MINORITIZED PARENTS, SPECIAL EDUCATION, AND INCLUSION

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Theory and Policy Studies
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ABSTRACT

While there is a large body of literature on the subject of inclusion from a student’s perspective in terms of program delivery, little has been written about how minoritized parents are included in special education processes. This critical study examines how minoritized parents – those who are at times disadvantaged because of how they are differentiated within society – are included in and/or excluded from special education in the varying circumstances associated with this process. To delve into the parameters and implementation of special education identification, placement, and program delivery, I spoke with four minoritized parents and one minoritized youth engagement worker. Additionally, I examined codified policies and regulations, in order to consider how individuals interpret and shape the enactment of this policy within school cultures. In recording and coding the stories of minoritized parents, I have found that Ontario’s system of identification, placement, and program delivery presently leads minoritized parents to experience varying degrees of inclusion and/or exclusion. These degrees may be influenced by a number of circumstances, including how knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy are presented. As outlined in this paper, Ontario’s
Ministry of Education, along with school boards across the province, may pursue a number of different change avenues, and these paths will inevitably lead to different outcomes. While some paths may lead to conflict resolution and enriched inclusion, others may intensify situations of exclusion. Any sort of policy change that sets out to transform special education identification, placement, and program delivery along an Inclusion/Exclusion, Transparency/Opaqueness continuum would ultimately have to address a variety of complications. While the two general forces of larger social context and policy complications are addressed in the concluding chapter of the paper, the specific manner in which they materialize cannot be predicted with complete accuracy. Rather than articulating a detailed set of instructions to redesign policy, I hope to generate critical reflection and discussion on the matter of transforming Ontario’s special education model. If special education inclusion is to be enriched in Ontario, change is imperative.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This research study examines inclusion within Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. In particular, I explore how minoritized parents – those who are disadvantaged because of how they are differentiated within society – are included in and/or excluded from the varying circumstances associated with this process. To delve into the parameters and implementation of special education identification, placement, and program delivery, I spoke with four minoritized parents and one minoritized youth engagement worker. Additionally, I examined codified policies and regulations, in order to consider how individuals interpret and shape the enactment of this policy within school cultures, and reflect on dimensions of inclusion and/or exclusion. Researching special education identification and placement in Ontario in relation to the dimension of minoritized parental inclusion has prompted me to outline scenarios in which special education identification, placement and program delivery policy could change, and consider the outcomes that could stem from particular change scenarios. These scenarios of change are outlined in the discussion chapter of this paper.

Scope and Perspective

Perspective is a key component of research. In collecting and analyzing data researchers bring “a construction of reality to the research, which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied” (Merriam, 1998, p. 22-23).

As a white male born into a middle class home I have had certain advantages as a child, adolescent, and adult (McIntosh, 1989). While one’s advantages are partly derived
from how he/she is identified ethno-racially, ethno-culturally, and in terms of sex, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status, I did not critically interrogate this social network, or my position within it, until reaching adulthood and working as a teacher.

Over the course of my career I have had the opportunity to teach a variety of grades and work in special education. Early in 1996 I began teaching English as a Foreign Language in South Korea. After returning to Canada I taught at a language school and took the Bachelor of Education program at OISE/UT. In 1999 I began working as an elementary teacher for the Toronto District School Board and since then I have taught in two different school communities. During my first few years of teaching I encountered a number of situations where Somali-Canadian parents expressed discomfort with special education support and assessment. In particular, the aspect of meeting with a school board psychologist and taking a psycho-educational assessment heightened parental anxiety. While I initially viewed special education parameters, as set out by the Ontario Ministry of Education, as a matter of scientific fact I have since come to question the normalizing aspects of special education and the notion of *objective* assessment.

I have participated in pre-School Support Team (SST) discussions, SST meetings, Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) meetings and IPRC reviews on behalf of over one hundred students. My capacity within these proceedings has included making and documenting referrals, adjusting waiting lists for assessment, presenting profiles of learners, chairing SST meetings, and scheduling, presenting and keeping records at original and review IPRC meetings. These experiences have led me to encounter both situations where parents were included and excluded, to varying degrees, in the dialogue and decision-making process.
Although my own experiences do not form a part of the data within this study I would be remiss not to articulate their impact on my perspective. As my professional encounters made me aware of problems of exclusion within the current special education identification structure, I decided to delve further into the dynamics of this phenomenon in this research study.

**Inclusion, Minoritization and Ontario’s Special Education Identification, Placement, and Program Delivery Process**

In this research study I explore the possibility that minoritized parents are being excluded from the special education process. At the core of this research question are the concepts of inclusion and minoritization. While outlining how I conceptualize these two ideas, I address the larger issue of why it is that minoritized parents are more likely to get excluded from special education identification, placement, and program delivery in Ontario.

Inclusion provides a way of perceiving an interactive special education identification, placement, and program delivery procedure. But there are many layers of parental inclusion. In the following few sentences I consider the following three dimensions of inclusion: physical presence; awareness; and dialogue. Because physical presence represents one form of inclusion, instances where parents attend meetings at schools (such as IPRC meetings) exemplify one way in which parents can be included in Ontario’s special education model. Having parents sign special education documents (i.e., to provide consent) and inviting them to special education meetings indicate similar forms of physical inclusion. While physical presence is certainly important, I would contend that because inclusion should also involve awareness parents need to be clearly
informed about ideas, findings and choices in conversations and decision-making processes. The need for schools to obtain informed consent from parents exemplifies this layer of inclusion. Awareness would also solidify in situations where the chair of a meeting takes the time and effort to ensure that parents understand the ideas, results and choices that are being discussed (along with their implications). To push this form of inclusion further, educators and other school personnel would strive to engage parents in dialogue. Situations where the chair of a parent-school meeting attempts to foster meaningful conversations where ideas, findings, and choices are discussed in depth illustrate this level of inclusion.

Because inclusion involves individual and group interactions, any definition of inclusion must also consider larger social dimensions. In referencing works by Byrne (1999), Dei, Wilson, and Zine (2002), and Riley and Rustique-Forrester (2002), Ryan (2006) notes that, “Recently, many of those concerned with seeing that all people enjoy the same kinds of opportunities in life and in school have begun using the term inclusion” (p. 15). He also observes that among others, Boscardin and Jacobsen (1997) “have expanded the concept [of inclusion] to encompass not just (dis)ability, but also other axes of disadvantage such as age, gender, class, and race/ethnicity” (Ryan, 2003, p. 17). Similarly, Dei (1996) and Connell (1993) describe a practice of inclusion that interlocks with social justice, which itself “is not satisfied with one counter-hegemonic project” (Connell, 1993, p. 44).

With these larger sociological forces in mind, I believe that inclusive practices need to encompass the three interconnected dimensions of: dialogue; comfort; and collaborative action. Inclusive dialogue would arise as the process of speaking and
listening in settings and situations where people are informed, empowered, and feel safe enough to express their views in an open manner. In order to foster inclusive dialogue, those who are conversing would take steps to better ensure that others are informed, empowered, and feel safe. Collaborative action arises when decisions are made through a process that is collective in nature (collective in terms of people but also in terms of ideas). A decision that is made collaboratively takes everyone’s values and perspectives into consideration.

Minoritization connects to marginalization, an inclusion-exclusion continuum, and a continuum of empowerment and disempowerment. Within a society, people may be marginalized and/or disempowered in a variety ways, sometimes in relation to layers of identity and notions of difference. As Minow (1990) notes, “Neither separation nor integration can eradicate the meaning of difference as long as the majority locates difference in a minority group that does not fit the world designed for the majority” (p. 25). While individuals may be differentiated according to ethno-racial identity, ethnocultural identity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and so on, they may also encounter social barriers in relation to these aspects of identification. Thus, rather than perceiving minoritization as an adjective or statistical descriptor I view it as something that happens, and is created by a relationship between identification, marginalization, and disempowerment.

Literature written on the subject of minoritized parental inclusion in special education identification, placement, and program delivery indicates that there is a rift between the minoritized parent community and schools (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995; Tellier-Robinson, 2000; Todd, 2003; Rogers, 2003; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004). There
are a number of reasons why minoritized parents are more likely to be excluded from school processes, including how linguistic diversity and ethno-cultural and ethno-racial differences arise in parent-school interactions. For instance, ethno-cultural and/or ethno-racial perspectives may create situations where parents and school board personnel differ in how they view and/or interpret special education knowledge and philosophy. This theme has emerged in the work of Harry, Allen, and McLaughlin (1995) and Rogers (2003) in the African-American community, and Tellier-Robinson (2000) and Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson, and Brusca-Vega (1999) in the Portuguese- and Hispanic-American communities. On another level, linguistic diversity has been identified as contributing to the exclusion of minoritized parents in special education processes, and this phenomenon is visible in the research of Lai and Ishiyama (2004), Tam and Heng (2005), and Rueda and Windmuller (2006). In sum, minoritization is a social process that at times inequitably advantages and disadvantages people, creating a dynamic where minoritized parents are more likely to get excluded from Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery procedure.

**Research Question**

Discourses can be interpreted as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of actions, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and worlds of which they speak” (Lessa, 2006, p. 285). With this definition in mind, we may view special education as a discourse in and of itself. On one level, special education is a vast organization, forming a grid of interconnected – albeit changing – ideas, which simultaneously construct and presume the acceptance of a particular belief system, or philosophy. Systems and processes, such as special education
program delivery and special education identification and placement (a classification process), are shaped by the larger special education organization. In this way, on a macro-level, the overarching special education organization is comprised of various interlocking ideologies. Additionally, the specific concepts buttressing the special education organization, such as (supposed) objective psychological assessment and learning disability, connect to other (sometimes interrelated) ideological views, such as psychology, objectivism, normalcy (i.e. within an age-based normative intelligence continuum), and central tendency. So, on a micro-level, special education is comprised of various interlocking discourses. I return to this matter of philosophy in the subsequent chapters of this paper.

An institutionalized system of interwoven ideologies creates a demand for individuals, such as parents, to be aware of, or better yet, agree with its basic philosophy. It also fosters a power dynamic. Simply put, those who are more fluent in the knowledge base, linguistic components, aspects of positioning, and the overall philosophy, have more opportunities to access systems of power and influence processes of power. In terms of special education, one’s awareness of its knowledge base, ability to utilize its language, positioning within its framework, and philosophy may have an impact on inclusion in the process of dialoguing and decision-making.

My central research question is as follows:

- How are minoritized parents included in and/or excluded from Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process?

My sub-questions are as follows:

- Who is involved in the special education identification process?
• How are they included?

• How does a minoritized parent’s knowledge of Ontario’s special education knowledge pools, fluency in special education-oriented language, positioning, and overall philosophy influence inclusion and exclusion?

In posing the above-mentioned questions I strove to move “from describing inequities and power/knowledge relationships in interactions to interpreting and explaining them” (Rogers, 2003, p. 142). Speaking with minoritized parents who have had experiences with Ontario’s special education model led me to delve into the four above-listed questions in an open and interactive way, as detailed in my Methodology chapter.

**The Identification, Placement, and Program Delivery Process**

Special Education is a form of educational support. It offers alternative, more individualized modes of program delivery (with smaller class sizes) in an attempt to meet a wide variety of learning needs. Ontario’s special education system includes the assessment of learning needs, the process of identifying exceptionalities in learners, the placement of exceptional learners in different classrooms, and the program delivery to these children (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001).

Exceptionalities represent a standardized method of conceptualizing and classifying learning profiles. In Ontario, different exceptionalities, such as Learning Disability (LD), are assigned to children in order to first profile and then channel them into different program delivery formats, such as self-contained LD classes. Exceptionalities enable school boards to assign different funding packages to learners in a standardized manner (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003a). General parameters of
exceptionalities are set by Ontario’s Ministry of Education, as is the method of identifying exceptional learners (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; 2006c). With both informal and formal elements, the process of identifying exceptionalities in learners is lengthy and complex. Formal identifications, which are designated at Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) meetings, represent the culmination of this process. Identification in Ontario includes a number of standardized elements, including: formal testing, such as psycho-educational assessments; informed consent, which is required in order to conduct psycho-educational assessments and hold IPRC meetings; parental/guardian invitations to IPRC meetings; IPRC meetings themselves; and the documentation produced in IPRC meetings (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; 2006c; Weber & Bennett, 2004). These standardized elements have been established to create a system where identification, placement, and program delivery are consistent across the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006c). In theory, this is how Ontario’s special education identification procedure is meant to operate.

In terms of chronology, the formal identification process includes the five key steps of informal classroom assessment; dialogue among school board personnel (i.e. administrators, educators, and psychologists) and between school board personnel and parents/guardians at meetings (such as School Support Team, or SST meetings); formal assessment; further dialogue among educators and between educators and parents/guardians at IPRC meetings (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; Weber & Bennett, 2004). All subsequent references to parents made throughout this paper include both parents and guardians.
Figure 1: Special Education Identification, Placement, and Program Delivery Process

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT
Teachers assess children in relation to Ontario curriculum

DIALOGUE
School board personnel discuss a child’s performance among themselves and/or with parents (IST, SST, IEP)

FURTHER DIALOGUE
School board personnel discuss the findings of additional assessment then prepare for placement and

FORMALIZATION
Identification and placement are formalized (IPRC)

ADDITIONAL ASSESSMENT
May include a psycho-educational assessment
Informal classroom assessments are usually conducted by a classroom teacher and measure a child’s performance against the expectations of the provincial curricular expectations (Weber & Bennett, 2004).

When informal assessment is completed a dialogue process is initiated. At this stage, the teacher discusses the child’s learning needs and strategies with administrators and/or a special education teacher at the school. A parent/guardian may or may not be invited to contribute to this dialogue. If it is agreed that the child requires further support, or the teacher would benefit from further guidance, follow-up meeting(s) (such as SST meetings) are scheduled. SST meetings often involve educators, parents, and specialists, such as psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and social workers (Weber & Bennett, 2004; The Association of Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards, 2007). Conversations at these meetings tend to focus on student performance in relation to the provincial curriculum, learning needs and educational histories of children and approaches to the needs of those learners. As The Association of Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards (2007) notes, “This multi-disciplinary team of professionals … supports the classroom teacher in trying to modify the regular program to meet an individual child’s needs.” If it is decided that the child is to be formally assessed then the child is placed on an assessment waiting list, providing parental consent is obtained. While parents may be invited to SST meetings, their physical presence at these discussions does not necessarily lead to their inclusion within the dialogue and decision-making process (Rogers, 2003).

In undergoing a formal assessment, a child is assessed by a psychologist (with the informed consent of a parent). On an official level, psychological assessments are
believed to offer unbiased, standardized means of developing a learning profile and pinpointing learning capacities within different skill areas (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). As the Ontario Ministry of Education notes in *Education for All*, “Different psycho-educational reports may incorporate different measures, but all will, in general, include valid and reliable measures of processes that have been found to have a major impact on learning” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 28). The currency of the psychological assessment is partly derived from its ties to the medical profession.

When the psycho-educational assessment is completed and its results are interpreted, results are discussed among school personnel. Results are also shared with parents at this stage of the special education identification process.

An IPRC meeting is then scheduled on behalf of the child. IPRC meetings can only be conducted with the consent of a child’s parent, and parents must be invited to IPRC meetings no less than ten days prior to the scheduled date of the meeting (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006c). IPRC meetings are chaired by school administrators, and are attended by a panel, which includes at least one representative from the child’s school, the child’s parent (if he/she chooses to attend the meeting), a school board psychologist, a special education consultant, and a variety of others (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006c). Additional members of an IPRC meeting would depend on circumstances, and may include such personnel as a speech-language therapist and a social worker. Learning needs, educational histories, and psycho-educational assessments are discussed at IPRC meetings. Ultimately, the IPRC team has the authority to decide whether or not the child is exceptional, and then determine what form of program delivery that child will receive. IPRC decisions relating to the exceptionality
designation and/or the placement recommendation may be appealed by parents, and IPRC decisions and classroom placements are reviewed on a yearly basis at IPRC review meetings (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006c). IPRC review meetings often include special education consultants, school administrators, the student’s teacher(s), and depending on circumstances, a variety of others, such as a school board psychologist or speech language therapist. While parents must, by law, be invited to attend initial and review IPRC meetings, their attendance and/or participation may or may not lead to their meaningful inclusion in the process.

But special education identification, placement, and program delivery does not always involve the practice of assigning designations of exceptionality. In a number of circumstances, specialized forms of program delivery are offered to students who have not stepped through the IPRC process. Behavioural-oriented programs that operate in elementary, middle, and high schools across the province provide an example of this scenario. Within the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), for instance, the following three alternative programs function as a form of special education program delivery:

- Section 23;
- Alternative Pupil Placement for Limited Expulsion (APPLE); and
- Transition Intervention Program for Suspended Students (TIPSS).

Like APPLE and TIPSS, Section 23 offers placements geared to “high risk students” (TCDSB, 2009c). More specifically, Section 23 “refers to a section of the Legislative Grants Regulation. Over the years, the number of this section has changed. The programs have also been known as section 19 and section 21 programs” (Bluewater
According to the Toronto Catholic District School Board (2009c), “The main criteria for entry into a Section 23 program is that the child's/youth's need for treatment is so severe that a regular day school or special education classroom program cannot serve the needs of the student.”

Because the three above-mentioned programs intend to provide behavioural support and simultaneously exist as a form of discipline, their placement process stems from disciplinary situations and procedures that do not necessarily link to the IPRC procedure. I revisit this layer of special education identification and placement in the final segment of the participant stories chapter, which draws from the reflections of a youth engagement worker I interviewed in December 2008.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework draws researchers to a phenomenon and guides them through the study of that phenomenon. As Merriam (1998) observes, a “disciplinary orientation is the lens through which you view the world” (p. 45). A theoretical framework is often what first leads researchers to become aware of particular social phenomena.

Permeating every aspect of my critical lens is the matter of social dynamics. Social interactions underlie all steps of the special education model, from pre-SST discussions to IPRC reviews. As social interactions and individual perspectives are contextual, every child’s/family’s journey through the identification process is unique.

Inclusion provides a way of perceiving a more interactive identification procedure. It supplies a body of literature and the foundation of my outlook within this
research study (Merriam, 1998, p. 47). I should point out, however, that inclusion shares goals and interlocks with the perspectives of social justice, equity, and anti-racism. Some researchers widen their definition of special education inclusion and view it as a dimension of a larger inclusive society. As Friend, Bursuck and Hutchinson (1998) note, “In Canada, the context for discussions about inclusion is society” (p. 16). Within this wider framework, social inclusion is to be fostered in both an education system and in the larger society as a whole. Such a dynamic places emphasis, “not on the placement [of learners], but on participation. The intent is not that people are returned to inclusive settings, but that they are always included” (Friend, Bursuck, & Hutchinson, 1998, p. 16). An inclusionary school system would then help exceptional learners to prepare for “adult participation in employment and all other aspects of a democratic society” (Friend, Bursuck, & Hutchinson, 1998, p. 16). Although this view of inclusion widens our sociological lens it does not address the question of inclusion at the procedural level. More recent writing on inclusion has expanded into the realm of leadership. As Ryan (2003) notes, “those interested in inclusion have expanded the concept to encompass not just (dis)ability, but also other axes of disadvantage such as age, gender, class, and race/ethnicity” (p. 17).

In developing ideas of inclusion, researchers and theorists have been moved to rethink traditional concepts of leadership, such as the notion of leadership being a function carried out by individuals. This has led writers such as Ryan (2003; 2006) and Dei (1996) to explore decision-making, in terms of how school decisions are made, who is included in the decision-making process and what sort of power dynamics are involved in such practices. Some of these researchers further examine these layers of power and
inclusion by investigating the effects of inclusive and exclusive practices on schools and school leadership (Ryan, 2003; 2006; Dei, 1996). Viewing schools in such a way invites people to critically reconsider how curriculum is developed, how schools are staffed, and how communities are actively involved in the operations and life of their local schools (May, 1994). This idea of inclusive leadership is relevant to this study as it led me to recognize that the way in which leadership operates within a school community (and I researched in five communities in all) can impact tremendously on how special education identification, placement, and program delivery operates within that community. Rather than existing in binary opposition to exclusion, inclusion exists on a continuum.

**Conceptual Framework**

To develop a conceptual framework, a researcher applies a critical lens, or combination of lenses, to perceive social phenomena. Reflecting on the matter of research design, Robson (2002) suggests that researchers ask: “What conceptual framework links the phenomenon you are studying” (p. 81)?

Conducting this study led me to delve into interlocking dimensions of identification:

- Inclusion/Exclusion
- The process of identification, placement, and program delivery; and
- The elements of the process (knowledge, language, position, philosophy).

On one level I consider how the elements of knowledge, fluency in special education-oriented language, positioning, and philosophy impact on how minoritized parents can be included in and/or excluded from Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. More specifically, I have
investigated this phenomenon by talking to people about their experiences and views relating to the special education identification procedure. As layers of identity, such as ethno-race, ethno-culture, sex, gender, and socio-economic status may further impact on the dynamics of this social phenomenon, I have dialogued with people who can speak to this issue, namely minoritized parents.

On a second level, I study the mechanics of the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process and consider layers of inclusion, as various members of school communities (such as parents, teachers, administrators, and school psychologists) interact. Six key steps within this process include informal assessments; SST meetings, formal assessments, IPRC meetings, placements and IPRC review meetings. Interviewing minoritized parents who have encountered aspects of special education and examining relevant Ministry of Education and school board documents has enabled me to investigate dimensions of inclusion and exclusion. While participants do not always speak directly about dimensions such as knowledge, language, positioning, philosophy, and/or exclusion itself, their narratives still uncover instances and circumstances where exclusion intermingles with the four themes.

In the figure below I provide a visual representation of this conceptual framework.
Within this opening chapter I have reflected on my perspective, defined inclusion and minoritization, and outlined my research question. Additionally, I have summarized
the identification, placement, and program delivery process and articulated my theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Having introduced six key aspects of this research study, I sketch out how the following five chapters are structured in the following few sentences. In Chapter 2, entitled Literature Review, I provide a review of the literature on the phenomenon of how minoritized parents are included in and/or excluded from special education identification, placement, and program delivery. The third chapter details the methodology I utilized in conducting this research study, and states the rationale behind these methodological choices. Participant stories are examined in detail in Chapter 4 (which is divided into two parts) and this data is analyzed in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, entitled Discussion, I consider different ways in which the policies and practices of Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery model may change in the future and, in doing so, I consider various implications. Additionally, I outline various areas of significance, articulating contributions of the study to theory and practice.
Ontario’s identification process excludes members of school communities in a number of different ways. These forms of exclusion in turn lead to situations where participants in the identification process become detached. In conducting a review of the literature I have noted that exclusion within the identification procedure predominantly arises in relation to the following four interrelated areas: one’s knowledge of the discourse on how Ontario’s special education system operates; one’s fluency in terms of special education-oriented language; institutional positioning, and one’s discursive position on special education-related subjects, such as intelligence, assessment, and program delivery. In this chapter I provide a review of the literature on this topic.

While special education programs represent a fragment of larger school systems, academic research on the topic is immense. Across North America, and indeed around the world, research studies delve into such subjects as the reliability of special education assessment tools, the effectiveness of curriculum modifications, overrepresentation, and parental inclusion. A variety of journals, for example, focus their attention on special education-related topics. Geared to the psychological/clinical aspect of special education are the *Journal of School Psychology* and *Intervention in School and Clinic*. Exploring the general realm of exceptionalities special educational program delivery are *Exceptional Children, European Journal of Special Needs Education, Remedial and Special Education, The Journal of Special Education,* and *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. Alternatively, *International Journal of Inclusive Education* focuses on issues of inclusion in the educational arena. While some research studies and journals
gravitate to a structuralist view of human relations (see Minnow, 1990, p. 185), others
apply a more critical perspective of social dynamics, and more specifically the interplay
between individuals within the special education domain (see Rogers, 2003, p. 141-142).

An examination of special education-oriented literature published over the past
thirty years reveals an intensifying concern with the potentially interlocked issues of
limited parental involvement (which itself intertwines with inclusion) and ethno-racial,
ethno-cultural, and linguistic overrepresentation. I initially review literature on
overrepresentation in North America then reflect on studies that detail connections
between overrepresentation and parental involvement, and subsequently explore research
on the dynamics of parental inclusion.

The disproportional presence of African-Americans on referral lists and in special
education programs has been documented by an assortment of studies over the past two
decades (see Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Hilliard, 1992; US Department of Education, 1994;
Agbenyega & Jiggetts, 1999; Oswald, Coutinho, Best & Singh, 1999; US Department of
Education, 2000; Rogers, 2003; Kearns, Ford & Linney, 2005). Although there have
been changes to special education policies in recent years (see, for example, U.S.
Department of Education, 2003; 2005), the question of African-American
overrepresentation continues to concern researchers. No less than eleven American
studies have interrogated this issue over the past fifteen years alone.

In addition to the African-American community, a number of other groups
have been found to be overrepresented in special education programs across the
United States. Citing studies conducted by Artiles and Trent (2000) and Artiles,
Harry, Reschly and Chinn (2002), Rueda and Windmuller (2006) note that African-American, Chicano/Latino, Native-American, and various subgroups of Asian-American students are “The most common groups involved in overrepresentation” (p. 99).

While the issue of overrepresentation in special education programs has been brought up by some Canadian writers (see Dei, 1996, p. 33, 110), it has been researched far less than it has been in the United States. In a recent report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Geneva, the African Canadian Legal Clinic (2007) states:

African Canadians are unfairly and disproportionately streamed into less intellectually challenging courses, programs and opportunities. The practice is highly racialized as stereotypes about students’ abilities or inabilities influence the streams into which students are placed. (p. 28)

Citing Braithwaite and James (1996), the report goes on to note that “African Canadian children are also often streamed into special education classes based on stereotypes about their learning and intellectual capabilities” (African Canadian Legal Clinic, 2007, p. 29). Surveying research on overrepresentation of African-Canadians in special education, Braithwaite and James (1996) offer a grim observation:

The research of the seventies and eighties showed that Black students were regularly streamed into lower level or vocational classes within Ontario school. For example, Toronto Board of Education studies over the two decades showed that Black students were second to Aboriginals in being the most highly represented in basic level programmes of study. (p. 16)

Five reports referenced by Braithwaite and James (1996) include ones written by Wright (1971), Deosaran (1976), Wright and Tsuji (1984), Cheng, Tsuji, Yau, and Ziegler (1987), and Cheng, Yau, and Ziegler (1993). Although the question of representation has
been researched far less in Canada than in the United States, a similar trend of
overrepresentation of minoritized students in lower leveled programs has been observed.

Numerous researchers have raised questions about the underrepresentation
of minoritized students in gifted programs (Maker, 1996; Ford, 1998; Daniels,
1998). In 1996, Maker observed, “certain cultural, ethnic, and linguistic minority
students continue to be underrepresented in special [gifted] programs” (p. 1).
According to Daniels (1998), “Inequities in education perpetuate
disproportionality” and “disproportionate minority representation in gifted and
special education programs” stem from such social processes as special education
knowledge production (p. 1). Over ten years ago, Ford (1998) stated:

> Concerns over recruiting and retaining minority students in gifted
> education programs have persisted for several decades, and, although
> many educators, policymakers, and researchers have deliberated about the
> underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education, few articles,
> reports, or studies exist on this topic. (p. 4)

Little research exists on the parents of minoritized gifted children, and more specifically,
A recent phenomenological study of parents of gifted African-American students relayed
a sense of frustration expressed by parents who felt that school programs lacked cultural
sensitivity and observed a degree of elusiveness in the gifted identification procedure
(Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, & Tavegia, 2005).

Reflecting on the phenomenon of overrepresentation and underrepresentation, a
number of Canadian and international researchers have put forward the argument that
there is a relationship between low parental involvement and overrepresentation. But
what exactly is meant by low parental involvement? In her quantitative follow-up to a
1996 study conducted by the Department of Special Education at the Stockholm Institute of Education, Roll-Pettersson (2003) perceives involvement as circumstances where parents are “actively engaged in their child’s education” (p. 334). In interviewing 24 parents, Todd (2002) highlights a reciprocal aspect of involvement in viewing “partnership as exchange of knowledge, common purpose and joint decision-making” (p. 281). In another qualitative study, one that draws lengthy interview data from a purposeful sample of 10 Chinese-Canadian mothers who had all lived in Canada for less than 5 years, Lai and Ishiyama (2004) note that parental involvement includes “input to the development of appropriate programs as well as the placement decision process” (p. 98). Citing Bailey et al. (1992), Bjorck-Akesson and Gronlund (1995) outline four layers of parental involvement in their survey-based quantitative study including:

parent participation in decisions about the child assessment process, parent participation in the assessment of children prior to the individualized education plan (IEP) … parent participation in the team meeting and decisions about child goals and services, and provision of family goals and services. (p. 523)

In conducting interviews and observations with parents of 42 African-American parents, Harry, Allen and McLaughlin (1995) consider wider dimensions, such as parental advocacy and contributions to the decision-making process, and also reflect on the more day-to-day aspects of involvement, such as the “monitoring of notebooks and homework, regular “dropping in” to the classroom, informal chats with the teacher observation of classes and attendance at IEP conferences” (p. 370). Conducting interviews with nine Portuguese-speaking parents prompted Tellier-Robinson (2000) to note that a significant component of involvement is the act of fighting for what they believe is due their children (p. 316).
Some researchers reason that such factors as conceptualizations of dis/ability and learning may erect and/or widen barriers between schools and parents, and this in turn may hinder inclusion within school communities (see Harry, 1992; Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995; Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson & Brusca-Vega, 1999; Tellier-Rebecca, 2000; Kearns, Ford & Linney, 2005). The question of low parental involvement represents a key issue in the special education academic arena. Those who explore this aspect of special education in their work include Hoff (1978), Goldberg and Kuriloff (1991); Harry, Allen and McLaughlin (1995); Bjorck-Akesson and Gronlund (1995); Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson, and Brusca-Vega (1999); Tellier-Robinson (2000); Roll-Pettersson (2003); Todd (2003); Rogers (2003); Lai and Ishiyama (2004); Lindsay and Docrell (2004); Tam and Heng (2005); Rueda and Windmuller (2006).

A number of academics focus their research on the more specific question of how parental involvement unfolds within the African-American community (see, for example, Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995; and Rogers, 2003). Tellier-Robinson (2000) and Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson, and Brusca-Vega (1999) explore the matter of limited parental inclusion as it relates to Porteguese- and Hispanic-Americans respectively. In investigating the dynamics of parental involvement in the Chinese-Canadian community, Lai and Ishiyama (2004) summarize that “language and cultural beliefs/practices affected parental involvement” (p. 103). Similarly, Tam and Heng (2005) and Rueda and Windmuller (2006) document challenges faced by linguistically diverse families as they interact with special education program delivery. In addition to the above-cited studies conducted in Canada and the United States, researchers in Sweden have also raised
questions about the degree of parental involvement in special education settings (see Bjorck-Akesson & Gronlund, 1995; Roll-Pettersson, 2003).

Because one of the participants I interviewed referred to experiences she had before her autistic daughter entered public school, I investigated literature on the subject of special education and the inclusion of parents of preschool-aged children. According to Barnett (1992); “More than 100 studies provide some information about the effects of compensatory preschool education on disadvantaged children” (p. 281). These studies, however, tend to focus on assessment and academic effectiveness (Barnett, 1992). Citing Peck and Cooke (1983), Odom and McEvoy (1988), Lamorey and Bricker (1993), and Buysse and Bailey (1993), Odom et al (1996) note:

Since 1980, at least four comprehensive reviews of the literature on preschool inclusion have concluded that children with disabilities enrolled in inclusive settings make at least as much progress on standardized measures of cognitive, language, motor, and social development as children in noninclusive special education classrooms.

A more recent United States-oriented review of literature written about developments in assessment and curricular materials for preschool-aged special education children can be found in the work of Pretti-Frontczak, Kowalski, and Brown (2002). While a number of studies have addressed questions relating to educational resources, and the inclusion of preschool-aged in different programs (see Barnett, 1992; Pretti-Frontczak, Kowalski, and Brown, 2002), I was unable to find any studies that focus on the experiences of the parents (let alone minoritized Canadian parents) of preschool-aged children in special education.

Although there is quite a large body of literature on the domain of inclusion, and more specifically parental involvement in special education, the topic has yet to become
recognized as part of the *classic* body of literature on special education. In surveying the 50 most often cited special education articles to appear between 1960 and 1996 – based on citation frequency in *Exceptional Children, The Journal of Special Education;* and *Remedial and Special Education* – McLeskey (2004) was unable to include any articles on the topic of parental involvement on his list. Instead, the 50 articles on the list tend to focus on such matters as the reading assessment, program delivery, and the parameters of special education designations (McLeskey, 2004). While Tam and Heng (2005) argue that “the literature on parent involvement in preferral intervention is scant” (p. 224), this growing field of research on parental inclusion has yet to join the ranks of mainstream special education themes.

**Shaping Inclusion**

Examining a variety of research studies in preparing this literature review has revealed four key themes, or dimensions, which impact on the shape and likelihood of inclusion in special education systems. As previously mentioned, they are knowledge of special education, fluency in special education-related language, positioning within special education processes, and philosophy of special education.

