a) Characteristics and identification of gifted children
(b) Educational practices with gifted children, and
(c) Available support services for gifted children

Currently, the Australian government is reviewing early childhood and primary educational practices within all states of Australia. As part of this review, it has proposed the implementation of an Early Years Learning Framework which outlines educational practices and guidelines for services operating
to meet the needs of young children. As part of this Early Years Learning Framework, the researcher recommends that there be guidelines that are of assistance to gifted children and their families in relation to their specific personal and educational needs; support educators in the identification and programming for gifted children; and guide policy makers in the provision of appropriate support for families and educational organisations. Therefore, as explored in this study, there are three main areas requiring greater attention when providing for the specific needs of young gifted children and the researcher’s recommendations for these will now be addressed.

(a) Guidelines in relation to the characteristics and identification of young gifted children

The current study has recognised that the most negative and harmful influence on the provision and development of services for young gifted children has been the existence of common myths and misconceptions about giftedness. As discussed by the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia (2001), it is critical that political and educational organisations raise public awareness by dispelling these common myths and misconceptions. However, considering the culture represented within the Australian context, a nation known for ‘cutting down the tall poppies’ and ‘barracking for the underdog’, the term ‘giftedness’ is often perceived as a form of ‘privilege’, and therefore, disregarded. Consequently, attention to the realities of the ‘lived’ experiences of gifted children has not been explored and remains largely ignored. Therefore, the researcher has recognised that this study provides one opportunity to begin changing opinions about giftedness in an Australian culture through the ‘voices’ of the young gifted children themselves.

Young gifted children may present with a wide range of behaviours and characteristics, however, they are not typical for all gifted children. In fact, the behaviours and characteristics of any one group of gifted children can be as different to each other as they are to the average ability child. However, this study did find that there were characteristics and behaviours demonstrated by the case study children that consistently presented as being common to most gifted children. For example, this research found that the gifted children consistently presented with wide ranging interests and knowledge and demonstrate advanced skills through their interests in comparison to same age peers. Furthermore, it was found that the gifted children needed regular opportunities to interact with other likeminded children. In conclusion, however, this study found that all five gifted children were significantly different from each other and the individual expression of their characteristics and behaviours could be extremely complex.

Not recognising some young gifted children can be detrimental to their overall well being. Young children’s brains are highly sensitive and susceptible to new experiences and if they do not receive appropriate recognition and response during this sensitive period their potential skills may deteriorate. However, this study also discovered that even when the gifted children were aware of their abilities, they often regressed to match the behaviour of their age-mates and learnt to hide or
deny their abilities in order to fit in with classmates and avoid feeling isolated or different. Therefore, this study recognises that it is important for young gifted children to be exposed to high quality learning environments that are informed about the possible range of characteristics and behaviours as soon as possible.

The needs of gifted children must be addressed whether they are labelled ‘gifted’ or not. Positive identification experiences of the gifted children in this study have included an inclusive and comprehensive definition of giftedness, a well informed knowledge of a wide range of indicators and characteristics of gifted children, and the utilisation of a wide range of methods and strategies in their identification. It is recommended that identification methods including checklists, teacher generated assessment, questionnaires, interviews, portfolios, work samples and internationally recognised standardised tests of intelligence and achievement should provide information that is useful for planning curriculum for gifted children. The study has also demonstrated that if some gifted children are not identified early they are unlikely to receive appropriate curriculum and may develop a poor academic self image. Therefore, identification should not be viewed as a way of assigning special status to children, but should be used to provide evidence of a gifted child’s needs followed by an appropriate educational program that can be easily justified as necessary to meet that need.

In addition, this study recognised that some children may be overlooked and left unidentified or even misdiagnosed. Factors such as disabilities that are masking their giftedness, ethnic minority, economic disadvantage, age of the child – in particular preschoolers, females, and underachieving children, are often neglected when planning for appropriate educational experiences and challenging curriculum. Therefore, it becomes even more important for educators to utilise a range of fair and inclusive identification methods in order to provide for a greater number of unidentified gifted children.

An additional source of information when identifying giftedness comes from a child’s own family. This study has recognised that families are usually good judges of their children’s giftedness particularly when provided opportunities to openly discuss their child’s skills and abilities without judgement. In contrast, teachers were not as able to readily identify the children as gifted, although a higher degree of professional knowledge or experience with gifted children had a positive influence on the teacher’s identification abilities.

