

From Misalignment to Realignment: Parent Perspectives on Educational Fit for Highly and Profoundly Gifted Twice-Exceptional Learners

A Qualitative Multiple Case Study

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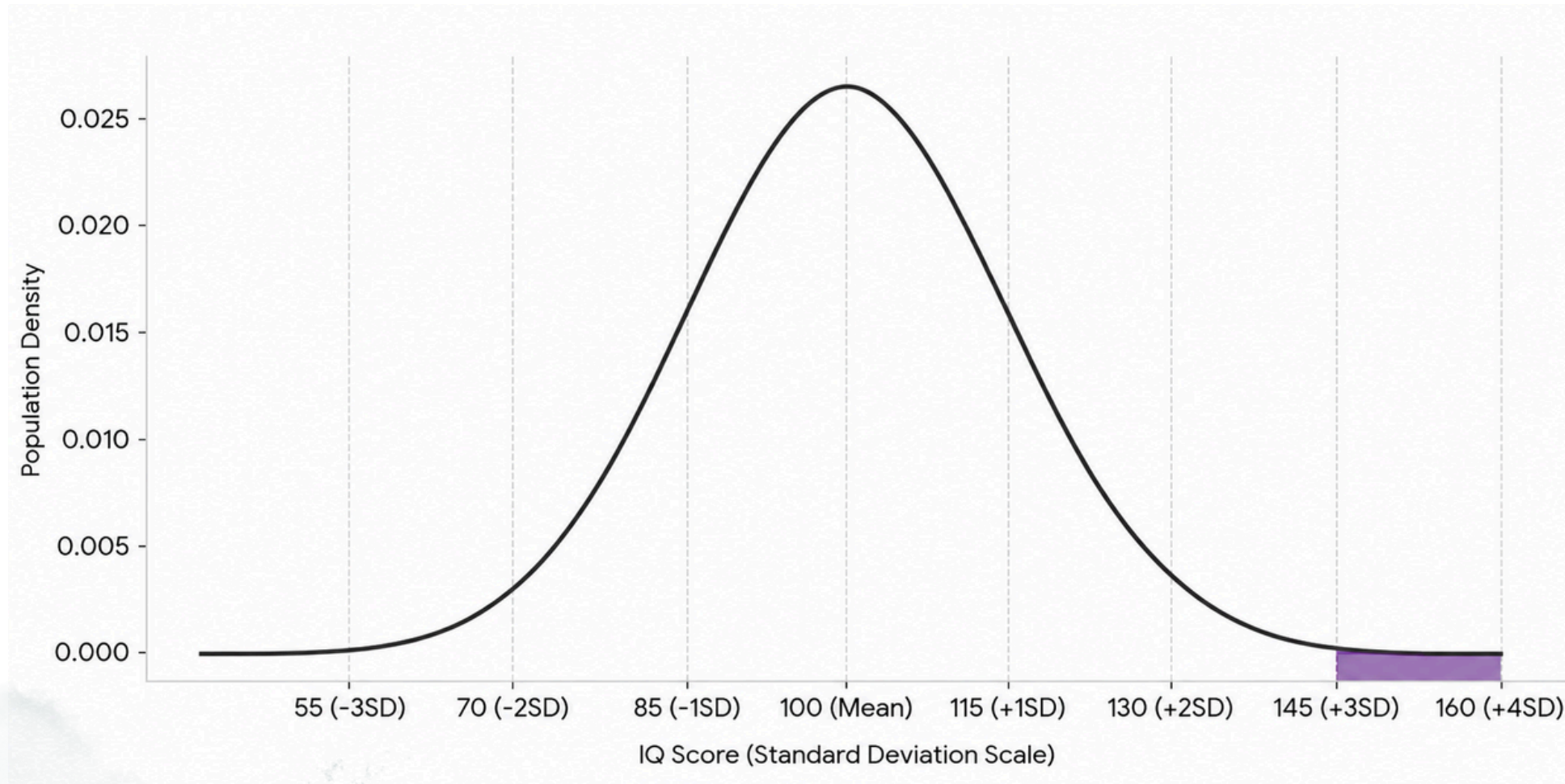
(Formerly Bridges Graduate School)

Dissertation Defense

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Introduction and Background



Silverman (1993); Columbus Group (1991); Wood (2020); Reis & Baum (2014).

Bell curve adapted from standard normal distribution models used in gifted education literature.