**Knowledge**

Knowledge is often identified as a key contributor to the shape and degree of inclusion in special education settings. More specifically, one might ask: How does an individual’s knowledge of the special education discourse impact on how he/she is included or excluded from the special education identification procedures? To clarify, I view special education discourse as the ideological foundation of a special education system, such as Ontario’s special education organization.
A variety of research studies examine how general knowledge of special education policies, programs, and procedures contributes to one’s involvement in a child’s special education experience (Goldberg & Kuriloff, 1991; Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995; Todd, 2003; Lindsay & Docrell, 2004; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004). As many of these researchers conclude, a parent’s awareness of school expectations and available programs within a special education system may foster or hinder his/her child’s access to special education support. This dynamic raises concerns for some researchers. Echoing the observations of Wesley, Buysse, and Tyndall (1997), Lindsay and Docrell (2004) note, “Parents may lack knowledge of the services available” (p. 226). Similarly, Lai and Ishiyama (2004) identify “lack of familiarity within the school system” as one of “eight reasons for the low rates of minority parent participation” in special education (p. 97). Concurring with this view, Harry, Allen, and McLaughlin (1995) reflect, “One outcome of the [special education] classification system was considerable parental confusion” (p. 5). The three researchers observed a pattern of circumstances where parents were unable to accurately explain the meaning of documents they had signed, which raises questions about obtaining of informed consent (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995). In discussing school interactions with parents, Todd (2003) explains, “many parents had little idea of the official time their child’s assessment took” (p. 288). Exploring the question of fairness of special education hearings in the United States, Goldberg and Kuriloff (1991) were disturbed to report survey results where “over half of the parents (51%) [claimed] that schools provided no or almost no explanations of the meaning of whatever records were provided” (p. 550). In gathering data, Goldberg and Kuriloff (1991) utilized two questionnaires to learn about how 37 Pennsylvania
families viewed their experiences with special education processes. Goldbert and Kuriloff (1991) ultimately find that because parent-school disagreements escalate into court cases with seriousness and frequency, school systems need to develop ways of working collaboratively with parents at the earliest stages of the special education identification process in order to build relationships of trust.

Numerous researchers have uncovered possible connections between knowledge of special education discursive frameworks, inclusion and the linguistic, ethno-racial and ethno-cultural identity of parents. Suntag and Schaot (1994), for instance, report that Native American and “Hispanic-American parents were less likely than Anglo American parents to be knowledgeable about the process of obtaining services and to be involved in coordinating and making decisions about services for their children” (cited in Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson, & Brusca-Vega, 1999, p. 2). Reflecting on an ethnographic research project conducted by Lynch and Stein (1987), Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson, and Brusca-Vega (1999) note that the:

study of ethnically diverse parents of school age children with various disabilities, reported that Hispanic-American and African-American parents were less knowledgeable about the special education services their children were receiving and were less likely to offer suggestions at the IEP [Individual Education Plan] meeting than were Anglo-American parents. (p. 374)

Researching the experiences of Portuguese-speaking parents of special needs children, Teller-Robinson (2000) observes, “Most of the parents in this study … stated that it was necessary for them to keep after the professionals “all the time” in order to get the information they needed about their children’s education” (p. 317). Thus, for many researchers, there is a clear link between linguistic, ethno-racial, and ethno-cultural
aspects of identity and knowledge of special education, and this in turn impacts on the shape of inclusion within school communities.

Knowledge of Ontario’s special education discourse may also link to one’s awareness of the mathematical idea of central limit theorem, and its dominant hold on how special needs, or exceptionalities, are defined and measured by school systems and assessment tools (Bonnell, n.d.; Williams, Weiss, & Rolfhus, 2001). The idea of central limit theorem argues that widespread random samples of statistical results, such as how children perform on intelligence tests, can be objective (if designed properly) and ultimately would be represented by a normal curve, or Bell Curve (Herrstein & Murray, 1996, p. 45, 580). Championing the knowledge of school board psychologists, Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, and Jacob-Timm (1995), for instance, state:

Even if the special education reform movement results in widespread provisions of services without labels, the need to objectively define children’s problems will continue, and school psychologists will be the professionals in the school most knowledgeable in measurement. (p. 192)

While I have focused on North American studies thus far within this segment, the issue of knowledge, and its relationship with special education inclusion, is a global concern. In investigating the perceptions of parents with children receiving special education in Stockholm and nearby areas, for instance, Roll-Pattersson (2003) observes, “In general the findings reveal that participating parents, regardless of setting, express greatest needs in the information category” (p. 307).

In various ways knowledge acts as a force that empowers and/or disempowers individuals who embark on the path of choosing and utilizing special education services. Nearly thirty years ago Hoff (1978) summed up the matter by stating, “Sharing information is crucial to parental involvement” (p. 266).
Language

Like knowledge of special education, one’s fluency in the technical language that circulates through special education ideas, policies, and discussions may impact on the shape of inclusion. While language itself exists as a mode of facilitating communication, it may also, at times, erect barriers, and hinder communication. Linguistic proficiency, a result of fluency and second language acquisition, may impact on the interplay between parents and school workers. On another level, language may tie to the use of terminology, or what Foucault (2003) has described as “the language of knowledges, or the language-knowledge system” (p. 153-154). On a third level, language may exclude in a more subtle fashion, as those representing a school system may at times foster confusion through the use of ambiguous language.

Fluency represents one layer of the language issue. In studying the views of Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents of children receiving learning disability services, Kalyanpur (1998) observes, “Hispanic parents had their rights concerning the IEP process explained to them in their native language significantly less often than did Non-Hispanic parents, 59% and 90% respectively” (p.4). As Kalyanpur (1998) points out, limited interpretation and translation services may limit the availability of special education information, or knowledge, to linguistically diverse parents.

The use of and/or reliance on specific terminology, marks a second aspect of language. In encouraging educators to foster interactive encounters with parents, Lupi and Tong (2001) assert that such a goal “requires teachers to review their use of language to avoid any unnecessary barriers to communication, such as professional terms and jargon” (p. 3). In investigating exchanges between African-American parents and
schools, Harry, Allen, and McLaughlin (1995) reflect, “Though most parents said they had no trouble reading the documents, they also admitted that they did not understand much of the terminology in the reports” (p. 7).

Ambiguity, a third layer of language, impacts on special education interactions and the resulting shape and degree of inclusion. Unlike fluency and use of terminology, however, linguistic ambiguity is more difficult to detect. Examining one mother’s personal experiences as her daughter moved through the referral process, Rogers (2003) notes, “June’s decision to begin the process … was shaped by the available options within this particular institutional context and the linguistic ambiguity surrounding the process” (p. 148). She goes on to note, “The ambiguity of the beginning of the referral process was further complicated through the difference in assumptions about the link between the referral of a student and their placement in special education” (Rogers, 2003, p. 148). Specifically, in this situation, a reading teacher neglected to use precise words, such as “special education,” and instead used words, such as “tested,” “the process,” “my list,” and “recommended,” “to signify special education” (Rogers, 2003, p. 149). In this case, a “lack of explicit language to special education referral and placement led June Treader [the parent] to believe … that the conversation she had with the reading teacher – was just that – a conversation rather than seeking initial permission from June to begin the referral process” (p. 149).

In sum, language may act as a mode of miscommunication, rather than a mode of communication. This is evident in how limited interpretation services, use of terminology, and use of ambiguous language may shape the interactions between parents and people representing schools.
Positioning

How people are institutionally positioned within the special education identification procedure marks a third key dimension of special education inclusion. By position, I refer to the act of taking on particular roles in special education-oriented interactions between individuals within school settings. As detailed below, these positions are, in part at least, constructed by policies and regulations, such as Regulation 181/98 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006c). According to Todd (2003):

Many parents of children with special education needs are required, by the need to liaise with teachers over the assessment and education of their child, to have a relationship with schools that is different to that of other parents, and one they may or may not wish to have. (p. 284)

The overlapping elements of special education assessment and program delivery formats could be viewed as an intricate web of human relations and interactions. Intermingling within this web are people who work on behalf of school boards, such as school psychologists and teachers, and people who represent their children, such as parents and guardians. Each interaction – whether it is a referral meeting or a meeting about a placement – represents a point at which individuals intersect within the web. While some special education-driven interactions, such as chats about assignments, may be informal in nature, others, such as placement (IPRC) meetings, mark a more formal exchange. The official interactions initiated and/or carried out by teachers, school psychologists, principals, and parents are set out by a variety of codified procedures and boundaries. In Ontario, a number of these details are mapped out in Regulation 181/98 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; 2006c).

In setting out provincial requirements in how Ontario school boards implement the IPRC process, roles within official special education interactions are defined by
Regulation 181/98 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; 2006c). Unlike parents and teachers, for instance, a school psychologist is the only individual with enough expert authority to make a diagnosis (Rueda & Windmueller, 2006). The special education department representative at a referral/IPRC meeting is the only individual who may officially offer a special education placement to a child/family (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; 2006c). In these situations, school systems vest a degree of institutional authority in certain individuals involved in the special education web. It follows that within this dynamic, we may also observe an element of hierarchy as legislation, such as Regulation 181/98 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006c), assigns different powers to different individuals. As Lindsay and Docrell (2004) caution, a parent’s role within these circumstances may be relegated to that of a consumer, or taxpaying customers. Highlights of Regulation 181/98 can be found at the Ontario Ministry of Education website at the following URL:


Harry, Allen, and McLauhlin (1995) view the dimension of status and position as a “structure of power” (p.8). In their study of the interactions between African-American parents and schools in the special education domain, they observe:

Overall, the interpersonal dynamics of these meetings placed parents at a distinct disadvantage and undermined parental efforts at advocacy. The structure of conferences, in which professionals report and parents listen, implies that initiative and authority are solely in the hands of professionals. (p. 372)

In studying one specific family’s experience with the referral process, Rogers (2003) notes that teachers “privileged the institutionalized set of beliefs and practices embedded
within the objectified forms and tests that will be administered to Vicky [the child] as authority, rather than their own knowledge of her on a daily basis in the classroom” (p. 150). Researching the experiences of linguistically diverse parents of special needs children led Lindsay and Docrell (2004) to note:

the parents in this study thought they were often not listened to, both at the outset and later, and that they had to fight hard for appropriate support services or entry to an appropriate school for their children. (p. 9)

One parent Todd (2003) observed was so intimidated she avoided a meeting altogether, afraid that “she would make a fool of herself” (p. 289). All three exemplify situations where parents are institutionally positioned in a way that diminishes their voice both within a process and an organization.

**Philosophy**

The special education organization within a school system conveys a general philosophy, or ideological perspective, relating to knowledge, intelligence, curriculum, and program delivery. As Rueda and Windmueller (2006) note, Reid and Valle (2004) offer a useful portrait of this dynamic of medicalized discourse:

In that medicine and psychology spawned the field of learning disabilities (as well as the institution of special education), it is no surprise that the traditional conceptualization of learning dis/abilities embodies the scientific, medical, and psychological discourses; a scientific expert … must make a “diagnosis” based on comparisons with the performance of children thought to be “disability-free” … We see the basic tenets of science, medicine, and psychology in the centring and privileging of statistically defined “normalcy.” (p. 515)

Founding its principles of normalcy on a premise of neutrality, special education in Ontario exhibits what Stone (1988) would call a “rational ideal”, which “presupposes the existence of neutral facts—neutral in the sense that they only describe the world, but do
not serve anybody’s interest, promote any value judgments, or exert persuasive force beyond the weight of their correctness” (p. 252).

Parents who travel through the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process, do not necessarily have to agree with the philosophical ideas entrenched within Ontario’s special education organization. While philosophical difference would certainly lead some parents to halt the identification process, others might be prepared make a number of concessions. As Minow (1990) observes, however, significant repercussions would arise when a parent halts the identification process, as “Nonidentification frees a child from the risks associated with labeling but also denies him specialized attention and servicing [program delivery]” (p. 36).

A parent’s response to philosophical disagreement with Ontario’s special education organization would depend on how he/she feels about the special education program his/her child might access. For instance, if a parent wants his/her child to have guaranteed access to a smaller sized classroom, then that parent might be inclined to make a variety of philosophical concessions in order to pass through the special identification, placement, and program delivery process. Further complicating matters is the possibility that special education programs exist on a continuum of desirability. As Minow (1990) observes, “Schools that devise special programs for gifted students as well as for disabled students begin to remake the classroom as a setting for individualized learning. But such programs may also resegregate or communicate in ever more powerful ways the pecking order used by adults to rank children by traits the adults value” (p. 94).
But what sort of philosophical concessions do parents have to make? Subscribing to Ontario’s present special education system would lead a parent to accept certain interlocked concepts tied to normalization, objectivity, and decontextualization (Rueda & Windmueller, 2006, p. 104; Davis, 1995; Reid & Valle, 2004, p. 515). In the following few sentences I describe how this dynamic would discursively position Rebecca, a hypothetical parent. In terms of normalization, Rebecca would have to concede that there is such a thing as a bounded set of normal and abnormal behaviours and skills, where disability is learner-centred. On the matter of objectivity she would have to concede that it is quite possible to design and administer standardized tools, which accurately and fairly measure intelligence capacity. In reflecting on the concept of decontextualization, Rebecca would simultaneously have to concede that social factors, such as socio-economic status, ethno-racial identity, ethno-cultural identity, language proficiency, do not interfere with an individual’s performance on standardized tools of measurement (Rueda & Windmueller, 2006, p. 104; Davis, 1995; Reid & Valle, 2004, p. 515). Before Rebecca could utilize, or even seek out, special education services on behalf of her child she would have to first concede the three above-mentioned concepts as being universal truths.

But are these concepts universal? Or, alternatively, are they products of socially constructed views of intelligence, behaviour, and normality? Reflecting on Valsiner’s (1989) work on the matter of cultural blindness Kalyanpur (1998) notes:

The assumption that special education practice is a culture-free and therefore universally applicable is of particular significance for family-focused service delivery. Scientific objectivity is considered best practice, and is further fortified by … the belief that ability, or disability, is inherent in an individual, precluding the possible impact of externalities such as environment. (p. 328)
The constructs attached to special education are not universal and may be perceived, and/or interpreted by different people in different ways (Lindsay & Docrell, 2004; Tellier-Robinson, 2000). Consequently, the beliefs that lurk beneath the surface of a school system’s special education organization may clash with those of teachers, principals, psychologists, and parents, among others. One could view this clash as a matter of discursive incongruence. A growing body of research on special education focuses on this aspect of philosophical incongruence as it unfolds between parents and special education establishments. Discursive incongruence may tie to one’s ethno-racial, ethno-cultural, and/or linguistic identity, and this in turn may also foster situations of exclusion. In her critical analysis case study of an African-American family’s experience with the referral process, Rogers (2003) states that, “disability is a cultural institution through which people acquire disabilities through ideologies – or sets of assumptions about what counts as learning, achievement and ability” (p. 140). Similarly, “in an ethnographic study by Harry (1992) of 12 Hispanic-American parents who had children with mild disabilities, the input of parents concerning their children’s special education programs was found to be greatly compromised by differences in cultural conceptualizations of disability” (Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson, & Brusca-Vega, 1999, p. 2). Lai and Ishiyama (2004) articulate similar findings in their study on Chinese-Canadian mothers of children with learning disabilities, “Another reason for the mother’s limited school participation may be attributed to different ideas held about teaching and learning between them and Canadian educators” (p. 104). As the above-referenced studies indicate, there are a number of counter discourses in the field of special education.
Conclusion

In addition to the above mentioned studies, the work of Minow (1990), de Carvalho (2000), and Stone (1988) form a key part of how I conceptualize difference, envision parental inclusion, and perceive the complexities associated with policy in the Data Analysis and Discussion chapters of this paper. Although the arena of academic research on special education and inclusion is immense, visible gaps remain within the literature. In examining the material cited in this review I would note that one significant gap in the literature on special education inclusion is an absence of studies geared to the subject of identification. Of the studies I have examined from different countries only one, an American study (Rogers, 2003), focuses on the referral/identification process. As the identification process itself sets the tone for interactions and solidifies the relationship between schools and the parents, it is vital that researchers begin to investigate the phenomenon of inclusion as it unfolds within this crucial stage of every child’s/family’s special education experience.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Kirby and McKenna (1989) define methodology as “the gathering of data and the making sense of it in an orderly way, as well as the study of methods” (p. 63). They describe research design as being interconnected with one’s perspective, “Methodology, theory and ideology are intertwined. How you go about doing your research is inextricably linked with how you see the world” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 63). Within this segment I articulate my methodology, and in doing so explain the rationale behind my choices in research design.

Critical Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry “is used to gain insight into people’s attitudes, behaviour, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyles” (QSR International, 2007). According to QSR International (2007), a producer of qualitative-oriented computer software programs,

Qualitative research seeks out the ‘why’… of its topic through the analysis of unstructured information – things like interview transcripts and recordings, emails, notes, feedback forms, photos and videos. It doesn’t just rely on statistics or numbers, which are the domain of quantitative researchers.

By removing the task of trying to prove or disprove a hypothesis, qualitative research is more open-ended than quantitative research. The stories participants share with qualitative researchers not only inform data but also potentially shape the parameters and outcomes of a study.

The way in which I apply qualitative research in this research study is critical in nature. Kincheloe & McLaren (2005) articulately define a criticalist a:
a researcher or theorist who attempts to use his or her work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness); that certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as neutral, necessary, or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and the focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them; and finally, that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression. (p. 304)

With a critical perspective, I was drawn to investigate the subjective-oriented nature of the phenomenon of minoritized parental inclusion and/or exclusion in special education identification, placement, and program delivery in Ontario. The personal nature of critical qualitative inquiry led me to encourage the five participants in this study to value their own stories, and tell their own stories in detail at their own pace. Participants were not constrained by limited choices available in a survey and they were not distanced by the impersonal nature of filling in forms without human interaction. Ultimately, dialoguing with minoritized parents led me to learn about how they have experienced inclusion and/or exclusion, and perceived their own experiences.

Rather than taking a deductive approach to study the degree and shape of inclusion within Ontario’s identification procedure I investigated the phenomenon inductively, and this approach has led me to “build rather than test concepts, hypotheses, and theories” (Merriam, 1998, p. 45). In the following subsections of this chapter I outline further details regarding sampling, generalizability, gathering participants,
dialoguing with participants, and transcribing, coding, and analyzing data within this research study.

**Purposeful Sample**

While participant samples can be random they can also be purposeful, or purposive. Purposive sampling involves situations where researchers seek out participants with certain criteria in mind. In such cases, the notion of attempting to gather a random sample from the larger population is set aside.

A number of the studies explored in my review of the literature on minoritized parental inclusion in special education processes gathered data through interviewing a purposeful group of participants. Many of these researchers also took an inductive approach to analyzing and interpreting data. While Harry, Allen and McLaughlin (1995) sought out participants from the African-American community, Tellier-Robinson (2000) gathered a small group of participants from the Portuguese-American community. Similarly, Todd (2003) gathered participants from a particular socio-economic group in American society. In exploring special education in Canada, Lai and Ishiyama (2004) met with a small group of Chinese-Canadian mothers. In all of these studies, the researchers focus on a particular segment of society, with the aim of learning about how people within those communities experience a particular social phenomenon. As Meriam (1998) suggests, “The criteria you establish for purposeful sampling directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases” (p. 61-62).

To learn about how minoritized parents experience special education inclusion/exclusion, I sought out minoritized parents who have taken part in Ontario’s identification, placement, and program delivery process. I also interviewed one
minoritized youth engagement worker who supports students/families as they move through the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. In other words, the central aim of this study led me to gather a purposeful sample.

Because codified policy can be interpreted and enacted in varying ways in differing circumstances (Lipsky, 1983), I decided to explore how inclusion and/or exclusion and identification unfolded within different school communities. Also, as the identification component of special education identification, placement, and program delivery primarily occurs at the elementary school level (Weber & Bennett, 2004, p. 29), the majority of the parents I interviewed spoke about experiences with elementary schools.

It is important to include minoritized parents as participants in the study. This study is, after all about them, and they will have much to say about their inclusion in Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. Their views are crucial, and talking to them will provide a much-needed perspective on the process. But inclusion and exclusion occurs in the context of interactions with others, and so others who have been involved in these interactions will also have something to say about them. Indeed it may be useful to have these others report on these interactions. With this in mind, I sought out another person who was knowledgeable about this process. Eventually I chose a social worker that had experience in the area. While he was not able to report on the subjective orientations of the parents that he worked with, he had considerable knowledge of the interactions that occurred. In addition to this he had more diverse experiences than the parents. Whereas parents dealt exclusively with their own children, this social worker was involved with many different parents, students
and educators, and this provided him with a unique, but very useful, perspective on the process.

By interviewing four minoritized parents and one minoritized youth engagement worker (two data pools) in five different school communities within three school boards I drew from a purposeful sample. Hearing the narratives from parents who identify themselves in different ways in terms of ethno-race, ethno-culture, social class, and gender, has helped me to consider how these dimensions can at times impact on the complex relationship between Ontario’s general special education philosophy, power relations, and inclusion. More specifically, conversing with four minoritized parents led me to learn about how inclusion and/or exclusion is experienced in Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. In addition, speaking with the youth engagement worker enabled me to learn about a very different possibility, as I became aware of how people in supporting roles can impact on the process and, as outlined in the second part of the Participant Stories chapter, enrich inclusion. In this sense, the data I gathered from the youth engagement worker acted as a foil to the data I gathered from parents. It informed me about an alternative dynamic which I address more fully in my Data Analysis and Discussion chapters.

**Sample Size**

When considering sample size, numerous researchers sample until a point of saturation or redundancy is reached (Merriam, 1998, p. 64). In conducting her study of 9 Portuguese-speaking families of special needs children, Tellier-Robinson (2000) illustrates this very point in noting, “New participants were added until I attained a
saturation of categories … for analysis” (p. 313). Aware of the possibility of saturating categories, I approached my sample size with flexibility in mind.

While the qualitative studies I have reviewed in surveying the literature on special education identification ranged from one (Rogers, 2000) to over 42 (Harry, Allen & McLaughlin, 1995), I decided to focus on a relatively small group, drawing from numerous school communities. For Lai and Ishiyama (2004) and Tellier-Robinson (2000) a sample size close to the one of this study led to a rich variety of narratives and perspectives.

I stopped seeking out participants once it became apparent that the data categories were repeating themselves. However, I should point out that while I had hoped to interview the families the youth engagement worker had supported, none were comfortable participating in a research project. Although these parents would have added a critical dimension to my second pool of data, the data I gathered from the youth engagement worker himself was certainly valuable in other ways, predominantly, as previously mentioned, as a foil to the first pool of data.

**Generalizability**

In outlining the design of this research study I will also speak to the matters of generalizability and exclusion in the sampling aspect of research design. While this study was not designed to gather findings that are generalizable, I would be remiss not to articulate this layer of the study.

Let me begin with generalizability. “Some researchers lay claim to generalizability on the basis of the similarity of their case study to others reported in the literature” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 63). While there are 72 district school boards and
4002 elementary schools across the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006a), my thesis focuses on the experiences of a limited number of individuals involving a small number of schools within three school boards. As my research study does not involve 69 school boards and nearly 4000 elementary schools, it will not hold external validity. Simply put, because my study does not gather data from a large, random group of participants, its findings are not generalizable. However, as previously mentioned, generalizing is not the aim of this research study. Rather, I have sought to delve into individual experiences within the identification, placement, and program delivery procedure, and then reflect on power dynamics and dimensions of inclusion within that specific practice in education.

But there is also the matter of exclusion. In certain ways, this research study is exclusionary. Because I did not have a budget for interpreters and/or translators my project did not involve Ontarians who do not speak English. While the youth worker and two of the parents I interviewed do not speak English as a first language, they are able to converse in English. The exclusion of non-English speaking parents led me to miss the perspective of a crucial segment of the parent community.

In outlining a network of special education policy pathways in relation to the interlocked dimensions of inclusion/exclusion and transparency/opaqueness, I return to the matter of generalizability in the final chapter of this paper. Outlining potential change scenarios in this way enables me to consider various associated with different policy shifts.
Gathering Participants

After passing my thesis proposal hearing on Tuesday, March 18, 2008 I spent the months of April, May, and June developing and editing my ethics protocol. Shortly after my ethics protocol was approved (on June 17, 2008), I began the work to gather participants for this study.

During the summer of 2008 I contacted (sometimes on numerous occasions) and corresponded with (via phone and/or email) with a number of organizations in order to gather participants who matched the sampling criteria (minoritized parents who have, in one way or another, participated in Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery procedure). More specifically, I contacted and/or corresponded with the following organizations between the months of July and September 2008:

- Somali Immigrant Aid Organization (SIAO);
- Somali-Canadian Association of Etobicoke;
- The Arab Community Centre of Toronto;
- Broad African Resource Centre;
- Ghanaian Canadian Association of Ontario;
- Canadian Arab Federation;
- Somaliland Canadian Society of Toronto;
- Kenyan Community in Ontario;
- Settlement At Work (where my research advertisement was initially posted on July 20 2008 at the following website: http://atwork.settlement.org);
- Centre for Independent Living in Toronto Inc. (CILT); and
Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (where my research advertisement was posted in the August 2008 [#65] and the September 2008 [#66] issues; see http://socialplanningtoronto.org/CSPC-T%20Newsletters/2008/September08.pdf).

In initially communicating with representatives at these organizations (via phone and email), I outlined the research project and requested that my advertisement be placed either in a form of printed literature or on a website. A number of the organizations did not reply to my initial telephone and email messages. One of the organizations communicated with parents on my behalf but was unable to gather participants for the study. Some organizations put me in touch with others and eventually my advertisement was posted with two organizations (as indicated above). This ultimately led me to communicate with my five participants. Initial interviews began in August and were concluded in December 2008. Follow up correspondence and interviews continued into February 2009.

**Individual Interviews**

While interviews can be conducted in a collective format, they can also be held in an individual format. The latter of these two options offers interviewees a more private setting where recollections, reflections, and opinions may be expressed directly to an interviewer. In such a dynamic, interviewees do not have to wait for other people to finish speaking before they can share their thoughts, and they do not have to worry about linking their comments to the shifting topic of a group’s discussions.

To dialogue with participants, I chose to lead a series of individual interviews. Speaking in a one-on-one setting afforded a private atmosphere with the aim of enabling
participants to openly share their feelings about their personal experiences, and articulate their critical view of the process itself. Prior to each interview I emailed participants information about the study along with a list of my initial questions. The core themes, along with the initial questions I posed, are included in the table below.

*Table 1: Initial Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Background** | Tell me about your experiences in the area of special education referrals and identification.  
How did you become aware of your child possibly receiving special education support?  
What sort of meetings have you attended? What happened at these meetings? |
| **Knowledge** | How did you learn about how special education operates in Ontario?  
How did this help you to participate in School Support Team (SST) and/or Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) meetings you attended? |
| **Language** | Tell me about the sort of language people used at the SST and/or IPRC meetings you attended. |
| **Positioning** | How did you express your ideas/opinions at special education-oriented meetings?  
How did people (such as teachers, administrators, special education consultants, and school board psychologists) respond to your ideas/opinions at these meetings? |
Initial interviews took approximately forty-five minutes, and with consent, they were all audio-recorded. Rather than strictly adhering to the above-listed preset questions, I conducted the interviews as conversations. Consequently, throughout all of the interviews I posed a mix of preset and spontaneous questions. While participants spoke, I sometimes took notes, and on numerous occasions I found that a participant’s reflections prompted me to formulate and pose a number of follow-up questions.

Because some participants did not speak English as their first language, I sometimes asked for clarifications during interviews (i.e., in relation to tenses). Taking field notes prior to, during, and after interviews enabled me to consider the tone and emotional atmosphere of our conversations. For two interviewees, for instance, revisiting difficult moments from the past was an emotional process. I transcribed the interviews myself and then coded and analyzed the data. Transcribing interviews led me to make some minor corrections to syntax.

**Follow-up Conversations**

Following initial interviews, I met with, emailed, and/or telephoned all participants to review transcripts and field notes, and discuss matters further. While I did
not conduct additional interviews with every participant, I did continue to interact with all participants over a period of three to five months. Some of these follow-up interactions consisted of extended conversations to delve further into topics explored in the initial interviews, and others related more to confirming details. Engaging in follow-up discussions enabled me to clarify queries, establish a level of familiarity, and build trust.

**Transcribing, Coding, and Analyzing Data**

Over a six-month period (August 2008-January 2009) I interviewed four minoritized parents and one minoritized youth worker. We corresponded via email, communicated over the telephone, and met in a variety of locations. While some interviewees preferred to meet at a café near their home or workplace, others preferred to be interviewed in their homes. With the consent of all participants, all interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, and I transcribed the interviews between December 2008 and January 2009. Each transcript was created as a Microsoft Word document and was numbered individually. I photocopied each transcript so that two 8½ by 11 sized pages of transcript would be minimized and captured horizontally on one page 8½ by 11 page. Interview transcript photocopies were gathered in a small binder, which I utilized throughout the data coding, analysis, and writing process. With over 150 pages of transcribed interviews, this strategy enabled me to minimize on the page turning that is involved when analyzing and referencing data.

After transcribing the interviews, I examined and re-examined the transcripts, all the while looking for key themes. Initially, I used a yellow highlighter to demark portions of the data I felt were particularly significant for this research study. Following that, I reviewed the transcripts numerous times, gradually adding to the portion that was
highlighted. In reviewing the highlighted data a number of times, I used different
coloured pens to identify and took notes on key themes and related subthemes. Using a
colour-coded system to highlight and reflect on key themes within the raw data led me to
create a reference system that was both organized and easily accessible.

Because qualitative software prompts researchers to break interviews into smaller
excerpts and then classify and re-classify those excerpts, it has the danger of distancing
people from original interview transcripts and field notes. While I certainly reflected on
the key themes and subthemes found within the data, I did not want to utilize a program
that could lead me into an ongoing cycle of re-categorization. In sum, I chose not to use
qualitative research software so I could remain more closely linked to the original
interview transcripts and field notes and to avoid the temptation to reconfigure my
themes and subthemes repeatedly.

After identifying key themes and subthemes, I created a series of thematically
structured tables in a Microsoft Word document. These tables, or graphic organizers,
enabled me to classify information, and structure both the Participant Stories and Data
Analysis chapters of this paper. In all, I created four tables, one for each of the major
themes. Each table included a total of three columns. These columns were structured in
the following manner: the first column outlined the title of the major theme itself; the
second column included quotations (drawn from the raw data) that supported the theme;
and the third column articulated my own reflections on the themes and quotations
themselves. Information in the tables was aligned so that my reflections were placed
directly beside the data to which they linked. I used Microsoft Word’s text colour system
to colour-code reflections and quotations according to sub-theme. The major themes I
drew from the data, as previously mentioned, are knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy. The table below visually depicts this theme/subtheme framework.

*Table 2: Overview of Themes and Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
<th>Philosophy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Subtheme</td>
<td>What is knowledge?</td>
<td>Proficiency</td>
<td>What is positioning?</td>
<td>What is the dominant special education philosophy in Ontario?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Subtheme</td>
<td>Objectivist knowledge and special education</td>
<td>Technical language</td>
<td>De jure positioning</td>
<td>Philosophical concessions and special education philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Subtheme</td>
<td>How is knowledge used?</td>
<td>Persuasive language</td>
<td>De facto positioning</td>
<td>Clashing philosophies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Subtheme</td>
<td>Knowledge management</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alternative positioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Subtheme</td>
<td>Knowledge gaps</td>
<td></td>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Subtheme</td>
<td>Gathering knowledge informally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With continued reflection and editing I transferred the quotations in the second column to the reflections in the third column. As a result, each table morphed from 3-columns into 2-columns. I then took the major topics listed in the first column and used them as headings in the second column. In doing this, the four tables became a 1-column document and this document ultimately became the first draft of my Participant Stories and Data Analysis chapters.

Beginning with my Data Analysis chapter, I continually found myself referring to the stories of the five participants. Consequently, I soon decided to set the Data Analysis chapter aside and focus first on chronicling the experiences and views of my participants in a Participant Stories chapter without engaging in any sort of commentary or analysis. As a result, I composed the Participant Stories chapter as a way of providing a series of biographies, knowing that I would refer back to these storylines when I moved to the process of articulating my analysis of the data (Chapter 5) and ultimately discussing the implications of this analysis (Chapter 6).

As I have outlined, in coding and analyzing data I applied Glaser’s constant comparative method. Specifically, I “look[ed] for key issues, recurrent events, or events in the data that become categories of focus” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982, p. 70). I collected data that provided incidents of the categories of focus, and then wrote about the categories I explored (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982, p. 70). This enabled me to “work with the data and emerging model to discover basic social processes and relationships” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982, p. 70). As Bogdan and Bilken (1982) note, “although you can talk about
the constant comparative method as a series of steps … [the process] goes on all at once, and analysis keeps doubling back to more data collection and coding” (p. 70).

It is through these interconnected steps that I simultaneously gathered, interpreted, and articulated the way in which I communicate my findings within this paper. All of my initial interviews with participants were conducted between August and December 2008, and were transcribed between December 2008 and January 2009. Data was coded and analyzed between December 2008 and March 2009. I began writing this research paper in December 2008 and completed the first draft in April 2009.

Conclusion

Having outlined the methodological choices and reasoning behind these choices, I will next move to the data itself. More specifically, in the following chapter I will relate the stories of the four parents and one youth engagement worker who took part in this research study.
CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANT STORIES

In outlining the findings of this research study, this chapter presents two pools of data within two distinct parts. The first part of the chapter focuses on data gathered from parents while the second part shares the experiences of a youth engagement worker.

Overall, this Participant Stories chapter provides a series of snapshots. These snapshots compile the narratives of the five people I interviewed between August 2008 and February 2009. The stories of these five participants offer a window into their lives. After sketching out the background of each participant, I provide a chronological retelling of their personal experiences with school personnel in relation to the interlocked matters of special education identification and program delivery. To protect the anonymity of these participants, and those they referenced in our conversations, I will use pseudonyms throughout this paper. Utilizing pseudonyms in lieu of identifying public schools mentioned in interviews will further ensure that anonymity is not compromised.

Participant Stories – Part I

The first part of this chapter outlines data I gathered from the four minoritized parents interviewed for this study. Anoushka, Zawadi, Beatrice, and Hana all worked without outside support as they encountered Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. In articulating the stories of these four mothers I sketch out situations where inclusion and exclusion exist in a state of tension.

Anoushka

Anoushka Ramesh lives in Milton, Canada, a satellite town in the Greater Toronto Area. According to the city’s municipal website, Milton has a population slightly over 66
000 and is located approximately 60 kilometers west of Toronto (Town of Milton, 2008). Growing at a rapid pace, the population of Milton has more than doubled over the past seven years. Non-denominational public schools in the city belong to the Halton District School Board.

Born in 1970, Anoushka grew up in the northeastern region of India. She was raised in the small town of Ropar, which has since changed its name to Rupnagar. The town is situated in the state of Punjab, which boarders Pakistan to the west, India’s state of Jammu and Kashmir to the north, and India’s state of Himachal Pradesh to the northeast. Anoushka attended a private school from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 10 and completed Grades 11 and 12 at a secondary school in Ropar.

