Newcomers: Portraits of Immigrants Raising Academically Achieving Gifted Children

Kipling E. Wiles
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd

Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, and the Gifted Education Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/704

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu,dig-commons@du.edu.
NEWCOMERS: PORTRAITS OF IMMIGRANTS RAISING ACADEMICALLY
ACHIEVING GIFTED CHILDREN

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Kipling E. Wiles
June 2014
Advisor: Dr. P. Bruce Uhrmacher
Abstract

To date, few research studies have focused on the home environments and specific strategies used by immigrant families to successfully parent gifted youth. This dissertation explores the parenting beliefs and practices of immigrants raising academically achieving gifted children in the United States. Using data from home observations and interviews, the study attempts to detail the cross-cultural parenting beliefs and practices of immigrants and what role these play in nurturing the academic success of gifted children. The study also examines the influential role of traditional values from the country of origin on these beliefs and practices. Using the qualitative method of portraiture, one cross-cultural belief, five cross-cultural parenting practices, and the concept of a Bicultural Academic Home Environment are illuminated through a narrative that combines both aesthetic and empirical detail. Central to this narrative are four meaningful themes—“Sometimes It Is Just a Part of the Story,” “Doing the Best You Can,” “Promoting the Good,” “I Plant and Now I Harvest”—that ultimately illuminate the home environment and parenting used by immigrant families to nurture the academic achievement of gifted children in America.
Acknowledgements

I thank my dissertation advisor Dr. Bruce Uhrmacher and my dissertation committee members, Dr. Nick Cutforth and Dr. Norma Hafenstein, for the knowledge, encouragement, and smiles they have shared with me over the last seven years.

I also thank my parents, Barbara and Glenn, and my stepparents, Ginny and Ed, for their ennobling example. Finally, I thank my participants for sharing their stories and opening their homes.

Lastly, this study is dedicated to my three boys, Matt, Griffin, and Sutton. May every mother be so fortunate.

“I have always believed, and I still believe, that whatever good or bad fortune may come our way we can always give it meaning and transform it into something of value.”

Hermann Hesse
Table Contents

Chapter One: Immigrants, Giftedness, and Parenting ..........................................................1

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature ....................................................................................16
  Parenting Style and Academic Achievement .................................................................16
  Academic Achievement and the Home Environment ......................................................22
  Cultural Differences and Similarities in Parenting for Academic Achievement ..........26
  Similarities and Differences in Parenting for Academic Achievement Among Asian
  American Families ........................................................................................................28
  Similarities and Differences in Parenting for Academic Achievement Among Other
  Ethnic Groups ...............................................................................................................32
  Immigrant Parenting Practices .......................................................................................36
  Giftedness: Conceptions and Identification Practices ...................................................42
  Parenting Practices That Support Giftedness ...............................................................51
  Conclusion ......................................................................................................................60

Chapter Three: Methodology .................................................................................................62
  Why Portraiture? .............................................................................................................62
  Participants .....................................................................................................................66
  Data Collection ............................................................................................................69
  Data Analysis ...............................................................................................................71
  Validity ..........................................................................................................................72
  Minimizing Researcher Power and Privilege ...............................................................73
  Limitations .....................................................................................................................75

Chapter Four: Sometimes It Is Just a Part of the Story ..........................................................77
  Parents Need to Be Their Best and Education Comes First .........................................79
  Take Care of Each Other .............................................................................................88
  Work Hard and Be Good ..............................................................................................94
  Balance: A Little Push, a Little Freedom .....................................................................99
  Sometimes It Is Just Part of the Story ..........................................................................107

Chapter Five: Doing the Best You Can ................................................................................110
  Doing the Best You Can and Giving a Sense of Control ...........................................111
  Giving a Sense of Control: The Middle School Crisis ...............................................126
  Nurturing Motivation and Encouraging Self-Confidence .......................................129
  Embrace the Good for Your Family ...........................................................................139
  Education is About Having Choices and Giving Yourself Options .......................148

Chapter Six: Promoting the Good .........................................................................................153
  Giving the Right Foundation .......................................................................................157
  Education Takes Precedence .....................................................................................168
  Open-minded and Balanced ......................................................................................179
  Promote the Good ......................................................................................................189
“How can I know who I am until I see what I do? How can I know what I value until I see where I walk?” Karl Weick

“How is the context that fixes the meaning.” Gregory Bateson

**Chapter One: Immigrants, Giftedness, and Parenting**

America is changing. The norm is no longer schoolyards dominated by various shades of apricot and almond. Instead one is more likely to witness a collection of sepia, sienna, and umber colored faces darting across playgrounds, dribbling down athletic fields, and conversing in classrooms. In fact, it is necessary to reach beyond the Crayola crayon box to recognize the diversity of skin color represented today in many of our nation’s public schools.

The Census Bureau has also noted this change (Table 1), projecting that by 2042, non-Hispanic whites will no longer make up the majority of the United States population. By 2050, the population of non-Hispanic whites is expected to fall from 68% to around 46%, while the Hispanic population is expected to rise from 15% to 30%, the African American population from 12% to 15%, and the Asian population from 5% to 9%.

According to the Washington Post:

The shift will happen sooner among children, 44 percent of whom are minority. By 2023, more than half are expected to be minority, and by 2050, the proportion will be 62 percent. The largest share of children, 39 percent, is projected to be Hispanic, followed by non-Hispanic whites (38 percent), African Americans (11 percent) and Asians (6 percent) (Aizenman, 2008, p. A06).
The changes projected by the Census Bureau cannot be seen in every schoolyard today, but the reality is clear, America is changing.

**TABLE 1**

Data from the United States Census Bureau 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2050 Projected Population</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population of non-Hispanic whites</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected population of non-Hispanic whites in 2050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected population of non-Hispanic white children in 2050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population of Hispanics</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected population of Hispanics in 2050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected population of Hispanic children in 2050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population of African Americans</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected population of African Americans in 2050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected population of African American children in 2050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population of Asian Americans</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected population of Asian Americans in 2050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected population of Asian American children in 2050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall projected population of minority groups in 2050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consequently, the immigrant population in the United States has also seen a dramatic increase over the past few decades. According to the Urban Institute, from 1990 to 2006, the number of immigrants living in the U.S. rose from 20 million to more than 37 million (Fortuny, Capps, Simms, & Chaudry, 2009). In fact, the fastest growing segment of the United States population is under 18 youth in immigrant families. Estimates indicate that immigrants and their children represent about 17 percent of the U.S. population and that in many metropolitan areas immigrants make up over a third of the total population (Fortuny et al., 2009). As per the Urban Institute, this paper defines immigrants as any persons who have come to the United States to take up permanent residence. However, it is important to note that how the Urban Institute and this study
define immigrants differs from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services definition, which classifies an immigrant as, “an alien who has been granted the right by the USCIS to reside permanently in the United States and to work without restrictions in the United States, also known as a Lawful Permanent Resident” (IRS, 2011). From this point forward, when referring to immigrants, this study will use the broader definition found in the Immigration and Nationality Act, which defines, “an immigrant as any alien in the United States” (USCIS, 2012). Any further reference to immigrant in this paper will include both those who have and have not been granted the right by USCIS to reside permanently within the United States.

Historically, immigrants have settled in the nation’s poor urban neighborhoods, but recent data collected by the Urban Institute finds that this is no longer the case. Immigrants are leaving the nation’s urban centers for smaller cities, towns, and rural areas. As the immigrant population spreads out, more communities are faced with educating immigrant youth and helping immigrant families successfully integrate into American society (Fortuny et al., 2009). This responsibility has long been placed on the public schools in the United States and the recent deluge of immigrants into U.S. public schools poses many challenges for educators and administrators; not the least of which is ensuring that immigrants achieve academic success, are prepared for higher education, and/or successfully integrate into the workforce. Although there is a great need to understand this new population, there is a dearth of literature addressing immigrants and immigrant homes that support academic achievement (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990; Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002; Lim & Lim, 2004).
From the little research that does exist, we know that immigrant families frequently have different values and that their family ecologies differ from majority families in that they must on some level compromise their minority group status in order to function within their new home country (Harrison, et al., 1990; Ochocka & Janzen, 2008; Silverstein, 2000). These families often possess the drive for their children to succeed given the sacrifices they have made migrating to a new land. They are also willing to make changes in order to accommodate the socialization practices of the United States (Kelley & Tseng, 1992). They use adaptive strategies to become accustomed to their new homes, finding ways to relinquish or retain characteristics of their cultures of origin in order to find a place where they can function in the United States (Harrison, et al., 1990). This filtering of parenting orientation and style creates modifications, parenting modifications that are the direct result of living in a new country (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008; Wu, 2008).

Due at least in part to these sacrifices and modifications, many immigrant families acculturate and find great success in the United States (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Their children achieve academically, receive advanced degrees, and establish distinguished careers. Moreover, a report by the Partnership for a New American Economy found that, “more than 40% of the 2010 Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children” (The Partnership for a New American Economy, 2011, p. 6). Despite these amazing success stories, little research exists on populations of academically successful children of immigrants and even less exists specifically on gifted children of immigrants.
who have the potential to attain the status of the likes of Colin Powell, Madeleine Albright, Barack Obama, or Steve Jobs.

The dearth of research on gifted immigrant populations is due in large part to the fact that the field of gifted education in the United States has largely focused on white middle class children and although some immigrants fall under the categories of white and middle class many others do not. Though one could argue why the gap in the literature exists, it is most likely due to the nationwide underrepresentation of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students in gifted education programs. This underrepresentation is of particular relevance to this study as many of this population are also recent immigrants to the United States.

According to the research of the National Center for Educational Statistics presented in Table 2, 3,236,990 public elementary and secondary students were identified as gifted and talented in 2006, of these, 68% were identified as White, while only 55.8% of all students enrolled nationwide in public schools were Caucasian. Only nine percent were identified as African American, while 16.9% of all students enrolled in public schools were identified as such and 13% were identified as Hispanic, much less than the 21.4% of Hispanics represented in the nation’s public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

TABLE 2
Data from the National Center for Educational Statistic 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total students identified gifted and talented nationwide</td>
<td>3,236,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White students identified gifted and talented</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White students enrolled in public schools nationwide</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
African American students identified gifted and talented .........................................................9%
African American students enrolled in public schools nationwide ..............................16.9%

Hispanic students identified gifted and talented.................................................................13%
Hispanic students enrolled in public schools nationwide ..............................................21.4%

Likewise, according to the research of the Equity Alliance at Arizona State University, black students made up 7.4% of the total school population in California public schools in 2007 and only 4.13% of those in gifted and talented education programming, while white students made up 28.5% of the total population and accounted for 41.7% of those in gifted and talented programming (Table 3) (King et al., 2009). In the Scottsdale Unified School District large discrepancies were also found. In 2004, white students made up 38% of the total population and 72% of the gifted education program, while Latino students represented 50% of the overall population and only 14% of the gifted student population (King et al., 2009). Consequently, when researchers choose sample populations for their studies, by default, their participants are mostly middle class Caucasians who for the most part are not recent immigrants to the United States.

**TABLE 3**
**Data from the Equity Alliance at Arizona State University 2009**

**California public school data 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White students identified gifted and talented</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White students enrolled in public school</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American students identified gifted and talented</td>
<td>4.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American students enrolled in public school</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scottsdale Unified School District data 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White students identified gifted and talented</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White students enrolled in public school</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Latino students identified gifted and talented .......................................................... 14%
Latino students enrolled in public school .............................................................. 50%

The root causes for the underrepresentation of immigrant and/or ethnically diverse students in both the research literature and gifted programs nationwide, most likely include: elitism, cultural misunderstanding, deficit thinking, IQ-based definitions of giftedness, and inadequate or discriminatory identification practices (Ford, 2003; Richert, 2003). The recognition of these causes has in turn contributed to growing concerns within the gifted education field around access for and recruitment of culturally and linguistically diverse students, including immigrants (Ford, 2003; Richert, 2003).

Although attention has been drawn to issues surrounding immigrants and/or ethnically diverse gifted students, most of the research to date has focused on classroom implications and instructional strategies for these learners (Brody, 2004; Castellano, 2004; Ford, 2001; Ford, 2003; Ford, 2010; Ford, Grantham, & Milner, 2004; Gottfredson, 2004; Klug, 2004; Parrish, 2004; Renzulli & Reis, 2004). Very little has been written specifically on the home life of immigrants and/or ethnically diverse gifted students, although a fair amount of research has focused on the parenting of white middle class gifted children, finding that gifted children arise from vastly different home environments: academic home environments that are harmonious and achievement orientated or home environments that are achievement orientated but filled with a great deal of tension and dysfunction (Freeman, 2000; Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962; Subotnik & Borland, 1992; Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1995). It seems that there is no one ideal family structure that supports gifted development as both harmony and dysfunction have encouraged eminent adults, talent development, and academic success (Albert, 1978;

Additionally, from general parenting literature focusing on all children, not just gifted and talented, we know that there are three main parenting styles employed by caregivers: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive (Baumrind, 1967; 1968; 1991). Research on these three parenting styles has shown that the authoritative parenting style is positively correlated with academic achievement and higher cognitive abilities while, permissive and authoritarian parenting styles are negatively correlated (Baumrind, 1968; Chao, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, & Evans, 2006; Rudasil, Adleson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Nevertheless, it is problematic to generalize these findings to ethnically diverse or immigrant families as this research is based on predominantly white middle class children and their parents, justified by the reality that the sample ethnicities of these studies are consistent with the gifted populations in United States schools today (Garn & Jolly, 2010). By failing to look at families of color, parenting research on gifted and talented children to date is incomplete, rationalizing this study, which examines the parenting practices of ethnically diverse immigrant families raising academically achieving gifted children.
Quite simply, segregated gifted programs have led to a crippling gap in the literature, a gap that this study hopes to lessen and one that I experienced as a first year teacher of ethnically diverse gifted students. In 2005, I was assigned the position of Gifted and Talented resource teacher at a culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse school in suburban Colorado. Like many urban schools in the United States, Westview Elementary served 850 students who spoke 57 languages and represented five of the seven continents. Over 80% of these students were on free or reduced lunch and most lived in the neighboring low-rent apartments or public-housing facilities. Many were also refugees fleeing any number of recent conflicts or natural disasters in Africa, East Europe, Asia, or the Middle East.

As the Gifted and Talented resource teacher, I was expected to identify and program for the gifted students at Westview. Knowing little about the field of gifted education, I immediately sought out the resources available in my district and through my graduate program. Over the summer and subsequent fall, I took a number of courses and read literature on the nature of giftedness, instructional strategies, identification practices, curriculum development, and programming for gifted students. I learned a great deal, but I also realized that for the most part I was on my own when it came to developing a program and process that would identify and serve the diverse population of students at Westview Elementary.

Relying heavily on the work of Donna Ford and Suzanne Richert, I pieced together a successful gifted program for the ethnically diverse gifted students at my school, successful in the sense that the population of students in my program achieved at
high levels on district and state assessments (Developmental Reading Assessment 2, Measure of Academic Progress, and Colorado Student Achievement Test), were excited and engaged in their learning, and matched the diversity of the student body.

Over my five years in this position, the immigrant families that I came to know had the most profound impact on me. Families like the Hamals, who had escaped Sadam Hussein’s persecution of the Kurds in northern Iraq; the Beyenes who had walked 2,000 miles across Ethiopia to arrive in the safe haven of Djibouti; Dek San who dropped his immaculately dressed daughter off every day with his glasses taped together and holes in his shoes; and Anuka and Han Ehkbat who were both grand chess masters in their native Mongolia. The stories of these families were fascinating. And what amazed me the most was that despite the hardships and sacrifices they had faced, all of the families had raised academically achieving gifted children. Their children even outperformed the middle class white students in the school on district and state assessments (Developmental Reading Assessment 2, Measure of Academic Progress, and Colorado Student Achievement Test).