Therefore, in relation to the characteristics, behaviours and subsequent identification of gifted children, it is recommended that comprehensive information on the qualities of young gifted preschoolers and primary age children be provided. Also, families and teachers in early childhood settings and schools can be supported in their roles through descriptions of a wide range of methods of identification within a section of the Early Years Learning framework allocated to gifted children.
(b) Educational practices for gifted preschool and primary age children

The current study has uncovered evidence that preschool and primary age educational programs were not always providing appropriate educational experiences for the five gifted children. Programs were reported as lacking the ability to engage at a level which would show the children’s true abilities. In fact, it was commonly stated that there was little provision for the gifted children and that some children were already hiding their abilities to fit in with peers. Moreover, it was perceived that some gifted children in the study were often forced to underachieve when teachers appeared to be under the impression that they were doing enough for the gifted child. Therefore, this study recommends that gifted children’s needs should be addressed beginning with the preschool level through the implementation of uniform national guidelines and the establishment of gifted policies within educational services in line with these guidelines.

In Australia, it appears that educators are often afraid of drawing attention to differences between children for fear of comparison. Furthermore, the recognition of intellectual talents has not been promoted in the Australian culture for the same reason. Therefore, in order to cater for the needs of all children within our educational system, whilst also value all abilities it is recommended that the Early Years Learning guidelines support, as a normal practice, similar philosophies to that of Reggio Emilia in Italy. The Reggio Emilia philosophies and educational systems do not hide the fact that all children have different abilities, in contrast, they support children to recognise and utilise the abilities of others. Therefore, future guidelines should encourage and promote ‘strength based focuses’ for all children and celebrate the abilities of children with them.

The study revealed that some of the most successful educational experiences for highly gifted children were in services where the children were enrolled in full time programs with gifted peers, with qualified teachers in gifted education and supported by an appropriately designed accelerated curriculum. Clearly gifted children should be challenged and provided curriculum at an appropriate level of complexity and pace throughout the day. The consequences of not providing appropriate services for gifted children in educational settings were found to contribute to underachievement, frustration and stress. Therefore, learning environments should be designed to meet the unique needs of each child, and the child’s indication of readiness to learn should be a determining factor in the type of challenge provided. This study recommends that modifications to the educational environment, such as acceleration, must follow a comprehensive review and consultation with the gifted child, parent and educational service. It is also suggested that highly gifted or profoundly gifted children be provided with appropriately challenging curriculum matched to their abilities, achievement levels, need for complexity and interests.
Educational programs in regular services should be designed to motivate and stretch all learners to reach their maximum potential. Therefore, in order to provide a challenging curriculum that develops the abilities, skills and talents of all children, educators should regularly assess and identify the needs of all students. Furthermore, when assessing the needs of all students, it is important that the influence of cultural differences are recognised as one approach may be appropriate for some individuals in some settings, however, may be culturally inappropriate in other places. That is, there needs to be a range of appropriate educational approaches when meeting the needs of culturally diverse students within an inclusive classroom. As discussed earlier, disadvantaged gifted children are at greatest risk, however, rich early childhood opportunities can reverse perceived delays in their development and provide opportunities for these children’s gifts and talents to be recognised and nurtured.

This study recommends a range of practices for promoting the needs of all children within preschool and primary learning environments that may also meet the needs of other gifted children. Firstly, individual program planning in consultation with parents and significant others was found to improve the understanding of the characteristics and behaviours of gifted children’s as well as improve the appropriateness of the educational program offered. Secondly, curriculum design that included a breadth of content, covered a range of domains, utilised ‘play’ and an invitational curriculum in preschool, and offers appropriate curriculum materials that provide challenge and extension. Finally, it is recommended that learning environments promote and support opportunities for gifted preschool and primary age children to work with other children of similar ability and interest.

In conclusion, this study has recognised that the talents of the case study children did not emerge at one set time. Furthermore, any one educational service could not effectively meet the needs of all of the gifted children. However, it is recommended that educational systems be flexible enough to address the gifted child’s needs when they present themselves and seek the most appropriate and effective type of service or program to nurture those abilities. In order to achieve this, educational systems will need to assess their own abilities when catering for any one gifted child and then search for resources outside their system to assist in the development of appropriate resources to meet the child’s personal and educational needs. In addition, parents, educators and administrators will also need to be flexible and recognise the value of collaborative problem-solving and imagination when assisting the gifted child and their needs. Therefore, it is recommended that educational practices reflect the latest research informing best practice in early childhood, primary and gifted education.

(c) Available support services for gifted children
This study has identified a range of support services for gifted children and their families. In particular, the most commonly identified support services accessed by the gifted children’s families included other parents of gifted children, books on gifted children, the internet, and the gifted child’s
parents themselves. Other services were identified by well informed professionals and individuals, however, many of these were not common knowledge or considered inaccessible to the families in need. Consequently, as discussed in previous recommendations, many support services for gifted children can be difficult to access by many families due to the location of the service, financial expense, lack of preschool age support, lack of services available and lack of knowledge that they exist. The researcher recommends, therefore, that national guidelines provide information on the range of support services for gifted children available with a description of the type of service each listing offers. Furthermore, it is also recommended that parents, teachers and administrators of gifted children encourage the development and establishment of further support services which utilise parents themselves and aim to achieve not-for-profit status so as many more disadvantaged families with gifted children can have access.