After completing high school, Anoushka earned a degree in Ayurvedic medicine, a traditional medicine native to India, at a university in the city of Chandigarh. She worked as a resident medical officer in a hospital for five years and married Kaden in 1997. The following year Anoushka and Kaden had their first child, a son named Ravi. Kaden moved to Canada in 1999 and was joined by Ravi one year later. Having moved to the United States, Anoushka gave birth to Bala in the summer of 2001 and the family soon settled in Milton, Ontario. Reflecting on how her family came to choose Milton as their eventual destination point, Anoushka reflected, “We chose Milton because it was small like my hometown, close to an escarpment area.”

In September 2008, one month following my initial interview with Anoushka, Ravi started Grade 5 while his younger sister, Bala, began Grade 2. Until the 2008-2009 school year, the two had attended Sattelitetown Elementary Public School together. While Bala continued on at her home school, Ravi was bussed to Castle Heights Public
School on a daily basis. Because Ravi’s home school does not offer a self-contained gifted program, the boy is required to travel outside his immediate community to access this program.

A self-contained gifted class is a form of special education program delivery in Ontario. As the Ontario Ministry of Education outlines, gifted classrooms are a type of “full-time special education class where the student-teacher ratio conforms to Regulation 298, section 31, for the entire school day” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a). In elementary schools, this cap ranges from 20 to 25 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

While some believe that self-contained gifted classes offer a positive learning environment, others believe that it is detrimental. One of the principles of the Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education, for instance, states that, “Quality education does not result from segregated classrooms or programs” (Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education, 2007a). On its website, the organization states, “Education occurs in age-appropriate regular education classes where all students are full and welcomed members of the class” (Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education, 2007a).

Anoushka’s experiences in relation to special education identification exclusively link to Sattelitetown Elementary Public School. Located on a quiet suburban street, Sattelitetown Elementary has an enrollment that exceeds one thousand. While Sattelitetown does not operate self-contained gifted programs, special education services are provided at the school through a number of resource teachers who support students and teachers through such strategies as small group and individual withdrawal. These supports are either provided informally or outlined in a learner’s Individual Education Plan, or IEP. The lead resource teacher at the school is Mrs. Wilcox.
Shortly after Ravi entered Grade 4, during the first term of the 2007-2008 school year, Sattelitetown personnel initiated the identification procedure on his behalf. Anoushka is not certain as to precisely who nominated Ravi as a candidate for gifted testing but she does recall receiving a letter her son brought home one day early in the 2007-2008 school year. The letter informed Anoushka that her son was being offered a chance to participate in a gifted assessment at his school. Mentioned in the letter was the name of the test Ravi would take, and Anoushka was asked to provide consent in written form. The consent letter was written in English. While Hindi is Anoushka’s first language, she is conversant in English and speaks English whenever interacting with school personnel. Anoushka examined the letter and, after conducting some research on her own about the test and the gifted program itself, she provided consent for her son to participate in the assessment.

Reflecting on the commencement of her son’s gifted assessment process, Anoushka informed me that the initial letter she received from the school principal was quite brief. Describing the letter she recalled:

The principal sent a note home saying this day there is an Otis-Lennon test. You don’t have to worry about anything, just send some pencils with the kid, or stuff like that; they want to know if we are okay with him having the test.

Whether intentional or not, the principal of Sattelitetown Elementary had already begun to foster a situation of discomfort. Anoushka had received a letter that sought to obtain her consent and yet explained very little about for what it sought consent. It was perplexing. Anoushka understood that the school needed parental consent in order for her son to participate in the gifted assessment. But what precisely would the assessment involve? What sort of expectations would her son have to meet in order to be deemed
gifted? And who would ultimately determine whether or not Ravi was to be formally identified as being gifted? Anoushka was confused. Casting her mind back to that moment she told me, “I was wondering, what does this Otis-Lennon mean?”

Bereft of information about the assessment and faced with a difficult decision, Anoushka decided to conduct her own research. Recalling her efforts to gather information about gifted assessment in general and the Otis-Lennon test in particular, Anoushka recalled, “So I searched the web.” Navigating through the Halton District School Board website, however, proved to be unrewarding. As Anoushka recalled, “there isn’t much information on any school’s website.” After extending her search, Anoushka eventually obtained some of the answers she sought. Although she did not recall specific websites she acquired information from, she told me that eventually “I found this [Otis-Lennon test] is a criteria for a child to be recognized gifted.” But learning about the Otis-Lennon test was not enough. Anoushka also needed to learn about the gifted program itself in order to determine how she felt about a possible gifted placement for her son.

In seeking out information about gifted program delivery, Anoushka recalled:

when they sent the note about the test, and when I searched over the internet, I searched the things. Okay, what are these things? And then I was trying to find out, okay, is this really a good program for my son, or not? And then I learned, okay, the kind of child he is, he is really good at certain things but he is not really good at some other things. Like not really bad, but he was average high-level personality, some things really at the top and some things a little behind. He has those qualities. Then I was thinking, maybe he needs to be there [in a self contained gifted classroom] so he can concentrate more on his studies.

Feeling positive about the gifted assessment, and the placement opportunities associated with a gifted identification, Anoushka decided to provide consent.
Later in the first term, Ravi was sent home with a second letter. The second correspondence from the school informed Anoushka that the test her son had taken was in fact the first step in a multi-step assessment process. The letter also informed Anoushka that her son had surpassed the expectations of the first assessment and would go on to take a second assessment. She summarized the contents of the letter as follows, “Okay, he passed the first test, so he’ll go for the second test.” At that point, Ravi “was called for the second test, which is non-verbal Naglieri.”

The Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test, or NNAT, is, according to a technical report published by Pearson Education, a 30-minute “screener” (Naglieri, 2008). Highlighting the products associated with this assessment tool, Pearson Education states, “The are 38 items [questions] in each of the seven levels can be administered in only 30 minutes, and scored quickly as well. Group administration provides a time-saving factor especially valuable for those in a school setting” (Naglieri, 2008).

Unfortunately, when Ravi took the 30-minute Naglieri screener, there was a fire drill at Sattelitetown Elementary. This upset him. As Anoushka recalled, “And he did that test and he came home and he was quite upset. He said, ‘Mommy, it was not fair, there was a fire drill and I was not given enough time.’” Comforting her son, Anoushka replied, “Okay, that happens to everyone, not just to you.”

Eventually, Anoushka received a third letter from the school. Reflecting on the contents of the third letter Anoushka told me:

We got a result saying okay but the statement, which showed us the result, was not clear enough. It said, okay, he participated. But it never said if he passed or not. It said the criteria is under 127. For the second test he scored 127.
Again, Anoushka was faced with a perplexing situation. She knew her son had taken a second gifted assessment; and she also knew how he had scored on that assessment, but she was not certain as to whether or not he had actually met the expectations of the school board.

Rereading the contents of the letter, Anoushka noticed a name and phone number. As she told me, “there was a name given, okay this is a special resource teacher, and you can contact her if you want more information about the result.” Although the resource teacher, Mrs. Wilcox, worked at Ravi’s school, her name was unfamiliar to Anoushka. Preferring to contact her son’s homeroom teacher, Anoushka instead decided to follow the instructions on the letter and place a call to the resource teacher at Satteliteton Elementary Public School.

In recalling her conversation with Mrs. Wilcox, Anoushka informed me:

So I called the [resource] teacher and she said that he passed the first test but in the second test you need to have 130 marks in order to be identified, otherwise you are not, no matter what happens.

The matter of the fire drill interruption was not viewed as being a cause for reconsideration. Reflecting on the details of this conversation, Anoushka told me that her questions were met with “very straight or blunt answers.” It was a trying experience. At one point Mrs. Wilcox said to her, “But if you want to go for further testing you have to go to a private psychologist, and you have to pay for that.”

According to the recently amended 2007-2010 Halton District School Board Special Education Plan:

Psychology staff are either members of, or supervised by members of the College of Psychologists of Ontario … Psychoeducational Consultants assist schools, students and parents through the use of specialized tests and procedures to assess a student’s academic, intellectual, perceptual, and
behavioural or social-emotional functioning. (Halton District School Board, 2009, p. 39)

In addition to this, the exceptionalities of behaviour, learning disability, giftedness, mild intellectual disability, developmental disability, and multiple “require a recent Psychological or Psycho-educational assessment/consultation by a member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario (or someone who is supervised by a member of the College)” (Halton District School Board, 2009, p. 52).

Investing in a private psycho-educational assessment would cost Anoushka and her husband approximately $1500 to $2000. In 2004, the Behaviour Institute, a private agency based in Hamilton, Ontario, charged $1600 per assessment, with assessments billed at a rate of $190 per hour (Behaviour Institute, 2004). As of January 2009, a psycho-educational assessment conducted through Seneca College cost a total of $1800 (Seneca College, 2009).

For Anoushka, spending a few thousand dollars on a private psycho-educational assessment was not an option. As she told me, “being new to the country I don’t think I’d like to spend that kind of money for one test.” Knowing she was not interested in a private assessment, Anoushka continued to pose questions to the resource teacher regarding her son’s performance and status. Eventually, Mrs. Wilcox replied, “Oh, you can call the supervisor at the board. This is her number. This is her name. You can get better answers from her.”

Conversing with the resource teacher at Sattelitometown Elementary left Anoushka with a feeling of suspicion. This was rooted in the ongoing confusion she felt and the lack of clear answers she obtained. Recalling this feeling she told me, “Then you feel
like, oh, there is something fishy, which you are not aware of and you want to know more.” Following Mrs. Wilcox’s advice Anoushka called the school board supervisor, Mrs. Rosie, and was impressed with her readiness to dialogue. Reflecting on this aspect of her experience, Anoushka informed me, “She was a nice lady. She listened to me. She didn’t know me. She didn’t know my son.” In her initial telephone conversation with the superintendent, Anoushka outlined the details of her son’s situation and, in doing so, voiced her two key concerns. First, Anoushka felt that the second letter she had received from Sattelitetown Elementary was ambiguous. Her son’s performance in relation to any sort of gifted cutoff criterion was not clearly articulated in the letter. Second, the question of the fire drill interruption was not addressed. Third, alternatives outlined by the school resource teacher did not take the letter’s ambiguity into consideration nor did they, from Anoushka’s perspective, offer a reasonable solution. As previously mentioned, Anoushka did not feel that pursuing a private psycho-educational assessment for Ravi was an option. On hearing Anoushka speak about the possibility of a private psycho-educational assessment, the supervisor replied, “But when you’re talking about the psychologist, who told you about the [private] psychologist?” Anoushka explained that she had heard this from Mrs. Wilcox, the resource teacher.

After listening to Anoushka’s story, Mrs. Rosie offered a solution:

She listened to me and then she answered: ‘Okay, this is the scenario. The board has certain criteria for a child to be identified, but if you’re mentioning context – certain things about your son – I wish we could go and talk to the schoolteacher, because the class teacher is the best resource you can talk to.

She went on to inform Anoushka that a meeting with Ravi’s teacher could lead to a School Resource Team (SRT) meeting (these meetings are referred to as School Support
Team, or SST, meetings by the TDSB and the TCDSB). As Anoushka recalled, “I was told by the supervisor in the board: ‘You can go to the meeting, or if you want you can just tell the teacher.’”

According to the Halton District School Board’s 2007-2010 Special Education Plan:

Referrals for specialized assessments take place through the School Resource Team and are recorded in the minutes of the SRT meeting. Members of the School Resource Team will help to identify the urgency of the need for assessment. (Halton District School Board, 2009, p. 42)

Following the supervisor’s advice, Anoushka requested a meeting with Ravi’s homeroom teacher with the aim of setting up an SRT meeting. Both apprehensive and excited amidst feelings of renewed hope, Anoushka wanted to be sure that she would articulate her aims and hopes, clearly. She wanted to be prepared. In order to articulate her ideas and gather the answers she needed, Anoushka prepared a list of questions to bring with her to the meeting, “Before going I made a list of questions which I needed to ask, like some homework, so I don’t forget what I need to say.”

The discussion between Anoushka and her son’s classroom teacher prompted Miss Charlotte to request an SRT meeting with administration at Sattelitetown Elementary. But Anoushka did not attend the SRT meeting when it was eventually held. “I never went to the [SRT] meeting,” she explained. Instead, Anoushka was content to have Miss Charlotte relay her concerns at the meeting.

Recalling this situation, Anoushka told me:

It was just a school meeting. The teacher … was Miss Charlotte; I asked Miss Charlotte, ‘These are my concerns, these are my things, these are the points which I really wanted to bring forward; now it’s your choice, as being the teacher, what do you want to do and how do you want to pursue it.’
Having already established a positive relationship established with Miss Charlotte, who had taught Ravi during the previous school year as well, Anoushka was confident in the motives and capability of her son’s teacher. “I trusted the teacher enough,” Anoushka explained. Miss Charlotte assured Anoushka “I’ll put this on to the school resource meeting [SRT].”

When the School Support Team met to discuss Ravi’s situation, it was determined that the boy would take a third, more comprehensive gifted assessment. There were two interconnected reasons for this, as Ravi scored tremendously close to the cutoff while having his test experience interrupted by a fire drill. Detailing the outcome of the SRT meeting, Anoushka told me, “It was the teacher and the principal, who recommended him [Ravi] for further testing.” As Anoushka elaborated, “they said they would do further psychological testing on him at the board’s expense.”

In setting up the more comprehensive final stage of the gifted assessment, Anoushka recalls:

[the school] sent a letter. And I had to sign that consent. I sent it back. Then they gave me a date when they’ll call our son from the class for further testing, and then they will send us the results.

Regarding the length of time it took for Ravi to advance through this step of the process, Anoushka told me, “It took longer; I think the first test happened in October or November, the second in January, and the further testing maybe in April.”

On receiving the results of Ravi’s third, and most comprehensive assessment, Anoushka remembered, “And then they sent me a note.” The note informed Anoushka that, “with the psychologist’s results, yes, he [Ravi] is being identified as gifted. His percentile is beyond 99.9. There is no doubt that he is gifted.”
Statistics Canada defines percentiles as “values that divide a set of observations into 100 equal parts. The percentile rank is the proportion of values in a distribution that a specific value is greater than or equal to” (Statistics Canada, 2009). A percentile of 99.9 would mean that overall, based on the contents of a particular assessment tool; an individual’s score would surpass the performances of 99.9% of a random group of 100 individuals, on average.

With this positive result, an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) meeting was scheduled. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education, “Exceptional pupils are identified as such by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC). Upon receiving a written request from a student’s parent(s), the principal of the school must refer the student to an IPRC. The IPRC will decide whether the student is an exceptional pupil and, if so, what type of educational placement is appropriate. The principal may also, on written notice to the parent(s), refer the student to an IPRC. The parent(s), as well as a student who is sixteen years of age or older, have the right to attend the IPRC meeting and may request that the IPRC discuss potential programs that would meet the student’s needs. On the basis of these discussions, the IPRC can recommend the special education programs and/or services that it considers to be appropriate for the student” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a).

Prior to the IPRC meeting, Anoushka received an information booklet from Sattelitetown Elementary. She did not find it helpful. Reflecting on the information package, she said that:

there was a big booklet but it was talking more about the [other] special education things but not about the gifted program. There was very little information about that. It was more about people who need support in terms of their challenges.
In order to attend the meeting, Anoushka took the day off work. On arriving at the school she reported to the main office. She was soon ushered into a room where other parents were also awaiting IPRC meetings scheduled for the day. In our interview Anoushka recalled various aspects of that day.

Reflecting on the expectant atmosphere of the waiting room, Anoushka told me:

There were a couple of parents, the teacher sent a note, and one parent showed up and the teacher said [to the parent]: ‘Oh, we really don’t need you; it’s your choice if you want to stay or if you want to go.’

As Anoushka recalled, that parent decided to leave. Then, after the parent exited the waiting room, the teacher turned to Anoushka and asked, as Anoushka recalls, “Oh, you want to stay?” Recalling the exchange Anoushka, told me she replied, “Yes [I would like to stay]. I have taken time off work; I would love to stay and see what you do.” The teacher listened to Anoushka’s answer and countered in the following manner, “I sent the note [the IPRC invitation letter], it’s just an internal thing. It’s not mandated that you have to come and attend the meeting. So it’s your choice.” Anoushka stood firm. “Now that I’m here I would like to wait and see, and maybe learn something new from the meeting,” she replied.

The IPRC meeting was a memorable experience for Anoushka. However, it was not memorable because it was lengthy and interactive, but rather because of its brevity and lack of interaction. Recalling the meeting, Anoushka told me:

It was just very brief. You just go there. They call you. And then the teacher presents the case, saying this and this has been done, he was identified as gifted. Then the members there, they gave some time to discuss something.
Prior to the end of the meeting, Anoushka was addressed in the following manner, “And they asked me: ‘Do you have any questions?’ And I didn’t have any questions at this time, because I was wondering: ‘What kind of meeting is this?’”

Reflecting on the formal atmosphere of Ravi’s IPRC meeting, Anoushka said “It’s more like a court than a formal meeting.” This was reflected in verbal exchanges and also in the physical layout of the room. In pointing out the adversarial nature of how the IPRC meeting was set up, Anoushka recalled that the room was structured “like a bunch of people sitting on one side and two people sitting on the other side.” In regards to her own role as a parent at the IPRC, Anoushka said that she had to “Just go, sit there, listen, and come back.”

Ravi received an identification of giftedness at the IPRC meeting. He was placed in a self-contained gifted classroom at Castle Heights Public School. Anoushka accepted this placement, and as previously mentioned, Ravi started at the school in September 2008.

Zawadi

Zawadi Mwangi lives and works as a social worker in Toronto, Canada. Toronto is Canada’s largest municipality with a population exceeding two and a half million (Toronto City Planning Policy and Research, 2007). Non-denominational public schools within the city belong to the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), an organization that includes over 550 schools and delivers program to over 275 000 students (Toronto District School Board, 2008).

Born in 1960, Zawadi was raised in the small town of Murang’a, Kenya. With a population of approximately 11 000, Murang’a is located in the Central Province of the
country, approximately 90 kilometers northeast of Nairobi. After studying in a private high school, Zawadi’s family moved to the United States, and between 1979 and 1982 she participated in a work-study program at a university in North Carolina.

At the age of twenty-five Zawadi transferred to a university located in the north Manhattan area of New York City. Seven years of studying and working in New York eventually led Zawadi to relocate to Toronto in 1992. Reflecting on her decision to move to Toronto, Zawadi explained that she “chose to move to Toronto simply because it was cleaner and more beautiful than New York, also a bit of social conscience and political activism around Kenyan refugees.” While living in Toronto, Zawadi took a number of courses in the field of social work from various colleges and institutes. In 1996, Zawadi gave birth to a daughter, Nabila, who she is presently raising as a single mother.

The 2008-2009 school year marks Nabila’s first year at a private girl’s school in Toronto. She had attended a midsized TDSB public school in an affluent midtown community from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6. This period began in September 2000 and ended in June 2008. I will refer to the public school Nabila attended as Midtown Public School, or Midtown, in this study. Enrollment at Midtown was approximately 500 in the fall of 2008.

Two aspects of Zawadi’s narrative struck me as I listened to her reflections. First, she was a tremendously active parent. Second, Zawadi’s daughter, Nabila, was immensely successful in her academic work. As a parent, Zawadi has been quite active in her daughter’s school life and this was evident as she informed me about different ways in which she has participated in Nabila’s school community. Reflecting on her volunteer efforts at Midtown, Zawadi noted, “I’m a very hands-on kinds of parent. I
volunteered, working at the school when she was in JK. And after school we have a very good After-Four Program. I sat on the TPSA, which is the school council.” Volunteering led Zawadi to work with learners who struggled with grade level expectations. This intensive support was provided both in one-on-one conferencing and in small group settings. Zawadi stressed the need for parents to involve themselves in schools, explaining:

Where I came from, really a lot of the teaching happened at school. In the Canadian system the teaching doesn’t happen. Parents have to really be hands on. And a lot of parents aren’t aware of that. They tend to think that you send your kid to school, and the kid gets educated, and comes home. But it doesn’t happen that way. More parents need to feel more involved about challenging what’s going on.

In addition to her volunteer work at Midtown Elementary, Zawadi sat on a number of committees at the school over the years, such as the parent advisory council.

But Zawadi’s involvement at Midtown went beyond the more academic and managerial aspects of school culture. It was also social. In addition to volunteering, organizing, and helping with school-oriented initiatives, Zawadi interacted regularly with fellow parents. As she recalled, “When you have classes between 18 and 19 kids, you get to know everybody quite intimately; and we’d been together from JK, all of us.”

During her eight years at Midtown, Nabila excelled at academics. In her mother’s words, “She’s been an A student forever, and ever, and ever.” For Nabila though, success went beyond grades. In addition to earning consistently high marks on report cards, Nabila was able to complete homework, tests, and assignments with remarkable accuracy, speed and ease. Elaborating on the subject of schoolwork, Zawadi recalled; “My daughter never, not one night, brought home homework. She did all of her work in class.” When I asked Zawadi if Nabila’s academic success impacted on her learning and
feelings about school, she told me that her daughter “was somewhat bored in the classroom.” With a general sense of repetition and academic inertia Zawadi began to feel concerned. “You can pick up when a child is learning something and when a child is not,” she told me. Summing up the situation, Zawadi said, “I do believe that my daughter has a much higher capacity than she was being exposed to.”

Listening to Zawadi’s reflections on her daughter’s academic success and simultaneous lack of engaging challenges led me to pose a series of questions about enrichment. When I asked Zawadi if anyone at Midtown had ever spoken to her about modifying her daughter’s program, Zawadi replied, “They didn’t. It was very interesting.”

I wondered if an Individual Education Plan (IEP) had ever been developed for her daughter in order to provide a more level-appropriate program. Zawadi informed me that she had never even heard of such a thing. “I know about the one below [individualized programming for students performing below grade level]. I had worked with a child who needed the one below. I didn’t know that it applied to above. It’s news,” she told me.

Zawadi only learned about the existence of gifted assessment and the gifted program from other parents when one of Nabila’s classmates was put forward for assessment. As she recollected:

I was petrified when my daughter arrived at Grade 5 and then at Grade 6; and I didn’t really have anybody who told me about special education programs. There were discussions with parents around whether or not my child was being tested for this program or another; I really had very little knowledge.

Describing this informal, word-of-mouth communication chain she said:

I encountered one other parent who was as perplexed as I was. So we both chitchatted because we both went though very similar circumstances in
terms of their education and in terms of their feeling not as challenged. And so I said, ‘Have you heard about it [gifted assessment and the gifted program]? So-and-so got tested. How do you get tested?’ And she said, ‘I don’t know. I was hoping to ask you.’

In her 8 years interacting with school personnel and volunteering at the school, Zawadi never received information from school staff about TDSB gifted program delivery. She was never made aware of the assessment procedures and possibilities nor was she informed about program delivery.

Having heard speculative comments from parents about the gifted program, Zawadi decided to explore the school board website in search of answers. As she recalled, “From what little I could gather from the website, when they talk about special needs, they’re talking about children who are having difficulty in the classroom. Period.”

In elaborating on this, Zawadi told me:

But when you read the website, and when I went to the website I didn’t get that [the gifted] side of it [special education]. And I knew at that point what I was looking for. I was not simply exploring. It [special education] appears to be focused on children who are having trouble in the classroom around reading, writing, behaviour, whatever, all of that. So, it wasn’t very helpful.

Feelings of frustration led Zawadi to investigate enrichment alternatives available in local private schools. Recounting what drove her to seek out alternatives for her daughter, Zawadi told me:

So I had, about a year and a half ago, started to look at alternatives; looking for a more well-rounded kind of enrichment, a more challenging environment for my daughter. So at that point when I was hearing about this whole testing thing I had almost shifted gears. I had looked into private schools, and looked into prices.

To this day, Zawadi knows very little about special education programs and processes. As she recalled:
We [the parents of children in Nabila’s homeroom class] had one child who was accepted [into the gifted program] in grade three. But most of our testing happened sometime during the course of last year: grade six. And I don’t know about the process or how it works.

As previously mentioned, in September 2008 Nabila transferred from Midtown to a private girl’s school near downtown Toronto.

Beatrice

Beatrice Quimby grew up in Ottawa, Canada. Recalling her own education, Beatrice told me she “had home schooling three times per week at home because the Ottawa Board of Ed. would not accept kids with my disability at that time.” Elaborating, Beatrice informed me that she was born with Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type II, also known as intermediate SMA, a form of muscular dystrophy (Muscular Dystrophy Canada, 2007).

When Beatrice was seven years old she “went to live in a hospital where she had access to educational programs to Grade 8. It was segregated.” On reaching Grade 9, she “went to a regular high school and loved it.” Following high school, Beatrice pursued an undergraduate degree at a university in Toronto. She was accepted into a concurrent education program where she completed both an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a Bachelor of Education degree over a five-year period.

Regarding her degree in education, Beatrice recalled, “Because I have a disability people would assume that I’d be teaching in special ed.” Such an idea was abhorrent to her. In explaining her rational, Beatrice said, “I’d been in the special education system myself through grade school, and felt it was quite inferior to the regular high school experience.”
Although she was uninterested in taking a special education course during her year at teacher’s college, Beatrice found that because “the only course that fit in [her] calendar was a special education course, [she] was kind of saddled with taking it.” After introducing herself to her special education instructor at the start of the school year, Beatrice stated, “I’m not sure if I’m going to stay because I don’t believe in special education. I don’t think it’s special and I don’t think it’s educational.” Beatrice did in fact end up remain in the course, as she went on to earn her Bachelor of Education.

Following teacher’s college, Beatrice went on to co-ordinate an adult literacy program for a college in Toronto. She went on to pursue a career in the civil service. Over the past two decades, she has worked with a number of different units in a variety of provincial departments, including, ironically, a unit on special education policy.

In her early years working for the Government of Ontario, Beatrice met and married Daniel. They settled in Scarborough, which at the time was its own city (Scarborough now comprises the easternmost part of Metropolitan Toronto). Recalling this period of her life, Beatrice informed me, “It was the only place with a wheelchair accessible apartment with attendant support services that offered a 3-bedroom apartment. We had two children by then and needed the space.” The Quimby family “Stayed [in the community] because my husband grew up in Scarborough and likes it.” They also stayed because the “kids had friends here.” Summing up her family’s decision to remain in this area of Toronto, Beatrice noted that her family basically “Grew roots.”

Beatrice continues to live and work in the Scarborough area of Toronto, and she and her husband told me that they do not intend to move. While there are three, as of early 2009, living in the Quimby household, Beatrice and Daniel have two daughters. At
eighteen, and living in the Quimby home, Liz is in her first year at a university in Toronto. Julie is a single mother in her early twenties.

When Beatrice and her husband became involved in the special education identification process, in the late 1990s, both of their daughters were attending Eastend Elementary Public School, a midsized school in the western part of Scarborough. In addition to an English program, Eastend Elementary offers a French Immersion program from JK up to grade 6. Beatrice and her husband enrolled both of their daughters in the French Immersion program when they started junior kindergarten.

By the time Julie and Liz’s school careers led their parents to become involved in the special education identification procedure, they had been enrolled in the French Immersion program at Eastend Elementary for a total of 7 and 5 years respectively. Originating in 1965, “French immersion is one of several French as a second language (FSL) program options available in elementary and secondary schools across Canada” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). In French Immersion programs, “French is the language of instruction for a large portion of the subjects taught in class, as opposed to being the object of instruction (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Both Beatrice and Daniel were satisfied with the French Immersion program at Eastend Elementary. As Beatrice recalled, “both girls were doing very well in French.”

However, while both Julie and Liz experienced moments of tremendous success in the French Immersion program at Eastend Elementary, these moments were dampened by a series of setbacks. Both children had also encountered a number of challenges. First, while the girls performed well on an academic front, such achievements were, to a degree, sporadic. For Julie and Liz, those complications went beyond academics. Both
girls also faced challenges on a social level, as conflicts arose with peers. The situation perplexed Beatrice and Daniel. Recalling her feelings of confusion, Beatrice informed me, “we weren’t sure exactly what was going on, and they were both very, very bright but not performing and not getting along as well.”

To learn more about their daughters, and hear about the challenges they were encountering at school, Beatrice and Daniel met with Julie and Liz’s teachers. Unfortunately, however, both parents were not satisfied with the responses these teachers offered. As Beatrice recalled:

We were talking to teachers and they were minimizing what the issues were, or just chalk ing it up to, well, they weren’t trying hard enough, or they weren’t following through, or they were having trouble remembering stuff, or keeping track of the assignments. It was just other stuff that they [the teachers] just stuck into what was general irresponsible childhood behaviour.

In time, both girls were seen by a specialist and diagnosed with attention deficit.

As school psychologists cannot make such a diagnosis, this was made by a pediatrician who had been recommended by the Quimby’s family doctor. While Julie was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Liz was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association:

Attention Deficit Disorder (also known as ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (also known as ADHD) are terms used to describe patterns of behaviour that appear most often in school-aged children. Children with these disorders are inattentive, overly impulsive, and, in the case of ADHD, hyperactive. They have difficulty sitting still, attending to one thing for a long time, and may seem overactive. (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2009)

Because these disorders reduce an individual’s ability to pay attention they interfere with the learning process (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2009).
(2007) note that, “Children and adults with ADHD often struggle with low self-esteem, troubled personal relationships and poor performance in school or at work.”

Following the diagnoses of attention deficit, challenges in terms of schoolwork and social interaction persisted for both Julie and Liz. Also, while the revelations of ADD and ADHD provided some valuable insights for Bernice and her husband, these diagnoses did not lead to any changes in the strategies utilized by their daughters’ teachers in the classroom. On the subject of supporting children with ADHD, the National Institute of Mental Health states “Behavior therapy, emotional counselling, and practical support will help ADHD children cope with everyday problems and feel better about themselves” (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). More specific strategies, such as preferred seating in a classroom, are technically known as accommodations and are formalized in schools through the creation and implementation of Individual Education Plans. With an absence of such strategies applied in Julie and Liz’s classrooms, both girls continued to study in the French Immersion program at Eastend Elementary with sporadic academic success and ongoing social challenges.

Without finding any sort of resolution, the situation concerned both Beatrice and Daniel, and over time a growing apprehension intensified feelings of frustration. Both parents contacted the school on numerous occasions, conversed with teachers, and asked teachers to develop and apply more individualized strategies to help set Julie and Liz up for success. They suggested that Individual Education Plans be developed to map out more specific approaches for their daughters’ needs. But these requests were met with inaction. Amidst these ongoing communications, Eastend Elementary never provided any sort of special education guide or program information to Beatrice and Daniel. With
a lack of information about special education supports, and facing resistance in regards to the question of setting up classroom accommodations and IEPs, Beatrice and Daniel considered various ways in which they could gather information and learn about their alternatives. Specifically, they sought out information from three sources: Beatrice’s workplace; a variety of support organizations; and websites on the internet.

Working for the provincial government offered a unique form of source of Beatrice, as she and her husband gathered information about special education and weighed their options. Reflecting on her situation, Beatrice told me that “Because of [her] day job” she had become aware of a number of regulations linked to special education. Elaborating on the matter, she informed me; “I knew my rights, and I knew the regulations very, very well because it was a big part of my work at the time.” However, even with a considerable degree of work-related knowledge, Beatrice and her husband still encountered challenges in their dealings with administration and staff at Eastend Elementary. As Beatrice recalled, “But even families that are well informed have expressed having difficulty. We were no exception.” Considering the possibility of ablism, Beatrice told me she feels she experienced it both as a student and as a parent. Specifically, she said, “Teachers were often condescending toward me.”

Eventually, Beatrice sought support from some of her coworkers. As she told me, “I knew a lot of people who had worked in school systems. They had been superintendents, and had been program coordinators, so I had easy access to very capable advisors.” In this sense, because of her line of work in the civil service, Beatrice had access to a unique form of support.
Beatrice also sought support from support organizations. Two organizations she mentioned in our interview are the Association for Bright Children of Ontario (ABC) and the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO). ABC articulates its mandate as follows:

The Association for Bright Children in Ontario is an all-volunteer, provincially incorporated support and advocacy group, with many chapters across Ontario. It is dedicated to providing information and support to parents of bright and gifted children and adolescents through newsletters, networking, an annual conference and local workshops. It offers the parents’ voice to local school boards, educators, professional groups and the Ontario Ministry of Education. (ABC, 2009)

Founded in 1975, the organization is based in Toronto, Canada. Founded in 1963 and based in Toronto, the LDAO describes itself as “a charitable non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of children, youth and adults with learning disabilities” (LDAO, 2009). One aspect of its function is to further the educational opportunities for people with learning disabilities in Ontario (LDAO, 2009).

In our interview Beatrice speculated that parents can struggle with the special education identification process “If they weren’t connected with an organization that focuses on exceptionalities – like ABC, great association for gifted kids where they give parents advice; like Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, very good to give advice.” Elaborating on her experiences with a worker at the LDAO Beatrice recalled:

I phoned the person I knew at LDAO. And even though we had opposite perspectives about how to address different issues, we still had respect for each other. When I phoned her as a parent, I said, ‘Hey I think there’s something going on with my kid. What would you recommend?’

Making this connection proved to be advantageous for Beatrice and Daniel. “She was very, very helpful,” Beatrice reflected.
Additionally, Beatrice sought support by conducting research on the worldwide web. At that point, during the late-1990s, the internet was still in its infancy as a mode of communication and source of information. Recalling this, Beatrice told me she said; “This was a time when it was just starting to be in vogue to look things up on computer and on the web.” Of the three sources of support Beatrice spoke about in our interview, the internet proved to be the least significant.

To encourage a response from the school Beatrice and her husband utilized the knowledge they had gathered, and simultaneously applied the strategy of transparently documenting their interactions with the school. While these communications were initially between Beatrice and Daniel and Julie’s classroom teacher, others eventually became involved. As Beatrice recalled, “Initially it was the classroom teacher. Our kids were in French immersion and then we were getting involved with the principal, and eventually the superintendent.” Beatrice and her husband were ultimately able to foster action by providing a “Written request quoting the regulation. Making sure they [administration at Eastend Elementary] knew they could not refuse.” A parent’s right to request an IPRC in Ontario is presently codified in Regulation 181/98 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b).