At the same time, I also worked with the Ochoas, the Aklilus, and the Subotics whose gifted children underachieved. Their children performed well below their abilities on achievement tests, failed to turn in assignments, and were often getting into trouble for their behavior. I began to wonder, what was the difference between these two parent groups? Why were some immigrant parents so successful at raising academically achieving gifted children, while others were not? What strategies could be shared to help other immigrant families raise academically successful gifted children?
These initial questions and my ongoing interest in the families I was so fortunate to teach, led to this dissertation, the purpose of which is to identify what cross-cultural parenting practices and beliefs support academically achieving gifted children of immigrants living in the United States. When referring to academically achieving gifted children of immigrants, this study will include those children who have been formally identified as gifted and talented by a gifted and talented specialist and/or licensed psychologist. High scores on report cards and district-wide and state-wide assessments define them as academically achieving, while immigrant status of the parents includes both parents who hold lawful permanent residence in the United States and those who do not but have come to live in the U.S. permanently. Moreover, this study will use the 1993 United States Department of Education’s definition of a gifted and talented child:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided in the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 3)

Through this study, I hope to describe and interpret what is going on in the homes of immigrant families who promote academic success in their gifted children, while also counteracting the negative images of immigrants perpetuated in the popular news media, which reports regularly on crimes committed by illegal immigrants or on recent legislative policy, like the failure of the Dream Act to pass the senate or the passage of Arizona SB 1070 aimed at identifying, prosecuting, and deporting illegal immigrants.
According to the New York Times, states across the country have enacted immigration laws and resolutions in record numbers since the last major federal attempt to address immigration fell short in 2007 (Archibold, 2010). The fact that popular media and legislation continue to focus on the negative impacts of immigration does nothing to help the schools and teachers who must educate this population whether illegal or not. One way that I feel I can counteract this pathology is by telling positive stories of immigrants: stories that often go unheard; quiet successes lived out behind closed doors.

Using the methodology of portraiture, this study details the cross-cultural parenting belief and practices of four immigrant families raising academically achieving gifted children in America. Specifically, the study explores the following research questions:

- What are the cross-cultural parenting practices of immigrants raising academically achieving gifted children in the United States?
- What role do these parenting practices play in nurturing the academic success of gifted children?
- What cross-cultural beliefs guide the parenting practices of these immigrants? How do these beliefs nurture academic success?
- How do the traditional values of the country of origin influence the cross-cultural parenting practices and beliefs?
- What implications, if any, can be drawn in order that immigrant parents can effectively foster the academic achievement of their gifted children?
Through portraiture, this study captures the experiences of four immigrant families raising at least one academically successful gifted child in suburban Denver, Colorado. Over the course of six months, I collected rich description during interviews and observations. During the data collection period, I watched, listened to, and interacted with the families. I then traced and interpreted emergent themes to piece together an aesthetic whole that captures the cross-cultural parenting belief and practices of these families (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

The final aesthetic whole reveals what is happening within the homes of these four immigrant families. Moreover, the study is written in a style meant to inform and inspire not only academics but also immigrants and educators working with gifted immigrant students; as the method of portraiture is concerned with broadening the audience in order to communicate beyond the academic realm (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

Through the gathering of empirical evidence into carefully composed portraits, I give voice to the experiences of immigrant parents focusing on the “goodness” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 9) found in each of the four homes. Specifically, through detailed observations and extensive interviews this study documents the cross-cultural parenting beliefs and practices employed by the parents as well as how their traditional values influence the cross-cultural parenting belief and practices to create Bicultural Academic Home Environments. In this case, portraiture was the appropriate method because it resists the tradition of documenting failure. As the researcher I first asked,
“What is good here?” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 9) opening up very different possibilities than if I sought to discover failure.

Although I was committed to identifying goodness, I recognized that goodness is often laden with imperfections and that there are many ways that goodness can be expressed. Therefore, throughout the research process, I paid close attention to evidence of weakness and vulnerability, while also capturing the participants’ unique perspectives on “goodness” and how they negotiate the bad. Likewise, I took special care, as all good researchers do, to counterbalance the portraits with healthy skepticism and scrutiny. The very fact that the researcher’s self is, “more evident and more visible than in any other research form” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 13) caused me to be more vigilant in identifying other sources that challenged my perspective.

The end result is a narrative that combines aesthetic and empirical description, is authentic to the voice of immigrant parents, speaks to a broader audience than the academy, and uses the self as the primary research instrument to document and interpret the experiences of immigrant parents raising academically achieving gifted children.

In summary, this research study uses portraiture to identify the cross-cultural parenting beliefs and practices used by immigrant parents to support their academically achieving gifted children. Moreover, this study is important for five significant reasons. Foremost, the study focuses on the fastest growing and most poorly understood population in our nation today in an attempt to contribute valuable information about immigrant families living in the United States. At the same time, this dissertation addresses two areas where there is a dearth in the literature, (1) how
immigrants and diverse ethnic groups parent for academic achievement and (2) the home life of gifted immigrants and ethnically diverse students. Specifically, the concept of Bicultural Academic Home Environments bestows valuable information to each of the aforementioned research gaps. Additionally, by using a methodology that aims to address an audience beyond the academic realm, this study seeks to resonate with, inform, and inspire other families, educators, and researchers by illuminating the cross-cultural parenting belief and practices of immigrants raising academically successful gifted children. Herein lays the possibility of helping other immigrant parents foster the academic achievement of their gifted children. Finally, this study highlights the “goodness” in immigrant parenting, counteracting the negativity and failure disproportionately presented in the popular news media today.

In the following chapter, I examine the four bodies of literature that inform this study: parenting that promotes academic achievement, cultural similarities and differences in parenting, immigrant parenting practices, and parenting that supports giftedness. Following the literature review, I detail the methodology of portraiture providing further explanation of the key elements of portraiture and my rationale for choosing this methodology. I then describe the process I used for selecting participants, and collecting and analyzing data. The central four chapters tell the individual stories of the four immigrant parents raising gifted children. Then I provide a cross-family analysis of the portraits that illuminates points of convergence and divergence. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the overarching story and implications of the study.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Parenting Style and Academic Achievement

Over the last five decades, many researchers have been preoccupied with how parenting supports academic achievement. The vast majority of this research has focused on the association between parenting style and the academic success of students. In Diana Baumrind’s influential studies on the socialization of competence, parents of the most mature preschool children were found to be controlling, demanding, communicative, and nurturing, consequently, parents of discontented children were non-nurturing and parents of immature children were non-controlling (1967). This initial research led Baumrind to identify the three main parenting styles still referenced in most literature today: permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian (Baumrind, 1968). Central to these are two key parenting aspects, responsiveness and demandingness, referring to the degree that the parent responds to the child's needs and the extent to which the parent demands more mature and responsible behavior from the child (Baumrind, 1991).

Parents who are both demanding and responsive are considered authoritative. They monitor and have clear standards for their children. They are firm but not rigid, willing to make an exception when the situation warrants. Their disciplinary methods are supportive rather than punitive and they want their children to be both self-regulated and cooperative. The authoritative parent is responsive to the child's needs but not indulgent. On the contrary, authoritarian parents demand a great deal from the child. They are
directive and not responsive. They expect their orders to be obeyed without question and create an orderly rule-regulated environment. They monitor their children very closely and are rigid, harsh, and demanding. At the other end of the continuum are permissive parents who demand little of the child and are overly responsive to the child's demands, seldom enforcing consistent rules. They tend to avoid conflict with the child and allow immature and self-regulated behavior (Baumrind, 1968). A fourth parenting style, the rejecting and neglectful parent, defined by Baumrind in later years is important to note but less prevalent in the research, is neither demanding nor responsive and often neglects his or her childrearing duties all together (1991).

Consistently and throughout many years of research, Baumrind found that children from authoritative homes are the most competent (1967; 1968; 1991). Many other researchers have extended Baumrind’s work finding that the authoritative parenting style is also positively correlated with academic achievement and higher cognitive abilities (Chao, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Rudasil, Adleson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). While permissive and authoritarian parenting styles are negatively correlated (Baumrind, 1968; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindog, & Evans, 2006; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992).

In the late 1980’s, Dornbusch et al. investigated the association between Baumrind’s parenting styles and school achievement in a diverse sample of 7,836 high school students from the San Francisco Bay Area (1987). The researchers found that
authoritative parenting was positively associated with grades, while both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were negatively associated. The sample size also allowed for further analysis of four ethnic groups, Asian, Black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic white. The data indicated that across ethnic groups, authoritarian and permissive styles were associated with lower grades, and an authoritative style was associated with higher grades. However, the typology was less accurate for Asian families. Asian students reported their parents to be higher on the authoritarian index and lower on the authoritative. Additionally, the data also indicated that Hispanic males were an exception to this typology. Authoritarian parenting of Hispanic males showed almost no relation to grades, but poor grades were associated with authoritarian parenting of Hispanic girls and Hispanics overall reported higher on the authoritarian parenting style index. Despite these inconsistencies, the authors concluded that Baumrind’s parenting styles were related to the academic performance of high school age students (Dornbusch et al., 1987).

In 1992, Steinberg, Lanborn, Dornbusch, and Darling conducted a follow-up study to the Dornbusch et al. study from 1987. The authors collected further data from the same sample of students and then used this data to examine the impact of authoritative parenting, parental involvement in schooling, and parental encouragement to succeed on adolescent school achievement. Again, the authors concluded that authoritative parenting leads to better adolescent school performance and stronger school engagement. Specifically, they found that three components of Authoritativeness seem to contribute to healthy psychological development and school success: warmth, control, and autonomy granting, while, parental involvement is much more likely to promote
adolescent school success when it occurs in the context of an authoritative home environment. The authors also noted that authoritative parenting is only one of several ways parents exert an impact on their children’s school performance.

Parents also influence children's achievement through their direct involvement with school activities, such as helping with homework or course selection or attending parent-teacher conferences, and through the specific encouragement of school success, both explicitly and implicitly, by setting and maintaining high performance standards. (Steinberg et al., 1992, p. 1268).

Another significant finding from the study was that children from authoritative homes are more engaged in school in part because their parents are more involved in their schooling. Further analyses indicated that the parents' involvement in schooling actually enhanced the adolescents' academic performance. However, it seems that parental encouragement of academic excellence does not enhance school performance or school engagement, once parental involvement is taken into account.

Similar to the 1987 study, Steinberg et al. also identified a number of cultural inconsistencies in their data. The results indicated that Asian and Hispanic-American adolescents are less likely to rate their parents as authoritative when compared to White or Black students and that parenting practices may have less effect on African-American students overall as high scores of authoritativeness, school involvement, and academic encouragement did not yield the same positive results when compared to white, Asian, and Hispanic students. The authors posit, as do Ogbu and Simons that peer influence not parental practice may significantly impact the academic performance of African-American adolescents (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Steinberg et al., 1992).
Perhaps the most relevant research on parenting style to the present study was published by Rudasil et al. in the winter of 2013. This research examined how gifted children’s cognitive abilities were related to their perceptions of their mothers’ and fathers’ parenting styles and the extent that these relationships were associated with race, sex, and age. Focusing on the work of Baumrind, the authors investigated the notion that children of warm responsive parents who set limits and have reasonable expectations tend to have better outcomes than overly permissive or authoritarian parents.

In the study, students (N=332) ranging in age from 9-17 years who attended a summer residential program for gifted children completed the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) and the verbal battery of the Cognitive Abilities Test. Using regression analyses the authors found support for the use of the PAQ with gifted children and “that more cognitively able students were likely to perceive their parents as employing a flexible (i.e., authoritative) parenting style” (p. 15). Similarly, the author’s found that students with lower cognitive ability scores were more likely to rate their mothers and fathers as either permissive or authoritarian than students with higher cognitive abilities. These results align conceptually with previously reviewed research by Dornbusch et al. (1987) which found that parents who use authoritative strategies have children who perform better academically.

Additional analyses found younger children to rate their parents as more permissive than older children, girls to rate their parents as more authoritarian than boys, and non-White children more likely to rate their mothers as authoritarian. This last finding suggests, as does previously reviewed literature that parenting style often times
differs by race and ethnicity (Chan, 2005; Dwairy, 2004; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Leng, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Lim & Lim, 2004; Strom, Strom, & Strom, 1992; Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002; Varela, Vernberg, Sanchez-Sosa, Riveros, Mitchell, & Mashunkashey, 2004; Yao, 1985). However, the limited ethnic and racial diversity of the students sampled in this study calls for further research to investigate “cultural differences in parenting styles within gifted populations” (Rudasil et al., 2013, p. 23).

Despite this limitation, the results nevertheless support the previously suggested notion that “authoritative parenting promotes positive outcomes for children, particularly those who have been identified as gifted” (p. 15). What is yet to be discerned is whether parents who demonstrate warmth, responsiveness, and high expectations foster an environment that promotes cognitive growth or whether children who are more cognitively able elicit authoritative parenting because they behave in a way that suggests an ability to handle more independence and responsibility.

Overall, the research shows a strong association between authoritative parenting style, higher cognitive ability, and academic achievement for Caucasian families. Further, academic achievement is greatest among children from authoritative homes that combine parental acceptance, control, involvement in school, and autonomy granting. However, the impact of authoritative parenting on minority youth seems to be less significant, with higher levels of authoritarian parenting style reported by non-white youth (i.e., Asian American and Hispanic youth) and a much weaker association between academic

**Academic Achievement and the Home Environment**

In addition to parenting style, a great deal of research has focused on the relationship between student academic achievement and the home environment. These studies largely identify specific practices used by parents in the home that promote academic achievement, including: parental involvement; creating academic home environments that mirror school environments; supporting academic motivation, attitudes, and beliefs; high achievement expectations; greater emphasis on learning opportunities and activities; encouraging curiosity, persistence, and mastery; autonomy support and structure; high levels of verbal interaction; positive affective relationships; and positive discipline and control strategies (Campbell & Verna, 2007; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1997; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Iverson & Walberg, 1982).

Looking at 66 studies, reports, and books on the effect families have on student achievement, Henderson and Berla found that, in general, the family makes critical contributions to student achievement from the earliest childhood years through high school and efforts to improve children’s outcomes are more effective when the family is actively involved (1994). Looking more closely at how actively involved families contribute to student achievement, Campbell and Verla examined families with high-achieving children from Scandinavia, Europe, Asia, and the United States (2007). They found that effective parents develop “Academic Home Climates” that mirror the
academic climates found in schools. These “Academic Home Climates” support attitudes, beliefs, and motivations that lead to higher achievement (Campbell & Verna, 2007). The concept of “Academic Home Climates” was also supported by a review of the literature conducted by Hess and Holloway, who identified five processes linking family and school achievement (1) verbal interaction between mother and children, (2) expectation of parents for achievement, (3) positive affective relationships between parents and children, (4) parental beliefs and attributions about the child, and (5) discipline and control strategies (1984).

Delving deeper into the concept of successful academic home environments, Gottfried, Fleming, and Gottfried looked at whether the home environment positively predicts academic intrinsic motivation from childhood to early adolescence when controlling for socioeconomic status, as it has been shown to correlate with academic performance and parental involvement (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1997; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Iverson & Walberg, 1982 Olson, 1984). The authors found that children who come from homes that have a greater emphasis on learning opportunities and activities are for the most part more academically intrinsically motivated. Leading the authors to hypothesize that the availability of cognitive stimulation in the home and exposure to learning-oriented academic opportunities and activities stimulates children’s orientation toward enjoyment of learning through engaging in, as well as, valuing such activities (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1997).

Using the theoretical framework that academic intrinsic motivation is positively related to children’s academic achievement and that intrinsic motivation in the primary
years predicts subsequent motivation, Gottfried, et al. conducted a similar study examining the impact of parents’ motivational practices on the academic achievement and intrinsic motivation of nine and ten year olds (1994). Specifically, this longitudinal study looked at the impact of mothers' encouragement of children's task endogeny and provision of task-extrinsic consequences. The authors hypothesized that the extent at which a parent encourages curiosity, persistence, and mastery should enhance intrinsic motivation, while extrinsic rewards should have a negative impact on intrinsic motivation, as children will perceive them to be controlling or indicative of incompetence. The results of the study supported the authors’ hypothesis as the mother’s motivational strategies had a positive impact on children’s intrinsic motivation and academic performance. Simply, task endogeny seems to have a positive impact on intrinsic motivation, while task-extrinsic consequences have a negative impact. However, more importantly, the positive effects of a mother’s motivational strategies persisted over a one-year period and could be generalized to children’s achievement. Therefore, the authors concluded that parents should find ways to encourage curiosity, persistence, and mastery (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994).