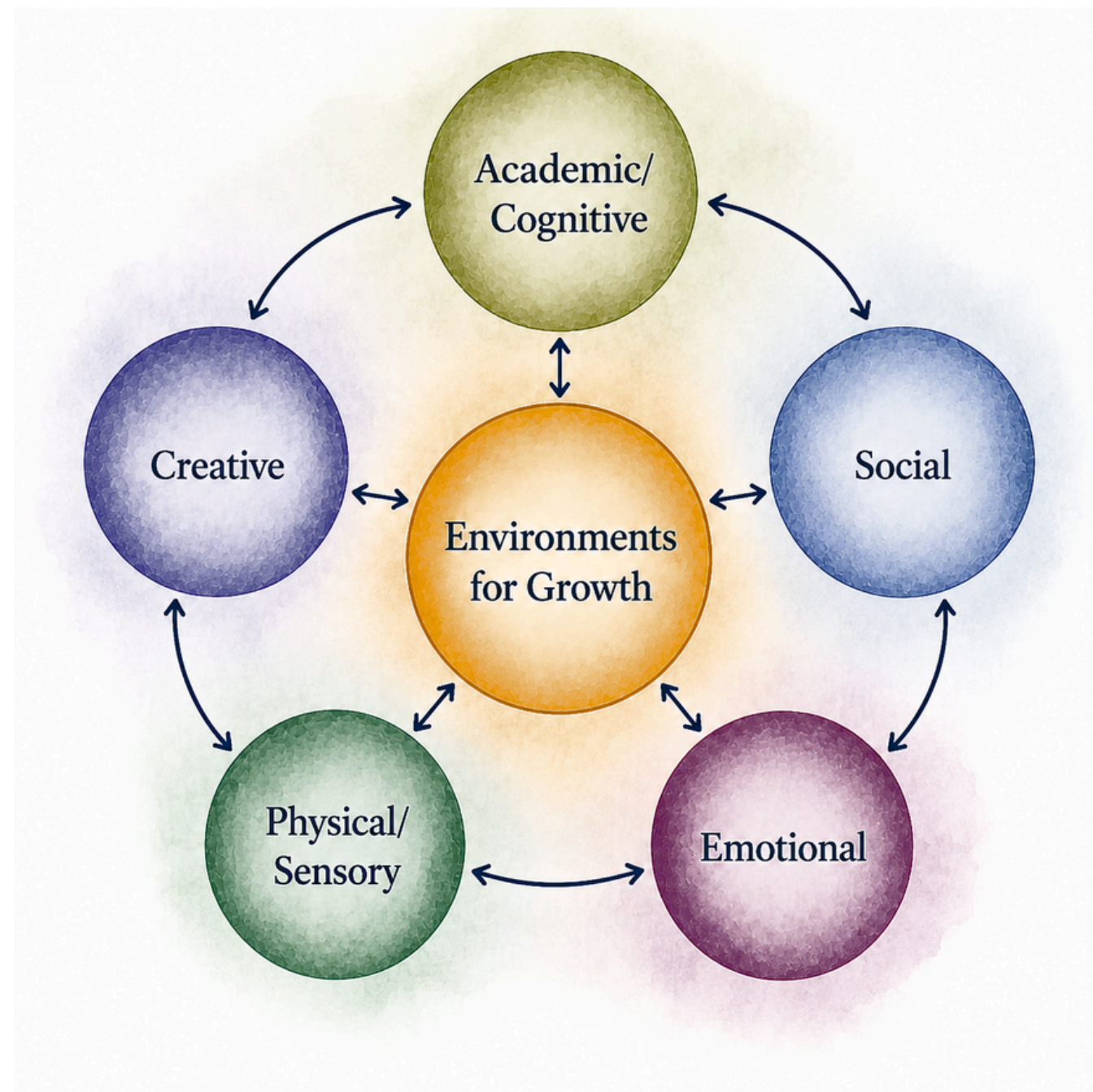
Highly/Profoundly Gifted (HG/PG) Learners

- K-12 learners with IQs ≥ 145
- Roughly top 0.1% of the population
- Advanced cognitive development, intensity, and asynchronous profiles.
- Educational needs substantially differ from those in many gifted programs.
- Davidson Institute provides support to families of these learners, recognizing their unique needs.

Twice-Exceptional (2e)

- Advanced ability + learning disabilities/differences
- Strengths and challenges often mask each other
- Ability/challenges inconsistently recognized
- Adds further complexity to learning profiles

Conceptual Framework: The Five Environments for Growth



+

Analytical Lens: Positive Niche Construction



Armstrong (2025); Baum & Schader (2024).

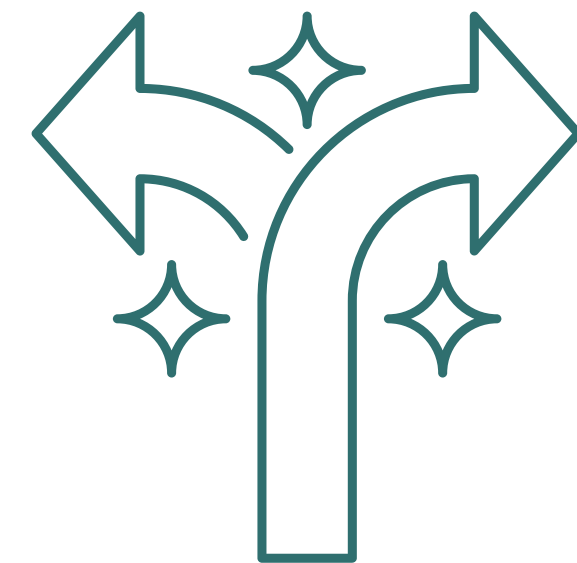
Problem Statement & Purpose

Problem Statement

- HG/PG-2e learners often demonstrate asynchronous development and multidomain educational needs that differ substantially from age-based expectations and traditional gifted programming.
- Existing school structures frequently rely upon standardized pacing, production-based evaluation, and limited conceptions of educational fit.\
- Many HG/PG-2e learners experience prolonged educational misalignment across academic/cognitive, social, emotional, physical/sensory, and creative domains.
- Many families ultimately pursue homeschooling after sustained attempts to establish educational fit within traditional school systems.

Purpose

To examine educational fit among HG/PG-2e learners across public school and homeschool contexts through the Five Environments for Growth framework.