Remembering her interactions with Julie’s classroom teacher, Beatrice told me, “In particular my older daughter’s teacher comes to mind … She comes to mind as being really defensive.” This resistance went beyond Julie’s teacher and was also evident in the responses of Liz’s teacher. As Beatrice recalled,

But the bottom line was they [Julie and Liz’s teachers] weren’t willing to implement any of the accommodations that were recommended through the assessment [ADHD and ADD diagnoses]. It was like, ‘I give one reminder, I give
one verbal cue, and I write it on the board, and that’s what I do; and if they can’t remember their homework assignment with that then tough.’

As previously mentioned, when Beatrice and Daniel repeatedly requested that IEPs be developed for their daughters based on their ADD and ADHD diagnoses, staff at Eastend Elementary refused.

Reflecting on the situation, Beatrice told me there was “no acknowledgement that a kid that was maybe having attention deficit, or other concerns, might need other types of prompts, or something a little more individualized than that.” Feeling frustrated, Beatrice described what transpired at a specific meeting:

And I distinctly remember one meeting with the teacher where she had this long list of complaints about our kid and we came up with a list of strategies. And just one-by-one, the teacher shot them down saying, ‘I can’t do that,’ ‘I can’t do that,’ ‘No, I don’t do this,’ ‘I don’t do this.’ So I just followed up the next day. I sent a letter to her and I copied the principal and I said here are the concerns you raised, and it was in a chart format. Here are the concerns and here are the strategies we suggested.

Two crucial things changed at this point. First, the Quimbys began to document all of their interactions with staff and administration at Eastend Elementary. Second, Beatrice and Daniel decided to pursue an IPRC meeting as a means of propelling the creation of the much-desired IEPs for their children.

In order to archive their experiences in the special education identification process Beatrice and her husband took a number of steps to document their actions and the actions of those they encountered at Eastend Elementary. For instance, they sent out and kept copies of letters requesting meetings. After meetings were held, the Quimbys followed up by sending letters to school personnel documenting what was discussed at those meetings. This applied to both in person meetings and telephone conferences. Additionally, Beatrice and Daniel kept photocopies of all documents, from assessments
and reports to different forms of correspondence relating to their daughter’s education. During our interview, which was at their house, Bernice’s husband retrieved a large file folder briefcase and allowed me to glance over a wide range of documentation, which dated back over a decade.

Another strategy the Quimbys employed, as previously mentioned, was to pressure staff at Eastend for an IPRC for Julie and Liz. They felt that having an IPRC meeting would lead to the accommodations they desired. Specifically, Beatrice and Daniel believed that IPRCs would lead to formal identifications and consequently fuel the creation and implementation of IEPs. Knowing that an accommodated dynamic at school was not working for their daughters, they felt that something had to be done. When asked about which exceptionality Julie might receive, the Quimbys were unsure. They speculated that giftedness would be the most likely exceptionality.

Facing continued advocacy from Beatrice and Daniel on behalf of their daughters, along with simultaneous and transparent documentation, both girls eventually took a psycho-educational assessment. Liz was identified first as she scored over the 99th percentile. She was in Grade 3 at the time. Julie was identified while she was in Grade 5 the following year, in 1998.

Recalling her experiences at the initial IPRC meetings for Julie and Liz, Beatrice told me:

Well, I think decisions had been made and it was five minutes for them to let you know what the decision was. And that was it. It wasn’t a discussion. It wasn’t problem solving. If you wanted to do any discussion or problem solving you did that at pre-meetings, before the IPRC. By the time you got to the IPRC everybody was supposed to have sorted and basically agreed to what was going to happen, and the IPRC was the formal process where it was minuted and written on a form, and you [as a parent or guardian] got a copy of the form.
When I asked Beatrice to describe how the staff at Eastend Elementary fostered an interactive and trusting relationship in those pre-IPRC meetings she had outlined, she told me, “They didn’t.” Rather, in their experiences the Quimbys found that the staff at Eastend Elementary met the legislated requirements and nothing else.

Beatrice informed me that she and her husband expressed their wishes at each of their daughter’s IPRC meetings. As Beatrice told me, “I knew what was available in the Toronto system, again, because of my work.” She added, “So we knew what the gifted placement looked like, we knew what an IEP was, and we weren’t really interested in special behaviour classes. We really wanted the accommodations in the regular classes as the first option. And it was the one that should have been made available, in my opinion, even in French Immersion.” In sum, the Quimbys hoped that their daughters would remain in the French Immersion program with accommodations and/or modifications provided through the development and implementation of IEPs. But this was not to be.

When I asked Beatrice to describe how individuals at the IPRC meetings were resistant to her suggestions and her husband’s, she replied, “Well, they refused. Not resistant.” Enrichment was not to be permitted in conjunction with the French Immersion program. If Julie and Liz were to remain in the French Immersion program, they would receive “No enrichment. Nothing.” As Beatrice recalled, “They said that it [French Immersion] was an optional program and they were not required to accommodate kids in that optional program.” Recalling those initial IPRC meetings, Beatrice informed me that with the strong encouragement from administration at Eastend Elementary, she and her husband agreed to have both girls placed in a self-contained gifted classroom. As
previously mentioned, Beatrice strongly opposed the idea of self-contained classrooms, viewing them as exclusionary. Daniel felt the same way. Ultimately, with reluctance and trepidation, the Quimbys accepted the placement offers, which prompted Liz and Julie to be transferred into self-contained gifted classes at Gifted Heights Public School.

Transferring into gifted classrooms impacted the two girls in very different ways. While Liz encountered some complications following her move, Julie’s challenges were far more pronounced. Although she had some issues with some of her math classes, and the development and implementation of IEPs, Liz went on to graduate high school in June 2008. Three months later she began her first year as an undergrad at a university in Toronto. As Beatrice told me, “But even with all that [the issues relating to math classes and IEPs], [Liz] ended up doing quite well. She’s started university. She’s in her first year of university.”

For Julie, a gifted placement led to disengagement, numerous school transfers and years of frustration. After starting Grade 6 in a gifted classroom, Beatrice noted that it soon became apparent that “She didn’t like it.” Being separated from her peers and moving to a new school were two key sources of frustration for Julie. As Beatrice noted, “she was disconnected from her group of friends.”

IEPs led to further tension for Liz. In fact, IEPs proved to be issues for both girls. Reflecting on the early IEPs developed for her daughters, Beatrice informed me that:

They didn’t really reflect their needs and we gave input, we had suggestions from the assessments that they had had, and we were expecting to see some of that reflected in the IEPs and it was not. It seemed the staff didn’t really have a clear sense of what they were supposed to do with an IEP. It was like a lot of extra paperwork.
After a challenging year in the gifted classroom, Julie returned to her old school, Eastend Elementary, to repeat Grade 6 in a French Immersion classroom. Although she passed her second year in Grade 6, Julie had by that point diminished the effort she put into school. Having graduated from her elementary school, Julie moved to the local French Immersion middle school. She had changed schools three times in as many years. During her first year of middle school, Julie had stopped doing any schoolwork and this prompted her to be transferred into an alternative program. Julie’s second year in Grade 8 was spent in a Section 19 classroom and her first year of high school was spent at a Section 19 alternative school (a brief overview of the Section program is provided in the Introduction chapter of this paper). As Beatrice added; “Julie was in the Section 19 as it was then; the number keeps changing because the [provincial] funding reg [regulation] gets rewritten.”

Section 19 programs have had a number of different names over the years. They are presently known as Section 23 programs. This, as Beatrice pointed out, has been a result of regulation modifications at the ministry level. In a 2007 memorandum to the Directors of Education across the province, Kit Rankin, Director of the Field Services Branch, stated that Section 23 programs “support children and youth who are unable to attend school because they are in care and/or treatment programs or because they are in custody and whose education is delivered through agreements between school boards and agencies” (Rankin, 2007). He went on to note that, “In 2005-2006, the Ministry of Education funded 582 programs” (Rankin, 2007).

As Beatrice recalled, “our older daughter was like … we tried numerous things and nothing clicked. I think there was only one year and by then she was in Grade 8 for
the second time, and we had her in an alternative program, an alternative school.”

Recalling her elder daughter’s first year of high school, Beatrice said, “The teacher was very good, had lots of creativity, and was a great teacher. But even by then [Julie] was so disengaged with the whole school process. She just wasn’t interested to stick around at all.”

By the time she turned 16, Julie had yet to obtain a high school credit. “Not a single one,” Beatrice informed me. At that point, as Beatrice recalled:

she went to the one [Section 19 alternative program] at Centennial College but that was when she quit; because she would go and then not go, and you have to attend everyday, and they were doing that attendance contract with her. And then it would be like, she wouldn’t stay, she wouldn’t be feeling well, she’d have a headache or something. She wouldn’t want to stay. And she was turning 16.

As Beatrice told me, one day as [Julie’s] father was driving her home from school, “she said, ‘I think I’m going to quit.’” Elaborating, Beatrice added:

And that was it. She never went back to school after that. She’s talked about getting her GED [General Education Development] lately. She’s 20 now and has a little baby of her own. She’d like to be able to get a job that pays decently, and she knows she needs her education for that.

Reflecting on her elder daughter’s ultimate situation, Beatrice noted, “I think for [Julie] the critical time had come at the end of Grade 5.”

Hana

Born in 1963, Hana Lee grew up in Seoul, South Korea. Located approximately 50 kilometers south of the North Korean border, Seoul is a centre of government, business, media, and many other areas of economy and culture. One of the largest urban centres in the world, Seoul has had a history as a capital city dating back over 600 years.
When Hana was fifteen years old, her elder sister married a Korean Australian and immigrated with him to Canada. Two years later, in 1980, Hana immigrated to Canada with her parents and younger brother. They initially settled in Scarborough, a city that, as previously mentioned, has since become a part of Toronto. Both of Hana’s parents had retired from work prior to their move to Canada.

After graduating from high school Hana went on to study fashion design and marketing at a college in the city of Etobicoke (Etobicoke has since become a part of Metropolitan Toronto). By that time her family had relocated to the Harbourfront area of downtown Toronto. Following graduation, Hana decided to pursue a career in the banking industry, and she soon secured a position with one of Canada’s major banks. While much of her work in banking linked to financial planning, it was not exclusively the focus of her time and energy. During her ten years in banking, Hana embraced a number of professional development opportunities, taking part in courses connected to such financial realms as mutual funds and Canadian securities. In 1999 Hana married Hansol, a Korean Canadian personal trainer who also lived in Toronto and had graduated from the same college, years earlier.

Hansol was born in 1960 and spent his first seven years in Busan (previously known as Pusan), South Korea. Located at the southeastern tip of the Korean peninsula, Busan saw rapid growth both as a port town and in the textile industry as South Korea’s economy strengthened in during the 1960s (Sohn, 1999).

Immigrating to Canada with his family while he was in elementary school, Hansol attended public schools in Toronto from third grade. On completing high school, he went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in environmental science at a university in southern
Ontario. He followed this with a two-year college program in personal training, after which Hansol began a career in that field.

Hana and her husband presently live in an affluent community in downtown Toronto, Canada. The couple owns and operates a café near the downtown campus of the University of Toronto. Their first daughter, Jae, was born in 2001 and their second daughter, Sun, was born in 2002. As their second daughter grew into a toddler, it became apparent to Hana and her husband that Sun communicated in a manner that was remarkably different than her elder sister, Jae. Initially it was thought to be a matter of personality and age difference. Over time, however, it became less a matter of difference in age and personality and more of a mystery. Reflecting on Sun’s behaviour and overall lack of communicativeness, Hana told me “There isn’t a conversation going back and forth. She says what she wants to say and she hears what she wants to hear. I mean, a lot of times she’s in her own world.”

When Sun was two, her parents began to explore the possibility of a diagnosis of autism. Outlining general characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs), the Autism Society of Canada states that “Children and adults with ASDs have challenges with: social interactions; verbal and non verbal communication; the ability to learn (in the usual settings); repetitive behaviours; and unusual or severely limited activities and interests” (Autism Society of Canada, 2009a). An example of a more specific characteristic of ASD is an “inability to initiate or sustain a conversation” (Autism Society of Canada, 2009b). As Hana recalled:

our family doctor wasn’t sure whether she is autistic or not. We knew, right? Because we spent all day with her. And she wasn’t responding to her name, and a lot of stuff that she did was just weird.
The family doctor was unconvinced. On this topic, Hana remembered, “And the doctor said, ‘Well, maybe that’s her personality. She doesn’t look like an autistic child. There’s good eye contact, and this and that.’ But you know, there are different levels of autism.”

According to the Autism Society of Canada, “children and adults with ASDs [Autism Spectrum Disorders] usually have particular communication, social, and behavioural characteristics in common, but the conditions cover a wide spectrum, with individual differences” (Autism Society of Canada, 2009c). Two such individual differences link to severity and level of functioning (Autism Society of Canada, 2009c).

Disagreeing with their family doctor, Hana and Hansol continued to pursue the possibility of a diagnosis of autism for Sun. Describing how these events unfolded, Hana told me, “So, Hansol and I were so sure that she was different. So we asked our family doctor to refer us to a specialist, so we can maybe examine her.” Eventually, as Hana recalled, “We were referred by our family doctor to go [to Surrey Place].”

Surrey Place Centre was established in 1962 by the University of Toronto’s Department of Psychiatry (Surrey Place, 2009b). On its website, the organization describes itself as follows:

“we help children and adults living with developmental disabilities reach their full potential. We offer a comprehensive range of programs and services, from assessment, diagnosis and one-on-one treatment, to family counseling and group support. And it’s all provided by a broad range of network clinicians and professionals. (Surrey Place Centre, 2009a)

The main office of Surrey Place Centre is located in the downtown core of Toronto, Canada. Surrey Place is primarily funded by the provincial government and as of January 2009 the organization numbered its staff at over 200 (Surrey Place Centre, 2009b).
After conferring with a specialist at Surrey Place, Hana informed me the doctor “saw her [Sun], assessing her, asking a lot of questions about my background, and Hansol’s, to find out whether it was genetic.” Eventually, “he said she was mildly autistic.” Sun received this diagnosis when she was two and a half years old. Recalling the diagnosis, Hana told me, “They gave us a paper, a thick paper, saying she’s mildly autistic.” The doctor went on to caution, “But a clear picture will show when she’s about five and a half.” In 2007, as Hana recollected, there was a second assessment conducted “By another doctor. It was done after she became five.” This second assessment supported the findings of Sun’s first diagnosis, “They called it high functioning mildly autistic.”

Rather than having Sun start kindergarten in a public school, in September 2006, Hansol and Hana enrolled her in a private childcare center at a downtown college campus. Sun remained in the program at Muswell Hill Daycare Centre for two years.

As Sun grew older, however, her parents struggled with the choice of either keeping her in the daycare at Muswell Hill, or her moving into a public school program. In late 2007, a kindergarten placement was strongly recommended by Sun’s second autism assessment. As Hana told me:

they told us to pull Sun out of daycare and put her in a regular school, because the people at the daycare make her so comfortable. She wasn’t really learning anything. She was just playing. They let her do whatever she wanted to do.

By early 2008 Hana and Hansol were seriously weighing the possible advantages and disadvantages of registering Sun in a public school. Some of their considerations were tied to social aspects of school while others were financial in nature. The cost of Sun’s daycare was a factor in this matter, as Hana reflected, “it’s a lot of money.”
Deciding between daycare and a public school placement was not easy for Hana and her husband. Numerous factors led the parents to feel reticent about enrolling their younger daughter in a public school. The daycare was a known entity. It offered a low educator to child ratio where all of the adults in the program knew Sun and her needs quite well. Eventually, Hana and her husband decided to have Sun begin Grade 1 in a public school in September 2008.

Discussing the logistics of Sun leaving the daycare in early 2008, personnel at Muswell Hill Daycare Centre advised the parents to immediately start taking steps on behalf of their autistic daughter with the school board. In February, Hana applied to the TDSB for Occupational Therapy (OT), speech therapy, and classroom support from an Educational Assistant (EA). As Hana recalled:

What happened was, I was told by the center, Muswell Hill Daycare Center, that we were supposed to apply for these things ahead; six months ahead, in order for you to get the service. Otherwise you’d miss a whole [school] term. It might start in January then. And I didn’t want that to happen. So what I did was I applied earlier.

As Hana continued, “There were a lot of forms we were supposed to fill out.” Summing up the matter of support, Hanna told me that the people at the daycare “helped me.”

While filling out a range of special education program delivery applications with the TDSB was a complex, it was certainly not the only action Hana and Hansol took on behalf of their younger daughter in the spring of 2008. As spring neared, Hana and Hansol applied to enroll Sun at Abbey Road Public School. Set in an affluent downtown neighbourhood of Toronto, Abbey Road Public School is a midsized school with an enrollment of approximately 450 students.
After filling out the enrollment application, Hana set up a meeting at Abbey Road Public School. In detailing how she came to initiate this meeting, Hana said:

Then some people at the daycare said, ‘You’ve got to hand in this letter.’ Then I brought Sun’s photo and a lot of … a doctor’s report that said which diagnosis, autism. They had to see proof, right?

A meeting was scheduled to be held near the end of the school year, “just before school ended,” Hana recollected.

Reflecting on this information-sharing meeting, Hana told me:

I kind of initiated the meeting, because I wasn’t sure … because I wasn’t with Sun too long. We were just dropping her off at the daycare and picking her up, so we had to explain to them [administration at Abbey Road Public School] what Sun’s day life was. What she’s doing at the center. The school people wanted to know. So we invited them, from the daycare. The teachers and there was a special developmental research person, Mary. So we invited them to the school. So we had a huge meeting. The principal and vice principal – who’s in charge of special ed – and also Mary, who’s a research person at Muswell Hill Daycare Centre, and one other teacher who’s now looking after Sun.

Elaborating, Hana informed me:

So I brought a lot of reports; a speech therapy assessment, and all the daycare reports. Then I put them all together in a binder with a photo and all that. We were actually asking them [administration at Abbey Road Public School] to have the meeting first because she’s not just a normal child. She’s a little special. Then she needs more help. And so we asked them just before summer vacation to have a meeting at the school.

When I asked Hana about terminology utilized at the meeting, she responded, “Actually, sometimes I feel like I’m left out.”

To facilitate a smooth transition from Muswell Hill Daycare Centre to Abbey Road Public School, Hana and Hansol took a variety of precautions. As Hana informed me:

Sun went to the daycare until the end of August [2008]. And then they [the staff at the daycare] said it’s their responsibility to help a lot of kids
go to a regular school smoothly. They said, for two weeks of a transition period, if we needed, the [daycare] teacher could come to the regular school and calm her [Sun] down.

But both Hana and Hansol did much more to set Sun up for success in this transition.

Casting her mind back to the summer of 2008 Hana recalled, “So what I did was, I … we drove by [Abbey Road Public School] all the time in the summertime saying to Sun, ‘This is the school you’re going to go to with your sister.’” Continuing, she told me:

And then we played in the school playground. Hansol took her there just before summer started. Hansol and Jae and Sun went there a half an hour earlier and played outside, so she’d get to know the school. And that really helped out. In the summertime the school was empty, there was nobody going. But we still drove by the park and we played there.

Hana added:

So, we played there all the time, and then one week prior to the start of the school year a lot of teachers were already coming to the school. So I was there everyday with Sun, and showing Sun where the washroom is and where her homeroom class is. We saw the teacher and I made her say hello. I was there every single day for about half an hour with her.

As the first day of the school year approached, Hana sought support from Sun’s daycare. As Hana remembered, “And I called the daycare people and said, ‘If anything happens I need you to help.’ And they were all in a standby position.” Regarding the start of the school year, Hana informed me that her younger daughter began with the OT, speech therapy, and EA supports in place. The EA support, however, was provided in the morning but not in the afternoon.

In spite of putting the above-mentioned supports into place, Sun’s first month at Abbey Road Public School was not smooth. As Hana told me:

What happened was, in the morning everything was going okay. But Sun kind of snuck out, opened the door and, while the teacher was teaching, she left. And then she would be wandering around the school. Looking for Jae [her older sister]. There’s a safety issue involved, right?
With Sun continuing to sneak out of her classroom during the afternoon, the principal eventually made a phone call to Hana. Recalling the telephone conversation, Hana told me:

The school actually approached me, saying, ‘I think you should push for this [EA support in the afternoon] through the school board, because if Sun ever gets hurt then it’s the school’s responsibility. And we don’t want that to happen. We’ve got to prevent that problem. One teacher really cannot look after her. There are 24 kids in the class.’ And he [the teacher] said, ‘It’s a little bit too much for me to handle. And in a split second Sun’s gone.’

Hana went on to add:

The school called me, saying what’s going on, ‘We do need some extra help, and the school board took it away from us. And we need it back. So, we need you to push for it, especially for Sun’s safety.’

With Hana in agreement, the school scheduled a School Support Team meeting. Reflecting on this process, Hana informed me, “They said they were going to have a meeting with a lot of special education student’s parents. They were going to have a psychiatrist [psychologist], social worker, special ed. consultant.” Elaborating, Hana added:

It was the first time they invited me. They said that a lot of parents were coming at different times; all the parents of students who need EAs, all coming and having a meeting with the teacher … and the principal and vice principal, psychiatrist, social worker, speech therapist. Everybody was there, and me and Hansol were there. We were there in the morning for about a thirty-minute meeting.

When asked about subject matter and central purpose of the meeting, Hana recalled:

And we said that we were very concerned about Sun, because the teacher’s teaching twenty-four kids there. And it’s okay in the morning because there’s an EA, but she sneaks out and starts running abound, and I’m really, really worried. And then Hansol was actually missing work, going to the school every single day for three weeks … to see how Sun was doing.
On the matter of communication, Hana told me that dialogue proved to be a challenge during the meeting. There seemed to be an air of discomfort. Explaining this, Hana noted:

We knew who was going to be there because I got a letter from them saying who was going to be there. But I didn’t know how to … they were there to kind of judge whether we needed help. I felt that it was kind of … I don’t know. It was kind of … with the psychiatrist [I told Hana that it was a school board psychologist] sitting there, not saying anything, just listening and monitoring. And the speech therapist I met a couple of times.

Unfortunately, Hana received some disappointing news regarding Sun’s speech therapy support early on at the meeting. Recalling her initial exchanges with the speech therapist, Hana informed me, “She was a really nice lady, but I asked her if she was coming down to teach Sun continuously, and she said, ‘No, I’m teaching the teacher to teach Sun.’” This was a revelation. Hana specified:

At that time it was news. I thought she was teaching my child, but she said she’s teaching the teacher to teach my kid. So, it was not fun because I really liked her, her plan and all of that. But it was kind of misinformed to me I guess, right?

Another aspect of the meeting was the fundamental clash between the wishes of the parents/school and those representing the interests of the school board itself. This clash stemmed from the question of how to provide adequate support for Sun.

Let me begin with the parents and the school. In this particular situation, Hana and Hansol, along with the principal of Abbey Road Public School, wanted additional EA support for Sun. They wanted the school board to allocate an additional half-day EA to the school in order to facilitate this increase in support. As previously outlined, the
principal of Abbey Road Public School had encouraged Hana to take this stand when he contacted her prior to the SST meeting.

As the SST meeting unfolded, however, the central request put forward by Sun’s parents and the administration at Abbey Road Public School was opposed by a school board consultant. Within this dynamic, the wider interests of the school board were interpreted and voiced by Anjelica, the special education consultant for Abbey Road’s family grouping of schools. Simply put, there was a conflict between the perceived individual needs of Sun and the perceived wider interests of budgeting and balancing EA allocations across the family of schools. The special education consultant, Anjelica, opposed the idea of increasing Sun’s support to a full day in-class EA. Recalling the clash, Hana said:

The lady from the TDSB … Her name was [Anjelica]; and she said, ‘It’s too late to get help now. School already started. And this is not something where you get help the next day, just like that. It doesn’t work like that. But we’ll consider it.’ Hana rebutted, ‘And I said, ‘She needs the help right now.’

The consultant countered back by stating that she would entertain such an option in the future, “We’ll consider that, maybe next term.” It was at this point that Hana brought up the safety issue. Paraphrasing her own words, Hana told me, “So I said, ‘So we need it now. What if Sun gets hurt? Who’s going to be responsible for it?’ I said.” Anjelica considered this point and responded:

She said, ‘How about we change the teacher’s duties? How about we have teachers having different lunch times, and then monitor her.’ And I looked at the vice principal’s facial expression, and she said, ‘Change the lunch time?’ And other thing Anjelica said was that we could keep Sun home from school in the afternoons and homeschool her. That was another option.

Other suggestions Anjelica made during this exchange were as follows:
But the lady from the TDSB just kept saying things like, ‘How about we change the lunch time, the teacher’s lunch time. How about she goes to a special ed class?’ I said, ‘That’s not an option.’ She’s settling in this class, the regular class, and she’s not so severe to go to another class. And I don’t want you to have her in a special ed class. We’re very happy having her in a regular classroom.’ And that’s what I said.

Hana was resistant to the idea of placing Sun in a self-contained special education classroom because of something she had heard at Muswell Hill Daycare Centre earlier in the year. As Hana recounted:

But one thing I was told by the people at the daycare as that it’s easier for you to move from a regular class to a special ed. class, but it’s not easy for you to go to a special ed. class first and then go to a regular class. So if it was my child, I’d push for regular, because Sun’s high functioning. She can talk. She eats by herself. She goes to the washroom by herself. If she really needed to go to special ed. then we’ll decide later. We don’t want her to go to special ed. right away. Once she’s in a special ed. class she’s going to be in a special ed. class forever. That’s what they told me.

Two things are significant here. First, the source of information was not the school board; and second, the information itself was erroneous.

While Anjelica was reluctant to consider the request for additional EA support for Sun, she eventually acquiesced. Mr. Cromwell, Sun’s teacher arrived after the meeting had started. As Hana recounted:

And then when the teacher mentioned that Sun’s wandering around all by herself in the school I was like … I cried. I just couldn’t stop. Think about it. Your child is wandering around all by herself in a big school. You know? And I cried and Hansol tried to calm me down.

This emotional turning point led the SST discussion to focus on the issue of Sun’s safety; and according to Hana this was what ultimately led the consultant to change her mind.

As Hana theorized:

I think the safety issue. We pushed for the safety issue … At the meeting. I said, ‘If Sun ever gets hurt at school, who’s going to be responsible for it legally?’ And then they kind of said, ‘It’s the school’s responsibility.’
By January 2009 Sun had begun the second term of her Grade 1 year. When I first spoke to Hana, she did not realize that Sun had an IEP, and it was only after I had described the document that Hana confirmed its existence. While Sun does have an IEP, it was evident from my conversations with Hana that she and her husband had not been informed about how an IEP operates. They were not aware of specific timelines surrounding the creation and sharing of IEPs, namely that IEPs must be drafted and shared with parents for feedback within 30 days of a child beginning a special education program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b). Also, while Hana was impressed with her daughter’s first term marks she had not been informed that those marks were actually based on kindergarten curriculum expectations rather than Grade 1 expectations. Lastly, Hana did not know that she and her husband, as parents, have a right to contribute to their daughter’s IEP.

**Participant Stories – Part II**

The second part of this chapter relates data I gathered from a separate participant pool. As outlined in my Methodology chapter, in addition to interviewing four minoritized parents I interviewed one minoritized youth engagement worker. In sharing his stories, Carlos led me to learn about a very different dynamic in special education identification, placement, and program delivery. Specifically, I became more aware of how the tension between exclusion and inclusion can unfold differently when parents receive support in the realms of knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy. By presenting this alternative scenario, Carlos’ data acts as a foil to the data I gathered from the four parents.
The parents to whom Carlos references were not interviewed for this research study. While Carlos communicated with them on my behalf, none were comfortable being interviewed, and while this was not preferred, it certainly did not diminish the contributions Carlos made to the data, and indeed to the study itself.

Carlos


Created by the city of Toronto in 2002, Toronto Community Housing is presently “the largest social housing provider in Canada and the second largest in North America” (Toronto Community Housing, 2009a). Funding for the organization is derived from three sources, “rent and associated revenue, federal and GTA [Greater Toronto Area] pooling, and City of Toronto operating subsidies” (Toronto Community Housing, 2009b). Toronto Community Housing has a mandate to “provide quality housing for low and moderate income households and to create community conditions that minimize risk and promote resiliency” (Toronto Community Housing, 2009a). A key initiative of Toronto Community Housing is its Youth Investment Strategy. Within this realm, the organization employs a number of youth engagement coordinators.

In outlining his role as a youth engagement coordinator with Toronto Community Housing, Carlos told me, “I’m working mainly with youth from Ghana and the Caribbean, and also Latin American youth in any aspect that impacts their day to day life.” In this capacity, Carlos has supported high school students in a variety of ways and circumstances. In doing so, Carlos has had numerous opportunities to interact with
students, parents, and school personnel. The experiences Carlos shared with me were exclusively tied to school personnel with the Toronto Catholic District School Board, or TCDSB.

When asked about how his work has led him to interact with schools school personnel Carlos replied, “Well, I’ve advocated on behalf of four black youth who have either been expelled, or had the principal attempt to expel from one particular high school.” During his first months with Toronto Community Housing, Carlos was involved in four situations where high school students were identified as having behavioural needs and involved in the process of determining what sort of placement would best suit their needs. In all four cases, alternative programs were at one time or another recommended by TCDSB personnel.

Before delving into the specifics of Carlos’ experiences with the TCDSB, I will provide a brief proviso. Not one of Carlos’ interactions relates to a child stepping through the formal process of being identified as having an exceptionality. Rather, Carlos has had experience with support programs, disciplinary in nature, which aim to curtail certain behaviours in high school learners. The alternative programs I reference in the segments below are Section 23, Alternative Pupil Placement for Limited Expulsion (APPLE) and Transition Intervention Program for Suspended Students (TIPSS). These programs could be viewed as a form of special education. Behavioural-oriented support programs are certainly individualized, to a degree, and they require the identification of a perceived need. Like special education services, these programs ultimately involve, and indeed require, the process of agreeing upon a particular placement.
Instead of relaying memories tied to one specific narrative, Carlos shared a variety of reflections linked to four separate families he supported. He drew from four different scenarios, three mini-narratives. I say mini-narratives not to diminish Carlos’ efforts but rather to differentiate between Carlos’ dynamic and those of other participants in this research project. Carlos, a youth engagement coordinator, provides support for a period of months (which could theoretically stretch into years), whereas the parents I interviewed interact with schools on the behalf of their children for decades. I should also point out that although Carlos told me stories tied to his work experiences, there is also an emotional investment linked to the families he has helped. Recalling his approach to work, Carlos told me that each youth he has advocated for is “a youth I have faith in.”

I will outline the specifics of each of the three scenarios below. Rather than offering a single thread, or chronology of events, as I did in compiling the stories of the other participants in this research study, I will summarize each of the three situations Carlos shared with me in our conversations.

**Carlos’ Experiences Supporting Badu**

As Carlos informed me, Badu Adowa, a young African-Canadian youth, faced expulsion at his high school. At the heart of Badu’s scenario is the matter of language. While Badu Adowa was not in the process of being identified special education, he did face the possibility of being placed in a Section 23 program. For Badu, formal special education identification was not a part of the scenario. Rather, a perceived need for specialized program delivery, solidifying in the form of a behavioural-oriented school program, was at the centre of Badu’s story. While one could argue that Section 23 does
not technically constitute a special education program, I would counter that as an alternative program it embodies the idea of individualization that rests at the heart of special education philosophies and programming.

Badu attended Waterloo Sunset High. With an enrollment of 850, Waterloo Sunset is located in the northwest part of Toronto. The school offers a number of programs including enrichment, broad-based technology, integrated special education, and a youth-to-youth peer counseling program. I learned from Carlos that prior to his involvement in Badu’s situation, the boy’s father, Tano, attended a number of meetings at Waterloo Sunset High. These meetings were conducted exclusively in English. An interpreter was not provided, nor was the availability of such a service articulated to Tano. While Tano is able to interact in English, it is not his first language. Conversing with school personnel in English is not his preference. Recalling Tano’s precarious position, Carlos stated:

In one of the cases there’s this father from Ghana and his native language is Ewe. He can defend himself in English, but is not comfortable having an eloquent conversation, especially when it comes to fighting for the right of his son to stay in school, in English.

The responsibility of providing (or, at the very least, offering) interpretation was a key factor in Tano’s situation. Stressing the importance of this factor, Carlos explained, “And one thing is the principal and the school is mandated to provide interpreters for parents when they feel the need is there; this was never conveyed to the parent.”

Feeling uncomfortable at school meetings, Tano felt that he needed assistance both linguistically and in terms of learning about his own rights, as a parent. After becoming aware of Carlos through Toronto Community Housing, Tano sought out the coordinator’s support. From this point on Carlos began to attend meetings with Tano on
Badu’s behalf. At these parent-school meetings Carlos began to ask questions about terms utilized by school board personnel and documents referenced and/or utilized in meetings. Terminology and the matter of asking for clarification emerged as a significant issue in Badu’s scenario.

Carlos reflected on matter of obtaining linguistic clarification in the following way:

I think, with many immigrant communities, and I myself come from one, there’s this natural disposition to entrust and respect the authority, especially in the school system. And there’s a fear of challenging that authority, especially if they’re coming form situations where you get repressed brutally for doing so. So a parent, I think, feels intimidated to ask: ‘What’s an OSE? What’s Section 13 [Section 23]?’ And because the principal’s speaking so eloquently and in such a fluid manner about all these terms, he’s not making the parent feeling open to actually question what these terms mean. I myself have learned to ask about whatever I need to understand, so I have to stop the principal a good 5 or 6 times: ‘So what does OSSR mean? What does Section 13 [Section 23] mean? What does this mean?’

When representing parents, Carlos does not hesitate to pose such questions. To him, asking questions and gathering clarifications is a part of his job as a youth engagement coordinator. “I’m not afraid of them [school board personnel]. I’m not afraid to question what they’re doing, whereas the parent might be,” Carlos told me.