Another way that parents encourage intrinsic motivation in their children is through autonomy support and structure. Autonomy support being the degree to which parents value and use strategies that encourage independent problem-solving, choice, and participation in decision-making opposed to motivating achievement through punitive discipline, controlling pressure, or rewards. While, structure is defined as the extent that parents provide clear and consistent expectations, rules, and boundaries for a child’s
behavior. A study by Grolnick and Ryan (1989) examined children’s self-regulation, competence, and academic achievement in relation to autonomy support, involvement, and provision for structure. The researchers found that parents’ autonomy support was positively related to the children’s self-regulation, competence, and academic achievement while inversely related to acting out and learning problems. Maternal involvement was also related to achievement, competence, and some aspects of behavior adjustment, but father involvement showed no significant relationship. The authors concluded that in two-parent families, parents exert important influences on children's school-related self-regulation and competence through their support of autonomy (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989).

By and large, research supports the idea that both parenting style and home environments with specific parental attitudes, expectations, behaviors, and interactions are closely related to school success and achievement. Specifically, authoritative parenting style, autonomy support and structure, parental involvement, high expectations, encouragement of intrinsic motivation, exposure to learning orientated activities, verbal interaction between mother and child, and positive affective relationships all promote academic achievement. However, these conclusions cannot be generalized to all children as the majority of the research studies reviewed above used European-American middle class sample populations and those that used diverse samples noted cultural inconsistencies in their results (Chao, 1996; Campbell & Verna, 2007; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1997; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Hess &
Holloway, 1984; Iverson & Walberg, 1982; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Therefore, further research examining the relationship between parenting practices and academic achievement in various ethnic groups is needed. Although, in light of the immigration trends identified by the Urban Institute in chapter one, just investigating various ethnic groups will not adequately address the ever-growing immigrant population (Urban Institute, 2010). Further research must examine the relationship between parenting practices and academic achievement of immigrants explicitly. However, in order to be comprehensive, the focus must broaden to be inclusive of a wide variety of immigrants, not just African American, Asian, and Hispanic parents as has previous research (Campbell & Verna, 2007; Ceballo, 2004; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Included in further research studies should be immigrants who represent the Middle East, South America, South East Asia, Central Asia, and Africa.

**Cultural Differences and Similarities in Parenting for Academic Achievement**

To date the need to document and research the parenting practices used by diverse ethnic groups to promote academic success has been noted by a number of researchers (Bornstein & Cheah, 2006; Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990; Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002; Lim & Lim, 2004). All of these authors have recognized that the majority of the research conducted on parenting has been done with middleclass European American families and encourage further research focusing on the
socialization practices and/or parenting styles of different ethnic minority groups rearing academically successful children.

Not surprisingly, the limited research that does exist on ethnically diverse families has found that both similarities and differences exist between cultures in successful parenting practices and styles (Chan, 2005; Dwairy, 2004; Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Leng, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Lim & Lim, 2004; Strom, Strom, & Strom, 1992; Varela, Vernberg, Sanchez-Sosa, Riveros, Mitchell, & Mashunkashey, 2004; Yao, 1985).

A study done by Julian, McKenry, and McKelvey (1994) examined cultural variations in parenting among Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian American, and African American families when socioeconomic status is controlled. Specifically, the study looked at parenting attitudes, parenting behaviors, and parental involvement of two-parent households. The results indicated that there were more similarities than differences among the four groups when socioeconomic status was controlled. However, the ethnic parents as a whole stressed the importance of their children exercising self-control and succeeding in school more than Caucasian parents. At the same time, Hispanic and African American parents placed greater emphasis on self-control, obedience, and getting along with others than Caucasian and Asian American parents, while Asian parents exhibited more conservative practices using praise and slapping with greater frequency (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994).
Similarities and Differences in Parenting for Academic Achievement Among Asian American Families

The more conservative parenting practices noted by Julian et al. were also identified by Kelley and Tseng (1992) in their study of Chinese American mothers. The authors found that Caucasian mothers scored higher on sensitivity, consistency, nonrestrictiveness, nurturance, and rule setting, while, Chinese American mothers scored higher on physical punishment and yelling at the child. According to a lengthy literature review conducted by Kelley and Tseng (1992), Chinese parents are generally more controlling, more achievement orientated, and more encouraging of independence than Caucasian. In Chinese families the parenting role is that of teacher. Children are expected to satisfy their parents and show respect and reverence for elders. They are taught self-discipline, good manners, group identification, and mutual dependence. Likewise, Chinese mothers maintain close physical proximity to their children without displaying overt affection, but tend to be lenient, warm, and affectionate with infants until the child can understand. As they reach the age of understanding, Chinese parents impose strict discipline. Despite these differences in parenting methods, Kelly and Tseng’s (1992) study indicated that overall Caucasian and Chinese parents seem to have similar child-rearing goals.

Esther Yao also noted similar values between Caucasian and Asian families, reporting that both parent groups had high expectations, were concerned, and provided stable family environments with close familial relationships. However, her findings also suggest that the family life of Caucasian students tends to be less structured and that there
are less formal educational experiences provided after school and on weekends (Yao, 1985).

In a similar study conducted in China, Chan looked to see if Chinese families who tend to promote cohesion over encouraging independence are more likely to enhance their children’s academic skills but impede their creative development (2005). Surprisingly, the study found that Chinese children who perceived their families as being more cohesive and their parents as having high expectations of them were actually more likely to perceive themselves as having talents in academic skills, creativity, and leadership. The author posits that parental expectations and family cohesion may actually be necessary to develop academic skills, creativity, and leadership in Chinese children (Chan, 2005).

Additional research on Chinese parenting has found that Confucian philosophies contribute to the notion that success is less a result of innate ability than it is the effort and hard work of the individual. This thinking is contrary to the Western belief that success and failure are linked to ability. Therefore, Chinese parents often believe that achievement is the result of effort rather than innate ability, adults should be involved in their child’s education and high motivation and perseverance is key to learning. (Wu, 2008)

In regards to the parenting style of Asian Americans, significant differences have been found to exist between Caucasian families and Asians. As first noted by Dornbusch et al. Asian students report their parents to be higher on the authoritarian index and lower on the authoritative (1987). A study by Leng, Lau, and Lam attempted to determine the
cross-cultural generalizability of previous research done on predominantly white middle-class families that found lower parental authoritarianism and higher authoritativeness correlate with higher academic achievement (1998). In defining parental authoritarianism, the authors conclude that the definition used in previous studies is too simplistic. They argue that there are in fact two forms of authoritarianism, general and academic. General authoritarianism refers to a parenting style where children are told not to argue with adults, they will know better when they grow up, and that parents are correct and should not be questioned. Academic authoritarianism refers to parents who respond to poor grades by getting upset and reducing a child’s allowance or grounding the youth and in response to good grades tell the students to do better. The authors argue that it is academic authoritarianism, which negatively affects grades, while general authoritarianism often demonstrated by Chinese families does not. Further, the authors stress that the parental authoritarianism found in Chinese families is directly related to traditional Confucian values and when coupled with an emphasis on educational attainment, actually enhances academic performance. Although, the same it not true for American children who are raised in a culture that values autonomy and independence. Despite these differences, the authors hypothesized that academic authoritarianism should be negatively related to academic performance for both groups. The researchers then surveyed tenth and eleventh graders in Hong Kong, the United States, and Australia. For all three groups academic achievement was negatively correlated with academic authoritarianism, while general authoritarianism was positively correlated with the Chinese parents only. It appears that when Asian American parents use a more
authoritarian parenting style it does not negatively affect their child’s academic performance (Leng, Lau, & Lam, 1998).

This paradoxical phenomenon also confounded researchers Lim and Lim (2004). However, these authors took aim at the fact that previous research used Western categories that are less culturally relevant for Asian families. They argue that parenting style as a construct remains problematic in cross-cultural research, and therefore more accurate results can be found by (1) investigating parenting dimensions separately than as an aspect of style and (2) taking into consideration the qualitative differences between cultures and the associated child outcomes (Lim & Lim, 2004).

Despite the issues of generalizability raised above, the research does suggest that Asian and Asian American parents have similar values as Caucasian parents, both regarding high achievement and supportive family relationships as important. However, they differ in that Asian American’s tend to stress self-control, family cohesion over individualism, and appreciation of one's cultural heritage (Chan, 2005; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Yao, 1985). Additionally, Asian American parents use more authoritarian and conservative parenting practices than Caucasians in order to support academic achievement including praise, punishment, and strict discipline (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Leng, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Lim & Lim, 2004).
Similarities and Differences in Parenting for Academic Achievement Among Other Ethnic Groups

Cultural similarities and differences are also present between Hispanic and Caucasian families; however, less research has examined the specific relationship between Hispanic parenting practices and achievement. Alternatively, most of the studies done on Hispanic families have focused on parenting style or cultural differences finding as Julian et al. did that Hispanic parents place a greater emphasis on family being integral to daily life. Likewise, females tend to take a more traditional role, while males assume the dominant head of the household position. These roles are then further reinforced through child-rearing practices that place children as the central focus. (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994).

Strom, Strom, and Strom found that both Caucasian and Hispanic parents have favorable attitudes toward accepting a child’s imagination, tolerating the disorder of fantasy play, and recognizing the need for children to play with parents as well as peers. However, Caucasian parents demonstrate more favorable perceptions of creativity, control, and teaching/learning, while, Hispanic parents are more inclined to join their children in play, experience greater comfort playing with their child, and assign greater importance to play as influencing child development. Further the study found that Caucasian parents were more inclined to promote creativity, expressed less frustration with noise and disorder from play, encouraged their children to express their fears and anxieties more, and held more favorable perceptions of their ability to provide learning experiences in the home (Strom, Strom, & Strom, 1992).
Though these studies do not address the specific association between parenting and academic achievement for Hispanic children, a number of studies do speak to the relationship between parenting style and academic achievement in Hispanic families. As mentioned earlier, Dornbusch et al. found that Hispanics overall reported higher on the authoritarian parenting style index than Caucasians and African Americans, while Sternberg et al. reported that Hispanic-American adolescents are also less likely to rate their parents as authoritative when compared to White or Black students. An additional study by Varela, Vernberg, Sanchez-Sosa, Riveros, Mitchell, and Mashunkashey compared Mexican, Mexican American, and Caucasian families. The results indicated that all parents reported using authoritative strategies more than authoritarian, but Mexican American parents reported using greater authoritarian strategies than Mexican or Caucasian. These results indicate that previous research which found a greater prevalence of authoritarian parenting in Hispanic families may have more to do with the ecological context (ethnic minority status) for these families than their affiliation with Mexican culture. The researchers note that when understanding parenting practices of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. it is important to differentiate between the effects of being an ethnic minority in the U.S. and associating with Mexican culture and values. The authors posit that Mexican descent families may use stricter parenting strategies as a response to the challenges they face as ethnic minorities living in the United States (Varela et al., 2004).

Despite the lack of research relating specific Hispanic parenting practices to academic achievement, it does appear that Hispanic parents use less authoritative and
more authoritarian practices with their children, especially boys. Additionally, Hispanic families may be more inclined to participate in traditional family roles, value play, and emphasize self-control, obedience, and getting along with others than Asian and Caucasian families.

Beyond Asian and Hispanic parents, there are few studies looking purposefully at how other ethnic groups parent for academic achievement. This being said, there are a few additional studies worth noting. Julian et al. found that African-American parents mirror the socialization practices of Caucasians, but with one key difference, they provide explicit racial socialization (teaching coping skills for survival in a hostile environment) (1994). The authors conjecture that a stricter parenting style is employed by these parents in order to develop the coping skills necessary to deal with the realities of racism and discrimination. Therefore, African American parents value strictness, expect children to assume responsibility for feelings and needs, and demand that time to be used wisely and not wasted. They teach their children: to respect authority; balance personal needs with the groups; to work hard and achieve; a sense of obligation to kin; to withhold a strong religious orientation; and that many talents and abilities are valuable (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994).

Subsequently, a study by Jambunathan and Counselman (2002) examined the parenting practices of Indian mothers. Their results indicated that Indian mother’s living in the United States have fewer inappropriate expectations of their children, were less likely to reverse roles with their children, and used corporal punishment less than Indian mother’s living in India. The authors contend that Asian Indian mothers living in the U.S.
demonstrate more authoritative parenting styles while Indian mother’s living in India use a more authoritarian style (Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002).

In conclusion, limited research has been done looking at the association between academic achievement and parenting practices or styles for diverse ethnic groups. The research that does exist notes similarities in values and goals between various ethnic groups and Caucasians, but for the most part seeks to identify key cultural differences in parenting practices and styles. This focus on cultural differences is most likely do to the fact that, “virtually all aspects of parenting children are informed by culture” (Bornstein & Cheah, 2006, p. 4) as all cultures dictate certain traits that people are expected to possess and require members to exhibit specific behaviors in order to be a fully functioning citizen of that particular society. Some of these characteristics and behaviors vary greatly from one environmental context to another, while others are universal across cultures, such as requiring parents to nurture and protect their children (Bornstein & Cheah, 2006). Specifically, LeVine argues there are three universal goals related to parenting:

(1) Ensuring the physical survival and health of the child; (2) providing an environment for successful progression through the developmental stages into adulthood to assure self-maintenance in maturity; and (3) teaching/modeling normative cultural and societal values” (LeVine, 1977, p. 20).

These goals may indeed be ‘universal’, but the ways in which parents accomplish these goals may not be. Parenting therefore is an adaptive process, in which parents adjust to the cultural, social, geographical, economic, and political environment in which the family lives.

35
Immigrant Parenting Practices

For immigrants, research shows that adapting to a new cultural, social, geographical, economic, and political environment impacts parenting practices in specific ways, as many immigrants develop unique family ecologies where parenting is modified to focus on socialization goals, adaptive strategies, biculturalism, and acculturation. (Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002; Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Harrison et al., 1990; Ochocka & Janzen, 2008; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Silverstein, 2000; Wu, 2008). To date, most of the research on immigrant parenting uses an ecological perspective, considering how an individual develops in interaction with their immediate environment and how dimensions of the larger social context affect the individual’s immediate environment. In large part, the ecology of ethnic minority families differ from majority families in that they must at some level compromise aspects of their minority group status in order to function within a new social system, while also facing specific ecological challenges originating from long histories of oppression and discrimination (Harrison et al., 1990). Specifically, Harrison et al. identify socialization goals and adaptive strategies as two important ways that immigrant families modify their parenting to adequately acculturate into the majority social system. According to the authors, socialization goals originate from cultural knowledge that determines adult tasks, essential competencies for functioning in the world, and how these competencies are transmitted generationally. Further the authors state that there are two key socialization goals associated with immigrant families: (1) positive orientation toward the ethnic group in order to promote biculturalism and acceptance of the ancestral worldview and (2) socialization for
interdependence in order to develop a cooperative view of life. Additionally, the authors identify the following social adaptive strategies often employed by immigrants: family extendedness as a “problem-solving and stress-coping system that addresses, adapts, and commits available family resources” (Harrison et al., 1990, p. 351); role flexibility in definition, responsibility, and performance, in which older siblings parent younger siblings or contribute as bread-winners; bicultural orientation toward the acculturation process which takes place on two dimensions, the first, accommodating to the host culture, and the second, a complex process of relinquishing or retaining characteristics of the culture of origin to find a place where one can function in more than one cultural context; and developing ancestral worldviews that stress collectivism versus individualism and religious/spiritual philosophical orientations.

Ochocka and Janzen also address the unique challenges immigrants face raising their children in a new environment. The authors use a comprehensive framework that considers both the parent’s cultural background and the way in which the host society shapes the parenting orientations. Particularly, Ochocka and Janzen employ an immigrant parenting model that begins with parenting orientations and styles, which when filtered by the new host country context create important parenting modifications. Parenting modifications are the changes which immigrants make in their parenting orientations and styles as a result of living in their new country. Also, integral to the framework are parent contributions or ways that immigrants influence and shape the society they join. Applying this framework to a participatory action research study with 317 immigrant parents, the authors identified a number of themes in parenting orientation, styles,
modifications, and contributions. Common themes that emerged about parenting orientation were: respecting others; importance of family and family obligations; maintaining native religion, culture, and language; hopes of long term economic stability and a good education; maintaining good values; being healthy and happy; and contributing positively to their new host society (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). As for themes related to parenting styles, evidence of authoritarian and authoritative styles was found, but no evidence of permissive. Likewise, the participants mentioned four key parenting actions related to parenting style: “responding to bad (disciplining), preventing bad/presenting good (role-modeling and moral education), and promoting good (creating mutually respectful relationships)” (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008, p. 100). As for parenting modifications, three themes emerged: greater involvement, especially fathers; usage of multiple methods, like becoming less harsh, reasoning and negotiating; and reversal of power as children speak better English than their parents, make more demands, and express their views in ways they had not done previously. Lastly, the immigrants in the study generally felt that they contributed to their host society by modeling better behavior of children and focusing on educational achievement, family unity, and stronger discipline (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008).