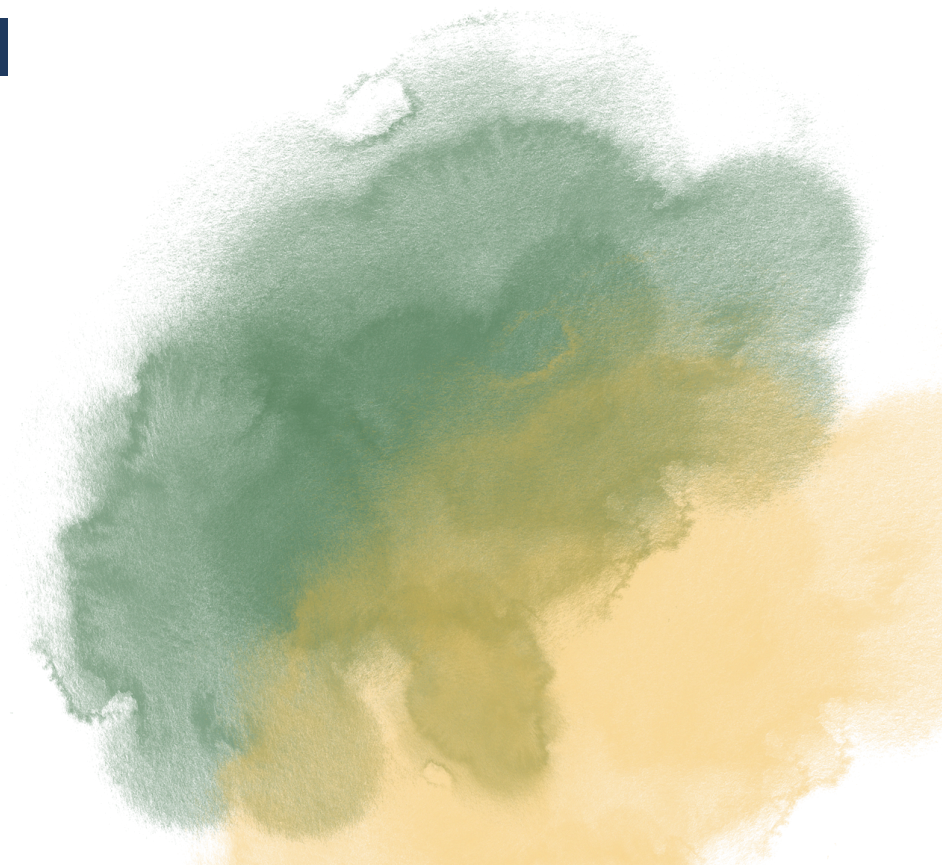
Research Questions

RQ 1

How does the Five Environments for Growth framework predict HG/PG-2e learner experiences in public school and homeschool settings?

RQ 2

What is the role of parents in advocacy, decision-making, and withdrawal considerations across educational settings?



Literature Intersection

Literature Area	Common Focus in Existing Literature	Ongoing Limitations Relevant to the Present Study
2e literature (e.g., Baum et al., 2014; Baum et al., 2026; Foley-Ripcon et al., 2013)	Masking, underachievement, accommodations, executive functioning, uneven performance, and talent development among gifted learners with coexisting disabilities	HG/PG learners are frequently collapsed into broader gifted populations, with less attention to highly advanced cognition, radical asynchrony, or multidimensional educational fit.
HG/PG literature (e.g., Gross, 2004; Schultz, 2018; Wood et al., 2024)	Asynchronous development, developmental intensity, advanced cognition, social-emotional complexity, and mismatch with age-based educational systems	Limited examination of how educational environments dynamically interact with HG/PG-2e learner profiles across the five environments for growth
Gifted homeschooling literature (e.g., Connolly-Sporing et al., 2024; Jolly & Matthews, 2018)	Individualized instruction, flexibility, learner-centered education, alternative educational pathways, parent motivations	Homeschooling is often framed as school choice or educational preference, which may not fully capture homeschooling as a last viable option following prolonged school misalignment or the ongoing construction of fit across the Five Environments.

Methodology

Inclusion Criteria

- Participants were parents of HG/PG-2e learners
 - Learners were required to have completed at least one semester of both K–12 U.S. public school and homeschool experience
- Participants completed a screening survey and submitted verification documentation demonstrating exceptionally advanced cognitive ability through either:
 - WISC assessment documentation reflecting a Full Scale IQ and/or multiple index scores at or above 145 OR
 - Documentation of Davidson Young Scholars qualification