As Badu’s scenario unfolded, a particular document emerged as a prominent source of tension. It is called a Minutes of Settlement. The document raised key concerns for both Tano and Carlos. Traditionally utilized in the legal arena, a Minutes of Settlement document functions as a protective device. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission:

Minutes of Settlement set out the terms agreed upon by the parties and require the signature of all parties in order to be considered executed. It is the Commission’s current practice to also ask the parties to initial the
bottom right hand corner of each page of the Minutes of Settlement to indicate that these have been read and to avoid the claim that pages were substituted after signing. (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2009)

More recently, school boards have begun to make use of Minutes of Settlement documents in their interactions with parents and guardians. In a 2008 report, a team led by the director of the TCDSB stated:

Historically secondary students on limited expulsions attended the Alternative Pupil Placement for Limited Expulsion (APPLE) for up to 1 year and the Strict Discipline Programs run by Hincks-Dellcrest or East Metro Youth Services for full expulsion parents signed Minutes of Settlement and Decision and Order Consent. They agreed to the placement and there was no formal hearing. This process can be carried forward. (Crawford, Matthews, Nemes, Sangiorgio, & Kobus, 2008)

With legal connotations, a signed Minutes of Settlement agreement becomes tremendously significant in situations where parents wish to reverse a decision (which they may have, for one reason or another, previously supported); or more generally, when the aims of parents clash with those of school board personnel. Interpreting the significance of this document, Carlos told me, “in reality, once the parent has signed it he’s tied his hands or she’s tied her hands to be able to fight for the child.” He went on to say:

then the principal can just dangle this document over to the trustees or to the superintendent and says: ‘Look, see, I’ve got a signature; they’re agreeing to settle this issue with the expulsion and they’re not going to appeal it, and we can move forward and kick the child out.’

Essentially, this document would weaken the position of parents who appeal, or contest, the decision of a school administrator.

As we spoke about the ongoing challenges associated with language in Tano’s situation, Carlos described what transpired at one meeting in particular. As he recalled, “So, when we [Tano, Carlos, and the principal of Waterloo Sunset High] met with the
boy’s father the first time, the principal basically handed over all this paperwork that he wanted us to sign.” He elaborated:

It was an agreement about the student’s conduct and what he did, and he [the principal] kept raising the issue of the Minutes of Settlement. So I said to the principal, ‘You know, the father is not comfortable speaking English, and you’ve presented a lot of paperwork that will affect the future of his son. Can we take this paperwork with us, and review it with the family, and then bring it back on the Tuesday?’ And the principal said, ‘No.’

When Carlos inquired as to why the principal would oppose this seemingly straightforward request, and not permit Tano to take documents home to read over more critically, the principal “said he wasn’t sure. He needed to consult, but he didn’t think so.”

With continued efforts Carlos was able to help prevent Badu from being expelled from the TCDSB.

Carlos’ Experiences Supporting Kimal

In the second scenario Carlos conveyed to me, he was working with Kimal Davies, an African-Canadian youth, who was transferred from one school to another after he participated in an incident which led to police involvement and ultimately led to his being charged. Kamal was transferred from Waterloo Sunset High to Village Green Collegiate during the 2007-2008 school year because the receiving school offered an alternative program known as the Alternative Pupil Placement for Limited Expulsion (APPLE). The APPLE Program is designed to facilitate partial expulsions within the TCDSB and is utilized for students between Grades 7 and 12 (Toronto Catholic District School Board, 2009a).
Whether the APPLE Program could technically be called a special education program or not is debatable. Nevertheless, it is an alternative program that offers a form of specialized program delivery for students, specifically in relation to the realm of behaviour. Kimal’s scenario exemplifies an issue of contesting a special education placement.

Outlining the origin of the scenario, Carlos recollected:

There was another youth I intervened for. He was with somebody who robbed a student of an iPod. It was caught on video. The youth that I intervened for was not the one that actually robbed the youth, but he was present, so he was partially at fault.

Things became more serious and eventually law enforcement entered the picture:

The police were involved. He was charged. He had to face trial, and at the same time he was also expelled from school. The expulsion … the twenty day period passed, the principal expelled him … this APPLE Program intervened.

It was at this point, when the APPLE Program became involved that Kimal was slated to move to Village Green Collegiate. “They were setting up a transfer to a different school,” Carlos informed me. The transfer led to a number of repercussions.

A significant conflict arose regarding Kimal’s transfer. Reflecting on the cause of the conflict, Carlos informed me, “The youth didn’t feel safe because he thought that there were youth there at the new school that had issues with him. He felt that his safety was in danger.” In response to the scheduled transfer, and to voice his concerns, Kimal “called the APPLE Program and asked them if they could do something else because he didn’t want to go to the school. He didn’t feel safe.” Rather than working collaboratively to develop a solution, the conflict intensified at this juncture as Kimal’s school administration “basically brushed him off and said: ‘You have to go there.’” It
should be noted here that Kimal and his family did not oppose the APPLE Program itself, but rather they took issue with his placement at Village Green Collegiate. For them it was a safety issue.

Up to that point Carlos had not been involved in Kimal’s situation. However, as the conflict between Kimal’s family and school administration at Waterloo Sunset High intensified, the two groups failed to reach any sort of resolution. They had reached an impasse. The school had placed Kimal in a program at Village Green Collegiate and the family wanted Kimal placed at another school. As the family had reached a deadlock with the administration at Waterloo Sunset High, they contacted Carlos and asked him to become involved in their situation. It was hoped that Carlos’ assistance would help the family have Kimal’s placement changed.

As Kimal’s parents and Carlos approached the challenge, a number of barriers arose, which led them to take certain actions. Countering Kimal’s transfer, and having the placement decision overturned, posed a significant challenge, even with Carlos’ support. First, there was the matter of Kimal’s bail order. As Carlos recalled, “What I was able to do was first I got his bail order amended with the lawyer, so that the restriction of going back to the school would be taken away from the court side.” This was an obstruction hurdle in a sense. Reflecting on these circumstances, Carlos told me that “they [school administrators] use these tactics: ‘Oh, we can’t let him back into the school because his bail order doesn’t permit for him to be back.’”

Viewing the bail order modification as a surmountable challenge, Carlos responded to administration at Waterloo Sunset by saying, “Give me a couple of days, I’ll go speak with his lawyer, we’ll change the bail order.” After having done just that,
Carlos and Kimal’s parents faced yet another challenge. “It was still up to the principal to let him back, but they could not use the fact that the court had barred him from the school,” Carlos explained. Elaborating on this, Carlos recalled, “When we get back to them after the bail order’s been changed and they say: ‘Oh, well we need to set up a meeting.’” “Okay, set up the meeting,” Carlos replied.

Unfortunately, meeting timelines only complicated matters further. By scheduling events with short notice and without taking parent commitments into consideration, administration at Waterloo Sunset High fuelled further tension, whether this was intentional or not. As Carlos detailed:

Another issue that infuriated me is that the principal called me to say: ‘Come, we’re having an appointment next Tuesday at 3.’ They don’t care if the parent has to work, or if the parent has to change a shift. In one way they’re punishing the parent.

Although Kimal’s parents were unhappy with the circumstances of arranging the meeting, and the timelines of the meeting itself, they attended the meeting, along with Carlos, at the duly appointed time and location.

Another complication arose at the meeting itself, and this stemmed from a particular request made by the administration of Waterloo Sunset High. As Carlos remembered, “they were asking the youth to provide some type of a statement, which might have basically caused him to incriminate himself.” Carlos did not know how to respond to this development. Feeling suspicious, he advised Kimal’s parents to proceed with caution and refrain from making any commitments. Following the meeting, Carlos went as far as to seek out legal advice. “I even asked the lawyer at one point,” Carlos recalled. He added, “But his [Kimal’s] lawyer emailed the school and said, ‘No. He’s not going to provide the statement. What you’re asking him to provide is not legal.’” With
this response, the legal council representing Kimal had called into question the integrity of certain actions taken by the administration at Waterloo Sunset High. Kimal’s family and the school had reached yet another impasse. Without explaining its rationale, the administration at Waterloo Sunset High soon reversed its own decision, “And eventually he [Kimal] was let back in the school.”

Whether this reversed decision was prompted by the fact that the principal’s actions had been called into legal question is not certain. However, what is for certain is that once Kimal’s lawyer became involved in the situation, administration swiftly and significantly altered its approach.

Carlos’ Experiences Supporting Leoraldo

The third narrative Carlos shared with me involved his work with an African-Canadian youth named Leoraldo Burton. Like Badu and Kimal, Leoraldo had attended Waterloo Sunset High. In this scenario, the principal of the school repeatedly tried to have Leoraldo expelled, first from the school and later from the TCDSB itself. At one point, the possibility of a placement in the Transition Intervention Program for Suspended Students (TIPSS) arose.

TIPSS is designed to facilitate academic and social support for students as they serve a suspension that exceeds five days (TCDSB, 2009b). The TIPSS program includes such supports as academic support from a teacher, and for students on suspensions that exceed 10-days support from a social worker (TCDSB, 2009b). These supports are mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education via the Education Act and Program Policy Memorandum 141 (TCDSB, 2009b).
Leoraldo’s story begins when, following a number of “behavioural issues,” the principal of Waterloo Sunset High attempted to expel him from the school. This in turn led to a series of communications and events, which to Leoraldo’s parents, Alfonso and Rita, were convoluted. When the Burtons fully became aware of the gravity of their son’s situation, they contacted Carlos and asked for his support. Specifically, they asked Carlos to help them with their communications with the school, such as attending meetings and helping them to critically read over documents.

With Carlos’ intervention, the principal of Waterloo Sunset reversed his decision and allowed Leoraldo back into the school. As Carlos recalled, “it was a student that he [the principal] had tried to expel previously and I had intervened. He then reversed the decision and allowed the student back into the school.” At that point both Leoraldo’s family and Carlos believed that the conflict had concluded. They were wrong.

Two months later, following a behavioural incident, the principal of Waterloo Sunset High took steps to begin the process of having Leoraldo expelled from the school board itself. Summarizing the situation, Carlos stated, “The principal at this point was not just trying to expel the student from the school; he was trying to expel the student from the school board.” Once again, Leoraldo’s parents asked Carlos to support them in their continued interactions with personnel at Waterloo Sunset, and the TCDSB itself. Carlos’ involvement in this situation impacted the events that followed significantly.

One meeting in particular was memorable for Carlos. In this meeting the principal of Waterloo Sunset High strongly encouraged Leoraldo’s parents to sign a Minutes of Settlement document. As previously mentioned, Carlos views this document with suspicion and considers it to be a means of quieting the voice of parents/guardians.
In the early stages of the parent-principal meeting, Waterloo Sunset administration highlighted the fact that they were pursuing an expulsion from the TCDSB. After stating, on more than one occasion, that Leoraldo faced the possibility of expulsion, the principal made an offer to the Burtons. He told them that if they agreed to have their son placed in the TIPSS program, and also signed a Minutes of Settlement document, the school board would set aside the expulsion process. Alfonso and Rita were skeptical. They were not sure how to respond to this offer. Along with the TIPSS coordinator, the principal implored Leoraldo’s parents to accept the TIPSS placement and sign the Minutes of Settlement document, reasoning that doing so would work to their advantage and speed up the process of resolving Leoraldo’s situation.

At this point that Carlos advised Alfonso and Rita to be cautious and recommended that they not to sign the Minutes of Settlement document. “Any parent that I come into contact with, I beg them not to ever sign that document,” Carlos stressed. Recalling this stage of the meeting Carlos told me the principal was “trying to get the parents to agree to the Minutes of Settlement; and the parent doesn’t want to agree.” Rather than letting the issue rest, the principal persisted. As Carlos recollected, “the parent didn’t want to sign anything and the principal kept persuading the parent to sign, and so did the coordinator from the alternative program; they work in tandem.” Despite the combined efforts of the principal and the TIPSS coordinator, the Burtons stood their ground and refused to sign the Minutes of Settlement document. In failing to reach any sort of agreement, the events that unfolded at that meeting were unsatisfactory to those who represented the school, and those who represented Leoraldo. Having reached an
impasse with Alfonso and Rita, the principal closed the meeting stating that he would continue with the process of seeking Leoraldo’s expulsion from the school board.

Feeling apprehensive about the previous meeting, and leery of the methods of the administration at Waterloo Sunset High; Carlos decided to carefully document all interactions with TCDSB personnel that followed. “I’ve been documenting all of these irregularities,” Carlos informed me. He outlined his approach to documentation as follows:

I would call the vice principal, and I would email the vice principal, and the vice principal would call me. And the coordinator of the TIPSS program, there was a lot of mistakes that were made along the way.

Elaborating on this strategy, Carlos continued:

So I would email her and she would call me. And I would say: ‘Can you please email me what you said?’ And both of them [the Vice-Principal at Waterloo Sunset High and the TIPPS coordinator] would refrain from emailing me.

These guarded responses, in Carlos’ view, were suspicious.

Reflecting on the refusal of school personnel to repeat statements or commitments made in telephone conversations in an email correspondence, Carlos told me that such actions are “a sign that something is happening. Why are you afraid to document this conversation?” As Leoraldo’s expulsion process moved forward, Carlos continued to keep a close record of all correspondences and all events that unfolded.

As the principal moved ahead with the expulsion process, further complications arose. In recalling actions he felt were highly questionable, and even unprofessional, Lennox said:

So I basically went to the trustee level, and what happened is … the principal has to submit a principal’s report, if he’s going to investigate and
if he’s going to expel a student, and at every point of the appeals process parents are supposed to have a written explanation of what is taking place.

In keeping with Bill 212, the TCDSB states that:

If, on concluding the investigation, the principal decides to recommend to the Board that the pupil be expelled, he or she will prepare a report that contains the following: (i) A summary of the principal’s findings; (ii) The principal’s recommendation as to whether the pupil should be expelled; (iii) The principal’s recommendation as to the type of school that might benefit the pupil, if the pupil is expelled from his or her school only, or the type or program for expelled pupils that might benefit the pupil, if the pupil is expelled from all schools of the Board; (iv) The principal will promptly provide a copy of the report to the Board and to every person whom the principal was required to give notice of the suspension [which includes parents]. (TCDSB, 2008)

Then, following the investigation correspondence:

If expulsion is recommended … The principal will ensure that written notice … is given to every person whom the principal was required to give notices of the suspension [which includes parents], at the same time the as the principal’s report is provided to that person. (TCDSB, 2008)

In Leoraldo’s situation:

The principal did not provide any of this along the way of the appeals until it came to the time that the parents were going to the trustee level. And so the principal showed up on the Saturday morning to their home to deliver the principal’s report; or the principal’s investigation rather. The hearing was on the Monday; which was two days later.

For Carlos, this was intolerable. “I was infuriated by this,” he told me. Arriving at the meeting, Carlos voiced his concerns with the actions of the principal during the expulsion process. Carlos recalled:

I raised it at the board level. I asked their legal council: ‘Is this even legal that we’re having a meeting today and the parents received the information two days ago? And is it even professional that the principal would show up to their house on a Saturday?’

When I asked him about the response his statement garnered, he told me:
They actually had to take a break from the session and go consult with the legal council behind closed doors, and they ended up having to adjourn the meeting for one week, as a result of the fact that legalities had been violated by the principal.

Ultimately, Leoraldo was not expelled from the TCDSB. Summarizing the outcome of his scenario, Carlos informed me that, “In the end they did not expel the student from the school board. They did expel him from the school; he’s been transferred to another school.”

**Conclusion**

In recounting the personal stories of the five participants in this research study, I have detailed a number of instances where minoritized parents encounter exclusion as they interact with Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. While numerous situations of exclusion have been documented in this chapter, I will analyze the parameters and implications of these situations in the following two chapters. More specifically, Chapter 5 will explore my analysis of the data while Chapter 6 will discuss the social and academic implications of the data I have gathered and analyzed in conducting this research study.
CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS

The previous chapter of this paper sketched out the backgrounds and experiences of five participants in this research study. Chronicling these narratives led me to detail how a number of these minoritized parents have interacted with Ontario’s public school system, in relation to special education identification, placement, and program delivery.

As outlined in the methodology chapter, I initially expected interviews to focus purely on special education identification. Conversing with minoritized parents, however, led to other aspects of special education, such as placement and program delivery. Consequently, I have come to view identification, placement, and program delivery as interlocked areas of special education that cannot be isolated. Simply put, one cannot speak about one dimension without simultaneously considering the others.

Having documented the stories of participants in the previous chapter, I will now analyze the key themes and related sub-themes that emerged within the data. In all, four central themes arose in the data I collected from participants. While these themes were anticipated at the thesis proposal stage, as they emerged in my review of the literature on the phenomenon of minoritized parental inclusion and/or exclusion in relation to special education identification, their associated sub-themes were not.

Circulating through all four key themes of the data were the elements of persistence and time. I was struck by the tremendous amount of energy, patience, and time it took for all four parents to get support for their children. Although time, patience, and persistence did not arise as separate themes within the data, these dimensions of
parental experiences lurked in the background of each narrative and formed a part of each of the four key themes.

The following themes emerged in the data I collected, analyzed, and coded between the months of August 2008 and February 2009:

- Knowledge;
- Language;
- Positioning; and
- Philosophy.

**Knowledge**

A key theme that emerged in the data I gathered was the pervasive nature of knowledge. Learning about how various minoritized parents interact with Ontario’s special education process uncovered a link between knowledge and inclusion. This link was especially pronounced in situations where knowledge gaps arose. More specifically, one’s knowledge of Ontario’s special education superstructure helped to shape how that person was included/excluded from the identification process. For the parents I met, knowledge gaps acted as barriers, instilling an opaqueness that diminished opportunities for individuals to be included in the identification process.

Within the larger theme of knowledge, emerged a variety of related sub-themes; and rather than exploring knowledge as a singular entity, I will investigate these different aspects of knowledge one at a time. In doing so, I will consider how these dimensions of knowledge can impact on the interactions of parents. Following my analysis of these sub-themes, I will articulate some general reflections on knowledge itself.

The six sub-themes stemming from the larger knowledge strand are as follows:
What is knowledge?

Objectivist knowledge and special education;

How is knowledge used?

Knowledge management;

Knowledge gaps; and

Gathering knowledge informally.

What is Knowledge?

Knowledge has been conceptualized in different ways by a great many thinkers over the years. But this is not simply a temporal matter, as knowledge continues to be defined in different ways in our present world. While some view knowledge as value-free and objective, as Gould details in *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981), others assert that it is inherently subjective in nature and inexorably linked to power (Brown, 1996; Banks, 1996; Foucault, 2004; Giroux, 1983). On a wider scale, the tension between objectivism, subjectivism, and understanding knowledge-power is visible in such oppositional schools of thought as positivism and critical theory.

To me, knowledge involves three interlocked elements. It is a product of subjective ideas and also both a producer and product of power. As Banks (1996) argues; “knowledge is not objective in the sense that people observe and draw uniform, unbiased conclusions” (p. 279). Viewing knowledge as a matter of subjective perception has led Brown (1996) to redefine objectivity:

The subjectivist position is that all knowledge is perspectival; knowledge approaches but never achieves objectivity. From a deluge of perspectives a representative (contextualized) object is elicited. An objectivity centred in the context of an object leads to a richer account of the object, even if the perspectival basis of the object is an argument for the relativism of all objectivity. (p. 164)
Pushing this concept of knowledge into the realm of sociology, some argue that being aware of the influence of subjectivity can help us to critique knowledge, whereby “Perspective-taking problematizes the idea that knowledge is objective” and helps us to “understand that knowledge is socially constructed” (Banks, 1996, p. 51). Foucault (2004) adds a layer of power, as “Knowledge appears to be profoundly linked to a whole series of power effects” (p. 128).

While I do not propose that knowledge is a simple matter of objectivist-subjectivist binary opposition, I do believe that the ideas of objectivism and subjectivism can help us to unravel some of the complexities implicit in discussing how knowledge operates, and more specifically, how it impacts on minoritized parents as they encounter Ontario’s special education organization.

**Objectivist Knowledge and Special Education**

Perceiving knowledge as an objective entity has been a powerful force in the broad arena of epistemology. Numerous schools of thought have based key foundations on objectivist principles, including positivism, logical positivism, sociological positivism, and naturalism. Outlining her own principles of objectivism in *The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Through*, Ayn Rand (1989) notes, “My philosophy, Objectivism, holds that: 1. Reality exists as an objective absolute—facts are facts, independent of man’s wishes, hopes, or fears” (p. 3-4). Such a view carries with it the assumption that knowledge is not shaped by such sociological dimensions as ethno-cultural identity, race, economics, social class, gender, and sexual orientation. In short, it assumes that knowledge exists in a universalized state. Because an objectivist view of knowledge does not consider deeper sociological dimensions, de Carvalho (2000) would counter that:
While the universalization of schooling meant democratization of formal knowledge or high culture, it also meant the imposition of one cultural form over others. While it meant access to a good form which the lower classes have been excluded, it also meant cultural uniformization via compulsory learning of an arbitrary knowledge. (p. 54)

Objectivism takes on significance within this research study because its principles provide the foundation of key aspects of special education in Ontario. The pervasive nature of objectivist thinking in special education was evident when I investigated policies and regulations, and this was punctuated as I listened to the stories of minoritized parents. Many of the ideas, or knowledge bases, that form the foundation of Ontario’s special education system are themselves based on objectivist premises. For instance, there is a belief that intelligence is measurable and quantifiable. There is also a premise that it is possible to design and implement value-free standardized measurement tools, which can be administered to ascertain one’s level, or degree, of intelligence. Percentile intelligence scores, derived from such tests as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV), provide examples of this premise being put into practice (Pearson Education, 2009). Another example of objectivist thinking in special education is visible in the widely-held notion that school board psychologists, as perceived experts in the field, are best able to administer and interpret the results of standardized intelligence assessments.

Stemming from these interconnected objectivist premises are various special education structures, and the practice of deriving the content of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) from psycho-educational assessments provides an example of this. While some would view the above structures as value-free examples of objective science, others
would view this dynamic, to use Foucault’s words, as a regime of truth (Haugaard, 1997, p. 69).

**Accepting objectivism.** Objectivist views of knowledge influenced parents I interviewed in a number of different ways, leading back to de Carvalho’s (2000) idea of “arbitrary learning of arbitrary knowledge” (p. 54). The notion of giftedness provides one example. Associated with giftedness are the interlocked ideas of the existence of an intelligence continuum, and the simultaneous belief in utilizing impartial and accurate methods of measuring an individual’s location on that continuum. Stemming from these ideas is the practice of employing psycho-educational assessments to measure and quantify the performances of individuals. These objectivist premises behind giftedness impacted on the experiences of Anoushka, Zawadi, and Beatrice.

Anoushka invested respect in the particular gifted assessments her son encountered at Sattelitetown Elementary Public School. She gathered information about the Otis-Lennon Test and ultimately decided that she accepted the premise of an intelligence continuum and the practice of utilizing standardized assessment tools to measure the intelligence of children. This acceptance explains why Anoushka ultimately gave consent to have her son to be tested by a Halton Board school psychologist. Although Anoushka later took issue with the fact that Ravi experienced a fire drill interruption during the 30-minute Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test, and also took issue with the ambiguous way in which the results of this assessment were communicated to her, she never questioned the validity of these assessments themselves. When speaking, Anoushka cited her son’s percentile score as a matter of truth.
Similarly, Beatrice questioned neither the way in which her daughters were assessed for giftedness, nor the findings of the assessments themselves. Like Anoushka, while Beatrice took issue with certain actions of school board personnel she and her husband came into contact with, she accepted the concept of giftedness itself, and the interlocked premise that there is an impartial and accurate way of measuring giftedness in children.

In a different but related circumstance, Zawadi also assigned tremendous respect to giftedness and assessment. It is possible, however, that the desirability of giftedness, being the exceptionality associated with intellectual aptitude, contributed to Anoushka’s, Beatrice’s, and Zawadi’s interest in special education identification and placement.

While Nabila was never actually assessed for giftedness, Zawadi wishes she had been. Specifically, Zawadi takes issue with the fact that gifted assessment was never offered, or even mentioned, as a possibility for her daughter. In our conversations about her experiences as a parent at Midtown Public School, Zawadi never questioned the concept of giftedness, nor did she question the idea of using standardized assessments to determine giftedness.

While the three above-mentioned scenarios exemplify situations where parents accepted objectivist ideas within Ontario’s special education superstructure, I also learned about instances where parents countered objectivist structures with subjectivist-oriented responses.

**Countering Objectivism.** The commencement of the identification process itself provides an example of this subjectivist-objectivist tension. In dialoguing with minoritized parents, I learned of instances where school personnel and parents could not
agree on whether or not there was a need to pursue the identification, placement, and program delivery process.

Subjectivist-objectivist conflict was a key aspect of Zawadi’s story. During our interview, Zawadi informed me that she does not believe Nabila’s teachers adequately challenged her. Because Nabila exceeded grade level expectations, and her teachers never put her forward as a candidate for gifted assessment, Zawadi reasons that these educators did not meet her daughter’s academic needs. As no discussion about giftedness was ever initiated by the staff at Midtown Public School, there was no identification process from which Zawadi could even be excluded. In a sense, Zawadi was excluded from the identification process in the most extreme way possible, because the process itself never began. Frustrated with her daughter’s situation, Zawadi ultimately removed Nabila from the public school system. Zawadi’s scenario raises the following question: Is Ontario’s present system of employing Ministry-generated curriculum and classroom teachers to trace exceptionalities in learners infallible and objective?

Another example of objectivist-subjectivist conflict between school personnel and parents is visible in circumstances where individuals engage in the act of interpreting psycho-educational assessments and developing IEPs. As previously mentioned, an IEP is a document, theoretically constructed in collaboration between a team of educators and parents, designed to individualize a learner’s program. The IEP, to varying degrees, derives from the content in a child’s psycho-educational assessment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 15). Because psycho-educational assessments are often perceived to be objective, this process of composing IEPs is, through association, considered by some
to be an objective process. But this rests on the assumption that individuals interpret
psycho-educational assessments in the same way.

In Beatrice and Daniel’s case, a conflict arose in relation to the development of
various IEPs for their two daughters. Specifically, in these circumstances, the Quimbys
took issue with the way in which educators interpreted, or failed to interpret, psycho-
educational assessments, and the initial ADD/ADHD diagnoses. Because IEPs are
developed on a yearly basis and then adjusted as the school year progresses, this situation
repeated itself. Entering into programming-oriented disagreements, stemming from the
task of developing and implementing of IEPs, Beatrice’s actions raise the following
question: If the resources used to develop an IEP are, to a degree, open to subjective
interpretation, what role do parents have to play in the related processes of interpretation
and decision-making?

In sum, objectivist ideas emerged as a pervasive aspect of the experiences of
various minoritized parents I interviewed, and this was evident as they recalled details
that occurred as their children stepped through the special education identification,
placement, and program delivery process. As previously illustrated, tensions arose when
parents’ subjectivist concepts of knowledge conflicted with the objectivist principles, and
practices, associated with Ontario’s special education superstructure. In these
circumstances of conflict, parents had to assert themselves in order to impact decision-
making, whether it involved assessment, placement or programming. When parents
asserted themselves (as in the case of Beatrice and Daniel), time, persistence and patience
enabled them to attain a degree of inclusion within a special education decision-making
process. In Zawadi’s situation, inclusion was neither offered nor was it pursued. In the
narratives I have documented, when the subjectivist knowledge of parents conflicted with objectivist principles of Ontario’s special education superstructure, parents needed to be assertive, articulate, confident, and well versed in both strategy and policy in order to put forward their own views. Recent research on special education and minoritized communities documents a need for minoritized parents to possess and/or utilize certain communication and/or research skills in their interactions with schools (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995; Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson, & Brusca-Vega, 1999; Rogers, 2003; Todd, 2003; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004; Tam & Heng, 2005).

**How is Knowledge Used?**

Knowledge, as a theme within the data I gathered, went beyond the matter of objectivist-subjectivist tension. For the parents I dialogued with, knowledge was also an instrument to be employed to influence the special education identification, placement and program delivery process. Actively participating in the identification procedure, and contributing to decision-making, required a certain awareness, or knowledge base. More specifically, knowledge associated with special education ideas and procedures could be utilized to engage in the identification and placement process. In sum, for the people I interviewed, awareness of special education formed a crucial aspect of their interactions with school personnel, and with the process itself.

Utilizing knowledge was crucial for Anoushka. Early on, when she was asked to provide consent for Ravi to take gifted assessment, Anoushka determined that she had to gather knowledge about gifted assessment and the gifted program itself. For Anoushka, the first step was to determine what knowledge she needed to acquire. Once this was established, in order to gather the knowledge she desired, Anoushka conducted research
by exploring different sources. Over time, she collected information about gifted assessment and the gifted program itself, and ultimately decided she felt gifted assessment and placement would be suitable for her son. Later, when a point of contention arose in regards to her son’s second assessment, Anoushka determined that she needed to gather more knowledge. To learn about countering a decision a public school has made, and reactivate her son’s identification process, Anoushka contacted Mrs. Wilcox, a resource teacher at Sattelitetown Elementary, and Mrs. Rosie, a special education supervisor at the Halton District head office. In speaking to Mrs. Rosie, Anoushka learned that she could advance her son’s case by communicating with his classroom teacher, discussing the situation, and asking if the teacher could set up an SST meeting. Ultimately, administration at Sattelitetown Elementary decided to schedule an SST, and this led to further assessments conducted on Ravi, who was eventually identified with a gifted exceptionality.

Before Anoushka could gather and use knowledge about special education, however, she had to possess a certain set of skills. She had to be computer and research savvy to gather information about the Otis-Lennon test on the internet. Anoushka also had to be articulate in English in order to gather information from Mrs. Rosie, a special education supervisor. Throughout all of this, Anoushka had to be persistent in order to set up SST meeting on Ravi’s behalf, ensure that further gifted assessments were conducted, and then take part in her son’s eventual IPRC meeting. In short, before Anoushka could gather knowledge, and impact her son’s identification process, she had to be computer and research savvy, articulate, and persistent.
Like Anoushka, Zawadi recognized the value of gathering knowledge. However, while Anoushka was able to identify, acquire, and then utilize the knowledge she needed, Zawadi, was unable to do so. But this was not for lack of trying. Zawadi was curious about giftedness and gifted assessment because she wanted to know if Nabila would qualify for such an assessment. She knew that her daughter had been tremendously successful in school, and simultaneously did not feel adequately challenged. Initially, Zawadi attempted to gather knowledge from parents at Midtown Public School. When this strategy proved to be ineffective, she went to the internet and navigated pages on the TDSB website. But this second strategy did not lead Zawadi to the answers she sought. To put it simply, Zawadi was frustrated. Unable to gather the knowledge she desired, she removed her daughter from the public school system. Unfortunately, Zawadi never knew that she herself could have requested an IRPC meeting to put Nabila forward for gifted assessment and/or consideration.

Unlike Zawadi, Beatrice had an awareness of, and access to, a range of accurate sources of knowledge about special education. Consequently, she and her husband acquired information and in turn made use of that information to impact on their daughters’ identification, placement, and program delivery scenarios. With two daughters experiencing social and sporadic academic challenges at school, and having ADD and ADHD diagnoses, Beatrice and Daniel approached both staff and administration at Eastend Elementary to inquire about what could be done for their daughters. When the school did not take action, the Quimbys pursued other avenues. Working for the provincial government led Beatrice to gather information from co-workers about exceptionalities, IEPs, and the special education identification procedure
itself. She also spoke to associates, such as individuals who worked with such organizations as the LDAO and ABC.

With the information Beatrice had gathered, the Quimbys were able to determine that they wanted IEPs to be developed and implemented for their daughters. They felt that setting up more individualized approaches to the girls’ education, with such supports as classroom accommodations firmly in place, would benefit Julie and Liz tremendously. When administration at Eastend Elementary did not respond to their ongoing requests for IEPs, however, Beatrice and Daniel had to rethink their approach. It was at this point that special education awareness proved to be crucial for the couple. Knowing that schools must respond to a parental request for an IPRC meeting to be held (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b), the Quimbys decided to submit one. They even cited the policy in their written request. Beatrice and Daniel knew that an IPRC would provide a venue where they could voice their requests for IEPs, and special education support for their daughters, and have these requests recorded in their daughters’ Ontario Student Records (OSRs). In short, Beatrice knew how to exercise her rights as a parent in order to initiate action.

While the Muswell Hill Daycare Centre did not provide Hana with information that was completely accurate (a topic I explore in more detail elsewhere in this chapter), much of the information it did provide was correct. The accurate knowledge Hana gathered from the daycare was invaluable. It led Hana and Hansol to learn about different forms of support the TDSB offers, and it also helped the couple to determine which supports would benefit their daughter, such as EA support, occupational therapy, and speech-language assistance. Additionally, becoming aware of the application
procedures associated with these different forms of support enabled Hana to begin the paperwork process on Sun’s behalf, prior to her first day of school. Ultimately, because Hana knew how to have these supports put into place for her daughter, she was able to circumvent waiting lists that her daughter would otherwise have had to endure.

But special education knowledge does not have to operate in an exclusionary way. Hearing Carlos’ recollections, I became aware of a very different scenario that can occur when support comes from outside a school board. In a number of situations, Carlos was able to use his knowledge to benefit parents with whom he worked. As previously mentioned, Carlos works as a youth engagement coordinator in a community in the northwest area of Toronto. He supports parents in a variety of ways, as their children face such situations as transferring into alternative programs and being expelled from a school or school board. As Carlos recalled, his awareness of parental rights and school board procedures enabled him to assist parents in a number of ways, and I provide three examples of this below.

First, there is the matter of documentation. Carlos makes parents aware of documents they are encouraged, by school personnel, to sign. This was evident in his recollections of instances where a particular school administrator strongly encouraged parents to sign a letter of agreement. Because Carlos understands the pseudo-legal and procedural implications of signing this document, and does not hesitate to share this knowledge with parents, the parents with whom he has worked have been able to take more care when deciding whether or not to sign documents.