Similar to the scholars above, John Ogbu also offers an ecological view of minorities. Specifically, Ogbu proposes a cultural-ecological theory, which focuses on the impact of a families’ minority status on the children’s school performance. Ogbu’s cultural-ecological theory explains minority school performance by considering the societal and school factors in addition to the dynamics within the minority community. In
his theory, cultural refers to the way people behave and see the world, while ecological refers to the environment, setting, or world of people. The theory has two major parts “the system and community forces” (Ogbu, 1998, p.158). The system is defined as the ways in which minorities are treated or mistreated by educational policies, pedagogy, and whether there is a return for investing in school credentials. Similarly, the “community forces” are the ways in which minorities respond to schooling as a consequence of this treatment. Essentially, community forces are minorities’ perceptions of and response to schooling, including four main factors: a frame comparing minority schools to schools in the native country or in white suburbs; beliefs about the instrumental value of schooling and that credentials can help you get ahead; relational interpretations of schooling or the degree of trust of schools and school personnel; and symbolic beliefs about schooling, whether school curriculum and language are harmful to minority cultural identity.

Particularly germane to this study is Ogbu’s research classifying minorities into three different categories: autonomous, voluntary (or immigrant), and involuntary (or nonimmigrant). Especially relevant is Ogbu’s concept of voluntary minorities, those immigrants who more or less willingly moved to the United States to find better opportunities than they had in their homeland. According to Ogbu’s research, the distinguishing characteristics of this group is that they voluntarily chose to move to America in hopes of finding a better future and therefore, they do not interpret their presence in the United States as forced upon them. These immigrants generally do well in school although they may experience some difficulty when they first arrive because of language, cultural differences, and discriminatory practices.
Generally, voluntary minorities have a “positive dual frame of reference,” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p.170) one frame based on their situation of being in America and the other centered on their place of origin. Quite often, they see opportunities for success in the United States and are willing to accept less than equal treatment in order to improve their chances for economic success. They also maintain the folk theory of “making it,” that hard work, following the rules, and getting a good education will lead to good employment and success in America. Likewise, roles models within the voluntary minority community are usually people who, “have fully acculturated, attained a higher education, and achieved economic success. They are hard workers who have played by the rules of the system and succeeded (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p.173).” For the most part, these immigrants have an optimistic and practical outlook when they arrive, leading to a trust of white institutions, like public schools. Therefore, they do not question the authority of schools because they see them as providing the route to success. In turn, voluntary minorities take a “tourist” approach to learning mainstream white ways. They do not see this as harmful to their group identity, but as additive (e.g. learning English is adding another language instead of replacing). These attitudes and beliefs naturally affect voluntary minorities’ attitudes and behaviors in school. These parents have high academic expectations of their children and hold the children (not schools) accountable, except in cases of blatant discrimination. They give unequivocal support of their children learning English and expect high grades. They also maintain strong control of their student’s time, insuring that homework is completed even if they cannot help their child with it. Their
children generally, work hard, strive for high grades, pay attention in class, do their homework, and follow the school rules.

Furthermore it is important to note that children of immigrant minorities are considered voluntary minorities like their parents, as Ogbu has found that, “the education of the descendants of immigrants continues to be influenced by the community forces of their forebears (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p.166).” The exceptions to this idea are those descendants of immigrants who share affinity with nonimmigrant minorities, those who were incorporated into the US against their will (e.g. immigrants from Africa, Mexico, and the Caribbean).

By and large, immigrant families face the additional challenges of managing differences in values between their home country and the dominant culture. They also face stress caused by acculturation, oppression, discrimination, and maintaining bicultural identities (Silverstein, 2000). To deal with these unique challenges, many immigrant families employ a strategy of traditional parenting practices and styles mixed with adopted Western notions, using socialization goals as their guide and adaptive strategies as the tool to modify their parenting in order to function well within the new home country. For the most part, these immigrant parents are able to successfully use their adaptive strategies to raise hard-working children, who strive for high grades, pay attention in class, do their homework, and follow the school rules. Despite these general trends, in the end, the competency and academic success of immigrant children comes
down to the ways in which individual families react to the adversity they face in their new home country.

**Giftedness: Conceptions and Identification Practices**

In the United States, many immigrant families have responded effectively to the adversity detailed above, raising gifted and talented children who have gone on to achieve great academic success. However, what remains to be documented is whether immigrant families implement similar parenting practices to support giftedness and academic achievement as Caucasian middle class parents. In order to make any comparisons, we must first review the diverse theoretical conceptions of giftedness that exist in the field of gifted education. Likewise, we must also look at the identification practices aligned with these various conceptions. Only then, can we begin to look more closely at the research on parenting gifted children and consider how these strategies may or may not be supportive of immigrants raising gifted children.

Many theorists from the gifted education field have proposed conceptions of giftedness (Binet & Simon, 1905; Galton, 1869; Gagne, 2003; Gardner, 2003; Sternberg, 2003; Renzulli, 1984; Tannenbaum, 2003; Terman, 1926). These conceptions are quite diverse, but most agree with the basic premise that potential can be identified in some children and when this potential is developed into different traits, giftedness can be observed in a broad range of categories. Upon closer look, we find that some of these theorists focus on the genetic components of intelligence and giftedness, others differentiate gifts from talents using potential and chance as key factors, while a third group emphasizes multiple types of intelligence or intelligences.
From the earliest years, definitions and conceptions of giftedness generally equated giftedness with high IQ. Psychometricians and psychologists, like Sir Francis Galton, Alfred Binet, and Lewis Terman were some of the first to emphasize the genetic component of intelligence. Using Galton’s (1869) theory of natural ability, which defined mental ability and genius in terms of scores, Binet (1905) and Terman (1926) developed general intelligence tests that were used throughout France and the United States to identify gifted children. Consequently, these three theorists’ conceptions of giftedness focused almost exclusively on general intelligence scores. For example, Terman's 1926 definition of giftedness read, "the top 1% level in general intellectual ability as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale or a comparable instrument" (Terman, 1926, p. 43). The legacy of these early conceptions of giftedness is still present today as seen in states like Arizona who define giftedness as, “scoring at the 97th percentile on a state approved test of reasoning ability” (SUUSD, 2014). However, in the last forty years, other theorists have argued that intellect cannot be expressed in such a unitary manner and have suggested more multifaceted conceptions of giftedness (Gagne, 2003; Gardner, 2003; Renzulli, 1984; Sternberg, 2003; Tannenbaum, 2003). These theorists’ ideas are described below in further detail.

Abraham Tannenbaum’s definition of giftedness focuses on the potential of children to become “critically acclaimed performers or exemplary producers of ideas in spheres of activity that enhance the moral, physical, emotional, social, intellectual, or aesthetic life of humanity” (Tannenbaum, 2003, p.45). He classifies gifted adults into two
basic categories, producers and performers, the former creating thoughts and tangibles and the latter contributing artistry and human service. Further, Tannenbaum (2003) delineates these two categories into those who work creatively and those who work proficiently. However, these categories speak only of giftedness in its mature adult form. As for identifying children, Tannenbaum (2003) offers “The Star Model” of giftedness. “The Star Model” identifies five interacting factors that contribute to gifted behavior: a) superior general ability, b) distinctive spatial aptitudes, c) nonintellective traits, d) a challenging and facilitative environment, and e) chance. These five factors interact in different ways to create separate categories, but all factors must be present in some degree for giftedness. When these five factors combine in children there is the potential for them to grow into gifted adults. However, Tannenbaum (2003) reasons that only time can tell whether this early promise will be fulfilled.

Similar to Tannenbaum who focuses on the behaviors that must be present in children to attain gifted status as adults, Francoys Gagne (2003) is also concerned with potential in children, but in particular, differentiating between the terms gifted and talented. The distinction between the two terms is central to his conception of giftedness titled, *The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT)*. Specifically, Gagne (2003) defines giftedness as the possession of aptitudes or gifts in at least one specific domain to a degree that he or she is among the top 10% of his or her peers. He defines talent as the superior mastery of the skills and knowledge in a specific domain that places one among the top 10% of age peers active in that field. Further, Gagne (2003) breaks the term gifted into four domains: creative, intellectual, socioaffective, and sensorimotor.
While he delineates talents into seven separate fields: arts, business, leisure, social action, sports, technology, and academics. According to Gagne (2003), three catalysts play a major role in whether gifts develop into talents: chance, environment, and intrapersonal factors. By in large, in order for gifts to develop into talents a developmental process (maturation, informal learning, formal non-institutional learning, or formal institutional learning) must take place. Gagne (2003) also argues that the five components of his model impact the likelihood of talent emergence in the following order of greatest to least: 1) chance, 2) gifts, 3) intrapersonal, 4) learning/practice, and 5) environment. Taken as a whole, Gagne’s (2003) DMGT represents a complex model of interactions between these six. Although, the most important interaction is that between gifts and talent as gifts are the raw materials of talent; Gifts can remain undeveloped but the presence of talent implies underlying gifts. Lastly, Gagne (2003) delineates five subgroups within the talented 10 percent: mild (1:10), moderate (1:100), high (1:1,000), exceptional (1:10,000), and extreme (1:100,000).

Another theorist who proposes a multidimensional view of giftedness is the prolific scholar Joseph Renzulli. Renzulli’s Three Ring Definition of Giftedness was developed with a “decidedly educational perspective,” (Renzulli, 2005, p. 28) perhaps contributing to its greater visibility and use within K-12 educational settings. Like Tannenbaum and Gagne, Renzulli differentiates between children with potential and gifted individuals who have successfully used their potential to produce. Overall, he defines two possible and equally important types of giftedness “schoolhouse giftedness,” (Renzulli, 2005, p. 8) those who excel at lesson-learning and test-taking, and “creative-
productive giftedness,” (Renzulli, 2005, p. 8) those who excel at developing original thought, solutions, or materials. However, Renzulli’s Three Ring Definition of Giftedness focuses specifically on defining the main dimensions of human potential that encourage the creative-productive type of giftedness. In his model, the interaction between personality and environmental factors gives rise to three interacting clusters of traits: Above-Average Ability, Task Commitment, and Creativity. Specifically, Above-Average ability refers to performance or potential for performance at the top 15-20% of both specific and general areas; Task Commitment is a refined or focused form of motivation; and Creativity refers to those recognized for their creative accomplishments. Of this model, Renzulli (2005) stresses that it is no single “cluster” or “ring” that makes giftedness but the interaction among the three that is the necessary ingredient for creative productive accomplishment. To Renzulli (2005), giftedness consists of thoughts and action that result from an interaction among above average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity.

Perhaps equally prolific in the field of gifted education is Robert Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory of Successful Intelligence and Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences. Both have contributed greatly to the multidimensional view of intelligence that has surfaced over the last few decades (Colangelo & Davis, 2003). Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory conceptualizes intelligence within a sociocultural context, meaning that intelligence is defined as, “the ability to achieve success in life in terms of one’s personal standards,” (Sternberg, 2003, p.88) leaving the possibility that intelligent pursuits may or may not be common across contexts. Independent of context, a gifted person will
demonstrate a blend of three skills: Analytic, Synthetic, and Practical giftedness. Analytic refers to the ability to dissect a problem and figure it out; Synthetic means the ability to cope with novel situations creatively and intuitively; and the Practical combines the application of the other two skills to pragmatic situations. All gifted individuals display strengths and weaknesses among these three skills, but people who consistently demonstrate intellectual giftedness are those who are able to capitalize on their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses.

On the other hand, Howard Gardner’s (2003) theory of Multiple Intelligences proposes a conception of human abilities that includes multiple areas of intelligences (like Tannenbaum, Gagne, Renzulli, and Sternberg) and challenges traditional education’s emphasis on scholastic intelligence and the use of IQ tests for assessing giftedness. Drawing from a pluralistic view of intelligence, Gardner identified nine intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and existential. Each of these intelligences is autonomous and capable of operating independently, but in most cases these intelligences work together creating unique individual profiles of abilities with strengths and weaknesses. According to Gardner, a student can be considered gifted in any domain that draws on one or more of these intelligences. Ultimately, Multiple Intelligence theory influences how we conceive and measure giftedness and how gifted students are educated. It asks educators to value a greater variety of abilities and to educate children using approaches that are sensitive to each individual’s unique profile.
Though differing in the details, the conceptions of giftedness detailed above can be divided into two basic categories, those that rely solely on general ability as measured by IQ test scores (Galton, Binet, and Terman) and those that rely on multiple and interrelated components (Tannenbaum, Gagne, Renzulli, Sternberg, and Gardner). The former will be referred to as one-dimensional and the latter as multidimensional. Among those categorized as multidimensional, greater diversity is seen within the conceptions as Tannenbaum (2003) stresses potentiality; Gagne (2003) differentiates between talents and giftedness and focuses on chance; Renzulli (2005) emphasizes motivation; and Sternberg (2003) and Gardner (2003) look at the varieties of intellectual skills or intelligences. Despite these differences, it is the overall premise of the one-dimensional and multidimensional conceptions that in turn lead to varying identification practices, those that are singular and those that are multifaceted.

Singular identification practices rely on strict cut-off scores for identification and placement in gifted and talented programming. For example, the State of Arizona and the Scottsdale Unified School (SUSD) district, which was detailed in the first chapter as having an underrepresentation of ethnically diverse students in their gifted education programs (King et al., 2009), offer both a one-dimensional conception of giftedness and a unilateral identification practice, as quoted directly from the SUSD’s gifted homepage:

The program complies with Arizona Law that mandates that school districts identify gifted students as those scoring at the 97th percentile on a state approved test of reasoning ability. All students scoring at the 97th percentile or above on any one of the three batteries of the Cognitive Abilities Test or on any other appropriate test administered by Scottsdale District personnel will qualify for placement (SUSD, 2014).
Conversely, the Cherry Creek School District (CCSD) in the state of Colorado offers a multifaceted conception of giftedness and multidimensional identification practices:

Children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, and/or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative and/or artistic areas, may possess an unusual capacity for leadership, or excel in specific academic fields. These students require services beyond the rich and varied services normally provided by the regular classroom. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata and in all areas of human endeavor.

These guidelines support the approach of looking at a variety of information on a student, both quantitative and qualitative, in building a "body of evidence." In building the body of evidence, information is gathered in four areas: aptitude, achievement, performance, and behavior. Data is collected, both quantitative and qualitative, as evidence of intensive academic need and/or exceptional ability (CCSD, 2014).

At the national level the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) defines a gifted individual as:

Those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports). (NAGC, 2014)

Additionally, the NAGC has issued the following position on identification practices:

Identification of gifted and talented students should not be based on a single assessment. Rather, multiple pieces of evidence should be collected that measure different constructs and characteristics aligned to the gifted program’s definition, goals, and objectives (Callahan, Tomlinson, & Pizzat, 1993), ideally including a variety of format types (e.g., paper-and-pencil; performance assessment). (NAGC, 2008)
Given the great difference in conceptions and identification practices detailed above, it is important to note that for this study, the participants were identified by the Cherry Creek School District in Colorado, which aligns with both the NAGC’s position on identification practices and the multidimensional category delineated above. Therefore, we can assume that all students in this study adhere to the definition and meet the subsequent identification qualifications stated by CCSD, however, we must recognize that there is the possibility that the identification practices in specific schools failed to adhere to the school districts policies.