7.2.5 Parents, early childhood service providers, preschool and primary teachers need opportunities to participate in professional development on the issues of gifted children as there are for other special needs

This research found that the most positive experiences and feelings of parents and gifted children studied were more probable when others had an appropriate understanding of the characteristics and needs of gifted children. In contrast, the negative experiences and challenges reported reflected dissatisfaction or frustration with professionals and educational systems that demonstrated a lack of knowledge about gifted children. Therefore, the most effective educational programs and practices for gifted children occurred when parents, teachers and support services were well informed in gifted education.

Findings reported that teacher knowledge about gifted children, as well as individual teacher attitudes and feelings, were highly influential in the quality and provision of appropriate strategies and practices when catering for the needs of both the gifted preschoolers and primary age children within the study. Therefore, it is recommended that as teachers play a vital role in the planning of educational experiences for young gifted children, it is essential that teachers learn how to identify the characteristics and behaviours of gifted children in order to provide exciting programs that challenge and extend their intelligence and interests.

This study found that few teachers were trained in identification and provision of appropriate learning experiences for young gifted children. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers of preschool and primary age children have the opportunity to learn about the characteristics and behaviours of gifted children in order to recognise and encourage early intervention in the educational system. Young gifted children need rich and varied learning opportunities with trained teachers who focus on their strengths and nurture their potential. Appropriate professional development for teachers can increase
awareness of the identification, characteristics, education and support services available, and consequently, assist educators in implementing appropriate strategies for gifted children. Furthermore, it is recommended that course work for pre-service teachers will also need to include an understanding of young gifted children and inform practice in identification, program development and teaching strategies.

In conclusion, the researcher also recommends that professional development and assistance on the personal and educational needs of young gifted children could also be provided in the form of additional gifted advisers. This study highlighted the need for practicing teachers to be able to consult with professionals trained in gifted education who can be available for practical assistance when need arises. These professionals may be in the role of a gifted coordinator, a preschool field officer or area consultant specifically trained for the support of gifted children and their teachers.

7.3 Future Directions

Further research required into early childhood and primary education services that provide appropriate educational practices to young gifted children

This research has built upon several aspects of previous research designs and has contributed new information in regards to the ‘lived’ experiences of a small sample of five young gifted children and their families. Although, these recommendations are based on a small sample of gifted children and may not be generalised to represent all gifted preschoolers and primary age children, several recommendations have been put forward as a result of the findings with a view to informing teachers in early childhood and primary education settings about ways to improve the personal and educational experiences of the gifted population. Furthermore, the researcher recognises that there are several opportunities for ongoing research with a view to further informing practice with young gifted children in early childhood and primary education settings.

Future directions suggested by the researcher include undertaking research that examines the impact of teachers’ higher expectations and greater challenge for all children in educational environments; undertaking research that examines the effectiveness of cluster grouping with gifted children in educational settings; and finally, undertaking research to examine the impact of collaboration between children, parents and teachers in the learning, teaching and planning of programs for gifted children.
Reference List


Chipego, A. D. (2004). *Factors associated with the attitudes of elementary level classroom teachers toward gifted education*. Center for Education, Widener University, USA.


Richert, E. S. (1999). Excellence with equity in identification and programming. In Colangelo, N. & Davis, G.A. (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education* (pp.75-88), Allyn & Bacon, USA.


10 April 2006

Ms K Grubb
11 Hopkins Pass
Pakenham Vic 3810

Dear Karen

Re: Human Research Ethics Application – Register number HREC B 752 – 08/05

The Design and Social Context Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 21 April 2006 will ratify the approval given by a committee member on 16 March 2006 for your amended ethics application entitled “Examination of the experiences of gifted children and their families from their initial identification through to their current educational experiences and support structures.”

I am pleased to advise that your application has been approved as Risk Level 2 classification by the committee. This approval will now be reported to the University Human Research Ethics Committee for noting.

This now completes the Ethics procedures. Your ethics approval expires on 16 March 2009.

You are reminded that an Annual/Final report is mandatory and should be forwarded to the Portfolio Ethics Subcommittee secretary by 16 March 2007. This report is available from: URL: http://www.rmit.edu.au/rd/hrec_apply

Should you have any queries regarding your application please seek advice from the Chair of the sub-committee Dr Desmond McDonnell on (03) 9925 3291, desmond.mcdonnell@rmit.edu.au or contact Cheryl De Leon on (03) 9925 2974 or email cheryl.deleon@rmit.edu.au

I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Nolan
Design and Social Context

CC: Dr A Wilks, Senior Supervisor
Consent Form

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Prescribed Consent Form for Persons Participating In Research Projects Involving Interviews, Questionnaires or Disclosures of Personal Information

Portfolio:  Design and Social Context
School of:  Education

Name of Participant:   ___________________________________________________________

Project Title:
Examination of the experiences of gifted preschool and primary age children.