Methodology

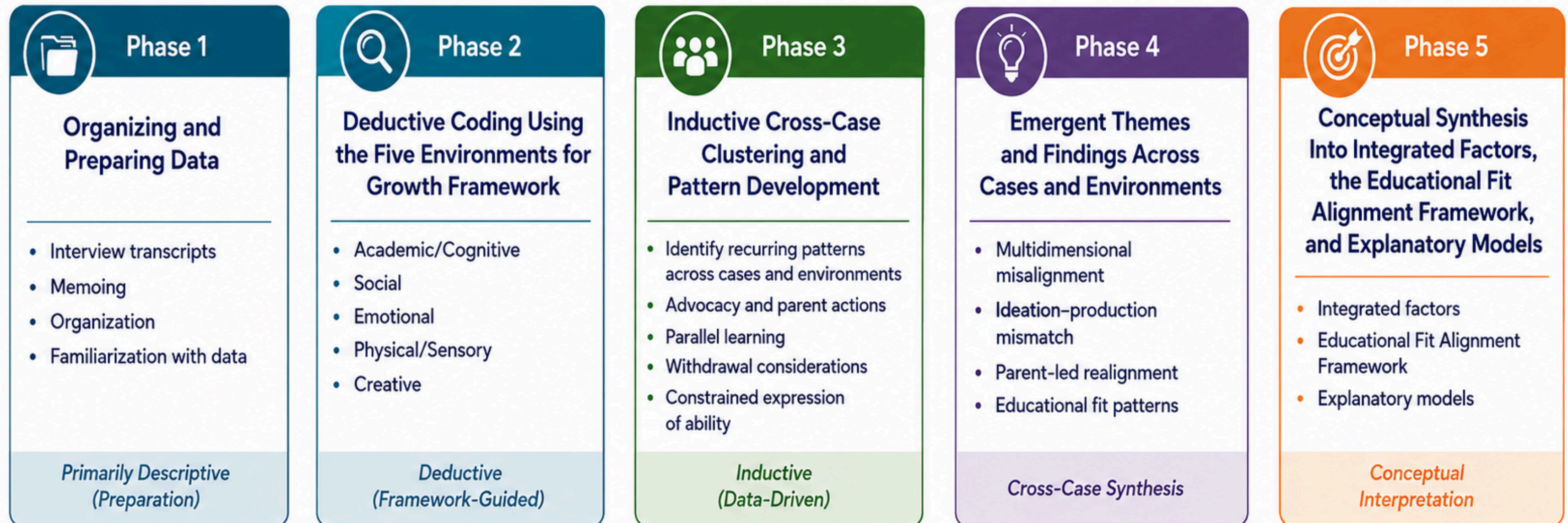
10 Participants

- Each participant was interviewed with a semi-structured interview protocol. Interviews took between 75 and 100 minutes.
- All participants were mothers of HG/PG-2e learners
- Learners ranged from ages 9–24, reflecting educational experiences across both homeschool and school settings from K -12th grade
- Participants represented first- and second-generation American families as well as varied racial, ethnic, cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds
- Participants represented multiple U.S. regions and urban and suburban communities across CA, WA, CT, FL, WI, MI, GA, SC, and NJ
- Diverse 2e profiles, including ADHD, autism, anxiety, dyslexia/dysgraphia, prosopagnosia, and sensory-processing differences



Hybrid Qualitative Analysis Process

Bingham's (2023) Five-Phase Hybrid Deductive-Inductive Analysis



Bingham (2023).

Thematic Domain	Context	Cross Cluster Examples	Themes
Physical/Sensory Representative Codes: long periods of sitting; movement restricted; transitions stressful; overstimulation; fatigue from sustained compliance; need for breaks ignored; physical restlessness interpreted as behavior; processing speed limitations; working memory strain; executive overload leading to burnout; task initiation difficulty; distractibility; lost or incomplete work; output avoidance under load; need for breaks; flexible seating; movement-based learning; short instructional blocks; balanced daily rhythm; sleep improved Physical/Sensory	Public School	noise sensitivity; visual overstimulation; discomfort with clothing or seating; difficulty concentrating; sensory overload	Sensory Experience and Environmental Constraints
	Homeschool	reduced noise; flexible seating; comfortable clothing	
	Public School	limited movement opportunities; fatigue; difficulty sustaining attention; need for breaks; decreased energy	Movement, Energy, and Daily Demands.
	Homeschool	frequent movement breaks; flexible scheduling; pacing to think	
	Public School	fixed seating; restricted movement; structured schedule; trouble with transitions	Physical Environment and Alignment
	Homeschool	movement during tasks; adaptable schedule; outdoor learning;	

Deductive Themes From Research Question 2	Deductive Code Examples
Parent Advocacy within Misaligned School Contexts	Requests for acceleration; communication with teachers; sharing outside assessment data; IEP/504 meetings; requests for changes to placement, pacing, or instruction
Parent Decision-Making	Iterative decision-making; increasing divergence between school and learner needs; development of parallel learning pathways
Withdrawal	Sustained mismatch across environments; continued misalignment despite advocacy; disengagement; emotional distress; school refusal

Parent Advocacy within Misaligned School Contexts

Factor 1: Educational Misalignment Across Multiple Environments

Maya

Highly Advanced Conceptual Thinking
 Creative Storyteller
 Extremely High Vocabulary
 “Social Butterfly”
 but
 Bored in Gifted Classroom
 Teacher Shut Down Questions
 Library Privileges Constrained by Lexile Scores
 Homework a Daily Struggle
 Lonely, Lack of Belonging iin Classroom
 Emotional Distress Associated with the School
 Building
 Before-School Dropoff Sensorily
 Overwhelming

Environment	Emergent Themes (from Chapter 4)	Multi-Domain Environmental Misalignment
Academic/Cognitive	Access to Level and Pacing; Output Demands and Production; Patterns of Engagement and Response	Misalignment in level, depth, and pacing constrained access to appropriate academic challenge
Social	Intellectual Peer Access; Peer Relationships and Social Belonging	Limited access to intellectual peers and interest-based relationships contributed to social isolation and a reduced sense of belonging within age-based settings.
Emotional	Emotional Distress and School-Based Experience: Regulation, Autonomy, and Environmental Fit	Emotional distress and dysregulation reflected sustained conditions of misalignment within the learning setting.
Physical/Sensory	Sensory Experience and Environmental Constraints; Movement, Energy, and Daily Demands; Physical Environment and Alignment	Sensory load and movement constraints interfered with regulation, participation, and sustained engagement.
Creative	Sensory Experience and Environmental Constraints; Movement, Energy, and Daily Demands; Physical Environment and Alignment	Constrained opportunities for inquiry, originality, and authentic intellectual exploration limited creative engagement and expression of advanced understanding.