Although, the conceptions and identification practices detailed above state or imply that a gifted child will show above-average intellectual abilities or achievement in one or more specific areas, it is important to note that this is not always the case. Being gifted does not assure achievement. In fact, according to Sylvia Rimm there are specific, “risks and pressures that accompany high intelligence that detour potentially high-achieving children toward defensive and avoidance patterns” (Rimm, 2003, p.424). Since many of the conceptions and definitions detailed above require or imply that a gifted child will show a high level of achievement in at least one domain, we can only assume that many underachieving gifted children remain unidentified nationwide. A closer look at the research on underachievement finds that the home, school, and peer environment are related to whether a gifted child will move toward high achievement or fall into underachievement patterns (Rimm, 2003). Specifically, underachievement may stem from overwhelming academic pressure from parents; parents who are not education-oriented; parents who do not demonstrate respect for school or independent learning;
parents who provided inconsistent leadership; an academic environment that is unchallenging; the presence of other “perfect” siblings in the home; peer influences that are anti-gifted and anti-intellectual; and/or disabilities such as ADHD (Rimm, 2003).

Knowing this, we can presume because the participants in this study have been identified high achieving gifted and talented students they and their parents will demonstrate few of the qualities of underachievement detailed above. Additionally, we can assume that the portraits presented in this research will most likely resonate only with parents who are raising academically achieving gifted children and not underachievers.

In summary, the field of gifted education proposes a broad range of conceptions of giftedness and identification practices. Therefore, it is important to state the definition and identification practices used to identify the children in this study. By detailing the broad range of definitions and identification practices found in the literature and those specific to the school district responsible for identifying the students in this study a better foundation is laid for understanding the portraits and analysis presented later. However, before moving into the research methodology we must first take a closer look at what the literature says about parenting gifted and talented children for academic achievement.

**Parenting Practices That Support Giftedness**

To date, the vast majority of the literature on parenting gifted and talented children has looked for commonalities in the home life of gifted individuals (Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1995). From this research conflicting patterns have emerged, leading many authors to conclude that there is no ideal familial environment for producing gifted children. In fact, the research seems to suggest that two very different pathways for
achievement may exist depending on the area of expertise and mini culture of the family (Freeman, 2000; Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962; Subotnik & Borland, 1992; Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1995). The first pathway being achievement orientated homes filled with tension and the second, achievement orientated homes that are harmonious.

In regards to the first category, well-known research by Goertzel and Goertzel (1962) suggests that there is no typical gifted child, nor any one direct path to eminence. Instead, from their biographical studies of eminent individuals the authors identified a number of themes which contribute to tension within the home: opinionated parents, failure-prone fathers, smothering mothers, troubled homes, children with handicaps, early agonies, and dislike of school and school teachers (Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962). Additional research by Robert Albert (1978) found that eminent-to-be male children tend to come from achievement oriented homes, which often have a good deal of “wobble” or disturbance. The mother son relationship is usually very close and somewhat “oedipal” giving the child a “special” position in the family, while the father son relationship centers on the son's achievement. As a result, Albert concluded that the eminent-to-be son usually grows up with ambivalence toward women and a tendency to be a loner, not minding that he may be different from others (Albert, 1978). Accordingly, there is evidence that dysfunctional families may act as a catalyst for talent development, especially in artistic domains, while the “orphanhood effect” may explain how in some cases a parent’s death can provoke achievement (Feldman & Piirto, 2002). Moon, Jurich, and Feldhusen (1996) also reported that strained relationships and conflict often exist in gifted families, while several additional authors stressed that birth order and siblings with
disabilities can affect the talent development of a child as parents may isolate, allocate resources, or have higher expectations of children for these reasons; the majority of this research claims that firstborns or children with disabled siblings are more likely to reach eminence because of their special status within the family (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Feldman & Piirto, 2002; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008).

Related to tension present in the home environment, Olszewski-Kubilius (2008) found that history, stability, and marginality affect the degree to which a family can support a gifted child’s talent development. Generally, a family must develop two to three successful stable generations in order to adequately provide the financial support necessary for the talent development of a child. Similarly, the family’s historical passions and values are often passed down generationally and therefore political families tend to produce politicians and musical families yield musicians. Marginality, or the degree to which a family is dissimilar from the mainstream culture, can also affect talent development. Families who are marginalized because of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status may believe that traditional routes to success do not offer the same rewards and will push their children down alternative paths, such as entertainment or sports (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008). Overall, it seems that gifted individuals can emerge from families where any or all of the following characteristics are present: marginality, tension, tragedy, family historical passions, siblings with disabilities or handicaps, dysfunction, “orphanhood”, conflict, and strained relationships (Albert, 1978; Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Feldman & Piirto, 2002; Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008; Moon, Jurich, & Feldhusen, 1996).
Conversely, many other research studies have found that gifted and talented children tend to come from more harmonious homes where parents exhibit a combination of the following: offering parental involvement and support with opportunities and resources; encouraging autonomy, choice, and creativity; modeling love of learning and desire for knowledge; providing enriched language experiences, cognitive interaction, and complex problems; balancing challenge and support; and fostering important psychological dispositions like motivation and persistence (Albert, 1978; Bloom, 1985; Campbell, 2005; Chan, 2005; Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Feldman & Piirto, 2002; Freeman, 2000; Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962; Groth, 1975; Howe, 1990; Karnes, Shwedel, & Steinberg, 1984; Landau & Weissler, 1993; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001; Silverman & Kearney, 1989; Silverstein, 2000; Snowden & Christian, 1999; Weissler & Landau, 1993; Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1995).

In 1985, Benjamin Bloom published perhaps the most famous and comprehensive study done on family environments that support gifted and talented children. In the book *Developing Talent in Young People*, Bloom and his research team examined the critical factors that contribute to talent development. Specifically, they looked at the childhood experiences of 120 elite performers who had won international competitions or awards in the fields of music, art, athletics, mathematics, and neurology. The study found no early indicators that could predict a gifted child’s success, but did note that all the superb performers had practiced intensively, studied with devoted teachers, and been supported enthusiastically by their families throughout their developing years. The researchers concluded that gifted and talented children do not succeed without the time and financial
support of their families as experts are made, not born (Bloom, 1985). This notion was also supported by the research of James Campbell (2005) who found that it is parental involvement, or very specific methods of working with and nurturing a child, which increases the child's chances of being gifted. Likewise in an extensive review of the literature, Feldman and Piirto (2002) concluded that parents make sustained efforts to identify and nurture talents in their children. Often times completely devoting their lives to supporting their child as talent requires sustained, coordinated, and effective support from parents and others for a period of at least 10 years (Feldman & Piirto, 2002).

In a review of the literature, Colangelo and Dettmann (1983) also identified high levels of parental involvement in the homes of gifted individuals, but found that it must be coupled with greater parental trust and approval, supporting the idea that families also need to allow for a certain degree of autonomy, choice, and independence. It seems that in order for a gifted child to achieve he must have the freedom to choose and make decisions, in conjunction with support and encouragement (Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Feldman & Piirto, 2002; Karnes, Shwedel, & Steinberg, 1984; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001; Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1995).

Along these same lines, research has shown that parents can facilitate their child’s gifted development by being involved academically at home, reading often with their children, helping their child develop self-confidence and a positive attitude toward learning, and encouraging risk-taking by rewarding good efforts as well as good accomplishments (Colangelo & Dettman, 1983). By doing so, parents create homes that respect learning and the educational environment (Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962). Homes
where parents hold high aspirations for their children, read often, and model a desire to learn and know (Silverman & Kearney, 1989).

In studying the academic home environments of gifted families, Landau and Weissler (1993) found that parents of one or two gifted children were more likely than parents with no gifted children to discuss problems, ask their children more questions, provide expansive answers to questions asked, break complex problems down into small steps, use analogies and metaphors to explain, and correct the grammatical and stylistic errors of their children. The authors concluded that the combination of direct cognitive interaction and the fostering of intelligence and knowledge, together with the indirect encouragement of risk-taking and the willingness to experience new things, create an environment that seems to foster children reaching their gifted potential (Landau & Weissler, 1993). Similarly, Freeman found that the single most effective way parents can direct their children toward giftedness is through the early encouragement of language by reading to a child from a young age; while Karnes, Shwedel, and Steinberg (1984) concluded that parents of the gifted tend to spend considerably more time with their child on school related activities and are more likely to report unconditional love for their child.

In particular, it seems that families can actually enhance the development of talent and academic achievement in gifted children by providing autonomy, parental support, and academic challenge in the home, an idea maintained in a well-known study by Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1993), who found that families, with gifted and talented children that achieve their talent potential, provide contexts that are both
integrated yet also differentiated. Integrated because family members are connected and supportive of one another, but differentiated because there are high expectations from parents that individual children will develop their talents to the highest degree possible, while also encouraging individual thought and expression. The authors conclude that such families produce autotelic personalities in their children, individuals who are self-motivated and self-directed.

Additionally, Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) highlight the important role parents play in developing the psychological dispositions in their children that support talent development. Specific dispositions like persistence, achievement motivation, self-efficacy, and self-confidence that are associated with high achievement (Silverstein, 2000). According to Olszewski-Kubilius (2001) some ways that parents develop these achievement orientated dispositions are by demonstrating a love of work and learning; modeling risk-taking and coping with failures; showing that success takes a great deal of hard work and sustained effort over a long period of time; helping their talented children build social networks that can give them emotional support for their abilities and who can provide support for a child to sustain commitment during critical times (teachers, mentors, coaches, and peers from the same talent domain); and letting the child experience some stresses in life (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001). Particularly, it is the promotion of motivation by taking the blame away from personal deficiencies and refocusing it on a lack of effort that is important to the development of talent. Gifted and talented children need to feel adequate challenge in tasks so that they understand the risk of failure and are praised for their successes. Essentially, without the development of
these key psychological dispositions, gifted children are at greater risk for underachievement (Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Freeman, 2000; Webb, Gore, Amend, DeVries, 2007).

Likewise, as mentioned earlier, there is some evidence that parents of gifted and talented children use an authoritative parenting style (Dwairy, 2004; Moraska & Sanders, 2008; Rudasil, Adleson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013; Snowden & Christian, 1999). This is not surprising as research shows a correlation between academic achievement and authoritative parenting. Furthermore, there may also be gender differences in parents’ perceptions of their gifted child with regard to the child’s use of leisure time and intellectual ability (Johnson & Lewman, 1990). However, there is very little research looking specifically at gender differences related to parenting.

Finally, it is also important to note that there is evidence that parents raising gifted children face unique challenges (Aslop, 1997; Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Hertzog & Bennett, 2004; Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, & Tavegia, 2005; Moraska & Sanders, 2009; Shaughnessy & Neely, 1987; Silverman & Kearney, 1989; Silverstein, 2000). Families with gifted children must manage sibling relationships when a talented child needs surpass or overshadow others. Likewise, parents must find ways to balance the needs of the gifted child with the needs of the entire family (Moraska & Sanders, 2009). While other parents struggle to intellectually challenge the gifted child and meet his or her unique social-emotional needs, laboring to find gifted programs and teachers who are prepared to teach their gifted child, and struggling to provide financial resources to support their child’s area of expertise (Silverman & Kearney, 1989; Huff, et al., 2005).
Quite often these parents are forced to advocate for their child’s educational needs as they find that gifted programs do not differentiate for individuals or adequate programming does not exist (Hertzog & Bennett, 2004; Huff, et al., 2005). Some parents even feel inadequate, especially when the gifted child’s intellectual capacity is far greater than the parents (Colangelo & Dettman, 1983). Whereas other parents fear that their child will be perceived as elitist, a nerd, or an isolate. Likewise, additional behavioral characteristics and vulnerabilities demonstrated by some gifted children, like perfectionism or overexcitabilities, can create further challenges for the family (Silverman & Kearney, 1989; Silverstein, 2000).

All in all, the effect of the family on a gifted child’s development is very complex, as both divergent and convergent pathways seem to produce gifted individuals. In fact, it appears that key family variables may be more or less supportive of creativity, scholastic achievement, and talent development for certain individuals and particular home environments (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001). As some gifted children will achieve success despite troubled homes; others will excel in agreeable homes that provide a balance of challenge and support. Regardless, the research demonstrates that parents of gifted children who achieve generally act as first teacher and use an authoritative parenting style that provides support, resources, opportunities, autonomy, and continuity throughout the child’s development. In addition, these parents foster key psychological dispositions, encourage learning, and promote academic challenge, however, not without a great deal of stress as parenting a gifted child can be no easy task.
Conclusion

Parents raise children in a variety of contexts, environmental contexts that are directly influenced by the values and culture of the family. The unique culture and values of the family in turn shape the parenting beliefs and practices employed within the home. By and large, the research shows that the academic achievement of white middle class children in the United States is positively related to authoritative parenting styles operating within home environments that maintain specific parental attitudes, expectations, behaviors, and interactions. Additionally, similar parenting beliefs and strategies seem to be present in homes where white middle class parents raise gifted children as both parent groups allow for autonomy, provide parental support, maintain high expectations, encourage the development of achievement orientated dispositions, act as first teacher, value learning, and interact verbally with the child from a young age. However, the research has also found that gifted children manage to achieve despite troubled home lives where high levels of dysfunction are present, something that does not seem to be true for other populations of students.

Moving beyond the majority population, less is known about successful parenting practices and beliefs for different ethnic groups. Research suggests that similarities in values and goals exist between Caucasians and various ethnic groups, yet the majority of this research looks to identify key differences, (e.g. Asian families employ more conservative parenting practices and tend to be more authoritarian). Likewise, limited research exists on how immigrants parent for academic achievement. What little evidence there is focuses on the unique challenges immigrants face managing the differences in
values between their home country and the host country, showing that immigrant families tend to use a mixed strategy of traditional parenting practices/styles and adopted Western notions. While studies that look specifically at immigrants raising academically achieving gifted children are few and far between, we can only assume that these parents may have similar beliefs and values as other parents rearing academically successful gifted children in the United States. We can also posit that they may use a blend of adopted Western parenting practices along with traditional parenting strategies from their home country to nurture the academic success of their gifted children.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Why Portraiture?

Portraiture was the appropriate method for this study for several important reasons. First, portraiture is distinguished from other methodologies in that it focuses on what is good and working within a particular research setting. Portraiture resists pathologizing its subject and in turn seeks to reveal their “goodness” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Ultimately, the job of the portraitist is to document the ways in which people work to overcome obstacles, improve their practices, and build on their strengths. As the researcher, I was committed to identifying goodness within immigrant families in order to break free from the tradition of documenting failure. However, in no way is this study an attempt to idealize immigrant parents, as special care was taken to examine the full dimensionality of their parenting, allowing the narrative to reveal any layers of vulnerability or weakness. Central to this expression of goodness were the ways in which these families balance their strengths and vulnerabilities.

I recognize that some scholars in recent years have used the methodology of portraiture in combination with critical race theory (CRT) (Chapman, 2007; Dixson, 2005; Harding, 2005) By conducting research with portraiture and analyzing the data using CRT, these scholars seek to both build on strengths and replace mistakes, all in an effort to erode the status quo. Although I am aware of this move by some researchers, the aim of my study was not to use a race-based epistemological lens to analyze my data.
Therefore, this study stays true to the original intent of portraiture to consciously explore the strengths of the research subject while also capturing the many contradictions and “beautiful/ugly experiences that are so much a part of human development and social relationships” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 9).

A second reason why portraiture was fitting for this study is that the methodology focus on documenting, “human behavior and experience in context” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11). Similar to other qualitative research methodologies, portraiture aims to document people's voices and examine their meaning-making, but the portraitist widens the lens to investigate not only people's words and thoughts, but also their actions and experiences in particular settings. Unlike positivists who see context as corruptive, portraitists insist that, “the only way to interpret people’s actions, perspectives, and talk is to see them in context” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11). Put simply, context is seen as the means to understanding and therefore the narrative is always rooted within a geographical, cultural, social, economic, and political setting. This setting provides valuable information regarding the ways in which the participants understand their experiences.

Attention to context was central to my study, as previous research has determined that the geographical, cultural, social, economic, and political environment influence parenting. Likewise, we know that parents and the home environment impact achievement and giftedness. Therefore, it was crucial to pay attention to the context in which the parents employed their practices. Additionally, context is central to understanding how the parents’ traditional values influence their belief and practices. As
with practices, beliefs and values do not exist in a vacuum, but are shaped by the context in which these families live. In particular, this study investigated families who as immigrants are already embedded within a unique context, one that is in most cases vastly different from their previous environment. Capturing the ways in which these families parent in this new context was critical to understanding the beliefs and practices they maintain to raise their gifted children.