Name of investigator:
Karen Grubb  Phone: 0408 144 003 or 59417204

1. I have received a statement explaining the pre-interview questionnaire and follow up interview session involved in this project.
2. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which – including details of the pre-interview questionnaires and interviews – have been explained to me.
3. I authorise the investigator to administer a pre-interview questionnaire and follow up interview with me
4. I acknowledge that:
   a) Having read the Plain Language Statement, I agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study.
   b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
   c) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
   d) The privacy of the personal information provided will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
   e) The security of the research data is assured during and after the completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to participants if requested. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant’s Consent
Participant: _____________________________________________ Date: _____________
(Signature)

Witness: _____________________________________________ Date: _____________
(Signature)

Where the participant is under 18 years of age:
I consent to the participation of _____________________________ in the above project.

Signature: (1) ___________________________ (2) ___________________________ Date: _____________
(Signatures of parents or guardians)

Witness: _____________________________________________ Date: _____________
(Witness to signature)

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research and Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 2251. Details of the complaints procedure are available from the above address.

Participants to be given a photocopy of this consent form after it has been signed.
Dear [Preschool/Young Primary age Children]

My name is Karen Grubb and I am a teacher who is interested in learning more about children like you. If it is okay with you I would like to send some questions to your parents, that I would like them to ask you at home. These questions will ask you things about what it is like being a child like you. When your parents have written down what you say they will check that the words they wrote are what you said by reading them back to you. Then they will send them to me in the mail.

After I get your words in the letterbox, I would like to come to your home for a short visit and talk to you about what you told your parents to write down. I am REALLY interested in what you think, do and feel because it helps me to learn about and understand other children like you.

If this sounds like something you would like to do, would you please write your name, draw a picture or make a mark with a pen or texta in the space underneath these words that shows me you are happy to help me. It is also important to tell you that it is okay for you to tell mum, dad, support person or me, at any time, if you do not want to do this.

Results:

When I have finished meeting and talking to other children like you I am going to write a thesis, which is a kind of book, to tell to other teachers and adults what things I find out. I will even send you a letter telling you about what other children told me if you like.

If you have any questions or are worried about anything I have written, please ask your parents, or me, at any time. My phone number is 0408 144 003, or an adult can email any of your questions or worries to me on: kgrubb1@bigpond.com

Thank you for reading this letter. If you would like help me learn about children like you, then please remember to write or draw something in the space below these words that tells me you are happy to help.

I hope to hear from you soon,

From,

Karen Grubb
Doctor of Philosophy Student
School of Education,
RMIT University, Bundoora.
Dear [Parents/Family Support Persons/Specialists/Teachers],

This letter is to introduce myself and explain what I’m doing. It is also to invite you to participate in a pre-interview questionnaire and follow up interview with me.

Firstly, my name is Karen Grubb. I am a student at RMIT University, where I am studying for a Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education. The title of my research is:

An examination of gifted preschool and primary age children.

The supervisor for my study is a senior lecturer at RMIT. Her name is Dr Anne Wilks (her contact details are included at the end of this letter).

What I am doing…

My research is a Case Study of the experiences of two groups of gifted children and their families, including gifted preschool age children and gifted primary age children. The children I will select in the study will have been identified as a result of teacher nomination, parent nomination and internationally recognised checklists for identification of gifted children. Following identification, the focus of the study will be on the personal and educational experiences of these children, with a particular interest on recording the ‘voice’ of the children in the study. Furthermore, the perspective of their family and the extent to which related support services for gifted children interact and influence the experiences of these children will be examined.

Why?

Many research findings within the field of gifted education have reported that the personal and educational experiences of young highly able children and their families as being significantly different to others. Therefore, through the completion of a Case Study method of research, I hope to achieve valuable insight into the personal views and perceptions of how effectively gifted children and their families believe they are identified and catered for in their communities. Furthermore, this study will provide an opportunity to observe and interpret the intricate complexities of the experiences of gifted children and their families at two significantly different stages of their educational journey.

Although there has been previous research utilising the Case Study approach when examining the experiences of gifted children, few studies have contributed to the understanding of these experiences through the inclusion of the ‘voice’ of the children studied, in conjunction with the views of significant others such as teachers, parents and specialists. Therefore, the main aim of this research is to collect a representation of the ‘reality’ of the experiences of gifted children and their families.
How?

The pre-interviews and interviews are completely confidential. I will not use your names in the research, nor will I include anything whereby you could be identified. The notes and tapes of all interviews will be stored in a locked cabinet in my supervisor’s office at RMIT. I am the only person who will have access to this confidential information.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, or about anything I have said, please feel free to ask me for clarification, at any time. You can contact me by phone on 5941 7204, or email: kgrubb1@bigpond.com.