Factor 2: System-Constrained Recognition and Response

“
He knows it; he just can’t
always show it the way
they want.
”

Environment	Emergent Themes (From Chapter 4)	Resulting System-Constraints
Academic/Cognitive	Identification and Recognition of Ability	Even when schools possessed evidence of exceptional ability well above gifted program qualification thresholds, recognition and educational response remained closely tied to observable classroom performance and expected forms of output.
Academic/Cognitive	Access to Level and Pacing	Learner readiness for advanced conceptual challenge was not consistently recognized through grade-level instructional pacing and placement structures.
Academic/Cognitive	Output Demands and Production	Production demands constrained how advanced reasoning became visible within classroom settings.
Academic/Cognitive	Depth, Differentiation, and Structural Constraints	Structural limits shaped access to advanced instruction and opportunities for sustained academic challenge.
Emotional	Pressure, Expectations, and Performance	Timed performance, pacing expectations, productivity demands, and behavioral compliance shaped the interpretation of learner competence within classroom settings.

Factor 3: Parent Advocacy to Withdrawal as an Adaptive Response to Sustained Misalignment

We brought in our own psychologist to train the teachers and aides.

Frequent requests for placement testing.... “but they still didn’t do anything.”

They refused to assess her for supports... unless she was removed from the gifted classroom.

The contrast between her engagement in authentic learning on family travel and her struggles in the classroom... we didn’t send her back.

Emergent Themes Aligned with Research Question 2	Parent Responses to Sustained Misalignment
Parent Advocacy within Misaligned School Contexts	Parents described sustained advocacy efforts to address multidomain environmental misalignment within public school settings.
Parent Decision-Making	Parent decision-making was shaped by ongoing patterns of learner disengagement, distress, unmet need, and limited school responsiveness.
Withdrawal	Families increasingly constructed parallel learning and alternative educational pathways when broader environmental alignment was not achieved within school settings.

Environment 	Emergent Themes (From Chapter 4)	Examples of Realignment Through Positive Niche Construction
Academic/Cognitive	Access to Level and Pacing; Output Demands and Production; Depth, Differentiation, and Structural Constraints; Patterns of Engagement and Response	Individualized pacing, asynchronous progression, self-directed learning, and sustained intellectual challenge responsive to learner readiness
Social	Peer Relationships and Social Belonging; Intellectual Peer Access; Relationships with Teachers and Mentors; Patterns of Social Engagement and Alignment	Access to intellectual peers, flexible social engagement, and relationships supporting belonging, authenticity, and shared interests
Emotional	Emotional Distress and School-Based Experience; Regulation, Autonomy, and Environmental Fit; Emotional Response and Realignment	Environmental realignment supported increased emotional regulation, learner confidence, willingness to engage academically, and renewed participation in learning
Physical/Sensory	Sensory Experience and Environmental Constraints; Movement, Energy, and Daily Demands; Physical Environment and Alignment	Modification of sensory demands, workload, pacing expectations, and daily routines supported learner regulation, executive functioning, sustainability, and access to participation.
Creative	Creative Thinking and Ideation; Constraints on Creative Expression; Modes of Creative Engagement; Creative Expression and Alignment	Opportunities for inquiry, self-directed study, mentorship, ideation without rigid production requirements, and flexible demonstration of understanding supported deeper engagement and sustained exploration of learner interests.

Factor 4: Realignment Through Positive Niche Construction

The meltdowns were basically gone after the first year... it was miraculous.

It really felt like we were being let out of a box or a cage.

He actually had people.