Second, there is the aspect of accessing services. Knowing that parents have a right to access interpreters and translation services, Carlos has linked numerous parents in
the Latin-American and Ghanaian communities to supports they never knew existed. Without learning about these services, these parents would otherwise have struggled to interact in a purely English setting of school meetings, telephone conversations and documentation.

Third, there is the aspect of being aware of school responsibilities. Carlos’ knowledge of regulations led him to make parents aware of circumstances when school personnel broke rules. In one circumstance, this occurred when a principal neglected to share his investigation report in a timely fashion prior to an expulsion hearing. In learning about this irregularity, the boy’s parents were able to raise this matter at the hearing, and this impacted significantly on the outcome of the hearing.

Knowledge impacted on the experiences of all of the parents I met when investigating the phenomenon of minoritized parental inclusion in (and/or exclusion from) Ontario’s special education identification process. More specifically, in instances where special education knowledge was either absent or incomplete, whether it related to theory, practice, or bureaucracy, inclusion was diminished. When Anoushka was never informed that she had the right to request an IPRC meeting on her son’s behalf, and had to contact a number of school board personnel in order to request an SST, she experienced a form of exclusion. When Anoushka was not informed about the parameters of the Otis-Lennon Test or the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT), and was less able to discuss her son’s performances on these assessments, she was also excluded. When Zawadi was never informed that gifted assessment occurs at all grade levels or that she (as a parent) could make a request for her child to be assessed for giftedness, she experienced a form of exclusion. When school board personnel failed to
informe Beatrice and her husband they had the right to request and IPRC for their
daughters, the Quimbys experienced a form of exclusion. When Hana and Hansol were
never told about the parameters of Sun’s IEP, they both experienced exclusion and their
opportunity to dialogue with educators and school board personnel was greatly reduced.
Beneath these surface issues of parental exclusion is the larger challenge of pinpointing
key causes of the problem. If absence of knowledge can foster situations of parental
exclusion, then the following question becomes vital: How exactly do schools, and school
boards, disseminate special education-oriented knowledge within parent communities?

Knowledge Management

Knowledge can be shared in a variety of different ways. The matter of how
organizations engage in the process of disseminating knowledge, and fostering a
“knowledge sharing environment” (Lebowitz, 1999, p. iv), is known as knowledge
management. While it is not my intention to focus on theories of organizational culture,
the concept of knowledge management can help us to investigate and reflect on the
question of how school boards, and schools themselves, attempt to disseminate
knowledge with the parent community and foster transparency. Exploring the practice of
training linguistically diverse parents, Tam and Heng (2005) identify various benefits of
enriching parental inclusion through knowledge management practices. In sum,
knowledge management is important because it can inform us about ways in which
schools include and/or exclude parents.

The question of special education knowledge management is crucial because
formalized information sharing is where schools begin their dialogue with parents. This
represents a point of origin, where parents initially hear from school personnel about the
interconnected matters of exceptionality, assessment, identification, placement and program delivery. Media through which schools communicate these aspects of knowledge include:

- Printed materials (i.e. brochures and booklets);
- The internet (i.e. a school board website or email correspondence); and
- Spoken word (i.e. face-to-face meetings and telephone conferences).

The parents with whom I dialogued did not find that printed materials produced by schools and boards of education raised their awareness of special education in Ontario. At the most extreme, in Zawadi’s scenario, printed materials about the gifted program at Midtown Public School were never provided. Because Nabila was highly successful with her schoolwork, and felt inadequately challenged, Zawadi wanted to learn about possibility of pursuing enrichment support for her daughter. Curiosity about giftedness and the gifted program prompted Zawadi to investigate the TDSB website. Unfortunately, however, searching on the website did not provide her with the answers she sought. Without any concrete awareness about the gifted program and its assessment criteria, Zawadi never spoke with staff at Midtown Public School about her daughter’s situation. In Zawadi’s situation, issues with knowledge management magnified an exclusionary dynamic.

When Ravi had the opportunity to take a gifted assessment, Anoushka received a letter that identified the name of the assessment and asked for her consent. The letter, however, did not provide information about the assessment or about the gifted program itself. Unable to find information about giftedness on the Halton District School Board website, Anoushka found some of the answers she sought on a variety of websites. Later,
Anoushka initiated conversations with school and school board personnel to learn about special education at the Halton District School Board. An initial telephone conversation with Mrs. Wilcox, a resource teacher at Sattelitometown Elementary, provided limited information about the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test, or NNAT. The conversation ultimately prompted Mrs. Wilcox to advise Anoushka to call Mrs. Rosie, a special education supervisor at the Halton District Board of Education head office. After a telephone interview with Mrs. Rosie, Anoushka learned that she could continue to pursue a gifted identification/placement on her son’s behalf by speaking with Ravi’s teacher and asking that he set up an SST meeting. While this information certainly aided Anoushka, this help was limited because Mrs. Rosie never made Anoushka aware of her right to request an IPRC meeting. Had she not pursued other sources of information, beyond the school board, Anoushka would never have acquired the knowledge she needed to dialogue with school personnel on the topic of giftedness.

None of the parents I spoke with acquired knowledge through email correspondence with school board personnel.

Spoken word interactions led some of the parents I interviewed to gather some degree of knowledge about special education in Ontario. In Hana’s narrative, a school administrator called her at home and encouraged her to attend a meeting and put forward a particular line of argument at the meeting. In this circumstance, the principal of the school wanted to increase EA support for Sun, and a brief telephone conversation enabled the administrator to prepare Hana for the school meeting. While the principal’s advice benefited Hana, it should be noted that knowledge management in an information sharing sense, was not the sole intention of the telephone call. The administrator wanted the
parent to express a certain view and articulate a particular point at an upcoming meeting. The principal never asked Hana about her daughter’s IEP, which, at that point was theoretically at the stage of parent-teacher collaborative development. Also, he never informed Hana about how an IEP operates. If the principal of Abbey Road Public School truly wanted to enrich parental awareness, he would have asked Hana about her daughter’s IEP; and, if needed, would have then outlined what an IEP entails. In doing so, he would have made Hana aware of her right to contribute to Sun’s IEP.

Unlike Anoushka and Hana’s partial success, the Quimbys found that educators, administrators, and school board personnel were not responsive to either face to face or telephone conversations. Simply put, for these participants, conversation (as a media of knowledge management) did not raise parental awareness about special education in a rich way.

The scenarios I have outlined above raise the following two questions about knowledge sharing:

- How do schools and school boards conduct knowledge management in the arena of special education?
- What happens when knowledge management strategies fail to raise parental awareness of special education?

While I consider the first of these two questions in the discussion chapter of this paper, I will answer the second in the following few paragraphs. Simply put, when formalized knowledge management fails in its intent, gaps arise and parents seek out informal sources of information and support. Before I delve into the aspects of knowledge gaps
and informal sources of knowledge, I will briefly indicate exactly how cracks in knowledge management can foster situations of exclusion.

The issue of knowledge gaps and informal knowledge sources is exemplified in the stories of Anoushka and Zawadi. When Anoushka received correspondence from Sattelitetown Elementary Public School that did not outline the parameters of her son’s assessments, or detail his status as a candidate for the gifted program, she conducted her own research on the internet. The limitations of the information Anoushka was able to gather in turn limited her ability to dialogue with school board personnel on her son’s behalf. Ultimately, the limitations of Anoushka’s ability to dialogue with school board personnel diminished her inclusion in Ravi’s identification, placement, and program delivery process. In a different but related context Zawadi was unable to find information about gifted assessment and programming procedures on the TDSB website. When seeking information informally, she was unable to obtain any conclusive answers from friends in the parent community at Midtown Elementary. The lack of information Zawadi was able to gather ultimately led her to explore private school options on her daughter’s behalf. Because Zawadi was never aware she herself could have put forward a request for gifted assessment, she experienced the most drastic form of exclusion, as the identification, placement, and program delivery process was never begun for Nabila. I will speak more specifically on the dimensions of knowledge gaps and informal sources of information in the following two subsections.
Knowledge Gaps

Minoritized parents of students who travel through the special education processes can potentially develop knowledge gaps in relation to specific elements of that process, and to the larger special education superstructure in general. Because a multiplicity of special education-related knowledge pools co-exist and indeed interlock, there are many areas where knowledge gaps may arise. The following five questions indicate areas where points may arise in relation to the identification process:

- What exactly is an exceptionality?
- What does the identification process entail?
- Who is involved in the identification process and what precisely are their roles?
- What sort of program delivery options are possible and/or available?
- What are my rights as a parent and participant in the identification process?

Knowledge gaps influenced the experiences of minoritized parents I met with and/or learned about in a number of different ways. Anoushka never knew she could have requested an IPRC on her son’s behalf. This is significant because Anoushka wanted Ravi to be reconsidered for gifted assessment. Had Anoushka known she had a right to request an IPRC meeting, the tone of her interactions with personnel at Satellitetown Elementary and Halton District head office might have differed. Specifically, rather than being in the passive position of requesting an SST, Anoushka could have been in the more active position of formally requesting an IPRC.

Although she was in a different context, Zawadi struggled with the same knowledge gap as Anoushka had. With a daughter experiencing tremendous academic success and feeling inadequately challenged, Zawadi wanted Nabila to be put forward for
gifted assessment. But she never knew that she herself could have submitted an IPRC request to the school. Because Zawadi was unaware of her right to request an IPRC meeting, one never took place. In this scenario, a knowledge gap led to frustration, and ultimately contributed to Zawadi’s decision to remove her daughter from the public school system. A key question Anoushka and Zawadi’s narratives raise is: How can parents exercise their right to request an IPRC meeting when they are not aware of this right?

Conversing with Hana led me to realize that she was not aware of the parameters of an IEP and was not even sure if her daughter had one. Because of this knowledge gap, Hana and Hansol did not contribute to the development of their daughter’s IEP. They were also not able to dialogue with staff on assessing how the IEP was working out, and being implemented in Sun’s classroom. Reflecting on Hana’s scenario, the following question arose: How can parents contribute to the development and implementation of their child’s IEP, which theoretically is a collaborative process, if they do not know what an IEP is and are not aware that they have a right to contribute to its development?

Carlos’s stories illustrated an alternative dynamic, where outside support empowered parents in the arena of knowledge. In two situations, for instance, the youth engagement worker’s persistence led him to raise pertinent questions about the exclusionary effects of special education knowledge gaps:

- How can parents (for whom English is not the preferred mode of communication) exercise rights (such as the right to access interpreters and translations) if they do not even know they have these rights?
• How can parents question the actions of an administrator who does not follow regulations (such as sharing reports and following timelines) if they are not aware of the regulations, or of the fact that regulations have been broken?

Although the parents I met experienced varying degrees of exclusion when knowledge gaps arose, they did not retreat to inaction. Encountering knowledge gaps prompted all of the participants I interviewed to take action. More specifically, when knowledge management fostered gaps, rather than awareness, parents sought out knowledge from a variety of informal sources when they became aware of these gaps.

**Gathering Knowledge Informally**

The parents I met with sought knowledge from a range of informal sources, and this led them to acquire knowledge that was:

• Accurate; and

• Partially accurate and/or inaccurate.

I would define an informal source as an organization or individual that provides support and/or information about an organization to which it is not connected. Surrey Place, for instance, informs parents about the boards of education without being formally attached to those boards.

**Accurate.** When informal knowledge sources are accurate, parents can be supported. Beatrice and Daniel provide an example of this dynamic. When the two were not able to gather the information about IEPs and special education policy from Eastend Elementary, they pursued other sources. Because of her position with the provincial government, Beatrice was able to gather vital information; and more specifically, she was able to learn that IPRC meetings must be held when parents request them in writing.
This fact was crucial for the Quimbys because the two then exercised this parental right in order to encourage Eastend Elementary to put Julie and Liz forward for possible assessment, and have IEPs developed. Thus, in Beatrice and Daniel’s case, acquiring accurate knowledge from informal sources helped immensely, as it made them aware of one of their rights as parents, and the couple then made use of this information to request IPRC meetings, and activate the identification processes.

**Partially accurate and/or inaccurate.** When informal sources of knowledge are inaccurate (or partly inaccurate), challenges associated with knowledge gaps can intensify. Hana and Hansol’s narrative provides an example of this scenario. Hana and her husband received a combination of accurate and inaccurate information about special education placement, procedures and program delivery options at the Muswell Hill Daycare Centre. In terms of accurate information, daycare staff made them aware of such services as speech language therapy, occupational therapy, and EA support. This in turn drew their attention to procedures that must be undertaken in order to access such services. Ultimately, this accurate information proved to be invaluable to the couple, as it led them to seek out these forms of support for their daughter and helped them through the lengthy application process. But Hana and Hansol also received inaccurate information from the staff at Muswell Hill. At one point, a member of the daycare staff informed them that once a child is placed in a self-contained classroom, it is extremely difficult to have him/her removed from that setting. This is not necessarily true, as unless there are significant behavioural concerns at hand, children can move out of a self-contained classroom with relative ease, as a “parent may request a review IPRC meeting anytime after their child has been placed in a special education program for 3 months”
(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b). While this information was inaccurate, it impacted on Hana and Hansol’s decisions relating to their daughter’s classroom placement. Had the couple received accurate information about placement transfers, they might have made different choices on their daughter’s behalf. We cannot be certain of this. What we can be certain of is that when parents obtain inaccurate information from informal information sources, their decisions and interactions with school/board personnel can be impacted profoundly.

Seeking out informal support from co-workers in the civil service, and at organizations such as the LDAO and ABC, led Beatrice to gather useful information. Hana accessed support (and partly accurate information) from a daycare, which benefited her in some ways and hindered her in other ways. Zawadi turned to the informal social network of her parent community, which did not lead her to fill gaps in knowledge. In these stories, accurate and partly accurate informal knowledge sources empowered parents to include themselves, to varying degrees, in the child’s identification, placement, and program delivery process of their children. Conversely, inaccurate and partly inaccurate informal knowledge sources raised barriers and intensified situations of exclusion.

As we have seen, informal knowledge gathering is a strategy taken by parents who become aware of their knowledge gaps in relation to the special education system, and the identification, placement, and program delivery procedure more specifically. All of the parents with whom I spoke sought out knowledge informally in one way or another.
Final Thoughts on Knowledge

While some define knowledge as being a static entity, others view it both as a product and producer/reproducer of social construction, and indeed power itself. As Foucault notes in a 1975 interview, “Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it” (Foucault, 1980, p. 59).

Many of the ideas and practices within Ontario’s special education organization are objectivist in nature, and a parent’s awareness and/or view of these ideas and practices can impact profoundly on how he/she experiences the identification process (I explore this idea in more detail in the Philosophy section of this chapter). Reflecting on the elusiveness of knowledge, Stone (1988) notes, “In the ideal market, information is “perfect,” meaning it is accurate, complete, and available to everyone at no cost. In the polis, by contrast information is interpretive, incomplete, and strategically withheld” (p. 62). An absence of knowledge can diminish the shape of parental inclusion in the identification, placement, and program delivery process. In these ways, knowledge can at once foster both inclusion and exclusion.

Language

As I spoke with minoritized parents, and learned about their experiences with Ontario’s identification and placement process, it became evident that language, like knowledge, simultaneously functions as a force of inclusion and exclusion. As Stone (1988) observes, “In the world of politics, language matters” (p. 121).

Because language has been conceptualized in different ways by different thinkers over the years it can be a difficult word to pin down. Some, for instance, view language as an apolitical entity. German linguist Humboldt, for instance, argues that, “Being
subjective in relation to the cognized, language is objective in relation to man” (Nalimov, 1981, p. 4). Similarly, Habermas (2004) believes in an “ineluctable grounding of objectivity in linguistic intersubjectivity” (p. 130). But this is not the only way to view language. Language has also been perceived as a social force that is political in nature. With this in mind, a number of critical thinkers, such as Foucault, have argued that language is both a product and a source of power. In a 1975 interview, Foucault (2004) asks, “Who are we, we who speak a language such that it has powers that are imposed on us in our society as well as on other societies” (p.95). In taking a critical view in this research study, I will apply the latter conception of language to analyze and report on data gathered from participants.

For all of the parents with whom I dialogued, language had a profound impact on interactions with school personnel in relation to the matter of special education identification. Reflecting on the strand of language itself led me to identify three key sub-themes, which include:

- Proficiency;
- Technical language; and
- Persuasive language.

**Proficiency**

Three dimensions of language proficiency that emerged in the data I gathered include syntax, vocabulary, and second language acquisition. Language proficiency is visible in terms of syntax and vocabulary. The English language contains a great number of grammatical structures. In terms of verb tenses, for instance, syntactical constructs may range in complexity from more straightforward structures, such as the simple present...
tense, to more complex constructs, such as the future perfect tense. Here, complexity can take form in word combinations and also in contextual possibilities. In verbal exchanges, situations may arise where one individual’s speaking syntax does not align with another’s listening syntax.

But syntax is only a part of linguistic complexity. With over 500,000 words defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2009), an individual’s speaking vocabulary may not correspond with another’s listening vocabulary. Parents approaching English as a second language will find that communication challenges associated with syntax and vocabulary are intensified.

Language proficiency arose in a number of different ways all the while impacting on the interactive dimension of the identification, placement, and program delivery process. Some examples of how proficiency shaped the experiences of participants include:

- Understanding Ideas and Explanations;
- Obtaining Clarifications.

**Understanding ideas and explanations.** Speaking with parents helped me learn about different ways in which language proficiency can impact on one’s understanding of ideas and/or explanations expressed by school personnel. In this sense, language can operate as a force intensifying a parent’s knowledge gaps in the realm of special education. Anoushka, for instance, did not grasp a number of the terms bandied about in her exchanges with school personnel at Sattelitetown Elementary. When I spoke to her, she called the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test “a Ligeri Test,” and was not aware that the assessment is designed to function as a 30-minute “screener” (Naglieri, 2008, p. 1).
When initially conversing with school personnel, Anoushka was not aware that special education identification assessments are a multi-step process. Similarly, Hana did not know about practices relating to IEPs. In her conversations with teachers and administration at Abbey Road Public School, Hana never learned about how IEPs are developed, how they are designed to function, and how parents may become involved in the development and implementation process.

As previously mentioned, numerous parents Carlos supported, in his capacity as a youth engagement worker, were not aware of their right to access an interpreter and/or translation services. Others did not understand the nuances and implications associated with the letter of agreement document. If Carlos had not been involved in those cases, the parents may never have learned about vital aspects of their child’s special education placement and program delivery process.

The situations of confusion that arose for participants stemmed from a lack of clarity in explanations. While all of these individuals converse in English, it is not their first language. Listening to people reflect on this aspect of their experiences led me to consider the following question: If language does not lead parents to receive important information about their child’s identification process, how can they hope to contribute to the complex identification, placement, and programming decision-making process?

**Obtaining Clarifications.** In addition to generating confusion with explanations, language proficiency can also pose challenges in relation to the matter of seeking out, or obtaining, clarifications. As previously mentioned, Anoushka placed a telephone call to Mrs. Wilcox, a resource teacher at Sattelitetown Public School, in order to learn about her son’s performance of the second stage of his gifted assessment. This telephone
conversation, however, did not lead to clarifications, and Anoushka was unable to gather precise answers regarding both Ravi’s second assessment and the letter she had received regarding the assessment. When pursuing an increase in support for her daughter at a school meeting, Hana did not obtain definitive answers from Anjelica, a special education consultant with the TDSB. Specifically, Anjelica would neither outline how support could be modified in Sun’s classroom, nor would she provide a timeline as to when Sun’s support dynamic would change. These two examples may not entirely be issues of language proficiency; however, as it is possible that Mrs. Wilcox and Anjelica intentionally refrained from providing clarifications.

Working to support parents, Carlos often asked school board personnel to pause at meetings in order to clarify terms they had referenced and communicate in a more transparent way. These references ranged from program names and acronyms to titles of official school board documents. For instance, at some of the meetings Carlos attended terms, such as OSE, Section 23, Minutes of Settlement, APPLE, and TIPSS, led to confusion rather than dialogue between parents and school board personnel. In these situations elements of sub-language hindered communication. By slowing the pace of conversations, and making sure that terminology was made clear to parents, Carlos’ persistence helped minoritized parents to overcome certain exclusionary barriers. Again, the youth engagement worker’s experiences illustrated a very different possibility in the special education identification, placement, and program delivery arena.

**Technical Language**

In conversing with minoritized parents, the use and influence of technical language arose as a second key sub-theme within the larger language strand. Functioning
as a sort of sub-language of English, technical language diminished transparency when school personnel communicated with parents. I will refer to technical language and sub-language interchangeably throughout this paper.

Before delving into specific instances of how sub-language impacted on minoritized parents I met, I will provide a brief outline of how I conceptualize sub-language as a strand of language itself. Sub-language exists as a lexicon associated with a particular field, or arena of thought. For mathematics, there are such ideas and terms as central limit theorem and standard deviation. “Syncopation” and “dissonance” offer examples in the realm of music theory. In terms of filmmaking, “deep focus” provides an example of both a term and a technical concept. Within Ontario’s special education framework, exists a reservoir of terms and ideas culled from a variety of fields including mathematics, psychology, and pedagogy itself. A number of special education terms also link to constructs that are logistical, in an organizational sense. Some of these terms include: exceptionality (a concept born of psychology and logistics); normalization (a mathematical concept); intensive program, self-contained classroom and alternative programming (concepts of logistics); IEP, SST and IPRC (also concepts of logistics); informed consent (a concept of psychology); letter of agreement (a pseudo-legal concept); and so on.

Special education sub-language is, if its lexicon is not clearly explained, an exclusive mode of communication. Exploring the experiences of one African-American mother, Rogers (2003) observed elements of “miscommunication that occurred between the home and the school at the start of the referral process (p. 154).” Using special education-oriented terminology can thus lead to situations where parents (those who are
not privy to its nuances) do not grasp the implications of points that are made, choices that are discussed, and decisions that are made. Simply put, using sub-language can confuse and it can also intimidate. While sub-language contributed to diminishing inclusion for the minoritized parents I interviewed in this study, it is possible non-minoritized parents would have very similar experiences in this realm of special education identification and placement.

In conversing with Anoushka, I came to realize that she was not aware of a number of the technical terms she had encountered. Some of these terms, such as Otis-Lennon Test, she was able to learn about by conducting her own research. Other terms, however, such as Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT), she was unable to learn about, despite her research efforts. Because she never found out about NNAT, and school personnel at Sattelitetown Elementary Public School never detailed the parameters, or even generalities, about the test to her, Anoushka was unable to engage in a dialogue with school personnel on her son’s performance on the test. This lack of dialogue ultimately prompted the school’s resource teacher, Mrs. Wilcox, to ask Anoushka to contact someone at the board office. Here, Anoushka’s situation provides an example of how sub-language can create knowledge gaps, and thus diminish parental inclusion in the identification and placement process. When I asked Hana to tell me about her encounters with technical language in her exchanges with staff and administration at Abbey Road Public School, she told me that she sometimes felt left out.

But sub-language does not necessarily have to raise barriers. In order to foster a dynamic where technical language bridges parents and school personnel, those who
utilize sub-language need to clearly outline the meanings of all terms referenced in a verbal exchange.

**Persuasive Language**

The third key sub-theme associated with language is persuasiveness. Simply put, as de Carvalho (2000) notes, “language in education inculcates” (p. 85-86). In a number of instances, participants with whom I spoke detailed instances where school board personnel employed language as a means of swaying parental decisions. More specifically, these acts of persuasion (or, in some cases, attempted persuasion) involved a variety of linguistic devices, which were often used simultaneously. They include:

- Repetition;
- Speed and urgency; and
- Framing suggestions as professional/expert recommendations.

Anoushka encountered all three tactics in a brief, informal exchange prior to Ravi’s IPRC meeting. In this scenario, the mother sat outside an IPRC meeting room awaiting her son’s IPRC. During a pause between meetings, a teacher stepped into the waiting room and engaged Anoushka in a brief verbal exchange. During this conversation the teacher informed Anoushka that although she was invited to her son’s IPRC meeting she did not actually need to attend the meeting. When Anoushka replied that she would prefer to stay and attend the meeting, the educator repeated his recommendation, stating that the invitation was only a formality, mandated by the Ministry of Education. Anoushka once again told the teacher that she would like to stay and attend the meeting.
In this situation, rather than telling Anoushka she did not have to attend an IPRC meeting once, the teacher repeated his point numerous times. Speaking from a position of institutional authority, both as a teacher and an interpreter of Ministry policy and regulation, the educator simultaneously utilized the strategies of repetition, speaking quickly and referencing timelines (which created a sense of urgency), and the act of presenting suggestions as professional recommendations. In sum, the teacher in this context attempted to employ persuasion as a means of excluding Anoushka from a meeting she, as a parent, had a right to attend and contribute to.

In a different circumstance, Hana encountered a special education consultant who utilized repetition, a sense of urgency, and framed recommendations as professional advice. At a school support team meeting, Anjelica, a special education consultant, repeatedly suggested that Sun either be placed in a self contained classroom, or be removed from public schooling altogether during afternoons so that she could be home-schooled. During this meeting, held in late September 2008, the special education consultant also asserted that it would not be possible to arrange afternoon EA support for Sun until January of 2009 at the very earliest. When the consultant continued to repeat these suggestions, as the classroom teacher detailed instances where the girl had disappeared during the afternoon, Hana began to cry, feeling at once both frustrated and concerned for her daughter’s safety at the school. It was only after Hana’s emotional outburst that the special education consultant stopped using repetition as a strategy of persuasion. In this situation, Anjelica utilized linguistic persuasion to counter Hana’s points and diminish dialogue.
As a youth engagement worker, Carlos was able to redirect situations where persuasiveness arose as an issue in parent-school interactions. While attending meetings to discuss alternative programming placement options and/or expulsions for students at Waterloo Sunset High, the youth engagement worker encountered different forms of linguistic persuasion. In one scenario, he observed an administrator repeatedly suggest that a father from Ghana sign a batch documents linked to his son’s placement. The principal implored the parent, for whom English was a second language, to sign the documents at the meeting and was not receptive to the idea of allowing the parent to take the documents home to read over more carefully. The administrator framed his suggestions as professional advice, and by insisting that the parent sign the documents on the spot, he fostered a persuasive sense of urgency. Other recollections Carlos shared with me outlined situations where an administrator utilized repetition and speed as a strategy to strongly encourage that parent(s) sign a letter of agreement. In all of these situations, linguistic persuasion arose as a method of encouraging parents to make particular decisions. Rather than encouraging dialogue and shared decision-making, persuasion diminished dialogue and inclusion. Intervening on behalf of the parents, Carlos was able to counter this exclusionary barrier; and again, his experiences indicate that, with outside support, transparency and inclusion within special education procedures can be enriched.

**Final Thoughts on Language**

Language has been constructed to act as a mode, or facilitator, of communication. As both a product and producer of power, language can empower and can also disempower. When language disempowers parents who are navigating the special
education identification process, it fosters distance. When language is used in a way that stratifies, confuses, intimidates, or overpowers minoritized parents it can lead to situations where parents are excluded from conversations, and from the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process.

Special education identification, both as an ideological superstructure and system of procedures, has associated with it, certain linguistic parameters. These parameters require parents to be proficient in English, to one degree or another, although this depends on how much support (such as interpretation and translation services) is provided. Parents need to possess syntactic and vocabulary levels that correspond to those employed by school personnel with whom they dialogue. They also need to recognize and understand the ideas and nuances associated with Ontario’s special education sub-language. Additionally, parents need to be able to resist linguistic persuasion when it is applied by school and board personnel. When parents do not possess these skills they are in danger of encountering situations of exclusion in Ontario’s identification process.

**Positioning**

Speaking with minoritized parents about their interactions with educators, administrators, and other school board personnel often led to the subject of positioning. Depending on the individuals and circumstances involved, parents positioned themselves, were positioned by others, or experienced a combination of the two. When parents attempted to break out of the way in which others envisioned their role in the identification process, a degree of tension emerged.
While the topic of positioning was not always discussed directly in our interviews, the parents I either met, or learned about, detailed social interactions where positioning was pervasive. Analyzing these conversations has led me to realize that the way in which people position themselves, are positioned by others, or experience a combination of the two, can form a significant part of their special education identification, placement, and program delivery experience. Ultimately, it can impact on how parents are included in (or excluded from) the process. With this in mind, positioning solidified as a third key theme in the data I collected and analyzed.

Within the larger strand of positioning, five central sub-themes surfaced in the data coding and analysis process, and they are as follows:

- What is positioning?
- De jure positioning;
- De facto positioning;
- Alternative positioning; and
- Role conflict.

What is Positioning?

Before delving into the question of how positioning emerged in my data, I should articulate a clear definition of what positioning is and what it entails within the parameters of this paper. I view positioning as the act of performing a role, or simultaneously performing different roles, in a given social situation. While people may actively choose to take on particular roles, choice may not always be available and in such scenarios individuals would be assigned ascribed roles. Because social situations are, by their nature, interactive, so is the process of positioning. In this sense, positioning
is relational, as an individual’s position always connects to, and is partly shaped by, the positions of others.

Positioning itself is also a constantly shifting (and sometimes subjective) force within the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. Exploring dimensions of family involvement in Sweden’s special education system led Bjorck-Akesson and Granlund (1995) to observe, “Assumptions about best practices are changing in relation to increased parent involvement, and new demands on professional roles and skills are put forward” (p. 520). Reflecting on the experiences of one African-American mother, Rogers (2003) noted:

Even though the school system had not served June well, she still believed in and valued the institution of schooling for her children. This belief can be located in various domains of language—including how June understands the institution of schooling and how she positions herself within that institution. (p. 155)

Because Ontario’s identification process involves ongoing social interactions, such as informal conversations, formal meetings, and parent-school correspondence, those who participate in the process are in a constant state of positioning and repositioning. Three key questions a parent participating in the identification process might ask are as follows:

- What is my role in this process?
- How does my role connect to the roles of others?
- How does my role lead me to interact with others?

Positioning can be institutional, or formal, in nature. Institutionally, one’s role can derive from parameters that are codified within an organization. Because codified structures, such as policies and regulations shape positions that are de jure in nature, they
act as a sort of conduit, ascribing roles to individuals. Considering the deeper implications of this situation, de Carvalho (2000) notes:

Institutionalization, meaning autonomization through delegation, implies a series of interrelated features … It imposes homogeneity, orthodoxy, and routinization of the work, insofar as the institutional demands related to the reproduction of the conditions for the continual exercise of the pedagogic work (whatever the habitus to be inculcated, and whatever the field). (p. 89)

But positioning is not always formal. It can also be informal, or interpretive. One’s position can derive from the subjective process of interpreting an organization’s policies and regulations. In these cases, authority would solidify into positions that are de facto in nature.

Positioning can be an active process and it can also be passive. In situations where an individual positions himself/herself, that individual is actively involved in forming his/her own role. Alternatively, individuals can have their role shaped by the words and/or actions of others. Such situations exemplify the process of passive positioning. While active and passive positioning may on the surface seem to co-exist in a state of binary opposition, they do not. Individuals may at once experience both active and passive positioning. At times this leads to situations of role conflict, which I explore in further detail below.

When considering positioning, there is also the aspect of sex and gender identity. All four parents I interviewed were women. Writing about parental inclusion from a female perspective, de Carvalho (2000) notes:

home-school relations are broadly and specifically built into gender-differentiated parenting roles. In the absence of collective or state responsibility, mothers are usually the sole responsible parent for children during preschool years (prior to the age of compulsory schooling), before and after school hours daily, and during school breaks and vacations,
which do not coincide with the length of the working day and working year. (p. 105)

While none of the mothers spoke directly about how their sex and gender identities contributed to their interactions with school personnel, where administrators were predominantly men, it is entirely possible that these aspects of identity contributed to how they were treated and positioned in the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process.

**De Jure Positioning**

As previously mentioned, one’s position within social interactions can be shaped, or ascribed, by codified policies and regulations. Indeed, within Ontario’s identification process a variety of roles are set out by the Ministry of Education. Individuals who take on these roles carry with them a degree of institutional authority, or de jure positioning.

De jure roles arose in a number of interviews I conducted and this aspect of role-playing impacted on parent experiences in a variety of ways. Because a number of different tasks need to be carried out in order for a child to be identified, placed, and receive special education programming, there are many possible roles people can assume in the process, including:

- Determining situations where support is needed;
- Identifying specific needs; and
- Deciding on how to supporting needs.

Early on in the special education identification and placement process, learners are put forward as candidates for identification and/or special education support. As outlined by Ontario’s Ministry of Education, teachers (as they deliver Ministry-generated curriculum) are ascribed the role of assessing students. When parents counter a teacher’s
judgment in this area, as Zawadi and Beatrice did, a role conflict arises (as explored in more detail elsewhere in this chapter) and parental inclusion becomes threatened.

According to the Ministry of Education, school board psychologists are partly responsible for identifying specific academic needs in learners (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006d). They are expected to determine these needs by conducting psycho-educational assessments (which may include such instruments as WISC-IV, NNAT, and Otis-Lennon). In this sense, psychologists operate in a position of institutional authority within the special education identification and placement process.

In sum, Ministry parameters assign a variety of roles that, with the buttress of codification, solidify as de jure positions, in the special education identification and placement process. These de jure roles, as outlined above, can impact profoundly on the shape of inclusion and/or exclusion in a parent’s experience. Both Anoushka and Beatrice learned through their disagreements with school board personnel that parents do not possess enough authority to adequately counter the views of those who, through de jure positioning, hold positions of institutional authority. After receiving the results of the second stage her son’s gifted assessment, Anoushka contacted a special education teacher at Ravi’s school and asked questions about how the assessment was implemented and interpreted. To Anoushka, the fire drill interruption and the cutoff score both raised questions of clarity. In articulating these concerns, Anoushka encountered opposition and she was told that she could pay for a private psycho-educational assessment if she wanted her son to receive further assessment. It was only through persistence and contacting additional school board personnel that Anoushka’s questions were eventually looked into. Beatrice sought to contribute to the development and an Individual
Education Plan (IEP) for her first daughter. Initially, she wanted an IEP to be created to address her daughter’s ADHD exceptionality. But Beatrice was informed that as long as Julie remained in French Immersion, she would not have an IEP. Later, after Julie was removed from the French Immersion program, and an IEP was developed, Beatrice wanted Julie’s IEP to reflect her dual gifted-ADHD designation. This required ongoing communications initiated by Beatrice over a lengthy period of time. Like Anoushka, Beatrice’s requests were initially disregarded by school personnel and it was only after her persistent efforts that her concerns were addressed. In both cases, parents faced challenges when their views differed from people in de jure positions of authority.