The collaborative approach of portraiture was also valuable to this study, in that it allowed the participants to shape how their voice was constructed and analyzed. Unlike other methodologies, portraiture embraces researcher subjectivity by engaging both the researcher and participant in a collaborative process (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Through this collaborative process, a narrative was created that represented the insider’s perspective and captured, “an experience-near” (Shweder, & Good, 2005, p. 33). To ensure that the process remained collaborative, I was diligent in member checking my data continually with each participant. I began each interview by asking the participants to confirm or contradict any emerging themes or patterns I had identified. Additionally, I asked the participants to read my final portraits and provide feedback as to whether the portraits were authentic and credible narratives that effectively portrayed their experiences.

Using portraiture, the researcher and the participant bring their own histories, perspectives, and interpretations to the research process and together they shape the evolving portrait. The researcher's background, values, and interests are not liabilities to be controlled for; instead, the researcher uses, "the knowledge and wisdom drawn from
life experiences as resources for understanding, and as sources of connection and identification with the actors in the setting” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 95). At each stage of the research process, my decisions, observations, and analysis were informed by my background and perspective. I choose to study immigrant parents who are raising academically achieving gifted children because this is the population I have taught. As an educator of gifted children and as a parent, I have witnessed immigrants who use parenting practices that foster achievement and have utilized similar practices with my own sons. Therefore, I conducted my study as both a researcher trained to see the outside perspective but also as a parent and teacher familiar with the dynamics of successful home environments. At different times, I drew on my various identities—teacher, parent, and researcher—to help build relationships with my participants and to better understand their stories. Portraiture allowed me the freedom to draw on both the personal and the empirical as I collected, analyzed, and wrote up my findings.

Lastly, portraiture is a methodology concerned with broadening its audience beyond the academy. By focusing on creating a narrative that used both metaphor and rich description portraiture naturally addressed a wider audience. Consequently, this study was written in a language that was meant to reach outside the boundaries of academia, one that is not elitist or oblique, but entices readers to think deeply about parenting, immigrants, and gifted children (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Using a methodology that aims to write for an audience beyond the academy was significant to this dissertation, as the measure of its success is whether the study can resonate with, inform, and inspire not only experts in the field but also immigrant families raising gifted
children and educators working with this population. With the purpose of identifying cross-cultural parenting practices of immigrants raising academically achieving gifted children, this study attempted to link the private stories of these families with the academic discourse on parenting.

**Participants**

This study used a purposeful sampling approach. I selected participants for the study because they could purposefully inform an understanding of my research questions (Creswell, 2007). I sought out families who met three specific criteria: (1) immigrants living within the United States for at least 2 years, but not longer than 15 years; (2) the presence in the home of at least one academically achieving child who is between the ages of 10 and 12 years old; and (3) documentation that the child is formally identified as gifted and talented.

I selected families who have lived in the United States for at least two years as a means of limiting immediate evidence of stress caused by acculturation, oppression, and discrimination. However, I recognized that there was still potential to observe the impact of these challenges. Therefore, special attention was paid to how the immigrant parents used socialization goals and adaptive strategies to modify their parenting in order to function well within their new home country. Concurrently, I selected families who had not lived in the United States for longer than 15 years, as the intent of this study was to identify parenting practices and beliefs of immigrants. I saw the potential for immigrants, who have lived in the United States longer than in their country of origin, to identify and
acculturate to resemble native-born American parents and therefore, established my criteria accordingly.

I also chose to limit this study to gifted children who are between the ages of 10 and 12 years old, as this age before adolescence is generally viewed as a developmentally stable time in a child’s life (Vygostky, 1978). This is also an age where parents still maintain greater involvement, supervising homework completion and monitoring decision-making. Additionally, intermediate elementary students are the age I have taught and am most familiar, which allowed me to build stronger relationships with the participants and gave me crucial background knowledge to inform my interpretation.

An additional consideration I took in my selection process was to choose families who had immigrated from a variety of home countries. I selected families who represented the vast diversity of immigrants living in the United States. Specifically, my participants were families from India, China, France, and Sudan. Consequently, three of the four immigrant families chosen were both ethnically and racially diverse (Chang, Rangan, and Ahmed), while the Benoit family was only ethnically diverse. The fact that the Benoit family was not racially diverse was purposeful, as I was interested in seeing the similarities and differences between European American immigrants and non-European American immigrants. This was of particular interest as white, European-American, middle class samples dominate the literature informing the study. Therefore, it was my intention that the Benoits would serve a role similar to that of a foil, emphasizing differences by serving as a contrast to the other three ethnically and racially diverse families included in the study.
Additionally, I only included families in which both parents had emigrated from the same region of the same country. These families were chosen from the greater Denver metropolitan area. Denver was selected based on proximity and access, but was also desirable given its significant immigrant population and the immediate school districts’ commitment to identifying and serving gifted and talented students.

In selecting my participants, I first asked the families of former students who met the above criteria to participate. From this initial step, I found three of the four families represented in this study (Benoit, Chang, and Rangan). I then requested nominations from colleagues who were also working with a gifted immigrant population and this is how I secured the final family (Ahmed). I recognize that selecting the families of former students is a possible limitation of this study, but I feel that the benefit of working with a family who I already had a strong relationship with far outweighed the limitations. Although I have worked closely with three of these families previously this has taken place in the school environment. Moving beyond the school walls to visit and interview these families within their homes allowed for me as a researcher to view these families anew. Likewise, the fact that I had no previous relationship with the Ahmed family is a possible limitation. However, I did not feel that this was a barrier in the data collection stage as Mrs. Ahmed was very interested in participating and appeared comfortable with my presence. Consequently, we were able to quickly establish a relationship similar to the ones I had previously built with the other three families.
Data Collection

Using the principles of portraiture, I conducted three interviews with the mothers in the Ahmed, Benoit, and Chang families and with both parents in the Rangan family. I attempted to interview both parents individually over the course of the study; however, in three of the four families this was not possible due to the fathers’ work schedules. The interviews used an open-ended guide and focused on autobiographical information, immigration experiences, beliefs on parenting that contribute to academic success, beliefs about giftedness and the gifted child within the home, traditions from country of origin that influence parenting, and practices used in parenting that support academic achievement (Appendix A). All interviews were audio recorded on USB drives and then transcribed.

During the first stage of the study, I visited each family in their home (or in the case of Mrs. Ahmed at her daycare) as a means of forging a nonthreatening and productive relationship. In all cases, I brought my own son to this initial visit, which I feel was productive at reducing issues related to researcher power. Likewise, in this initial visit, I took great care to stress that my role was that of respectful learner and that the parents’ role was that of expert and teacher. At this time, the parents were also asked to pick a pseudonym. Following this initial visit, I returned to conduct one one-hour interview with the mother in three of the families (Ahmed, Benoit, and Chang) and with both the mother and father in the Rangan family. After these initial interviews, I conducted one two-hour observation in the home after school and in the case of Mrs. Ahmed at the daycare. This observation was conducted to look for evidence of: 1) the
parenting practices and beliefs that promote academic success in the gifted child; 2) influence of traditional values; and 3) the overall academic home environment (Observation Guide Appendix B). Additionally, during this observation, I looked for specific examples of the beliefs and practices detailed by the parents in the initial interview. I then conducted an additional semi-structured, one-hour interview with the parent (or parents) who were home during the first observation. This follow-up interview gave me the opportunity to probe further into the practices and beliefs revealed during the first observation as well as any ideas related to the literature review.

Following this interview, I then again conducted one two-hour observation of the family at home after school and, in a few instances, on the weekend. At this time an attempt was made to observe whichever parent I had not been able to witness during the previous observation. It is also important to note that after this second observation, I felt that I had forged a productive relationship and gathered sufficient observation data from all four families. I then conducted a final interview with the mothers in the Ahmed, Benoit, and Chang families and with both parents in the Rangan family in order to follow-up on any additional ideas raised in the observations and to bring closure to the observation process. Finally, I collected documentation of academic achievement (report cards and test scores) and proof of formal gifted identification.

Central to the success of this study was my ability to build relationships with each family, as relationship building is fundamental in portraiture. Specifically, the relationship between researcher and participant allows for access, connections, and knowledge construction (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). During the data collection
process, I recognized that in order to build a relationship of trust, I needed to speak about my personal background and perspectives on parenting and giftedness as well. In three cases, I retained the added advantage of having previously taught the child and fostered a prior connection with the family. In seeking to build a relationship with the Ahmed family, my colleague, Rana’s 5th grade teacher, and the fact that I too shared the common experience of being a parent, were integral.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and all field notes from observations were typed up as scenes to be used throughout the portraits. Participants selected pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. All data were coded with emerging themes, which were found in the repetitive ideas, resonant metaphors, and rituals that I heard and saw in the various data sources (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Identifying emerging themes allowed me to begin to make sense of the individual parents and look for patterns across the various data sources and ways in which they transverse the four families. I also used the emerging themes as a tool to probe deeper during follow-up interviews and observations. Additionally, during the data collection stage, I wrote memos in order to help trace the process of description and interpretation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

After the collection of field data, I sifted through the interview transcripts, typed observation scenes, memos, and documents to find “patterns that order and scaffold the narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 189). I coded and recoded the data using the emerging patterns until they were narrowed into the final themes used to
construct the narrative. During this process I listened for both patterns and deviations, while taking special care to attend to perspectives that were discrepant.

**Validity**

Maxwell defines validity as the, “correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 87). This being said, portraiture is more concerned with authenticity than validity. In fact, the portraitist is looking more to create an authentic account or believable story for the reader, participant, and portraitist (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In order to ensure that my portraits were authentic, I used Eisner’s notion of “structural corroboration.” Similar to triangulation, “structural corroboration” is “a means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs” (Eisner, 1990, p. 110). Specifically, I used various sources of data - observations, interviews, documents - and the literature to minimize bias of interpretation. I also worked longitudinally with the participants in order to complete member checks of my transcripts. In my final interview with each set of parents, I also asked them to reflect on the observation and interview process, probing particularly to find out whether they felt they altered their parenting because of the research process or researcher presence.

Lastly, because portraiture encourages the researcher to embrace and use her autobiography in the process of collecting and analyzing data, I took special care to make sure that my autobiography did not, "obscure or overwhelm the inquiry" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 95). As the researcher I viewed, heard, and analyzed the data
through my researcher's lens. Specifically, I observed and analyzed the data as 1) a mother searching for “goodness” and successful parenting, 2) a teacher of gifted talented students, 3) a teacher who has served immigrant families, and 3) as a researcher informed by the extensive literature informing this study. Overall, the primary focus was always on telling the participants' story, in a way that was credible to the participants, the reader, and me.

**Minimizing Researcher Power and Privilege**

It is also important to note that this study is an example of “outsider” research as differences in race, ethnicity, class, religion, marital status, gender, and other demographics existed between me and the participants. Critics of “outsider” research are quick to point out that in this type of research there is a tendency to interpret societies from a position of power and privilege or without sufficient input from the research participants (Agar, 1980; Grafanaki, 1996).

Due to this common critique, I was committed to minimizing any behaviors that reinforced feelings of inferiority or powerlessness in my participants. I did so by first conducting a non-research visit to each participant’s home or workplace. This “happy” visit served to reinforce the intention of my research, which was to learn from the parents. I also brought my two-year-old son with me to all of the “happy” visits, as an attempt to draw attention to our similarities as parents and to minimize any perceptions that I was in a position of greater power or authority. I took special care to stress to the parents that they were the experts and that I wanted to learn from them about how they have nurtured academic achievement in their children. Additionally, all observations and
interviews with the participants were conducted in their homes or workplace, as another attempt to eliminate power differentials by using a setting in which they were the most comfortable. Similarly, I also asked the participants to read, revise, and approve the final portraits as additional means of insuring that they had the power to determine how the final research paper portrayed them.

In a similar fashion, I used my initial interviews and other traditional resources (books, journal articles, etc.) as a means of familiarizing myself with the basic elements of language, socio-cultural traditions, practices, and history of the participants’ native countries. This served to better prepare me to experience and more accurately interpret the differences of race, ethnicity, class, religion, marital status, gender, and other demographics that existed between the participants and myself. This also helped to minimize the power differentials that existed by conveying to the participants that I value and appreciate their language, cultural traditions, practices, and history.

Likewise and because this research study involved professional, social, and personal relationships between the participants and myself relationships that were affected by many factors including the identity assigned to me by my participants on the basis of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, marital status, etc. I took special care, throughout the data collection process to infer the identities being assigned to me so that I could renegotiate my identity in a positive way if necessary. For example, when the perceived differences assigned to me by my participants seemed to be affecting how much they chose to reveal during interviews I was able to encourage more open
interviews and increase disclosure from my participants by disclosing information about myself when appropriate (Song & Parker, 1995).

In reality it was impossible to eliminate all power and privilege differences between the participants and me because my status as a nonimmigrant researcher allowed me greater access to resources (money, education, knowledge, and power) and a privileged status within the United States (Apentiik & Parpart, 2006). However, it was definitely possible to minimize these factors and as the researcher I took special care to do so.

**Limitations**

The study is limited by the fact that all of the immigrant families live in the greater Denver metropolitan area. It is possible that the culture within this geographical area may influence the parenting of these families in unique ways, limiting the universality of the resonant metaphors to the immediate geographical area. My inability to observe and interview both parents in every family because of their busy work schedules and availability is an additional limitation of this study. This contributed to differences in the data, between the home where I was able to interview both parents and those where I was only able to interview one. However, the reality in these four families is that the mother generally assumed a greater role in supervising the children after school as the fathers all worked late into the evening. This dynamic lessens the study’s limitations due to my inability to observe and interview both parents. Third, although I studied immigrant parents, I only chose to include families who spoke English well, as using a translator was beyond the reach of this study. This may cause the study to
resonate only with English speaking immigrants. Finally, as mentioned earlier, the reality that three of the four participants were the parents of my former students limits the study in that predetermined bias or notions about the families may have influenced my interpretations. However, in order to reduce the impact of these previous biases, I bracketed my preconceived notions about the family before I began the data collection process. This process consisted of naming and recording the prior history and/or key experiences which have influenced my perception of each family prior to the study. By taking part in this self-critical exercise and registering my preoccupations, I increased my consciousness, opened my eyes, and was better able to record anew the reality I encountered (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
Chapter Four: Sometimes It Is Just a Part of the Story

Hands lift large silver trays of chicken nuggets into oversized ovens, scoop Crayola-colored macaroni and cheese onto Styrofoam trays, and key in lunch codes. Hands that labor away in school cafeterias; hands that can often seem faceless, nameless, taken for granted.

In the cafeteria at Aspen Creek Elementary School in suburban Denver, a pair of these hands belongs to Ann Chang, an immigrant from Hang-Zhou in the Zhang Jin region of China. Standing just over five feet tall with straight black hair tucked under a visor, Ann is always quick with a smile. Her soft dark eyes are set in a round face and the only sign of aging on her smooth skin are the fine lines that fan out from her eyes when she smiles, evidence of her natural conviviality.

Ann’s cheerful manner stands in contrast to her tendency to shy away from conversation, self-conscience of her English pronunciation and diction, but this very hesitancy to speak is a particularly endearing quality, especially because Ann’s English is actually much better than she believes it to be. Nevertheless, when she does speak, she talks slowly and pauses, almost appearing to stutter as she searches for the correct word or the proper syntax. However, these hesitations seem tempered when she speaks with the students who pass through the lunch line asking for double portions or how much money they have left in their accounts. Her comfort speaking with the children and her kindness does not go unnoticed even by her own daughter who often says, “Mom,
you are so nice to the kids at school, why do you yell at me?” In the cafeteria setting, it is hard to imagine that Ann has ever yelled at anyone, but her daughter’s words hint at the dedicated and authoritative parent who lies within.

To most of the children at Aspen Creek, Ann is known as the lunch lady, but to many of the staff she is recognized more so as Lily’s mother. Although Ann is one of three lunch ladies who work at the school, her dual role as parent of Lily seems to have illuminated her presence and elevated her status in the cafeteria thanks in part to Lily’s piano performances at the all staff breakfasts. For three years, Lily attended Aspen Creek and her skills at playing piano were often touted by staff members as “gifted.” Lily was also an excellent student; she was part of the gifted and talented program and served on student council. She is what some teachers might refer to as a “model student” as she always completed her homework on time, worked hard, and had a smile on her face.