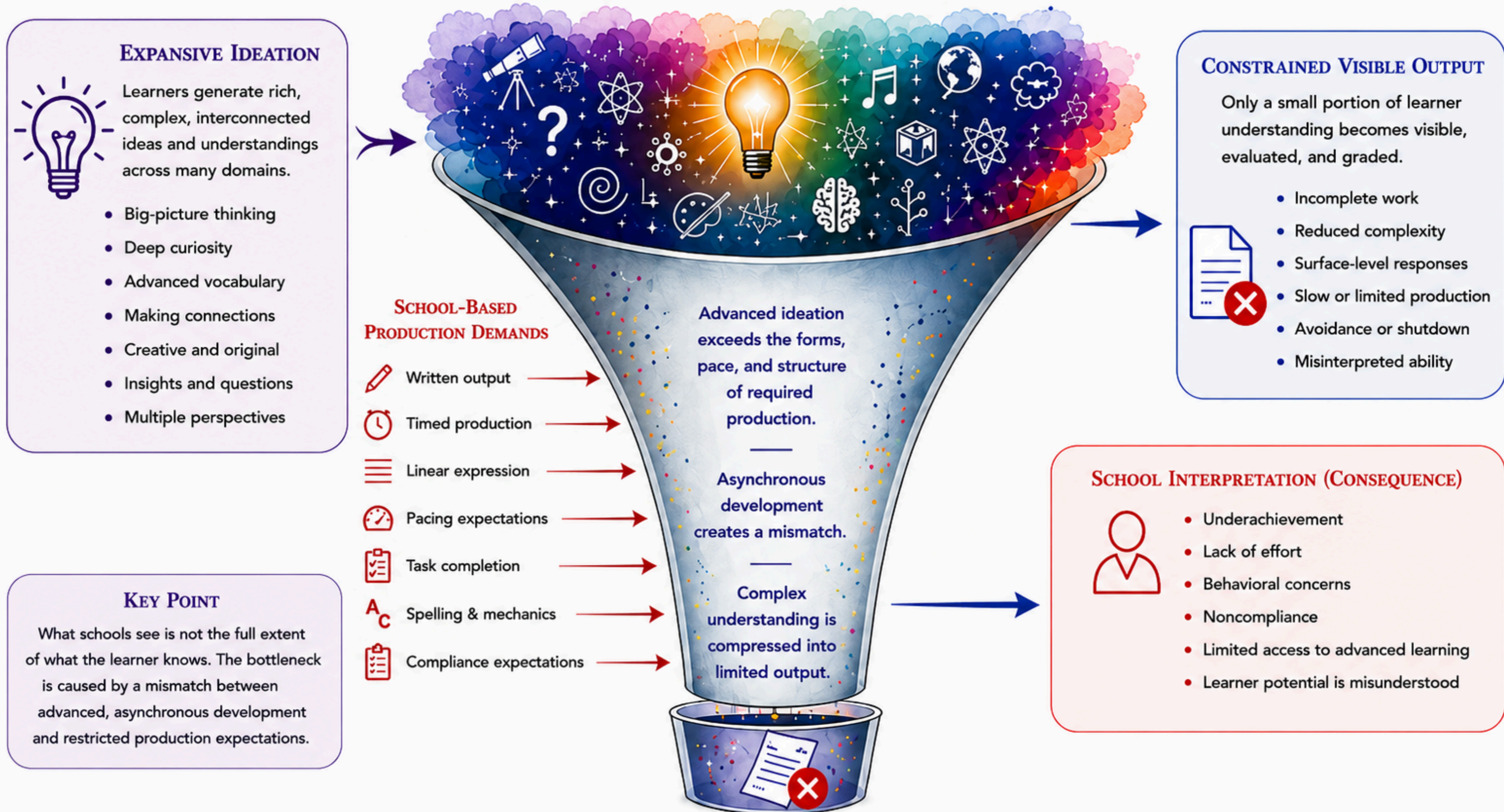
“The ability to move and learn at the same time was huge for him.”

She would stay with it for hours.

Like night and day.

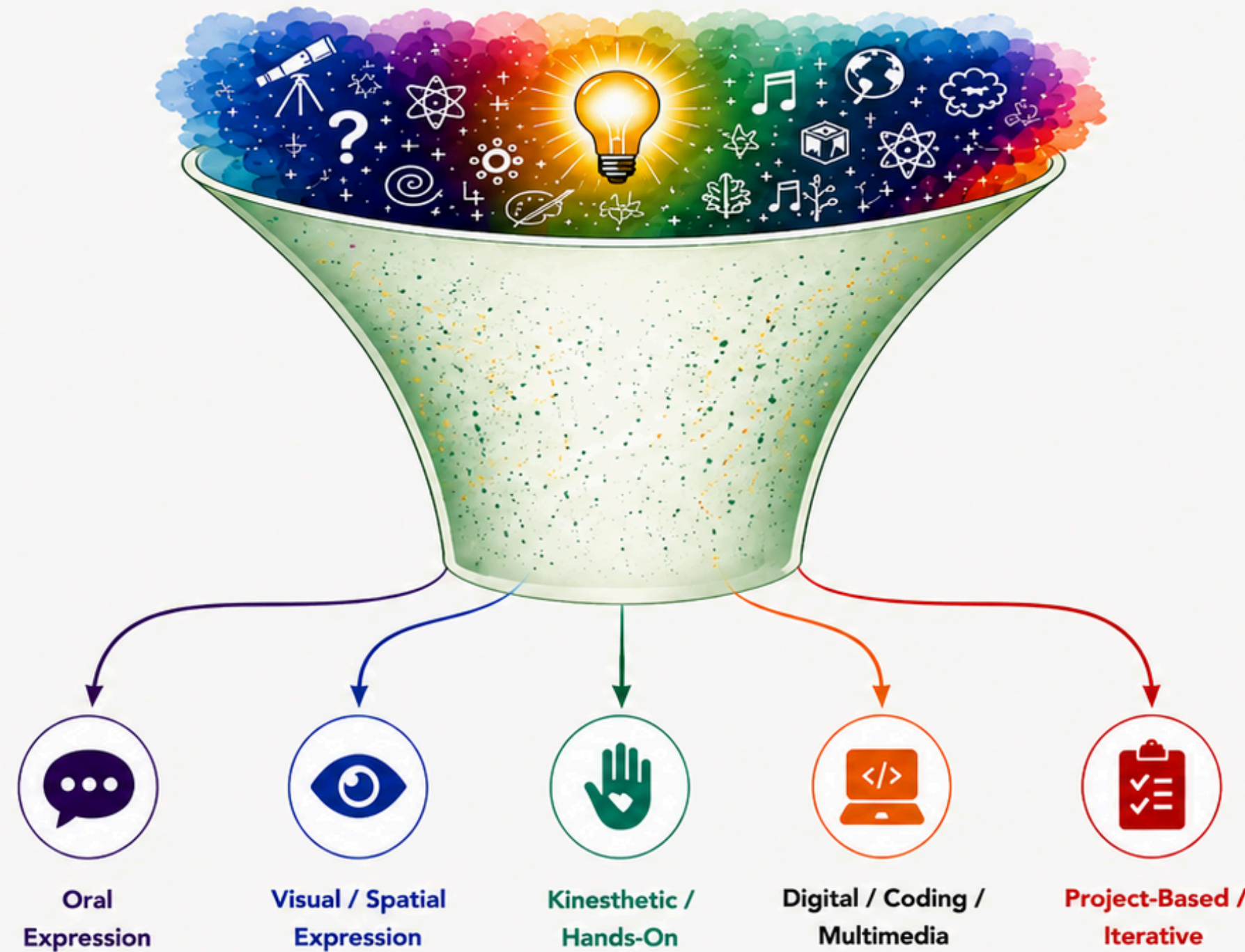
The Ideation–Production Bottleneck in Misaligned Environments