Thank you for reading this letter. If you do want to participate in this study there is a ‘consent form’ attached for you to sign. If your son/daughter (who is under 18) wishes to participate in the research, parental consent and co-signature is required too.

Yours Sincerely,

Karen Grubb
Doctor of Philosophy Student
School of Education,
RMIT University, Bundoora.

My Supervisor’s details are:
Dr Anne Wilks,
Senior Lecturer, Early Childhood Education,
School of Education,
RMIT University, Bundoora.
Ph: 9925 7806
Dear Pilot Study Participants,

Thank you so much for assisting me with my Pilot study. The pre-interview questionnaires are supposed to take only 30 minutes to complete, but as you will discover, they are much longer and the reason this is the case is so as I can gather feedback on what you (as my Pilot) feel are the most important questions I need to ask to gain the most qualitative and meaningful information about your experiences with a gifted child.

Please be as critical and as picky as you like. Following the completion of the Pilot study I will ask for verbal and/or written feedback on:

- The time it took to complete?
- The clarity of the instructions?
- The clarity of the questions?
- The general layout?
- Any questions you object to or questions you didn’t like answering?
- Whether there were any questions you felt were excluded from the questionnaire that would be related to the focus of the study?
- Whether there were any questions you felt were unnecessary or repetitive within the questionnaire?
- Any other comments you would like to make?

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me on M: 0408144003 or 5941-7204

Looking forward to hearing from you soon!

Karen Grubb
Dear [Case Study Family],

Thank you so very much for agreeing to participate in my research. As mentioned, I have included in this pack the questionnaires I require you to fill out and return to me as soon as possible.

In this pack you will find:

1. Three checklists to assist in the nomination or identification of your child as a ‘gifted’ child by a parent. These checklists are often used as complementary information or tools when examining the possibility a child is gifted.
2. One envelope with a questionnaire to be completed by your child (with assistance to write his responses exactly as they express them) and a second to be completed by both parents if possible.
3. One envelope to be forwarded to your child’s teacher
4. One envelope to be forwarded to a Family Support Person or Specialist who you believe understands your child best outside of their immediate family, particularly in relation to special or advanced talents and abilities.

I am very excited about reading your responses and hope you enjoy the experience too.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Karen Grubb

P.S. Please feel free to contact me on 0408144003 should you require further clarification with any aspect of the study.
Dear [Family Support Person/Specialist]

My name is Karen Grubb and I have become associated with [Child] and their family this year when they were recommended for my research and later accepted an invitation to participate in my PhD study focusing on the experiences of gifted children.

A large part of my study includes gathering information from several sources including the child, the parents, family support persons or specialists and teachers. Each source is invited to participate in the completion of a pre-interview questionnaire which takes about 30-45 minutes followed by a 45 minute interview.

[Child’s] parents have nominated you as their [Family Support Person or Specialist] for this study on them, and therefore, I would love to complete his/her case study by including your perspective on the experiences of [Child] as a gifted child. Naturally there is no obligation for you to participate, but should you be happy to assist me with this research I would be truly grateful. I can also assure you that the information I gather will remain confidential and, as outlined in the “Consent Form” attached, you have the option to withdraw from the study at anytime.

In the short time I have heard about [Child] I have been fascinated by his/her ‘story’. Please let me know if you would be willing to accept this invitation by completing the attached questionnaire and consent form and returning to me in the prepaid envelope provided.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours Sincerely,

Karen Grubb

P.S. Please feel free to contact me on 0408144003 or 59417204 should you require further clarification with any aspect of the study.
Examination of the experiences of gifted preschool and primary age children

A Confidential Pre-Interview Questionnaire for Preschool/Primary age Children

Please complete the following pre-interview questionnaire and consent form and return them to:

Karen Grubb  
School of Education  
RMIT University  
Bundoora, 3083  
Phone: 0408 144 003  
Email: kgrubb1@bigpond.com

Thank you for taking the time to complete the pre-interview questionnaire. The information you provide will remain confidential. It would be appreciated if you could return the completed information by ________________.

Please complete

Child’s Name: ___________________________________________________

Child’s Date of Birth: _____________________________________________

Parent’s Names: ________________________________________________

Pre-school/School Attended: __________________________________________

Phone: ______________________
Pre-Interview Questionnaire

The following questions are to learn as much as possible about children like you.

(Parents, please write responses to the following questions in the space provided.)