Furthermore, like Ann, Lily has a sweet gentle spirit and is always quick with a smile. She has an angelic face with full cheeks, big eyes, long straight black hair, and dimples that appear when she smiles. However, Lily’s personality and piano playing alone cannot take full credit for Ann’s popularity among the staff. Ann’s dedication and service to the students of Aspen Creek have secured her reputation as well.

Most days Ann arrives at Aspen Creek around 8:00 AM after dropping Lily off at a middle school five miles away. From 8:00 AM-2:30 PM, she prepares, warms, and serves two meals, while also cleaning the kitchen, updating students’ accounts, and placing orders with the warehouse. At 2:30 PM, she heads back to the middle school to pick up Lily and shuttle her home or to one of her various activities: piano lessons, tennis,
art class, or Chinese school. From there, they head home where Lily immediately begins
work on her homework and Ann prepares dinner for the two of them. The very essence of
this daily routine coupled with Ann’s repute at school give rise to the first theme of this
portrait: parents need to be their best.

**Parents Need to Be Their Best and Education Comes First**

On a cold wintry Friday in January, I leave Aspen Creek Elementary School after
the bell rings and drive south through the rolling prairies of suburban Denver to a newer
development of homes perched at the top of what used to be a mesa. The development
consists of well-maintained single family homes painted in various shades of brown and
alternating between designs that have larger front porches with second floor entrances
and those with small main level landings. I pull up in front of Ann’s home, park, and ring
the doorbell. Since I am visiting at 4:00 PM on a Friday, Ann and Lily have just arrived
home from school and they both greet me at the door and quickly usher me in from the
cold. Noticing they are both wearing only socks, I take off my shoes at the door leaving
them on a small rug. Ann promptly brings me a pair of purple slippers from the closet and
shows me into the living/dining room area, motioning for me to sit at the dining room
table. Lily and I chit chat about school while Ann prepares a plate of sliced apples and
oranges for us. She asks if I want to try some instant Vietnamese coffee showing me the
package as she offers. I accept and Ann serves it in a small china cup with a saucer. She
then sits down across the table from where I have set my laptop.

Lily excuses herself to go study in the office a short distance down the hall toward
the back of the house as I compliment Ann on the coffee prompting her to explain that
she bought it at the Chinese market. This leads us to discuss the food she buys and where she shops. She mentions two markets, one Korean in a neighboring suburb and one Chinese in the city. She then shows me the soymilk and tofu she buys at the Korean market in bulk and we share various dishes we both cook using tofu. It is obvious that Ann enjoys talking about food and cooking. These are comfortable topics and our conversation is effortless, as she seems much less self-conscious about her English when discussing food. This is most likely due to the fact that food serves an important role in the Chang family as both Ann and her husband Bob work in food service. Bob works six days a week from 10:00 AM- 10:00 PM as a chef at a local Chinese restaurant. While Ann, in addition to her food service position at Aspen Creek, picks up shifts at the same Chinese restaurant on the weekends and in the summers serves food a few days a week at a nearby Panda Express. Someday, Ann and Bob hope to open a Chinese restaurant of their own, but they are waiting first for Lily to finish high school and be on her way to college.

Making sure Lily is taken care of first before they open their own restaurant is very important to the Chang’s and is one of many examples where Ann does whatever it takes, even putting her own passions on hold, in order to be the best for her children. This sacrifice is recognized by her son Alex who is finishing a Master of Biochemistry degree from the University of Colorado and will begin medical school in the fall. He says, “My parents want the best for their kids. Kids come first. Kids before your dreams; many sacrifices.” Alex clearly understands and appreciates the hard work of his parents and although I do not hear Lily articulate the same appreciation, her drive to achieve in school
serves as evidence that she recognizes and is thankful for all of her parents’ hard work and sacrifice. It is as if both Alex and Lily have decided that the greatest gift of appreciation they can give their parents is to be successful in school as the only way to repay your parents for being their best is to be your best.

Beyond putting her passions on hold for her children, when asked about her parenting beliefs Ann shares, “First I think the parents need to be their best.” Ann goes on to explain that by being her best she believes her kids will do the same; the idea that, “parents do their best so kids can help follow.” In my many visits to Ann’s house, evidence of this belief statement can be found in the care that she gives to the home as if keeping her home clean and orderly both inside and out is one way that Ann is her best. For example, the small front yard is meticulously maintained and in the winter months the snow is always shoveled from the sidewalk and the driveway. In the spring, flowers are planted in two large pots on the front landing and the grass is cut and watered regularly. Even the inside of the garage is neat and tidy; a few tools and athletic equipment are stored carefully leaving enough room for two cars to be parked side by side.

Inside the house, all the surfaces and floors are clean of dirt and dust. There is no clutter other than the occasional stack of papers, mail, or magazines. The kitchen is spotless with no dirty dishes or mess. In the glass cabinets above the stove, a set of nice dishes are displayed, some that Ann shared she had bought here in America. Aesthetically, neutral tones dominate with various shades of beige used for the paint colors and carpet. A splash of color is found in the drapes pulled to the side of the large
living and dining room windows. Overall, the home decorations are minimal consisting mostly of silk plants, a handful of living houseplants, photographs of Alex and Lily, and a few contemporary American and Chinese prints hanging on the walls. The only bold statement in the decor seems to be the beaded door curtain that hangs in the doorway between the kitchen and the entryway, a playful statement amongst the practical that reflects Anne’s natural tendency to smile. The home is kept at a comfortable temperature and few lights are turned on during the day as the large windows provide decent natural light even into the early evening. A large flat screen television sits in the living room next to the fireplace, although it seems to get little use, as I never see it turned on during my six visits.

It is obvious that the Chang family values and cares for their possessions, especially the kitchen appliances, as Ann has covered the microwave and refrigerator with plastic wrap and the stove top with aluminum foil in order to keep them looking like new. Ann believes that keeping a clean house is a way that she models for her kids how to be your best. When asked about the importance of taking care of her home, Ann says, “(it) just feel very good…Yeah, taking care of. I don’t like the very messy. Also for kids, if kids they are growing up and still messy… the messy mom, the messy daughter.”

In the office, where Lily spends much of her time, there is a high quality piano against one wall and a desk with a newer computer against the other. Two charcoal portraits of Alex hang on the wall and the bookcase is filled with English books and binders full of old school work. The office and its contents represent Ann’s hope that Lily will be her best in all that she does. The English books which fill the bookshelf share
Ann’s desire that even though, “I’m not really good at English I still want my kids to be the best.” While, the high quality piano supports Lily’s musical talent, a talent that was discovered when Ann signed Lily up for a music class when she was four years old. When describing Lily’s talent for playing piano, Ann again points to her belief about being your best saying, “At first we just want her to be her best, to try…so she needs to try everything then she (the teacher) said, oh she’s very good, she can do that.” In fact, Lily was identified by her school district as gifted and talented in the area of music last year as she has won many local piano competitions and has been asked to perform around the state at premier concert venues and events. In addition to the talent she shows as a pianist, Lily also excels in all academic subjects as well and has participated in gifted programming for language arts during the last three years of school.

The newer desktop computer is an expense that also supports Lily’s ability to be her best in school, as many of her assignments require computer processing or researching skills. The decision to provide a computer primarily to support academic achievement is evidenced by the fact that the Chang’s have chosen not to buy a cell phone for Lily, even though as a sixth grader many of her friends have them. In essence, the Chang’s have made sure that Lily has the technology she needs, not for entertainment or pleasure, but to allow her to complete her school assignments to the best of her ability. As Ann says, “We wish they (our kids) have the best. We don’t like to spoil.” In addition, there is time for relaxing in the Chang household also as Ann permits Lily to use the computer to read CNN kids news and to explore other Pop-culture content like YouTube.
videos and music after she has completed her homework, practiced her piano, and eaten dinner.

During my first visit to the Chang home, I am particularly struck by the fact that it is Friday and Lily spends the majority of her time working in the office on a math homework assignment that is not due until the end of the following week. Furthermore, I am impressed that Ann never prompts Lily to go work on this homework. Instead, after chatting with me for a short time Lily excuses herself and goes into the office to study. However, it becomes obvious later that Ann does not need to tell Lily what to do because the expectation has already been made clear as halfway through my visit, the home phone rings and Lily runs out of the office to answer it. It is soon obvious that a friend is calling to see if Lily can go swimming at the recreation center located about a mile away. Ann tells Lily to have her friend call back after 6:30 PM and that she can go after she finishes her homework. It is here in this small exchange that we learn Ann does expect Lily to complete her homework on Friday and the expectation is so clearly defined that there is no need for her to remind Lily. She does not need to check in with Lily nor know exactly what she has to finish nor tell her what she needs to complete next. It seems instead that Ann has made her expectations clear and then given Lily the autonomy to complete her assignments independently, perhaps because her level of English language proficiency does not allow her to help further or because Ann trusts Lily will do her best on her assignments. Most likely it is a combination of the two as 1) Lily’s performance in school gives Ann little reason to doubt Lily’s completion of homework assignments and 2) the majority of Lily’s sixth grade work uses vocabulary that pushes the upper limits of Ann’s
comprehension. Whichever the reason, this exchange between mother and daughter is evidence of another key parenting belief for Ann: education comes first, while also further illuminating her belief that by being her best as a parent, her children will follow her example and try to be their best in school, even if that requires completing homework before relaxing on a Friday evening.

As for parenting practices, this exchange also displays Ann’s authoritative parenting style coupled with autonomy granting, an ideal combination for academic achievement seen by many researchers among Caucasian children and gifted youth (Chao, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Rudasil, Adleson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992) (Dwairy, 2004; Moraska & Sanders, 2008; Rudasil, Adleson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013; Snowden & Christian, 1999).

On subsequent visits, I witness the same disciplined behavior displayed by Lily. She comes right home from school and goes into the office until she has completed her homework, Chinese schoolwork, and practiced her piano. Ann has clearly created an academic home environment where the expectation is that education comes first and that you follow a disciplined routine of priorities: homework, Chinese schoolwork, piano, and then free time.

Further evidence that education comes first and is most important in the Chang family is revealed months later in May when Ann asks me about a possible summer tutor for Lily. She shares that Lily has found her honors language arts class very challenging this year as it is the only class she has received a B+ in all year long; the rest of her
grades have been straight As. Ann expresses that she feels she cannot help Lily with her work, especially her English writing, grammar, and mechanics. Therefore, she would like to hire a tutor to work with Lily over the summer in these areas so that she will be better prepared for her honors language arts class next year. She then goes on to tell me that Lily has also expressed that she wants to move up to the highest math class; she is currently in advanced math and she wants to move up to honors. I ask if they have spoken with Lily’s sixth grade math teacher about it and Ann explains that she is going to have Alex help her email the teacher this week to set up a time to meet and discuss Lily’s request. Again, from this conversation we see that Lily is striving to be her best in school and that Ann is trying to be her best as a parent by conferencing with Lily’s teacher and looking for a summer tutor.

During most visits, I also observe Ann working to be her best in the kitchen as she cooks elaborate multi-dish meals. All of the cooking is traditional Chinese food, combinations of chicken, tofu, pork, beef, seafood, vegetables, and rice. Each morning before she leaves for work, she starts a rice cooker and a slow cooker to make soup consisting of various bones, vegetables, tofu, and broth. Most meals are served with fresh tomatoes, lettuce, orange slices, a soup, rice, and two main dishes, like chicken with vegetables. Before I ask, I assume that cooking traditional food is important to Ann as it is a way for her to maintain food preparation traditions from her home country, but in fact, Ann clarifies, “I don’t think traditional food is important because I can only make dinner this food. I can’t make dinner most the United States food.” Although, Ann does not feel that cooking traditional Chinese food is important, she does express that taking
care of her family is very important, “family is to take care of each other.” Therefore, we can conclude that the care with which she prepares each meal is not about maintaining cultural traditions but yet another example of how Ann strives to be her best for her children. Ann does her best to cook and feed her family, while Lily completes her homework and practices her piano so that she can be her best.

Education coming first, following a disciplined routine of priorities, and being your best are beliefs and practices that Ann appears to have brought with her from China and especially from the family within which she was raised. Growing up in a small village, Ann shared during our first interview that her childhood was enjoyable: “I think my childhood was fun. Not a lot of homework, so after school we’d go home, first do homework…then we do a lot of chores in our house and we helped with dinner, and we had chicken, like goose…animals, yeah to take care of. Also a goat.” As Ann’s description elucidates, she and her five sisters enjoyed their first nine years of schooling in their village as they walked to and from school and in the summer had free time to go down to the levee and swim or to fish for shrimp with hand lines. But once they entered high school they had to travel by bus to attend what Americans refer to as a boarding school, where the focus was school and schoolwork all day long, “We were there (at the school) every week and on the weekend we’d get to go home.” Describing a typical high school day as, “go to class and then dinner, after dinner go to class. So after 9:30 go to sleep. In the morning 6 is the wake up and go to class again, then breakfast, then do normal classes…very, very tired, it’s a lot of homework.” In these descriptions, we hear evidence from her childhood in China of the importance of school and the routine of
schoolwork as the first priority for Ann and her siblings. We also hear echoes of a much disciplined adolescence filled with hard work and hours of studying.

Ann reveals later that she grew up the youngest of five siblings and her sisters took the greatest responsibility for raising her. She says, “Mom and Dad were so busy. They didn’t have time to take care of,” so her older sisters would supervise Ann’s homework completion after school, cook her dinner, and get her to bed. Ann shared that her oldest sister, who was a teacher, was integral in encouraging her to be her best. Ann thought, “Oh I need to be the best because my sister is going to be teaching.” Even though Ann’s sisters did the majority of raising her, Ann does remember her parents stressing, “Do work, do your best,” and, “feeling they (her parents) just wanted me to be my best,” and, “they just always want you to do your best.” Like her parents, Ann has chosen to stress with her own children the importance of being your best and that education comes first. She has also emphasized the importance of all family members working to take care of each other, another important theme that we will now explore further.

**Take Care of Each Other**

Ann and her husband Bob decided to move to the United States in 1999 after Ann’s uncle and aunt and many other cousins had left China to find a new home in America. Like two of the other immigrant families in this study, the Chang’s just wanted to try something new. They thought that moving to America might be better for their son, but mostly they just wanted a different experience: “We didn’t really know it was different, just thought…try something, try something different and we just think maybe
for kids it’s different because in China it’s really hard for kids. They have a lot of homework.” Their choice to come to the United States brought them to Colorado, where Bob immediately started working as a chef in a Chinese restaurant, and Ann enrolled 10-year-old Alex in public school. During this time, Ann also took English as a second language classes at a local community college; she remembers thinking that the English was “very hard” for both she and Alex. But Alex was placed in ESL classes and quickly made friends, which helped him master English quickly. After three years, Ann became pregnant with Lily, something she would not have chosen to do if they had stayed in China.

Settling in Colorado, the Chang’s did not have any family or friends nearby. They made friends through work and the Chinese school that Alex and Lily both attended, but for the most part they were on their own, creating a closeness that is visible during my observations. A closeness that Ann describes as a tradition she has brought with her to America, the tradition of “taking care of each other.” Further, Ann explains that she feels her relationship with her kids in America is “more lovely… because I think the…we are very close. I saw the China kids they are…the mom you better do homework, do homework.” Further, Ann explains how she and Lily always say sweet things to each other before they go to bed.

From these descriptions, we get the sense that Ann and Lily’s relationship is warm and affectionate, something that research has noted as a typical difference between Western and Asian parenting styles, with higher levels of authoritarian (less warm) parenting reported in Asian families than American (Steinberg, et al., 1992; Dornbusch,
et al., 1987.) Therefore, we can assume that at least in some ways Ann has adapted to the warmer, more responsive parenting style often observed in America and Lily has adapted as well, showing greater affection and kindness. This is something that Ann says her friends and family from China notice as well, telling her, “Lily is so different…In China the kids, they are not like this. So when Lily goes over there, they so love her because she’s different…she’s kind; she’s pleasant…” Overall, it seems that both the tradition of “taking care of each other” and the cultural adaptation of using a warmer more responsive parenting style have contributed to a special closeness in the Chang family that I witness on many occasions.