Advanced ideation may become constrained when school-based production demands do not align with asynchronous development.



Aligned Expression in Supportive Environments

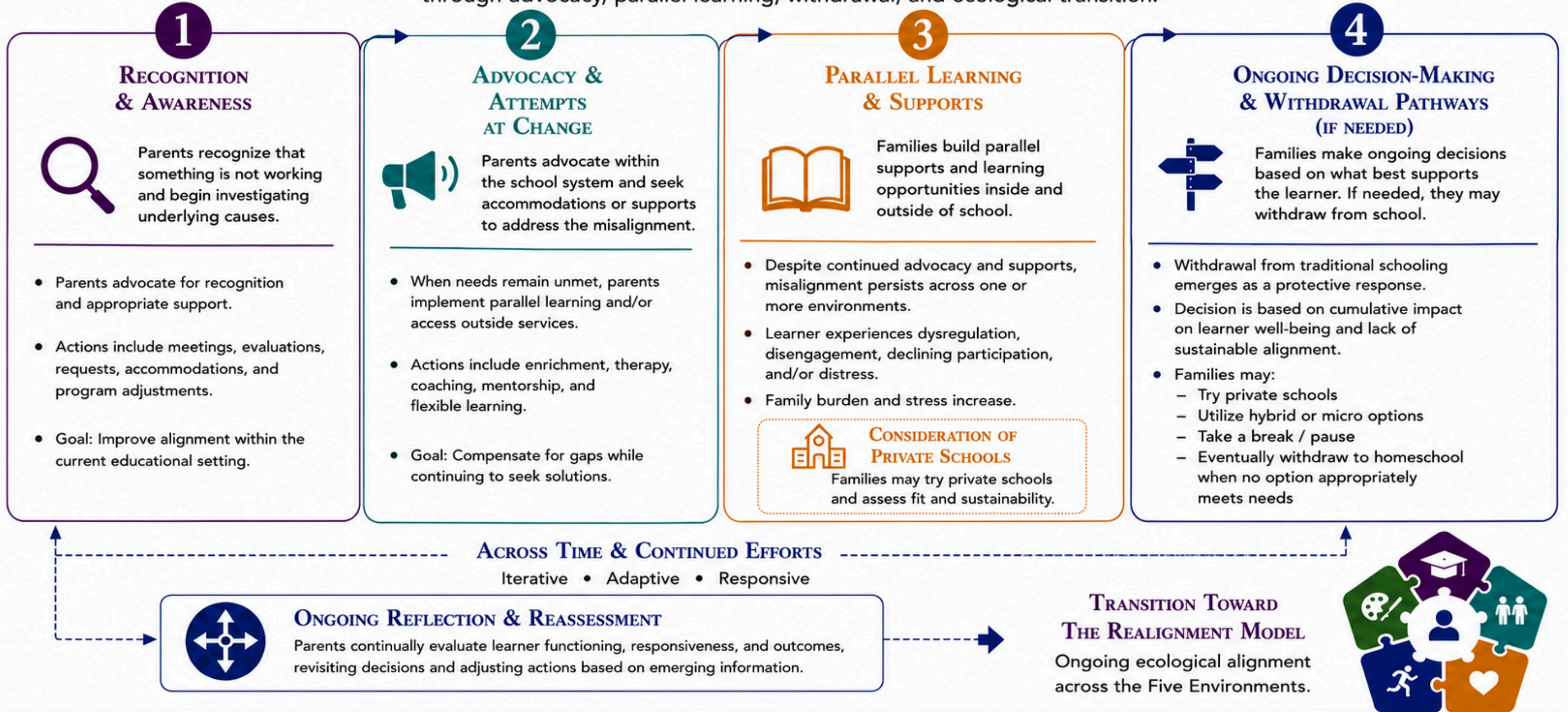
When environments align with learner profiles and asynchronous development, the bottleneck widens and true ability can be expressed.



Parent-Led Realignment Model (PLRM):

A Process of Educational Realignment

A temporal process of realignment across the Five Environments through advocacy, parallel learning, withdrawal, and ecological transition.



The Realignment Model:

An Ecological Alignment Process Through Positive Niche Construction

Realignment emerges as a dynamic, ecological, iterative process across the Five Environments.