What are your favourite things to do when you are alone?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What are your favourite things to do with a friend?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What do you look for when choosing a friend? Why?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What things do you do really well?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What is something you have done that you are proudest of? Why?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What do your friends like about you the most?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What do you like most at preschool/kindergarten/school? Why?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
What part of preschool/kindergarten/school do you enjoy the most? Why?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What part of preschool/kindergarten/school do you find the hardest? Why?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

In what ways are you like other children in your preschool/kinder/school group? Please tell me more.
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

In what ways are you special or different from other children in your preschool/kinder/school group? Please tell me more.
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What are the most important things to you in your life? Why?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What questions would someone need to ask if they wanted to learn more about you?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Is there anything else you could tell me that would help me learn more about you?
_________________________________________________________________________________
Thank you very much for finishing these questions. I am looking forward to meeting with you soon where I can find out more about you and other children like you.

It would be wonderful if you could please bring along any things that you feel may help me to learn a little more about you and your likes and interests (eg. certificates, drawings, photos, toys etc.)

You have been very helpful, thankyou!

If parents would please return the completed Pre-Interview Questionnaire and consent form in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope by _________________.

Thank you again for your participation!
APPENDIX 9 - Preschooler/primary play session/interview guide

Preschool/Primary Child Play Session or Interview Guide
(30 minutes)

Examination of the experiences of gifted preschool and primary age children

Your parents have mailed me the questions you answered at home and that has been very interesting and helpful to me when learning about children like you. Today and next time we meet, I would like to visit you so as I may learn more things about children like you.

At the end of my letter I asked if you would bring something along to today that you feel may help me to learn a little more about you.

Would you show me what you have brought and tell me about them? They look very interesting.

You said that ________________ are things you do really well. Would you tell me more about these clever things you can do?

How do you think you became so good at them?

You said that you like to do some things on your own like:

_________________________________________________________________________________

Would you tell me more about ________________ and why you choose to work on these alone?

You said your favourite things to do with a friend are:

_________________________________________________________________________________

Would you tell me more about ________________ and why you choose to work on these with a friend?

You said you look for ________________ when choosing a friend. Would you tell me more about this?

You said that your friends like ________________ most about you. Would you tell me how you know this?

You said you like ________________ most at preschool/kindergarten/school because

_________________________________________________________________________________

When do you get to do ________________ at preschool/kindergarten/school?

You said that you find ________________ the hardest part of preschool/kindergarten/school because

_________________________________________________________________________________

How could this be made easier for you?

It was interesting to read the ways in which other children at your preschool/kindergarten/school are like you, such as
I also read the ways in which other children are different from you, such as:

If you could make a special club at your preschool/Kindergarten/school, what would your club be called and what would children in the club do?

You said that the most important things to you are

because

Would you tell me more about __________?

In the questionnaire I asked you ‘what questions would someone need to ask if they wanted to learn more about you’ and you said:

Would you tell me what you would say to each of these questions?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me that you feel would help me to learn more about children like you?
APPENDIX 10 – Parent pre-interview questionnaire

Examination of the experiences of gifted preschool and primary age children

A Confidential Pre-Interview Questionnaire for Parents

Please complete the following pre-interview questionnaire and consent form and return them to:

Karen Grubb
School of Education
RMIT University
Bundoora, 3083
Phone: 0408 144 003
Email: kgrubb1@bigpond.com

Thank you for taking the time to complete the pre-interview questionnaire. The information you provide will remain confidential. It would be appreciated if you could return the completed information by ________________.

Please complete

Name: __________________________________________________

Professions/Qualifications: ______________________________________________________

Child: _________________________________________________________

Relationship to child: _______________________________________________

Preschool/School Attended: ______________________________________

Year Level: __________________________

Phone: ______________________

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Section One

This section of the Pre-Interview Questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the initial identification experiences with your child.

Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on the characteristics and identification of gifted children.

Voluntary response scale

- /-------------------------------------------------------------------------/

1  2  3  4  5
Very Poorly Poorly Somewhat Well Very Well
Informed Informed Informed Informed Informed

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

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
☐ enrolled in a parenting course
☐ had discussions with teachers or professionals in the field of gifted education
☐ read books or journals
☐ other (please specify) ______________________

Please comment:
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What characteristics have your child presented with that suggested to you they were ‘different’ from other children?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What characteristics have your child presented with that suggested to you they may be ‘gifted’?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

How have you confirmed that your child was a ‘gifted’ child?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
Has your child’s teacher been involved in the identification of your child as gifted?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

Has your child been involved in an identification experience?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

Have specialists or family support persons been involved in an identification experience of your child as gifted?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

What areas of development and learning demonstrated by your child have you valued as the most important indicator/s of ‘giftedness’ throughout the identification experience?

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

In relation to identification of your child as ‘gifted’, did you seek assistance or utilise 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 or Brochures
☐ Professional Development
☐ Newsletters
☐ Checklists
☐ Professionals (eg. Psychologists or experts in the field of gifted education)
☐ Other (please specify) __________________________
Have you been recommended any support services specifically catering for the needs of gifted children?

- Yes
- No

Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise about your child’s identification experiences which you feel I have not covered in this section?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Section Two
This section of the Pre-Interview Questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the educational experiences of your child.

Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on the educational needs of gifted children.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------/
1  2  3  4  5
Very Poorly Poorly Somewhat Well Very Well Informed Informed Informed Informed Informed

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

Does the preschool/school attended by your child have a gifted policy or programme?

- Yes
- No

Please comment:
Are you aware as to whether the preschool/school specifically uses a ‘gifted policy’ when planning and programming for the educational needs of your child?

- Yes
- No

Please comment:

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What educational experiences or strategies have been utilised or suggested to meet the needs of your child in preschool/school?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Have you been involved in any stage/s of the programming and planning of educational experiences for your child?

- Yes
- No

Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Has your child been involved in any stage/s of the programming and planning of educational experiences?

- Yes
- No

Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Have specialist/s or family support person/s been involved in any stage/s of the programming and planning of educational experiences for your child?

- Yes
- No

Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
During your child’s time at preschool/school, have you been informed of any changes to planning or programming so as to improve the educational experiences planned for your child?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

What areas of development and learning do you believe are the most important for planning and programming for the educational experiences of your child?

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the ‘educational experiences’ of your child that you feel I have not covered in this section?

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

Section Three
This section of the Pre-Interview Questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the role that support services for gifted children have played in the experiences of your child.

Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on ‘support services’ for gifted children.

-/--------------------------------------------------------------------------/

1  2  3  4  5
Very Poorly Poorly Somewhat Well Very Well Informed Informed Informed Informed Informed

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

What role have ‘support services for the gifted’ played in the provision of educational experiences for your child? Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________
Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the role ‘support services’ have played in the educational experiences of your child that you feel I have not covered in this section?

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you very much for completing this Pre-Interview Questionnaire. 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 may explain or elaborate further on the information you have provided.

It would be extremely helpful if you could please bring along any items related to the experiences of you child that you feel may assist in supporting your responses to the questionnaire (eg. records of developmental milestones, diary entries, reports, art work, stories etc.)

It is anticipated that this interview will take approximately 45 minutes in duration.

Therefore, if you would please return the completed Pre-Interview Questionnaire and consent form in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope by ______________________, I will be in contact with you in the near future to schedule a time convenient to you for an interview.

Thank you again for your participation!
You have completed a pre-interview questionnaire designed to gather information on your perceptions of your child’s experiences related to initial identification, education and support services for gifted children. I am inviting you to complete this follow up interview with a view to explaining and elaborating further on the information you have already provided. It is anticipated that this interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

You rated yourself as ______________ regarding characteristics and identification of gifted children.

Can you tell me where you gained this knowledge? (Personal experiences with the child, university, parent-teacher information sessions and interviews, reading, etc.)

_____________________________________________________________________

Would you describe ______________ as an infant and toddler/preschooler/early primary year student?

Would you describe ______________ to me at this stage of his/her life?

What sort of people does ____________ most like to be with? Why?

What are some typical comments or observations you have heard from other adults about ____________?

What do your friends and relatives most admire about ______________?

What experiences related to the identification of ______________ as gifted would you consider were the most positive?

What experiences related to the identification of ______________ as gifted would you consider were the most challenging?

What advice would you give to parents who describe similar experiences to you but are unsure as to whether their child would be identified as gifted?

When asked if there were ‘any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the initial identification of the child as gifted’ in the pre-interview questionnaire, you stated that:

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Would you please explain further?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
Prior to the identification of _____________ as gifted, would you describe his/her educational experiences?

Following identification of _____________ as gifted, would you describe his/her educational experiences?

What does the child most enjoy about preschool/school at present? Why?

What does the child find most challenging about preschool/school at present? Why?

Would you describe how _____________ interests and needs are catered for in his/her current educational setting?

In your opinion, how would _____________ interests and needs be better catered for?

What seems to be most important to _____________ at this time in relation his/her educational experiences? Why?

What advice would you give to parents who are seeking assistance in providing positive educational experiences for their gifted child?

When asked if there were ‘any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the educational experiences of the child’ in the pre-interview questionnaire, you stated that:

_________________________________________________________________________________

Would you please explain further?

_________________________________________________________________________________

Would you please name any support services you have utilised when addressing the needs of _____________ and the child’s family?

Which support services have been the most helpful when addressing the needs of _____________ and the child’s family? Why?

On reflection of your past and present experiences with the gifted child, can you identify any areas of support which have not been available but which would have been beneficial in supporting the needs of _____________? Why?

What advice would you give to parents who are seeking assistance from support services for their gifted child?