**De Facto Positioning**

As previously mentioned, codified policies and regulations can at times, be interpreted by individuals in different ways. This interpretation process, which is subjective in nature, fosters situations where policy interpreters in effect become policy creators (Lipsky, 1980). In these instances, positions that are de facto in nature solidify. Reflecting on their experiences with the identification and placement process, the parents with whom I spoke detailed a number of instances where de facto positions arose. These de facto positions impacted on the parents in different ways as they engaged, or in some cases attempted to engage, in the process.

De facto positioning impacted on Anoushka in a situation previously described in this chapter. In this scenario, a teacher informed Anoushka, as she waited for her son’s IPRC meeting to commence, that she did not need to attend the meeting and suggested that she leave the school. Here, the educator viewed parental participation at an IPRC as being unnecessary. More generally, this educator interpreted Ministry IPRC regulations
in a particular way, and then relayed his interpretation to the parent. The teacher employed persuasive language, and also assumed the de facto role of policy interpreter, or expert. While Anoushka stood her ground and chose to stay and attend the meeting, the teacher’s attempts to dissuade her from doing so were exclusionary.

In Hana’s situation, an administrator’s actions exhibited de facto positioning in a way that fostered surface inclusion. As previously mentioned, early in the 2008-2009 school year, the principal of Abbey Road Public School telephoned Hana, invited her to attend a meeting regarding her daughter, and then encouraged her to put forward a certain line of argument at the meeting. While the administrator took this course of action because both he and Hana wanted to increase Sun’s level of EA support at the school, he took on the de facto role of acting as a parent strategy advisor. In assuming this role, the principal engendered a dynamic of surface inclusion. Before continuing with Hana’s narrative, I will briefly outline how I conceptualize surface inclusion. Unlike rich inclusion, surface inclusion involves situations where an individual is invited to take on a participatory role that is more symbolic than interactive. Asking a parent to approve a decision (such as agreeing to a particular program placement), rather than contribute to a decision is an example of this. I would describe Hana’s situation here as being one of surface inclusion because the principal in no way sought out Hana’s input. Rather, he provided her with advice, assuming she would then follow his instructions at the meeting regarding Sun’s placement and level of classroom support.

De facto roles, or positioning, impacted on the experiences of parents with whom I spoke in a variety of ways. In the scenarios I outlined above, de facto role-playing fostered situations of exclusion and surface inclusion.
**Alternative Positioning**

Beyond the realms of de jure positioning and de facto role-playing, individuals may counter roles that, in one way or another, are ascribed, with an alternative. At times, individuals may counter the parameters of their position in terms of de jure parameters. Other times, individuals may counter parameters that are de facto in nature. Circumstances where parents countered roles they had been assigned, arose in a number of the stories I heard. Within this paper, I will refer to parental counter-roles as alternative positioning.

While school board personnel, assuming positions of institutional authority, may attempt to assign/ascribe roles to parents, it is not a given that parents will accept these roles. Parents may envision different roles for themselves; and, in having their own idea of what their role entails within the identification, placement, and program delivery process, parents may reshape their position within the process.

Two key questions relating to the matter of alternative positioning are as follows:

- What are different ways in which parents conceptualize their roles in the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process?
- What happens when parents attempt to break out of ascribed roles and take on alternative roles?

In questioning the school’s decision to halt her son’s identification process, Anoushka attempted to take on the role of interpreter of assessments. This led to a conflict of sorts between Anoushka and the school resource teacher, and only Anoushka’s persistence (by involving someone at the school board head office) led to action. Advocating for the creation and implementation of IEPs for both of her
daughters, Beatrice attempted to take on the role of co-determiner of a child’s support framework, IEP co-creator, and IPRC requestor. Similarly, in asking for additional classroom support for her autistic daughter, Hana also attempted to take on the role of co-determiner of her child’s support framework.

Role Conflict

Role conflicts arise in a variety of circumstances. For instance, a role conflict may occur when two (or more) individuals cannot agree on how their roles should intermingle in a given social interaction, or scenario. One may also arise when an individual attempts to ascribe another’s role within a particular context. If such a role conflict emerges within a decision-making process, the process itself can be adversely impacted.

In the stories I heard from four parents and one youth worker, role conflicts arose in a number of different ways. One aspect of all of these conflicts was an undercurrent of exclusion. While feelings of exclusion sometimes led parents to take issue with their assigned roles, the very act of taking issue with an assigned role would itself sometimes lead to feelings of exclusion. In this way, instances of role conflict operated as both a producer and product of exclusion.

For Zawadi, role conflict solidified as the following question: Whose role is it to determine whether or not a child should be put forward for gifted assessment? While none of Nabila’s teachers nominated her for gifted assessment, Zawadi felt that assessment would have been appropriate. Because Zawadi never questioned whose role it was to put a child forward for assessment, however, her role conflict was never discussed with educators or administrators at Midtown Public School. Nevertheless, a
conflict did exist, and it ultimately contributed to a child being removed from the public school system.

In the previous segment of this chapter, I detailed circumstances where Anoushka, Beatrice, and Hana countered roles school personnel had ascribed. They did this by attempting to assume alternative roles. But in all three cases, as outlined below, when parents countered ascribed roles conflict arose and inclusion diminished. In Anoushka’s case, role conflict led to disagreement between the mother and Mrs. Wilcox, a resource teacher at her son’s school. Ultimately, the resource teacher simply ended their conversation and advised Anoushka to contact a supervisor at the board office. For Beatrice, disagreement was followed by inaction and unresponsive replies, and this in turn compelled the mother to cite regulations (in relation to her parental rights) in order to encourage action at her daughters’ school. When administration at Eastend Elementary became aware that Beatrice understood her rights relating to IPRC requests, Liz’s identification process commenced. In Hana’s case, a disagreement arose between parents and a special education consultant at a parent-school meeting. During the meeting, Hana’s rationale for additional support for her daughter was repeatedly and summarily downplayed by a special education consultant. Ultimately, an emotional climax at that meeting, where Hana voiced concerns about Sun’s safety and inquired about the school’s/board’s responsibility in this realm, prompted Anjelica (the special education consultant) to commit to a specific safety/support plan.

**Final Thoughts on Positioning**

The dimension of positioning arose as a key theme in the data I gathered. Simply put, the way in which people perform roles in the special education identification and
placement process impacts on how they are included in (and/or excluded from) the process. Within the larger strand of positioning were five sub-themes, which, as previously mentioned, included: positioning itself; de jure positioning; de facto positioning; alternative positioning; and role conflict. While in the excerpt below Stone (1988) reflects on how students are systemically positioned by school systems, I would extend this scenario to include minoritized parents:

Dominant groups in every society inculcate values and attitudes that help preserve their position, and they do this without obvious apparatus of centralized control. Schools perform this function without any centralized curriculum planning … and without direct political control over the composition of school boards and the hiring of teachers. Schools are bureaucratic organizations that socialize their captive students, whatever else goes on in the process called education. They convey a “hidden curriculum” that teaches students about obedience to authority, about social stratification according to ascriptive ability characteristics, and about discipline, orderliness, and the subordination of serve to central schedules. (Stone, 257-258)

Studying socio-economic dimensions of parent-school interactions in the realm of special education, Todd (2003) noted, “Research suggests that dissatisfaction with professionals, and differences between parents’ and professionals’ priorities and assumptions of their relationships, have remained common experiences over the last 30 years” (p. 282).

**Philosophy**

Conversing with minoritized parents about their experiences with Ontario’s special education processes led to a topic I will refer to as philosophy. Before exploring various sub-themes associated with this strand, however, I will articulate how I conceptualize philosophy as a dimension of social interactions. To one degree or another, one’s philosophy of life permeates all social situations. Our philosophy of the world shapes how we interpret our surroundings and choose our actions. As individuals,
we all have a particular philosophy, which in a sense exists as a composite of our multilayered perspectives. Because our layered perspectives of the world change over time, our philosophy is in a perpetual state of flux. While this flux can be dramatic it can also be subtle. Glancing at a dictionary, philosophy is sometimes defined as, “a theory or attitude that guides one’s behaviour” (Oxford University Press, 2008). It is this idea of a value-based system of ideas that I will use to further detail my concept of philosophy.

Being social creatures, our philosophies are in part influenced by the outlooks of others. This is especially true when a philosophy is, in one way or another, popularized. Marxism provides an example of this. Marxism is a particular philosophy that has influenced the philosophy of many individuals in our world. But while a philosophy becomes popularized it also simultaneously becomes fractured. Let’s return to the idea of Marxism. While Marxism represents a school of thought that carries with it certain key ideas, Marxism itself does not exist as a universalized collective of ideas. In other words, while there are central premises to a Marxist view of the world, the philosophy itself can be, and indeed is, conceptualized in a great many ways. In sum, while I would argue that no two individuals have precisely the same philosophy, we can (and indeed do) hold areas of commonality. In this way, we function simultaneously as individuals and collectives.

Philosophy, as a theme, was conspicuous in the data I collected. This is because so much of special education, and indeed identification, relies on a centralized system of values (I discuss this aspect of special education from a different perspective in the knowledge section of this chapter). As previously mentioned, beneath the surface of special education policies, regulations, and procedures are interlocking pools of
knowledge, which are subjective. These interlocking pools form interconnected value-based systems of ideas, which in turn provide the foundation of the special education superstructure at any given moment. Reflecting on this concept of philosophy prompted me to consider the following question as I collected and analyzed data: How do minoritized parents intermingle with Ontario’s special education system of ideas?

In examining African-American representation in special education programs in the United States, Kearns, Ford, and Linney (2005) documented a number of situations where a parent’s ethno-racial knowledge conflicted with that of a school board. Similarly, Lai and Ishiyama (2004) noted numerous instances where ethno-cultural views within the Chinese-Canadian community diverged from those of school boards.

Minoritized parents I interviewed at times spoke about the philosophy implicit in Ontario’s special education organization. They also, whether directly or indirectly, spoke about their own philosophies (in terms of ideas, such as public schooling, intelligence, intelligence measurement, support, programming, and so on). While parents did not always speak directly about their own philosophy, their actions provided an indication of their views. At times, the overarching philosophy, or value-based network of ideas, that forms the core of Ontario’s special education organization clashed with the philosophies of parents. From the stories I heard from minoritized parents, it was evident that a parent’s philosophy can impact profoundly how he/she is included in, and/or excluded from, the identification, placement, and program delivery process.

Within the larger theme of philosophy in this research study, the following three sub-themes arose in the data:

- What is the dominant special education philosophy in Ontario?
Philosophical concessions and special education philosophy; and

Clashing philosophy.

**What is the Dominant Special Education Philosophy in Ontario?**

Before I begin to explore specific examples of how a dominant special education outlook emerged within the data I gathered, I will review my definition of philosophy. Philosophies, as value-based systems of ideas, can be held by individuals and can also be held by collectives. When collectives hold value-based systems of ideas, the systems, to one degree or another, become fractured. Considering the impact of collectives on a policy decision-making process, for instance, Stone notes (1988) notes,

> Changing the membership of decision-making bodies, then may give new groups a chance to shape policy. But these new groups and their representatives protect only some of their own interests, and certainly not everybody’s interests. Under the new regime, there will be other interests now squeezed out, or still neglected, and some of them will eventually press for change. Someone will be dominant in the new arena, too. The shift does not eliminate conflict, only restructures it. The representational mechanism never works out quite as automatically as predicted, and political conflict comes in new forms” (p. 295)

Inherent in Ontario’s special education organization are a number of interconnected ideas, which collectively form a composite, systemic philosophy. Two key premises behind special education in Ontario include:

- Continuum; and

- The interlocked ideas of exceptionality and measurement.

The first special education premise I will consider is the continuum. Key to Ontario’s special education ideological framework is the premise of an age-based intelligence/behaviour continuum. This idea is two-pronged. First, there is the assumption that a normative intelligence/behaviour range of skills/abilities exists, and
theoretically can be employed to objectively delineate between normal and abnormal
intelligence/behaviour. Second, there is the connected notion, which holds that this
intelligence/behaviour continuum can be linked to various ages, or steps in a child’s
growth, a view present in such perspectives as Piaget’s well-known child development
theory. In sum, a foundational component of special education asserts that there exists a
universalized, and bounded, set of cognitive/affective skills and behaviours that are age
based in nature. Some, however, would counter that the implications of such a system of
ideas constructs a paradigm where subjective practices are enacted under the guise of
objectivity. Foucault would describe this system as a regime of truth (Haugaard, 1997, p.
69).

In addition to shaping special education, on a more general level, this age-based
intelligence/behaviour continuum grounds Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum
expectations. It is conceptualized as a gauge that is at once impartial and measureable.
Within this ideological superstructure, exceptionality is regarded as being a matter of
pure science, or truth.

The prevalence of a universalized age-based performance continuum was evident
in a number of the stories I heard from participants. When Anoushka’s son outperformed
the curriculum, he exceeded the expectations of a normalized age-based continuum, and
this is why he was put forward as a candidate for giftedness. Similarly, at various
instances in their public school careers, Julie and Liz outperformed the expectations of the
Ontario curriculum, and this is why Beatrice and Daniel were ultimately able to have the
two put forward for gifted assessment. As these two narratives indicate, the notion of a
universalized range of normal and abnormal performance ultimately determined whether
or not three children (Ravi, Julie, and Liz) would be nominated for the identification process. For some unknown reason, in a different circumstance, although Nabila consistently performed above the expectations of her grade level in every subject area, she was never put forward for gifted assessment.

Exceptionality and measurement represents the second special education premise I will consider. As previously mentioned, prevalent in Ontario schools is the assumption that the way in which classes presently operate (with teachers delivering and assessing performance in relation to a Ministry-generated set of age-based curriculum expectations) enables educators to identify children who are exceptional, or to put it mathematically, abnormal. But curriculum, tested through continuous educational assessment, is not the only gauge employed to assess and measure a child’s performance/skills. As outlined in Policy/Program Memorandum Number 8, which lists “learning disabilities” as its subject (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006d), other diagnostic procedures include detailed health assessment, social/family history, and psychological assessment.

One of these procedures, the psychological assessment, carries with it a certain prominence, as school board psychologists assume a role of intelligence expert. According to Policy/Program Memorandum Number 59, which focuses on “the psychological testing and assessment of pupils”, those employed by school boards across the province must follow certain parameters whenever using a derivative of the word psychology. In the words of the Ministry of Education, “any service described by the use of the words “psychological”, “psychologist”, or “psychology” should be offered only under the supervision of or by a duly registered psychologist” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006e). By utilizing a variety of assessment instruments, purported to be
objective and accurate, psychologists assess children in relation to a variety of performance/skill areas, including verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning, processing speed, and working memory (Weiss, Saklofske, Prifitera, & Holdnack, 2006, p. 78). A child’s abilities in different performance/skill areas are then calculated in terms of percentiles and standard deviations (or distances from a centre) on a normalized scale.

Two key interlocked ideas associated with this way of conducting intelligence testing are as follows:

- Intelligence is measureable; and
- Intelligence is measureable in an objective way.

Ravi, Julie, and Liz stepped through the threshold of special education identification, because they performed in a particular way, and their performance was interpreted and measured in a particular way, by school board psychologists. Conversely, because Nabila never took an assessment, and although she seemed to outperform grade-level expectations in all subject areas, she was never identified as being a gifted learner.

**Philosophical Concessions and Special Education Philosophy**

Speaking to minoritized parents about their experiences with Ontario’s identification procedure, led me to reflect on ways in which the province’s special education superstructure, as a system of ideas, leads to situations of compliance. The question of compliance arose in a number of the narratives participants shared with me. It formed a sub-theme of the larger strand of philosophy.

Specific questions I contemplated in relation to the dimension of concessions were as follows:
• What happens when minoritized parents encounter the complex and interlocked system of ideas that forms Ontario’s special education organization?
• How does this interaction lead to instances of philosophical concessions?

Anoushka, for instance, complied with a variety of special education-oriented ideas as she interacted with school board personnel. Specifically, she accepted the ideas of giftedness, a normative range, and psycho-educational assessment as a means of pinpointing one’s level of intelligence.

Philosophical concessions took on a different shape in Zawadi’s narrative. Listening to Zawadi recall her interactions with Midtown Elementary, I became aware of a scenario where a mother wanted her daughter to be assessed for giftedness. The daughter had experienced phenomenal academic success throughout her years in the public school system. Over a period of years, Zawadi waited for Nabila’s classroom teachers to put her daughter forward as a candidate for gifted assessment. In a sense, Zawadi complied with the idea that it is a teacher’s role to deem whether or not a child should be put forward as a candidate for the gifted program.

Making philosophical concessions was also a key element in Hana’s situation. As detailed elsewhere in this chapter, prior to the SST meeting Hana and Hansol attended early in the 2008-2009 school year, the principal of Abbey Road Public School called Hana and recommended that she attend the meeting. He also advised her to express her concern for Sun’s safety at the meeting. The administrator stressed to Hana that focusing on the matter of safety would raise the probability of increasing Sun’s amount of EA support. While Hana’s aim corresponded with that of the administrator (as both were interested in having the amount of EA support in Sun’s classroom increased), one cannot
discount the aspect of compliance in this situation, as Hana accepted and then put into practice the suggestions of the principal.

The narratives explored above illustrate how parents may accept, or concede to, philosophical ideas associated with special education, and/or school and board personnel, in different ways. It is possible, however, that the desirability of a particular exceptionality or special education program, such as giftedness/gifted, could foster a dynamic of converging interests and move parents to make philosophical concessions.

**Clashing Philosophies**

Clashes may arise in instances where parents hold views that conflict with those of the either Ontario’s special education superstructure, or individuals who (in positions of institutional authority) interpret special education.

These philosophical clashes may stem from a variety of root causes, including:

- Differing opinions;
- Conflicting knowledge sources and/or ways of interpreting shared knowledge sources; and
- Conflicting ethno-racial and/or ethno-cultural perspectives.

In situations where there is a difference of opinion, parents and school personnel hold conflicting perspectives about elements of special education. Conflicting perspectives in turn complicate the process of collaborative decision-making.

Recalling her experiences with special education, both as a student and as a parent, Beatrice informed me that she and her husband strongly opposed the idea and practice of placing children in self-contained classrooms. Rather than using the official term, self-contained classes, Beatrice used the term, segregated classes. Because the
Quimbys did not believe self-contained programs offer a viable means of supporting learners’ needs, significant tensions arose when it came time to agree upon a placement that would best suit the needs of their daughters, who had been diagnosed ADD and ADHA and identified as gifted. Ultimately, Beatrice and Daniel compromised and agreed to have Julie and Liz placed in self-contained gifted classrooms.

Clashes may also arise in situations where differences in perspective stem from ethno-cultural dimensions. According to Zawadi, immigrant parents may, depending on their experiences, hold tremendously different views of the role of a parent and the role of a school. While some parents may come from a culture, or social framework, where parents are expected to be highly involved in a school community, and a child’s school life, other parents may come from a context where there is more of a distance between parents and educators. To illustrate this point, Zawadi told me about her own experiences as a Kenyan-Canadian. As she recalled, public schooling in Kenya, fosters a dynamic where parents entrust their children to schools and then leave the academic aspects of education to the school. Raising her daughter in Toronto, Zawadi came to believe that this sort of dynamic would not work in an Ontario context. As a result, Zawadi became closely involved in Nabila’s education, taking on a supportive role at home and volunteer role in the school. During our interview, Zawadi speculated that not all parents would come to this realization, and consequently would never become as involved as they could be in their child’s school community, and this could arise in such aspects of a child’s education as the special education identification and placement process.
Final Thoughts on Philosophy

Ontario’s superstructure of special education identification, placement, and program delivery has, associated with it, a certain perspective, or rather pool of interconnected perspectives, of the world. As previously outlined, these ideas include the concept of an age-based intelligence/behavioural continuum, which theoretically makes it possible to objectively determine if a child’s performance and/or skills fall inside or outside a particular normative range. These predominantly objectivist ideas at times lead to situations of acceptance where parents comply with the prevailing cumulative philosophy of special education. In other situations, however, parents put forward views that clash with the ideologies that dominate Ontario’s special education organization. “On the symbolic level,” de Carvalho (2000) notes, “the meanings parents assign to school knowledge, experiences, and credentials are related in complex ways to family history, current life situation, and aspirations” (p. 100). As outlined above, in circumstances of conflicting philosophies, inclusion can diminish considerably.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the stories I have gathered from four minoritized parents has led me to consider four dimensions of inclusion and/or exclusion within Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. These themes include knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy, and within each dimension are a number of interlocking subthemes. Carlos’ reflections illustrated how special education can lead to very different circumstances in terms of transparency and inclusion when parents receive outside support.
While there is a clear relationship between these four dimensions of minoritized parents’ interactions with school board personnel and the degree and shape of parents’ inclusion within that process, the implications of this impact have not yet been discussed. The following chapter, entitled Discussion, will delve into this matter and, in doing so, consider the larger question of what this study means for both education in Ontario and the realm of theory, practice, and indeed policy.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The previous two chapters detail and analyze data gathered in this research study. In this concluding chapter I reflect on the implications of these findings. More specifically, I consider ways in which Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery model might be restructured with the aim of fostering a dynamic that is more transparent and inclusive.

In the initial sections of the chapter I explain why a shift in policy is needed, by outlining how I conceptualize special education in Ontario as something that exists on an inclusion/exclusion and transparency/opaqueness continuum (see Table 3). In the latter segments of the chapter I outline a complex network of policy pathways (see Figure 3) along with their associated repercussions. This discussion chapter is divided into the following five sections:

- The Inclusion/Exclusion, Transparency/Opaqueness Continuum;
- Policy Pathways;
- Policy Complications;
- Implications of Study; and
- Conclusion.

The Inclusion/Exclusion, Transparency/Opaqueness Continuum

Ontario’s public school system offers special education so that students might access modes of support that offer a more intensive and individualized form of program delivery (Weber & Bennett, 2004). Within this framework is a formal process of
identifying and placing learners in special education programs. A description of this procedure is detailed in my Introduction chapter (and visually represented in Figure 1).

Rather than exploring inclusion from a student oriented program delivery perspective, I have investigated how minoritized parents experience layers of inclusion and exclusion within Ontario’s identification, placement, and program delivery process. The interlocked dimensions of inclusion and exclusion are central to this research study. As outlined in the Data Analysis chapter, transparency and opaqueness arose as an imposing force, and layer of tension, within each of the four key data themes, namely knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy. Within this dynamic, issues of opaqueness fostered higher degrees of exclusion for the parents with whom I spoke.

If we could take the elements of inclusion/exclusion and transparency/opaqueness and place Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process as experienced by the parents in this study on a continuum, what would it look like? This idea is visually represented in the graphic below (see Table 3).
### Table 3: The Inclusion/Exclusion, Transparency/Opaqueness Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion / Transparency</td>
<td>In this context, minoritized parent(s) predominantly encounter exclusion within the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. Conversations are not interactive and involvement is not meaningful (i.e. parents do not contribute to decisions). At the same time, the process unfolds in such a way that parents are clearly aware of special education oriented knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Inclusion / Transparency</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Imagine the Inclusion/Exclusion, Transparency/Opaqueness Continuum as a Cartesian coordinate system. As visible in Table 3, the system I have developed is not quantified, as the continuum does not include numbers. But a continuum does not necessarily require precise quantification. While I use this coordinate system analogy to visually depict the interlocked dimensions of inclusion/exclusion and transparency/opaqueness as existing on a spectrum, I have not attempted to employ criteria to quantify parental experiences or place school communities on that continuum. Consequently, Table 3 represents the presence and/or absence of two dimensions of minoritized parents’ experiences with inclusion/exclusion on the x-axis and transparency/opaqueness on the y-axis.

Although this coordinate system appears to lead us into a mode of binary opposition, this is not the case. Parents’ experiences could involve all four dimensions of inclusion, exclusion, transparency, and opaqueness. A minoritized parent might, for instance, face barriers associated with opaqueness and exclusion yet also, encounter instances of transparency and inclusion. Certainly this was the case for Anoushka and Hana who encountered some school personnel who conversed in an open and friendly way and other personnel who conversed in a convoluted and/or confrontational manner. While Mrs. Wilcox (a resource teacher) did not clarify matters about the identification procedure for Anoushka, Mrs. Rosie (who worked at the board office) answered a range of questions and also offered suggestions. Similarly, although Sun’s teacher never explained the parameters of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to Hana, the Principal of Abbey Road Public School engaged her in a detailed conversation about an upcoming meeting they were both scheduled to attend (also see Chapters 4 and 5).
In the top half of the Cartesian coordinate system minoritized parents encounter knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy within special education identification, placement, and program delivery in a predominantly transparent way. In the bottom half, minoritized parents experience the procedure in a manner that is generally opaque. On the right side, parents encounter the process in a largely exclusionary way while on the left side they encounter the procedure in manner that is essentially inclusionary. This visual enables us to perceive four general, but distinct, possibilities within special education identification, placement, and program delivery in Ontario.

But how are we to place the four parents interviewed in this research study on this continuum?

All four parents I interviewed – Anoushka, Zawadi, Beatrice, and Hana – experienced considerable, ongoing issues of opaqueness and exclusion. So did Carlos, the youth engagement worker. While Anoushka did not understand the steps in her son’s gifted assessment procedure, Zawadi never even knew how she could request gifted assessment for her daughter. While Beatrice was dissuaded from requesting the development of an IEP for her daughters, Hana never even found out that her daughter had an IEP, let alone what one was. Ontario’s special education model clearly fosters situations where minoritized parents are sometimes excluded from all of the major stages in the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process (see Figure 1). But if forces connected to knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy presently impede transparency and inclusion within special education, how are we to rethink policy in order to diminish, and indeed strive to eliminate, opaqueness and exclusion?
Policy Pathways

While conducting this study a number of people asked me: “Who is your audience?” I have returned to this question a number of times throughout the research and writing process, fully realizing that I could direct this paper to a variety of audiences. If I were writing for administrators, for instance, I might ask: How should special education identification, placement, and program delivery policy be interpreted by school leadership in ways to enrich the inclusion of minoritized parents? Alternatively, if I were writing for educators, my central question could be: How should policy be interpreted by teachers to make special education knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy more transparent and inclusive? While I certainly hope this paper offers insights to administrators and educators, I have conducted the study primarily for policymakers.

Before considering policy pathways, I need to reflect on the matter of generalizability (which I discuss in some detail in Chapter 3). Having read the previous paragraph some readers might wonder how I can possibly make recommendations on the basis of findings from five people familiar with the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. To this I have three responses. First, rather than making a specific set of policy recommendations I offer speculations on different pathways policymakers might take and, in doing so, consider their associated outcomes. Second, the change scenarios I outline are targeted at the particular parents in this research study and those in similar situations; which is why I present enriched forms of transparency and inclusion as being desirable goals. Third, it is very likely that there are other parents who are in the same situation as my participants. As indicated in the Literature Review chapter of this paper (see Chapter 2), minoritized parents of special
education children in Canada encounter a system of unbalanced representation (Wright, 1971; Deosaran, 1976; Wright and Tsuji, 1984; Cheng, Tsuji, Yau, & Ziegler, 1987; Cheng, Yau, & Ziegler, 1993; Braithwaite & James, 1996) and face ethno-cultural and/or linguistic barriers which at times diminish their involvement in special education processes (Lai & Ishiyama, 200; Kalyanpur, 1998).

Special education policy in Ontario presently fosters situations where minoritized parents face challenges stemming from issues of exclusion and opaqueness in the realms of knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy. Because I view policy itself as a central part of this problem, I do not believe that a solution is purely a matter of interpretation (i.e. interpret in a more transparent and inclusive manner). I do not write this to diminish policy interpretation, but rather to focus on the core of the issue. Policy is the zero point. In setting out rules, procedures, and regulations, policy is where everyone – parents, educators, and policymakers alike – begin. That said; policy is extremely complex.

In the Special Education Policy Network (see Figure 3) I illustrate a way of perceiving special education policy pathways (or approaches) along with their associated implications (or effects and outcomes). More specifically, the Policy Network indicates how approaches to modifying special education identification, placement, and program delivery policy could travel along four general pathways in terms of inclusion/exclusion and transparency/opaqueness. Following each branch, the paths extend into effects and outcomes. In a general way, as the fourth branch illustrates, special education policy in Ontario can potentially continue to contribute to exclusion and opaqueness.
Alternatively, it can veer into one of the other three pathways, as depicted in the top three branches.

**Figure 3: Special Education Policy Network**

While the Special Education Policy Network illustrates four pathways, within each of the branches there exists a multiplicity of possibilities. As a consequence, this graphic is not meant to depict four specific alternatives but rather general approaches and their associated effects and outcomes. Consequently, the Policy Network functions as a lens through which we view policy as it might exist in the future. It enables us to consider how policy decisions might impact on school communities in terms of a very real Inclusion/Exclusion, Transparency/Opaqueness Continuum that is experienced by minoritized parents who are in similar circumstances as the parents in this study.
Within the Special Education Policy Network, I use the word *conflict* in each of the four pathways. I do not perceive conflict as something that is purely positive or negative. Rather, I view it as something that arises in situations where people disagree and there is a venue for that disagreement to be articulated and discussed. For disagreement and articulation to unfold there would have to be a sense of awareness (in individuals and groups) and a forum for dialogue (in the opportunity for discussion). In the following eight subsections, I outline various scenarios that indicate how special education policy could take on aspects of transparency, opaqueness, inclusion, and exclusion along the Special Education Policy Network.

**Transparency, Inclusion, and Special Education Knowledge**

All four parents I interviewed were not aware of the objectivist foundation of special education knowledge in Ontario. To foster more awareness in this realm of special education, the Ministry could actively work to initiate dialogue on the subject of the objectivist-oriented leaning of the province’s special education organization. So, although objectivism, as a knowledge foundation, could be retained, it could exist in a more transparent state. Various knowledge management strategies could be utilized to facilitate this form of transparency, including:

- Providing additional, interactive information at Ministry and school board websites;
- Developing printed materials with the intent of sharing information about special education knowledge;
- Scheduling and facilitating interactive information sessions at schools and community centres; and
• Offering interviews between parents and school board personnel for the purpose of sharing information (such as school board psychologists, consultants, administrators, and educators).

There are many possible ways of structuring knowledge management to enrich parental awareness, as outlined below. Different outcomes could stem from a move towards more dialogue on the interlocked topics of knowledge and objectivism. For one, transparency would be enriched. At the same time, however, subjectivist/objectivist clashes could arise in situations where parents (who lean towards subjectivist knowledge) become more aware of the objectivist nature of special education in Ontario.

The act of enriching knowledge management in the realm of special education is not a simple matter. In the space below, I reflect on six potential dimensions connected to the act of initiating change in the arena of knowledge management, including:

• Interest in reducing informal knowledge (sources);
• Working to enrich or diminish partnerships;
• Reworking both printed and virtual materials (resources);
• Facilitating more face-to-face interactions;
• The matter of perspective; and
• The question of budgeting.

First, there is the question of intent. Ontario’s Ministry of Education could actively work to enhance special education knowledge management with the aim of maintaining, or enriching, the presence of informal knowledge sources across the province. Elsewhere in this paper I define informal knowledge sources as organizations and/or tools that function in a knowledge management fashion, but operate outside an
organization. The LDAO and ABC, for instance, are not formally associated with school boards but function as a source of knowledge and support for parents. While these organizations may inform parents about conceptual and logistical aspects of special education in Ontario, they may also take a more active role (i.e. as participants in IPRC meetings). For the Ministry and school boards to enrich informal knowledge sources, they would have to actively work with informal knowledge management organizations to rework their own knowledge management structures. Complications associated with this approach would link to the following questions:

- If organizations are going to be involved in revamping special education knowledge management within the Ministry of Education and school boards, which organizations should (or should not) be involved in this process?
- How should this decision be approached?
- How might this decision lead to conflicts?
- What might those conflicts be?
- How could this decision impact on the dynamics of parental inclusion in the identification, placement, and program delivery process?

Second, there is the aspect of partnerships. Schools and school boards could involve informal knowledge sources in the process of enriching knowledge management. For instance, schools could organize information sessions with the involvement of organizations such as the LDAO and ABC. Schools could also make use of informal sources, such as the Somali Immigrant Aid Organization, to liaise with communities. In this case, school boards would hold the view that informal knowledge sources have a role to play in the process of knowledge interplay. When Beatrice and Hana detailed how the
LDAO and Surrey Place supported them in their undertakings, I grew to appreciate the potential that exists in these sorts of informal knowledge sources.

Third, there is the aspect of revising printed and virtual materials, such as information brochures and websites. This could occur at the ministry level and it could also occur at the board and school levels. Such an approach would require both a philosophical and financial investment. It would also require a certain procedure, as the act of modifying knowledge management materials could unfold in an inclusive way (with collective dialogue and input from staff and school communities) and could also unfold in a more exclusive way (without dialogue and/or input from staff and/or school communities).

Fourth, there is also the strategy of facilitating face-to-face interactions in order to enhance knowledge management. School boards and schools themselves could plan, organize, and facilitate information sessions, town hall meetings, and other sorts of meetings that would offer a venue that would encourage dialogue. School personnel could also engage in dialogue with parents in more informal situations, such as conversations and meetings with parents and/or groups of parents. These sorts of interactive meetings could be planned and facilitated in a proactive way, in order to foster awareness, especially before complications, such as knowledge gaps, become an issue. These meetings could also be more reactive in nature, as they could be organized to respond to issues that arise within school communities. Additionally, these sorts of meetings could be set up as one-off engagements, and could also be designed to occur regularly within a school community in order to foster a more sustainable form of interactive knowledge management. The need for these sorts of interactions became
clear to me when I learned from Zawadi that even an active parent community can be completely unaware of how and why children are chosen for gifted assessment.