ADAPTATION & SUPPORT STRATEGIES MAY INCLUDE:



ONGOING, ITERATIVE PROCESS



ALIGNMENT, SAFETY, AND WELL-BEING ARE PRIORITIZED WITHIN AND ACROSS ALL ENVIRONMENTS.
Families select and adjust supports that best meet the learner's evolving needs.

FAMILIES MAY CONTINUE TO MOVE INTO DIFFERENT LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS WHILE SEARCHING FOR FULL ALIGNMENT.

They may prioritize certain environments or supports at any given time.



The Realignment Model supports families in navigating misalignment, making decisions, and creating conditions for the learner to thrive, experience well-being, and reach their full potential.

The Educational Fit Alignment Framework

A Process of Ongoing Alignment Across the Five Environments

1 MULTIDIMENSIONAL MISALIGNMENT

Learner needs, strengths, and contexts are misaligned across the Five Environments.



Misalignment in one area affects others—often resulting in what teachers observe, not the underlying issue.



SYSTEM CONSTRAINTS & MISRECOGNITION

- Standardization
- Time structures
- One-size-fits-most
- Resource limitations
- Institutional rigidity



BOTTLENECK (COMPRESSION)

Asynchronous development is compressed by school-based production demands.



LACK OF RECOGNITION

Learner strengths, needs, and ways of learning are often overlooked or misunderstood.

2 SYSTEM CONSTRAINTS & MISRECOGNITION

School systems often compress learner development through structural constraints and misrecognition.



Persistent misalignment continues.

3 PARENT—LED REALIGNMENT MODEL (PLRM) — ACROSS TIME & CONTINUED EFFORTS

As school settings fail to respond appropriately, parents lead the process of realignment.

Iterative • Adaptive • Responsive

RECOGNITION & ADVOCACY



- Parents recognize that something is not working and begin investigating underlying causes.
- Parents advocate within the school system and seek accommodations or supports to address the misalignment.

PARALLEL LEARNING & SUPPORT



Families build parallel supports and learning opportunities inside and outside of school.

CONSIDERATION OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS



Families may try private school as an alternative for fit and sustainability.

ONGOING DECISION-MAKING & WITHDRAWAL (IF NEEDED)



Families make ongoing decisions based on what best supports the learner. If needed, they may withdraw from school.

WITHDRAWAL PATHWAYS



- Try private schools
- Utilize hybrid or micro options
- Take a break / pause
- Eventually withdraw to homeschool when no other pathways meet their learner's needs

4 REALIGNMENT MODEL BASED ON POSITIVE NICHE CONSTRUCTION

Realignment emerges as a dynamic, ecological, iterative process across the Five Environments.



Alignment, fit, and flourishing emerge through ongoing adaptation across contexts and time.



A protective response that prioritizes alignment, safety, and wellbeing.

THREE EXPLANATORY MODELS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK



IDEATION—PRODUCTION BOTTLENECK MODEL

Explains how asynchronous learner development is compressed by school-based production demands, creating misalignment.



PARENT—LED REALIGNMENT MODEL (PLRM)

Explains the iterative process families use to navigate misalignment, make decisions, and adjust across contexts and environments.



REALIGNMENT MODEL BASED ON POSITIVE NICHE CONSTRUCTION

Explains educational realignment as a dynamic, ecological, iterative process across the Five Environments that leads to alignment, fit, and flourishing.

THE PROCESS CONTINUES.

Families continuously adapt across evolving conditions, resources, and learner needs.

Implications

Ideation–Production Bottleneck Model

- Flexible demonstration of learning
- Greater learner choice and expression
- Reduced reliance on production-based assumptions
- More responsive interpretations of engagement and performance

Parent-Led Realignment Model

- Stronger parent-school collaboration
- Earlier responsiveness to learner needs
- Greater system flexibility
- Equity concerns when support depends on family resources

Realignment Model Based on PNC

- Educational fit as an ongoing process
- Flexible and individualized pathways
- Greater responsiveness to changing learner needs
- Expanded options beyond single-placement models

Educational Fit Alignment Framework

- Educational fit as multidimensional
- Alignment beyond academics alone
- Greater attention to asynchronous development
- More individualized approaches for HG/PG-2e learners



Limitations

- Qualitative multiple case study focused on depth rather than statistical generalization
- Small, specialized HG/PG-2e population
- Parent perspectives served as the primary source of data
- Some participants were previously known to the researcher through professional and gifted community involvement

Trustworthiness

- Cross-case comparison and iterative coding
- Supporting artifacts collected where prior familiarity existed
- Ongoing dissertation advisor review, revision, and refinement
- Interviews continued until thematic saturation was reached



Recommendations for Future Research

Educational Fit Across Contexts

- Further examination of multidimensional educational fit across diverse learner profiles and educational settings
- Exploration of how alignment changes across developmental stages and transitions

Flexible and Alternative Educational Pathways

- Additional research examining acceleration, hybrid models, flexible pacing, and self-directed learning
- Longitudinal examination of educational alignment and learner outcomes across settings

Framework and Model Development

- Further refinement and testing of the Educational Fit Alignment Framework and explanatory models
- Examination across broader and more diverse HG/PG-2e populations



Closing Reflection

Ultimately, this study suggests that

**when educational environments become more responsive to learner complexity,
possibilities for engagement, authenticity, well-being, and future growth expand significantly.**

Thank You

Questions and Discussion?