When asked if there were ‘any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the role support services have played in the educational experiences of the child’ in the pre-interview questionnaire, you stated that:

_________________________________________________________________________________

Would you please explain further?
Examination of the experiences of gifted preschool and primary age children

A Confidential Pre-Interview Questionnaire for Specialists and Family Support Persons

Please complete the following pre-interview questionnaire and consent form and return them to:

Karen Grubb
School of Education
RMIT University
Bundoora, 3083
Phone: 0408 144 003
Email: kgrubb1@bigpond.com

*Thank you for taking the time to complete the pre-interview questionnaire. The information you provide will remain confidential. It would be appreciated if you could return the completed information by __________________.*

**Please complete**

Name: __________________________________________________________

Qualifications:  ___________________________________________________

Occupation:  _______________________________________________

Phone:  ______________________

- Please tick the box that represents your choice:

1. How many years have you been a specialist or family support person to the focus child?
   - Less than 5
   - 5 – 10 years
   - 11 – 20
   - More than 21

2. If you are a professional working as a specialist with the focus child, what other levels are you currently working with?
   - Preschool
   - Primary
   - Secondary
   - Adults
Section One
This section of the Pre-Interview Questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the initial identification experiences of the gifted children in the study.

Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on the characteristics and identification of gifted children.

-/--------------------------------------------------------------------------/

1  2  3  4  5
Very Poorly Poorly Somewhat Well Very Well
Informed Informed Informed Informed Informed

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

Related to the experiences and needs of the focus child and/or other gifted children, have you:
(You may tick more than one box)

☐ attended a conference
☐ attended an in-service
☐ engaged in professional development
☐ had discussions with other teachers
☐ read books or journals
☐ other (please specify) ______________________

Please comment:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How did you become involved with the focus child?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What role have you played in the initial ‘identification’ experiences with the focus child?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What characteristics did the focus child present with that suggested to you they were ‘different’ from other children?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What characteristics did the focus child present that suggested to you they may be ‘gifted’?
________________________________________________________________________
Have you used any identification strategies or approaches to confirm that the focus child should be identified as a ‘gifted’ child? Please discuss.
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Have the parents of the focus child been involved in identification experiences?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please discuss.
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Was the focus child involved in identification experiences?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please discuss.
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Have other specialists or teachers been involved in identification experiences with the focus child?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please discuss.
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What areas of development and learning demonstrated by the focus child do you value as important indicator/s of ‘giftedness’?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
During your involvement with the focus child and their family 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 or Brochures
- Professional Development
- Newsletters
- Checklists
- Professionals (eg. Psychologists or experts in the field of gifted education)
- Other (please specify) ____________________________

Please discuss.
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Have you recommended, or have you been recommended, any support services specifically catering for the needs of gifted children to the family of the focus child?

- Yes
- No

Please discuss.
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Are you aware of any changes in the ‘behaviour’ of the focus child during your involvement as a specialist or family support person since they have entered school?

- Yes
- No

Please discuss.
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the ‘identification’ experiences of the focus child which you feel I have not covered in this section?
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
Section Two
This section of the Pre-Interview Questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the educational experiences of the gifted child in this study.

Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on ‘planning and programming’ for gifted children.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------/

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</table>

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

Are you employed by a school or organisation that has a gifted policy or programme?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please comment:

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Please discuss your role or influence in the planning and programming of educational experiences for the focus child.

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Has the family of the focus child been involved in any stage/s of the programming and planning of educational experiences?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Has the focus child been involved in any stage/s of the programming and planning of their educational experiences?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________
Have other specialists or teachers of the focus child been involved in any stage/s of the programming and planning of their educational experiences?

- Yes
- No

Please discuss.

During the focus child’s attendance at school, are you aware of any changes to planning and programming so as to improve the educational experiences planned for the focus child?

- Yes
- No

Please discuss.

What areas of development and learning do you believe are the most important when planning and programming for the educational experiences of the focus child?


Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the educational experiences of the focus child that you feel I have not covered in this section?


Section Three
This section of the Pre-Interview Questionnaire has been designed to gather information on the role that support services for gifted children have played in the experiences of the focus child.

Using the following scale, rate how well informed you consider yourself to be on ‘support services’ for gifted children.

- Very Poorly Informed
- Poorly Informed
- Somewhat Informed
- Well Informed
- Very Well Informed

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.
What role have ‘support services for the gifted’ played in the provision of educational experiences for this focus child? Please discuss.

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Are there any other comments or questions you would like to raise in relation to the role ‘support services’ have played in the educational experiences of the focus child that you feel I have not covered in this section?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you very much for completing this Pre-Interview Questionnaire. 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 may explain or elaborate further on the information you have provided.

It would be extremely helpful if you could please bring along any items related to the experiences of you child that you feel may assist in supporting your responses to the questionnaire (eg. anecdotal or observational records, specialist reports, Individual Program Plans, Family Service Support Plans, Photos etc.)

It is anticipated that this interview will take approximately 45 minutes in duration.

Therefore, if you would please return the completed Pre-Interview Questionnaire and consent form in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope by ______________________, I will be in contact with you in the near future to schedule a time convenient to you for an interview.

Thank you again for your participation!