Fifth, a key factor linked to the matter of communicating and/or interacting with parent communities is perspective. Before any sort of changes are structured in the area of knowledge management, the Ministry of Education would have to consider how the views of parents could impact on how these communications and/or interactions are perceived. Dimensions such as culture, gender, religion, and ethno-racial and ethnocultural identity, could influence the outcome of knowledge management strategies. For instance, the way in which individuals interpret their spiritual beliefs could lead to situations where parents take issue with the notion of having their children meet with a psychologist and/or take a psycho-educational assessment. This leads to the following question: Should knowledge management procedures solidify in a standardized manner, or should they be designed to operate in a flexible manner? I return to this question of policy-flex later in this chapter (Stone, 1988).

Sixth, there is the layer of budgeting. For the Ministry of Education to pursue policy changes in the realm of knowledge management, certain costs would be incurred. While I do not intend to delve into specifics here, I should point out that in addition to requiring an ideological investment, pursuing change in Ontario’s special education knowledge management structure would also demand a financial investment. Redeveloping and expanding on the use of printed resources and the practice of engaging in face-to-face interactions requires spending.
Transparency, Inclusion, and Special Education Language

Ministry of Education policymakers could initiate change in the linguistic realm of special education identification, placement, and program delivery. Modifying the language aspect of special education identification, placement, and program delivery policy could occur in a number of different ways. I will briefly outline three in the following few sentences. First, one method of enriching the vocabulary layer of identification and placement would be to discuss special education-oriented vocabulary with parents before, rather than after, complications arise. This would represent a proactive approach that could be facilitated through information sessions and detailed printed materials available in different languages. Second, school communities, and/or families of schools, could establish a community liaison position to actively pursue community outreach and dialogue in the realm of special education, and more specifically identification, placement, and program delivery. Third, as previously outlined, the Ministry could enrich knowledge management-oriented resources, such as website design and user-friendliness, printed materials, to foster a richer form of parental inclusion.

When Anoushka, Beatrice, and Hana recalled conversations where they were pressured to comply with various recommendations, I came to realize how persuasive language can diminish parental involvement and arise as a pervasive aspect of special education identification, placement, and program delivery (as detailed in Chapter 5). It can influence parental decisions by reducing transparency, punctuating a sense of urgency, and encouraging compliance. If persuasive language can diminish the degree of inclusion within the identification, placement, and program delivery process, how can
Pursuing change in the area of persuasive language could occur in a number of different ways, and I will outline three possibilities below.

First, there is the possibility of pursuing change through modifying Ministry policy. Certain policies, for instance, could be modified with the aim of diminishing the presence of persuasive language in special education identification and placement meetings between parents and school personnel. Specific parameters could be outlined to engage and/or support parents for whom English is not a first language in order to ensure that parents are clearly aware of the language support to which they have access.

Second, change could be pursued in a more informal way. To further reduce the presence of persuasive language, Ministry of Education policymakers could add certain informal procedures. For instance, school board personnel (such as consultants, administrators, educators, educational assistants, and school board psychologists) could undergo training in the area of fostering inclusive and interactive dialogue and consciously attempting to diminish the usage of persuasive language. Such training could of course unfold in a number of different ways, ranging from one-off information sessions to ongoing discussion groups, such as professional dialogue and book clubs.

A third possibility would combine the two above-outlined approaches.

**Transparency, Inclusion, and Special Education Positioning**

Ontario’s Ministry of Education could at once rethink its present dynamic of positioning and foster dialogue and enhance transparency within school communities on the matter of role-playing. Rethinking de jure, de facto, and ascribed positioning (three concepts examined in the Data Analysis chapter) within the special education
identification, placement, and program delivery procedure could occur in a number of different ways. One possible series of events could unfold as follows:

- Ontario’s Ministry of Education conduct research and critically examine the aspect of persuasive language within the present special education identification, placement, and program delivery process;
- Develop and articulate change options;
- Recommend a plan for change, or offer alternative plans for change;
- Choose and implement plan, and initiate change. In doing so, readjust policies that would reshape the positions that presently exist in Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. One such example would be to loosen the prescriptive components within the model, leading to a dynamic of loose coupling (Weick, 1976), or policy-flex (Stone, 1988).

Changing positioning within Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery structure could impact on the practice of ascribing roles to parents. It could also impact on the frequency and shape of role conflicts that arise in parental special education identification, placement, and program delivery experiences. If ascribed role-playing becomes a more flexible aspect of positioning within special education identification, placement, and program delivery, the following outcomes could arise:

- A more vocal parent community;
- Parents who are better able to voice their concerns in relation to special education positioning;
- More parents who seek out and/or involve support agencies (i.e. ABC); and
• A less standardized identification and placement system.

The Ministry of Education could also initiate dialogue on the subject of positioning (i.e. de jure, de facto, and ascribed role-playing) in a number of different ways, and this interlocks with the practice of knowledge management (a concept explored elsewhere in this chapter). While information sharing presently materializes in a number of different ways (i.e. printed and virtual materials relating to special education), it could be modified. Informing parents about the positioning dimension of Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery could unfold in a number of different ways. Because I discuss the strategy of enriching knowledge management elsewhere in this chapter, I will not duplicate these reflections here.

But there is also the matter of positioning itself. Specifically, informing parents about positioning within the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process could involve informing them about the roles people perform within the process. Within this dynamic, roles that are de jure and de facto would be discussed openly and directly. Focusing on dialogue could also involve actively working to encourage conversations among school board personnel themselves. School board personnel could learn about positioning, and how it can diminish parental inclusion, and this in turn could enable them to be better prepared to identify and respond to challenges, even nuanced ones, that are associated with the phenomenon of role conflict. From speaking with four minoritized parents who never discussed the matter of positioning with school personnel and subsequently endured various forms of role conflict, I became aware of how positioning can damage parent-school relations and diminish inclusion.
Outcomes following an enriched level of awareness of special education positioning could:

- Illuminate (i.e. illuminate de facto situations and the pervasiveness of policy interpretation at schools).
- Enable parents to better identify articulate points of contention; and
- Lead to frustration (and increases in parent-school conflicts);

Overall, encouraging parental awareness in the realm of positioning within the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process would ultimately lead to a richer form of transparency and inclusion.

**Transparency, Inclusion, and Special Education Philosophy**

Ministry of Education policymakers could potentially initiate actions with the aim of pursuing change and simultaneously enriching transparency within school communities on the subject of special education philosophy. A potential complication associated with this scenario is the possibility of disagreements arising from the two questions:

- What sort of changes should be pursued?
- Who should be involved in the decision-making process when transforming policy related to special education philosophy?

If Ministry of Education policymakers actively worked to initiate inclusive-oriented change in special education philosophy what might this look like? Furthermore, to what sort of outcomes, or repercussions, could these changes lead? Take the aspect of identification, for instance. Ontario’s special education identification format could potentially become more open, more community-based, more flexible, less formal, and
less prescribed. But what sort of outcomes could follow this course of action? If identification were to become more community based and less standardized, school boards and schools themselves would have to determine exactly what this would look like within school communities. They would also have to determine who exactly would be involved in identification, and this would raise a number of conflict-generating questions, including:

- How should special education identification be practiced in different communities?
- Who would make this choice?
- Who would challenge this course?
- How and why would this choice be challenged?

**Opaqueness, Exclusion, and Special Education Knowledge**

Objectivist-oriented knowledge is a key aspect of special education in Ontario. If objectivist knowledge presently provides the foundation of Ontario’s special education organization, what should this look like in the future? Through inaction, the Ministry of Education could leave Ontario’s special education model as it is, with a predominantly objectivist knowledge base. Ministry policymakers could simultaneously refrain from attempting to dialogue with school communities on the subject of objectivism and with limitations in the realm of special education knowledge sharing.

The first aspect of this scenario would involve the special education component of Ontario’s Ministry of Education remaining objectivist in principle. Of course, for Ministry policymakers not to actively work to initiate change they would have to hold the view that the status quo does not need to transform. If this path of inaction is pursued,
however, a number of complications could arise. By retaining an objectivist foundation in the identification, placement, and program delivery process, for instance, special education would be open to objectivist-subjectivist knowledge-oriented clashes in areas such as assessment, student identification (of exceptionalities), and placement. As outlined in the Participant Stories and Data Analysis chapters, this particular scenario presently leads to issues of minoritized parental exclusion in Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process.

The second aspect of this scenario would involve the Ministry of Education and school boards refraining from openly sharing information on the topic of special education knowledge pools, and/or objectivism itself. Here, the Ministry and school board-produced knowledge management materials (ranging from printed literature, such as special education guides, to Ministry and school board websites) would not be designed/redesigned to clearly articulate ways in which special education utilizes knowledge sources that are predominantly objectivist in nature. Additionally, the matter of objectivist knowledge would not be discussed between school personnel and parents; and school personnel would neither be trained nor encouraged to pursue the topic of objectivism when conversing with parents. But if a lack of communication on the subject of knowledge and objectivism/subjectivism were to continue, numerous minoritized parents would never become aware of Ontario’s special education rooting in objectivist thinking. This is indeed the case today, in the case minoritized parents in this study. Ultimately, inaction in the area of knowledge management could lead to a number of different outcomes, including:
Knowledge gaps in parent awareness of special education and placement dynamics;

Criticism; and

Confusion that could arise when informal sources of knowledge misinform.

**Opaqueness, Exclusion and Special Education Language**

Ontario’s Ministry of Education could remain tied to the present identification, placement, and program delivery system, in terms of linguistics, and not actively work to foster a shift towards a more transparent and inclusive linguistic dynamic. The four parent narratives outlined in the Participant Stories chapter and analyzed in the Data Analysis chapter (see Anoushka’s and Hana’s reflections on meetings they had attended, for instance) illustrate situations of special education language raises barriers to minoritized parents. If policy surrounding the structure and use of special education language, such as technical and persuasive language remained inert, a number of outcomes could unfold, including:

- Situations would continue to arise where confusion within the parent community, in relation to special education, leads parents to become less involved in the identification, placement, and program delivery process. Continual pressuring of parents through the use of persuasive linguistic strategies;

- Continual parental unawareness where a number of parents are unaware of the use and impact of persuasive language upon the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process; and

- Continual parental exclusion where persuasive language diminishes parental inclusion.
Opaqueness, Exclusion and Special Education Positioning

Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery procedure presently fosters situations where individuals participating in the process take on a variety of roles, or positions. While some of these positions are formal, or *de jure* in nature, others solidify in a more informal, or *de facto* manner. At times, parents propose an alternative vision of their role in the identification, placement, and program delivery process and this sometimes leads to role conflicts between parents and school/board personnel. These conflicts may arise at any point in the identification, placement, and program delivery process, such as SST, IPRC, and IPRC review meetings (as visually represented in Figure 1).

Ontario’s Ministry of Education could refrain from modifying the present system of special education identification, placement, and program delivery positioning and simultaneously refrain from actively initiating any dialogue on the subject of the parameters, and nuances, associated with this system. A number of repercussions could result from this scenario, including:

- With a lack of information sharing, parental awareness (and resistance) would be curbed;
- Role confusion and role conflict would continue to raise barriers for minoritized parents and lead to a persistence of parental exclusion;
- A continued veneer of standardization. I say *continued veneer* because there are differences in the way school boards, schools, administrators, and staff presently interpret special education policy, although the policy itself imports with it elements of standardization (i.e. the concept of specifically defining
exceptionalities and specifically outlining what qualifies for placement in different special education programs); and

- In resisting change, there would be a continuation of the present hierarchical system where expertise (i.e. only psycho-educational assessments) may lead to a diagnosis of certain exceptionalities.

**Opaqueness, Exclusion and Special Education Philosophy**

Ontario’s Ministry of Education could refrain from actively initiating any sort of ideological shift and simultaneously refrain from attempting to enrich transparency and inclusion in the area of special education philosophy. But what sort of the outcomes could follow a course of actions that refrain from pursuing policy change and enriching transparency in the ideological layer of special education identification, placement, and program delivery? Four possible responses include:

- Continued instances of philosophical conflict where the views of parents oppose the general philosophy of Ontario’s special education organization (i.e. when minoritized parents question and/or oppose the notion of applying standardized assessments as tools of measuring intelligence);

- Continued parental frustration stemming from instances of philosophical conflict;

- Continued instances were philosophical conflict and parental frustration contribute to situations of parental exclusion from the special education identification, placement, and program delivery process; and

- Continued instances where parental confusion and unawareness arises in the realm of special education philosophy, and hinders parent-school relations and diminishes parental inclusion.
Policy Complications

As a policy matures from idea and articulation to interpretation and implementation; a variety of forces affect its growth. Along with multiple smaller factors, two central interlocking forces complicate, and sometimes impede, policy development. These two general forces are as follows:

- The larger social context; and
- Policy complexity.

In the following few paragraphs I consider how these two overarching complications might hinder the process of rethinking special education identification, placement, and program delivery policy in Ontario.

The Larger Social Context

Larger social elements can potentially hinder the way in which an inclusive-oriented policy would transform from theory to paper to practice. In terms of special education identification, placement, and program delivery, the larger social context within which school communities exist, contributes to how that policy is ultimately shaped within its implementation.
Figure 4: The Larger Social Context

The Larger Social Context graphic (see Figure 4) visually depicts the overarching social sphere, inside which a policy exists, as a circle with three rings. At the core of the circle is identity, which includes such overlapping aspects as minoritization, socioeconomic status, ethno-race, ethno-culture, sex, gender, and sexual orientation.

Identity is how individuals and groups self-identify and/or are identified by others. The second ring of the circle depicts what can occur when people are identified. Circulating within this second ring are such interlocking barriers as cultural capital, institutional
discrimination, inequity, positioning, and social reproduction. The outermost ring represents society at large. It is the holistic context within which a policy ultimately unfolds. Because the three rings in the sphere interlock so tightly, I simultaneously address aspects of identity and their associated barriers, along with the larger social implications in the following few paragraphs.

Overlapping forms of minoritization stem from identity and raise barriers for inclusive-oriented policy implementation within a larger social fabric. In the passage below, de Carvalho (2000) considers layers of identity that ultimately hinder inclusion:

> when schools and teachers expect parental involvement both in school and with homework, they do not consider the cases of single parents, working mothers, ethnic and language minority families, low-educated, handicapped, and chronically ill parents, those with a great number of children, in poverty, as well as those working irregular, night, and double shifts—all of whom have time constraints and limited skills and resources, and who add up to the majority of parents of public schools. (p. 98)

Any sort of change to Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery policy, with transparency and inclusion in mind, will ultimately have to address the above-mentioned challenges. Otherwise, the desired changes could be weakened significantly.

Socioeconomic status is one specific aspect of identity that affects policy barriers and the larger social picture of policy implementation. As de Carvalho (2000) observes, schools are both a product of and contributor to a larger, competitive economic social tapestry, whereby “the problem of inequality of educational opportunities and outcomes is not enclosed by the actions and interactions of individuals, schools, and families, but is broadly inscribed into cultural struggles rooted in (class) economic competition” (p. 67). As previously mentioned, parents, in various socioeconomic and employment
circumstances, coping with such challenges as shift work, an inflexible work schedule, and being unable to take time off from work, may not be able to meet with school personnel during the school day. If special education inclusion requires parents to go to their child’s school to dialogue at times they are unable to then the policy will not solidify in an inclusive way. In sum, special education inclusion will not solidify unless larger socioeconomic and employment-related barriers are carefully woven into policy transformation.

Cultural and symbolic capital and symbolic violence represent other aspects of identity-related barriers minoritized parents face contributing to a larger inequitable social context (see de Carvalho, 2000, p. 70-73, 78-79). On this matter, de Carvalho (2000) reflects:

In class societies, where power asymmetries among social groups determine differentiated appropriation, as well as differentiated attribution of values for the available resources, and where access to the means of producing and enjoying cultural and material resources is uneven and an object of competition, scarcity generates profits of distinction for the owners of a large or highly valued form of cultural capital. (p. 72)

For policy-driven changes to take form in school communities, the interlocking aspects of cultural and symbolic capital and symbolic violence would need to be confronted proactively and directly.

Positioning represents another component of the larger social context, as social roles shape one’s position within policy creation, interpretation, and action. Considering this matter, Stone (1988) notes:

Each mode of social regulation draws lines around what people may and may not do and how they may or may not treat each other. But these boundaries are constantly contested, either because they are ambiguous and do not settle conflicts, or because they allocate benefits and burdens to
the other people on either side, or both. Boundaries become real and acquire their meaning in political struggles. (p. 10)

Because positioning is a social reality, inclusive-oriented policy transformation would have to address larger social dimensions of how people perform positions and/or are positioned by other people, groups, and/or organizations.

While I have only delved into a few layers of identity and related barriers, it is evident that an inclusive-minded special education policy would have to be designed to push implementation into the terrain of equity. But without addressing overarching social conditions of inequity, a seemingly neutral approach to shifting policy would be in danger of fostering further situations of inequity. Articulating the tension between equality and equity, Minow (1990) notes that “Governmental neutrality may be the best way to assure equality, yet governmental neutrality may also freeze in place the past consequences of differences” (p. 21). Stone (1988) uses a similar lens, adding the dimension of liberty. In defining liberty as the availability of making choices, Stone (1988) argues that it will only materialize when power, wealth, and knowledge are distributed equitably:

If liberty is understood as the ability to make choices about matters of serious concern, then inequalities of power, wealth, and knowledge also create inequities of liberty. A society that maximized liberty would be one that equalized the prerequisites to liberty—power, wealth, and knowledge. (p. 102)

When wrestling with questions associated with the larger social fabric, de Carvalho (2000) states, “I pursue two interrelated questions that affect the overall quality of education: How does this kind of educational policy affect different families? Is it likely to create more educational equity or inequity?” (p. 46). Summing up this difficult situation, de Carvalho (2000) states, “I do not see the social conditions necessary to
universalize school-family partnerships in terms of equal political power in defining the curriculum, a specifically academic role for families, and shared accountability for educational outcomes” (p. 4). Although she is writing about the United States in this passage, de Carvalho (2000) could very easily be speaking about Canada.

In the following few paragraphs I consider three key dimensions of policy complexity.

Policy Complexity

Policy development is a complex process that involves ongoing interpretation and interaction. Three key forces complicate the policy development and solidification process and intensify policy complexity, namely:

- Complications of Agreement;
- Complications of Ambiguity; and
- Complications of Attainability.

Within each of these complicating factors are a variety of subcategories, which I present as questions, in the Policy Complexity chart (see Figure 5).

*Figure 5: Policy Complexity*
Complications of agreement. In terms of complications stemming from agreement, five central subcategories, or questions arise. These five questions are as follows:

- Why is this policy needed?
- How should language be used within the policy?
- What are the roles of the people/groups involved in developing the policy?
- What are the desired/predicted outcomes of this policy?
- How does the passage of time change things?

In the space below I address each of these questions individually.

First, why is this policy needed? Policies arise when there is a perception of need, such as the need to sort out the distribution/redistribution of something. Surveying a policy’s point of origin, Stone (1988) observes, “In every one of these policy debates, there is a fight about whether the item is needed: What kind of thing is needed? Who needs it? What does it provide? And what does it represent?” (p. 72). Stone (1988) views distribution as a critical component within this early metamorphosis:

every policy issue involves the distribution of something. There wouldn’t be a policy conflict if there were not some advantage to protect or some loss to prevent. Sometimes the things being distributed are material and countable, such as money, taxes, or houses. Sometimes they are a bit less tangible, such as the chances of serving in the army, getting sick, being a victim of crime, or being selected for public office. But always, policy issues involve distribution. (p. 40)

In addition to complications associated with distribution, there is also the dimension of power. When considering inclusion-oriented education policies de Carvalho (2000) raises the following three questions:
What are the rationales behind present policy efforts aiming at connection family and school? How are the needs and benefits of a close family-school partnership characterized? Is the aim to empower the family—granting families more control over schools and choice over instructional contents and practices? (p. 25)

Consequently, the initial act of identifying a need to foster richer inclusion of minoritized parents in Ontario’s special education model will lead to disagreement.

Second, given that language can be used and interpreted in a variety of ways, the task of wording a policy becomes a challenge. In The Policy Paradox, Stone (1988) offers a series of cake distribution scenarios that depict how the concept of equity could be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways. Summing up this exercise, she states:

Look carefully at what happened in the chocolate cake saga. We started with the simple idea that equality means the same-size slice for everyone. Then there were eight challenges to that idea, eight different visions of equality, each of which would result in unequal slices but equality of something else. Here is the paradox in distributive problems: equality may in fact mean inequality; equal treatment may require unequal treatment; and the same distribution may be seen as equal or unequal depending on one’s point of view. I have used the word equality to denote sameness and to signify the part of a distribution that contains uniformity – uniformity of slices, or of meals, or of voting power, for example. I have used equity to denote distributions regarded as fair, even though they contain both equalities and inequalities. (Stone, 1988, p. 32)

Because a language is not universal it is malleable, and as Stone (1988) observes, “Struggles over causal definitions of problems, then, are contests over basic structures of social organization” (p. 162). According to Stone (1988), “The most important feature of all symbols, both in art and politics, is their ambiguity. A symbol can mean two (or more) things simultaneously” (p. 123). Expanding on this idea, Stone (1988) notes, “The inescapable ambiguity of political goals means that they are more like moving targets
than fixed standards. If goals are forever changing as different people read meanings into them, they cannot serve as a stable reference point for evaluating alternative actions” (p. 195). Attempting to foster inclusion within Ontario’s special education model must carefully address questions of linguistic ambiguity.

Third, what are the roles of the people and/or groups involved in developing the policy? The creation and implementation process though which a policy comes to be involves a number of people. Interacting within the development process are numerous individuals and groups, prompting and Stone (1988) to state:

> policy making is not only about solving public problems, but about how groups are formed, split, and re-formed to achieve public purposes. On policy issues of any significance, it is groups that confront each other, using individuals only as their spokesmen. Groups coalesce and divide over policy proposals, depending on how they expect the proposal to affect them. (p. 20)

Ultimately, as Stone (1988) summarizes: “Most policy issues involve questions of who has the power to decide” (p. 193). But what does this mean for education policy? Policy creation and application is a very complex and interactive process. The process cannot be top down according to de Carvalho (2000):

> Therefore, educational policy can be better understood as policy-politics, for policy is more than goals and means, or frameworks and resources, insofar as it includes practices and outcomes, collective courses of action and their broad effects. Along this line, although it usually is not formulated by teachers, parents or students, formal policy is implemented or rejected, reproduced or resisted by them, and therefore its conceptualization must include practice and all of its actors, who may always, in some degree, recreate it differently than the original intentions of those who conceived it. (p. 45)

Also, de Carvalho (2000) later adds, “Nevertheless, besides specific conditions and dispositions of parents to participate, such a policy presupposes what it aims at building: cultural continuity and identity of purposes between all families and schools—a doubtful
prerequisite in times of acute cultural diversity and conflict” (p. 108). As there are many individuals, groups, and organizations involved in special education (such as ABC, Surrey Place, and the Ontario Psychological Association), navigating a shift in policy would lead numerous points of conflict.

Fourth, what are the desired and anticipated outcomes of the policy? How are costs perceived and measured when decision-making choices are analyzed? Stone (1988) observes:

The way costs are counted is certainly important in controlling how a decision appears, but in the polis, there is a far more critical aspect of strategy: deciding which consequences to include in the analysis in the first place. Finding the consequences of an action is like finding the causes in reverse. Every action has infinite consequences, so there is no natural or correct place to draw the line around which ones to evaluate. Selection of what to include is both arbitrary and strategic. By simply including enough negative consequences to outweigh the positive ones, one can throw the decision one way, or reverse it by drawing the boundaries of consequences differently. (p. 203)

Because special education identification, placement, and program delivery involves so many different people performing so many different roles, any sort of policy change will ultimately be perceived through a different lens. This matter of varying perceptions will stimulate significant complications for policymakers.

Fifth, given that policy development requires time, how will the passage of time change the direction of that policy? As time passes, the complexity of decision making can be problematized by what Stone (1988) calls “analysis paralysis” (p. 185).

According to Stone (1988):

A rational decision model portrays a policy problem as a choice facing a political actor. The actor is someone—an individual, a firm, an organization, or any entity capable of making a decision—who must choose a course of action in order to attain a desired end. The actor then goes through a sequence of mental operations to arrive at a decision.
These steps are: (1) defining goals; (2) imagining alternative means for attaining them; (3) evaluating the consequences of taking each course of action; and (4) choosing the alternative most likely to attain the goal. (p. 185)

As time passes, the way in which special education inclusion of minoritized parents is defined and analyzed will change. Consequently, developing a stable policy will present a challenge to those involved in the policy development process.

**Complications of ambiguity.** Policy flex represents ambiguity within policy. Considering how flexible or inflexible a policy should be leads us to ask: What are the benefits and drawbacks associated with having degrees of (interpretive) flexibility within a policy? (Stone, 236-241). Hearkening back to Weick’s (1976) notion of tightly versus loosely coupled systems, Stone (1988) observes, “Precision has its disadvantages, however. Precise rules cannot be sensitive to some kinds of individual and contextual differences, so inevitably, different cases will be treated alike” (p. 236). Elaborating on this thought, she states, “Precise rules stifle creative response to new situations … [and] as precise rules symbolize fairness and predictability, vague rules allow for the expression of community ideals” (Stone, 1988, p. 236-237).

**Complications of attainability.** Developing policy is also complicated by the question of attainability. According to Stone (1988), there are six unattainable ideals of policy, and they are as follows:

- “First is the rational ideal of the optimum social balance between discretionary power and control by formal rules” (p. 238);
- “A second unattainable ideal is the perfectly precise rule” (p. 239);
“Third is the ideal of the perfectly flexible rule” (p. 240) whereby “Rules are in constant tension between precision and vagueness, between centralization and discretion” (Stone, 242).

“A fourth ideal is the neutral rule” (p. 240);

“All rules benefit some and harm others” (p. 241); and

“Finally, there is the perennial quest for the perfectly enforced rule” (p. 241), knowing that “in order for rights to work as a policy strategy, there must be an enforcement mechanism” (p. 272).

Any attempts to achieve and/or sustain these ideals will present a challenge to policymakers who seek to develop a policy that addresses the issue of including minoritized parents in Ontario’s special education model.

**Implications of Study**

The phenomenon of minoritized parental inclusion and/or exclusion in Ontario special education model has a number of larger social implications. Because it is often a collective group that interprets and participates in decisions relating to identification, placement, and program delivery, the procedure may at once demonstrate layers of inclusion and exclusion. This paper offers a critical examination of how minoritized parents are presently included in, and/or excluded from, Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process. In terms of contributions to theory, future research, and practice, the findings of this study are socially significant on the following four levels:

- Social justice;
- Pedagogy;
Leadership; and

Budgeting.

One larger implication to which this research study connects is social justice. Special education identification, placement, and program delivery in Ontario, both in terms of written and enacted policy, is partially shaped by perceptions of human rights and interpretations of associated legislation (Bowlby, Peters, & Mackinnon, 2001, p. 1). At present, for instance, parents must provide informed consent before their child may take a psycho-educational assessment. Additionally, they must be invited to participate in both initial and review IPRC meetings (Weber & Bennett, 2004, p. 51-54). As this research study uncovers situations of exclusion within special education identification, placement, and program delivery, it is incumbent on future researchers and policymakers to consider strategies through which inclusion might be enriched and exclusion reduced. Because parental exclusion within special education identification, placement, and program delivery is a social justice issue, researchers and policymakers need to further investigate today’s dynamic of inclusion and exclusion and consider how to specifically pursue different avenues of change. A question that ought to be investigated in future special education research is:

- How can Ontario’s special education identification, placement, and program delivery process change in order to enrich minoritized parental inclusion?

Pedagogy, a matter of student learning and engagement, represents a second area within which this research study carries significance. As detailed in the Participant Stories and Data Analysis chapters, this study uncovers situations where Ontario’s special education model excludes minoritized parents. As outlined elsewhere in this paper, these
situations can at times lead minoritized parents to become disengaged. But what of the situations where disengagement leads parents to withhold permission for their child to be assessed or placed in a particular special education program? In these cases, a child’s identification process would halt, which may lead to situations where potentially identified children go unidentified. An unidentified exceptional child is one who would be identified within the parameters in Ontario’s special education system if he/she were to undergo the assessment procedure; but due to circumstances, has not gone through the procedure. But what are the repercussions of having an increased percentage of unidentified exceptional children within an education system? As Ontario’s present structure requires children to be formally identified to receive protected funding from the Ministry (Toronto District School Board, 2006, p. 10), an unidentified exceptional learner would receive no such guaranteed support. These learners would then attend class and encounter tasks and expectations often without the flexibility and support afforded by accommodations and/or modifications set out in an Individual Education Plan. Consequently, the manner in which special education identification is implemented within school settings can impact on the social and academic performance of children, classes, and schools. Because pedagogy represents a crucial dimension of the phenomenon of minoritized parental inclusion/exclusion in special education, the findings of this study, along with future research in the realm of unidentified exceptional children, will have larger implications for the theory and practice of how special education is approached in the future. Simply put, future research needs to explore the following questions:

- Who is not being identified, and why is this happening?
• How does not identifying children effect education in Ontario?

A third area of social significance in this research study connects to the matter of leadership. As the study itself delves into the phenomenon of identification inclusion, my inquiries are partly set to consider the shape and practice of leadership within school cultures. Examining identification has led me to consider its form in terms of policy and practice. Ontario’s identification policy is perpetually being interpreted and facilitated within schools by individuals and/or collectives in leadership positions. By this I mean institutional leadership, sometimes referred to as institutionalized authority, manifest in such positions as school administrator and special education consultant. On one level, researchers need to further explore the phenomenon of how leadership teams work to foster an inclusive dynamic within identification practices at schools. To further delve into this dynamic, a number of leadership-oriented questions must be considered in future studies, including:

• How do people in positions of institutional authority seek out and create opportunities for leadership to be collaborative within Ontario’s special education procedures?

• What sort of things do these people do to include others?

• How do they view leadership itself?

Researching the phenomenon of inclusion/exclusion within the identification, placement, and program delivery process can reveal much about the manners in which leadership operates and thinks. As this study illuminates issues of inclusion/exclusion connected to the arena of special education, its findings could benefit the theory and practice of leadership within school communities. Further studies need to identify and investigate
schools that are presently inclusive and transparent in special education identification, placement, and program delivery.

Fourth, while this study does not focus on the relationship between budgeting and special education identification, this aspect of special education identification and placement is significant. Reflecting on Ontario’s identification paradigm is more than a philosophical inquiry. It is also a budgetary one. Many children in Ontario have been identified as exceptional learners. As of “the 2004-2005 school year more than 190 000 students were identified by an IPRC as exceptional pupils” (Toronto District School Board, 2006, p. 10). Consequently, a significant portion of Ontario’s education budget is directed into special education. In 2006 Ontario spent at total of $17.5 billion on education with special education funding totaling $83 million (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006b). Coupled with this immense budget, special education in Ontario faces the pressure and responsibility of financial accountability, a concept, which is interpreted by different stakeholders in different ways. In *Let the Funding Follow the Children*, for instance, Hepburn and Mrozek (2004) utilize descriptive statistics tied to special education spending and student performance in Ontario to assert that the province’s present system is unsatisfactory:

> There is serious, documented evidence that [Ontario’s special education] system is not doing a satisfactory job of educating these children … [This report] then recommends a policy that promises to improve the education provided for exceptional children without increasing the cost to taxpayers. (p. 5)

Published by the Fraser Institute, the paper recommends that Ontario’s special education structure absorb layers of privatization. While the views articulated by Hepburn and
Mrozek (2004) do not link to my perspective, they do punctuate the significance of the budgetary dimension of special education.

But how precisely does special education identification connect to the matter of spending? Identification represents a threshold which learners must cross in order to access special education funding. The greater the number of students who pass through the threshold, the greater the amount of money that gets channeled into special education. Any increase to the identification rate within the province would either cause the special education share of education spending to rise, or cause education spending on the whole to increase. Within the elementary panel “between 1998-99 and 2001-02, the number of identified students rose by 4.6 percent” (Weber & Bennett, 2004, p. 32). If elements of exclusion within the identification procedure operate as a filter, then, to a degree, such elements would be partly responsible for staggering any increases in special education spending. Conversely, if developing a more inclusive identification process were to cause the identification rate to rise, then special education spending itself would rise. The parameters of special education identification and economics are inseparable and invite future researchers to ask the following questions:

- How does budgeting need to change in order to foster, stabilize, and sustain an identification, placement, and program delivery process that includes minoritized parents in Ontario?
- How will a more inclusive identification, placement, and program delivery model effect special education budgeting in Ontario?

While the findings of this study may help policymakers to recognize a need for change and consider various change options in the realm of identification, placement, and
program delivery, further research into the complexities of minoritized parental
inclusion/exclusion in special education is needed. As previously outlined, social justice,
pedagogy, leadership, and budgeting, represent four key dimensions of this phenomenon
into which researcher could further delve.

**Conclusion**

Ontario’s present system of identification, placement, and program delivery in the
arena of special education leads minoritized parents to experience varying degrees of
inclusion and/or exclusion. These degrees may be influenced by a number of
circumstances, including knowledge, language, positioning, and philosophy. As the
future unfolds, Ontario’s Ministry of Education, along with school boards across the
province, may pursue a number of different change/non-change avenues, and these paths
will inevitably lead to different scenarios. While some paths may lead to conflict
resolution and enriched inclusion, others may foster further situations of exclusion. Any
sort of policy change that sets out to transform special education identification,
placement, and program delivery along the Inclusion/Exclusion,
Transparency/Opaqueness Continuum would have to address a variety of complications.
While the two general forces of larger social context and policy complications are
addressed in this chapter, the specific manner in which they materialize cannot be
predicted with complete accuracy. I say this not to diminish the need for change, but to
highlight the complex nature of change. Rather than articulating a detailed set of
instructions to redesign policy, I hope to generate critical reflection and discussion on the
matter of transforming Ontario’s special education model. If special education inclusion
is to be enriched in Ontario, change is imperative.
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