On another cold winter’s day in February, I drive south to the Chang home, where I have been invited to stay for dinner after my observation. Like previous observations, Lily spends the first 90 minutes of my visit in the office working on her homework and practicing her piano, while Ann prepares dinner. As Ann cooks, she and I discuss various topics including a lengthy conversation about how marriages and wedding registries work in the United States. Ann is curious to learn about these American traditions and we compare differences between wedding traditions in the United States and China. Ann also asks me about why Americans go out to eat all the time without their children and we discuss the common practice of hiring a babysitter so that parents can have date nights. She shares that she thinks this is a good tradition, but that maybe more than once a month is too much. She also shares that in China generally the parents take their child(ren) with them whenever they go out to eat. Again our conversation is easy, as Ann seems eager to learn more about American traditions and customs. She says that she has learned some
from the other women who work in the cafeteria and many of the questions she asks me have arisen from conversations she has overheard or participated in at school.

Since today is Friday, Ann shares that she expects Alex home sometime between 6:00 and 7:00 PM for dinner. Generally, Alex drives home and spends the weekend with Ann and Lily. During the week, he lives in a rented apartment about 45 minutes away, which is closer to the university where he takes classes and works as a research assistant. Around 6:30 PM, the sound of the garage door raising can be heard as Alex pulls in. Lily runs out of the office to greet her brother as he comes in from the cold. They laugh and joke in the hallway before Alex enters the kitchen to say hi to his mother and me. Shortly thereafter, Ann calls to her kids, “wash your hands and eat dinner,” in English. I join them at the kitchen table, where we eat with chopsticks or our fingers: pork, potato, and carrot soup; a tofu, chicken, and soy sauce dish; leftover Lobster from the New Year’s feast served at Bob’s restaurant; rice, tomatoes, lettuce, and orange slices. Ann serves me what she describes as Chinese green tea, which consists of a few curly dried green leaves placed in boiling water. Alex helps himself to a coke and Ann offers me the same, but I chose to drink the green tea instead.

During dinner, Alex and I talk a great deal about medical school and his current research position. Both Lily and Ann listen intently to our conversation. I note that Alex appears to have adapted to life in America extremely well as his command of the English language and his knowledge and understanding of American culture would trick many people into believing he had lived in America his entire life. It is hard to imagine that he
arrived only 12 years ago speaking no English and now is a handsome, confident, graduate student trying to decide between two different medical schools.

At the same time, I notice from the way Lily watches and jokes with her brother that they share a very special bond. On a number of occasions, I observe them playfully swatting at each other and teasing. Additionally, the two portraits Lily has done of Alex that hang on the office walls suggest that she admires her big brother a great deal. Further evidence of this admiration can be found in the way that Lily mentions her brother often in conversation, like how he helped her pick her classes for next year or how he gave her his old IPod touch to use.

Beyond this admiration, Alex also seems to play an integral role in raising Lily: He attends most, if not all, of her parent-teacher conferences with Ann, helps Ann write emails to teachers occasionally, and guides Lily as to what classes she should take in school. When I ask Ann if she feels that Alex encourages and serves as a role model for Lily, she nods and says that he is, “very important.” The closeness, admiration, and role modeling that I observe between Lily and Alex demonstrate Ann’s belief, that in a family you take care of each other. Just as Ann’s sisters did for her, Alex and Lily take care of each other, especially when their parents are busy with work.

The practice of siblings serving dual roles within a family has been documented in previous research as a social adaptive strategy often used by immigrants. Harris et al. refer to it as role flexibility as older siblings often parent younger siblings (Harrison et al., 1990), while Ochocka and Janzen (2008) describe a reversal of power that can happen
in immigrant families as children speak better English than their parents (p. 100). In the Chang family, there is evidence of both of these adaptive strategies as Alex serves dual roles in the family, often stepping in to serve as a parent for Lily while also yielding a great deal of power, since his English language is far superior to Ann’s. Additionally, the long hours that Bob works contribute to the need for Alex to serve as another parent figure to Lily. Perhaps, Alex would have done the same if the family lived in China, although it unlikely that he would have yielded as much power in a country where language would not be an issue.

Even though I never get a chance to meet Bob, it is obvious that he also helps to take care of the family by working hard to make sure the family is financially secure. The evidence of Bob’s hard work is the fact that within the short 14 years that they have lived in America the Chang family has saved enough money to buy a $400,000 home, two cars, and pay for the expenses of their children. This is even more remarkable when you consider that both Ann and her husband work in food service. Clearly, Bob Chang has labored away to provide for his family, echoing back to the “many sacrifices” that Alex acknowledges his parents have made for him and Lily. Although Bob’s means of taking care of his family differ greatly from the cooking, cleaning, and transporting we see Ann do, it is important to remember that the research on parenting gifted children has found that in harmonious gifted homes parents offer involvement and support with opportunities and resources (Bloom, 1985). In the Chang household, Ann works diligently to provide opportunities for Lily by driving her to and from activities and researching/enrolling her in the best schools, while Bob labors long hours to provide the
resources to afford these opportunities. Within these description of all the hard work Bob and Ann do to support their family, the next important theme of this portrait is illuminated: work hard and be good.

Work Hard and Be Good

The last Monday in April, I arrive at the Chang house to observe at 4:00 PM. Ann and Lily have come home from school just a short while before I arrive so Ann is busy watering two small flowers pots and a few brown patches of her lawn with the hose. As I pull up, she quickly turns off the hose, grabs the mail from the mailbox, and opens the door for me. I take off my shoes, placing them by the door and Ann rushes to the closet to bring me the purple slippers that I am offered each time I visit. I walk into the main living area and take a seat at the dining room table, while Ann rushes around clearing a few piles of mail and magazines from the dining room table. Lily carries in her gigantic backpack, loaded down with heavy textbooks, from the garage and stops to say a quick hello. She then heads into the office and starts work on a number of assignments including: completing a science lab, taking notes while she reads an assigned novel, answering reading comprehension questions, and finishing a few math problems. After four visits, I have begun to see that Lily has a very established routine 1) eat snack on the car ride home, 2) complete homework, 3) practice piano, 4) take a shower, 5) eat dinner, 6) and then free time on the computer. I ask Ann if this is a routine she established when Lily was younger and she explains that in second grade she taught her daughter what to do when she comes home from school, so now Lily, “knows that first when she comes
home, no watch TV, no play. She has to do something…I just think that the homework is the first thing.”

After about 15 minutes of chatting with Ann, I walk into the office to see what Lily is working on. I am impressed to see that Lily has written a list of 15 assignments she needs to complete this week for school or Chinese school and she has taped the list to the desk in the office where she works. She explains to me that each time she completes an item; she checks it off the list. When I ask Lily about this strategy, she explains that she has a lot to do right now in school because it is getting close to the end of the year and she has so many projects or tests to complete that she needs a way to keep track of everything.

Leaving Lily to work in the office, I return to the dining room where upon Ann offers a bowl filled with apples and oranges. Taking an apple, I comment that I am very impressed with Lily’s discipline and work ethic; prompting Ann to share that, “We always encourage the kids, hard work, keep up the work, and do the best.” Ann also imparts that sometimes Lily works so hard that she actually has to tell her to take a break, saying, “Sometimes I need to say, you know, ‘hey Lily, you need a break’. Because when she reads a book she forgets that…it’s maybe one hour or two hours, so I need to say, ‘no, long time, take a break. You need to take a break.’”

In these descriptions, we see how Ann serves as an authority figure for Lily helping to establish a routine for her in second grade and monitoring her homework completion so that she is not working too hard or too long. Later, I ask Ann if she taught Lily to make a list of her assignments and she says, “No, she just did it.” In this example
as well as Ann’s description, we see glimpses of Lily’s refined and highly focused motivation; what gifted scholar Renzulli (2005) refers to as task commitment. We also see ample evidence of Renzulli’s “schoolhouse giftedness,” especially in Lily’s above average abilities, as she scores in the advanced range on achievement tests, and in her task commitment to complete schoolwork and practice her piano.

After about an hour, Lily comes out of the office to get another snack. Ann asks Lily, “Are you done?” and she replies, “No,” and heads back into the office closing the door behind her. Again in this exchange between mother and daughter, we see subtle hints that Ann serves as an authority figure for Lily by monitoring her progress. However, we also see that Ann gives Lily autonomy when it comes to homework completion. In fact, during all of my visits I never observe Ann go into the office to check on what Lily is doing; nor do I hear her ask what she is working on, I only observe her checking in with Lily on her progress periodically, telling her it is time to take a break, or explaining that she needs to complete her homework before she has a play date. Once more, Ann demonstrates a combination of authoritative parenting and autonomy granting, a duality shown in research to be effective at encouraging gifted children. Specifically, researchers have found that gifted children need the freedom to choose and make decisions, in conjunction with support and encouragement (Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Feldman & Piirto, 2002; Karnes, Shwedel, & Steinberg, 1984; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001; Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1995).

In addition to using an authoritative parenting style mixed with a certain level of freedom, Ann and Bob also use the parenting practice of serving as role models for their
children. On a daily basis Ann and Bob model a strong work ethic by getting up and laboring long hours six days a week. Likewise, Alex follows his parents’ example, working his way through a Master’s degree in biochemical engineering as a research assistant while also completing all of the necessary requirements for medical school. On some level, Lily’s academic success can be attributed to this role-modeling as she replicates the same behavior each day when she comes home and immediately begins her homework.

Besides role modeling, Ann also uses the parenting practice of having encouraging conversations with her children, conversations that generally focus on working hard and being successful. Ann explains that, “sometimes at dinner we talk…I just tell them about other people who work hard.” She goes on to explicate how she describes people like Jeremy Linn or Yao Ming, using these people as examples of “the importance of success… and also practice.”

Another example of how Ann uses encouraging conversation as a parenting practice that supports academic success comes when Lily tells her mom that she really would like to move up to the highest level math class next year. Ann shares that she told Lily, “You know, just keep work, you know. Summer keep work the harder work. So she still had a chance when she go to class (in seventh grade).” Ann also shares that she acknowledges Lily’s hard work and frustrations saying, “Yeah, we know this is hard...” but that she encourages her to work harder and to try to do even better. A strategy that Ann explains can sometimes frustrate Lily, who feels that her mom wants, “everything perfect.” But really, Ann details that she is careful not to praise too much and wants to
encourage Lily to improve, “to make it good, just better.” However, Ann feels that sometimes she can be too hard on Lily saying that, “I still want to change something, more encouraging… maybe I need more…somehow be more patient.” Ann goes on to talk about how kind and patient she is with the students at school and how she feels she could do a better job of this with Lily, not yelling as much. This brief moment of introspection illuminates how conscientious and thoughtful Ann is as a parent. She thinks about her parenting and contemplates her parenting practices on some level, trying to find ways to be even better. It seems that working hard is not the only behavior modeled in the Chang household- Ann also demonstrates how to be better, to be nice, to be good.

Being good and nice is something that Ann believes is very important. She explains that she has tried to impart this to her children. I would agree that Ann has been successful at teaching her children to be good and nice as all of my interactions with Lily and Alex are both polite and respectful. Ann describes an excellent example of this behavior in my last visit, telling me how she, Alex, and Lily had just returned home from a trip to San Diego, where they stayed with some of Ann’s friends from China. She said that upon their return both Lily and Alex, without her prompting, “sent emails to them (her friends) saying thank you so much,” exhibiting Ann’s belief that her children, “are supposed be nice, always be good manners.” There is also more than enough evidence that Ann models polite behavior as well for her children when she greets me at the door, offers me slippers, serves me refreshments, feeds me delicious homemade meals, and is kind and courteous in all manners of interaction; behavior that is often recognized by the staff at Aspen Creek Elementary School as well.
By and large, over six months, I continue to see Ann as a role model who encourages her children to work hard and be good. In addition, Ann’s parenting practices of talking with Lily and setting an example to follow seem also to be effective at promoting the academic achievement of both her children, as if Ann were constantly standing at the center of a giant seesaw, moving her feet to strike just the right balance in her parenting between motivating and pushing.

**Balance: A Little Push, a Little Freedom**

Coffee steam wafts in the air and mixes with the rising and falling piano notes creating a perfect soundtrack for the snowflakes spitting from the gray January sky. Sitting around the dining room table with our hands clutching warm cups of Vietnamese coffee and Lily’s piano music drifting in from the office, Ann begins to tell me about her life in China before coming to America.

After graduating from high school, Ann moved home and rode her bicycle to and from her job at a local hotel where she worked in human resources. It was at this hotel that she met Bob who was working as a cook in the hotel’s restaurant. Before meeting Ann, Bob had attended a vocational school where he completed a special cooking license that certified him as a chef. During the next two years, Ann also took courses at a vocational school and eventually started a marketing job for a large department store. In 1988, she and Bob were married. Two years later, Ann gave birth to her son Alex. The family stayed working in the Zhang Jin region of China for 10 more years before
deciding to come to America. During these years, Bob continued working as a chef and Ann primarily took care of Alex.

Ann rises to refill her teacup with more Vietnamese coffee as the piano music drifting in from the office ceases and Lily emerges from her chrysalis; Walking as a butterfly might, long-legged and with barely a footfall, Lily comes into the dining room and asks her mom if she can stop practicing her piano and begin work on her math homework instead. Ann responds affirmatively and Lily smiles at me, turns on her heal, and heads back into the office to work. Here again, we see the balance Ann strikes in her parenting, authoritative but also flexible. There is the expectation that Lily must ask permission, but there is also freedom and flexibility within the expectations as Ann allows Lily the choice to work on something new.

As we resume our conversation, I ask Ann if she has used the same parenting practices and strategies with both of her children and she begins to tell me about what parenting was like in China. In China, there was a great deal of homework and a lot of pressure put on children to do well in school, especially boys. Ann explains that, “In China most of the parents push their kids more than in the United States.” Further, she states that Alex, “had a lot of homework, so it’s (the pushing) needed…The United States has homework but still kids don’t have too much, they still do sports.” Here Ann hints at a cultural difference between parenting in China versus America; in the United States there seems to be equal or even at times less emphasis placed on schoolwork and homework than on afterschool activities like sports, art, dance, music, and friends, while in China parents and schools place most, if not all, of the emphasis on school and
schoolwork. Ann goes on to explain that in China there is “only homework.” At first I interpret this to mean that in China there is more homework, but Ann explains, “No, only homework.” Ann continues by sharing that in America “There’s more freedom,” and she doesn’t have to be as strict with Lily as she was with Alex in China. She also says that in America parents allow their children time with their friends as well, “Friends is another thing. I think in China, the parents, they don’t want friends coming because the homework is 5 or 6 hours.”

Living in Colorado, Ann allows Lily to have friends over regularly and Lily participates in many different afterschool activities: student council, tennis, piano, and art. For Ann, parenting in America is more a balancing act than the constant push of Chinese parenting. She says, “I think that, maybe that for homework, it’s a more of a balance. I like them (activities and school work) both, the balance.” As we continue to talk, I get the sense that Ann prefers parenting in America as opposed to China. She confides:

I think I was too pushy because school had a lot of homework…. I think just a little push is okay, not too much. Kids don’t like to be pushed too much. But for me, I just think the first thing when you go home is you need to do homework, after that you can do dinner.

Here Ann reiterates her appreciation for the balance between school and activities that exists in the United States. Smiling she says, “If the kids need to relax then they can do that.” She also explains that one of the reasons she and Bob decided to move to America was because “in China it’s really hard for kids. They have a lot of homework.” However,
Ann and Bob were not sure that it would be different in America; in fact, “10 years ago we really didn’t know… but now we know that.” They decided to try and in the end they learned it was really different. Likewise, Alex appreciates the differences between Chinese and American parenting, sharing that the, “Culture of parenting in China is very stressful and competitive because every parent wants his kid to be the best. Education is everything in China; it’s the only way out of poverty. In the US, people want kids to be happy.”

The distinctions that both Ann and Alex pinpoint are well documented in the research on cultural differences in parenting between Caucasian and Asian families. For example, Dornbusch et al. (1987) found that Asian students report their parents to be higher on the authoritarian index and lower on the authoritative index than Caucasian families. This finding was further supported by supplementary research which found that Asian American parents use more authoritarian and conservative parenting practices than Caucasians in order to support academic achievement including praise, punishment, and strict discipline (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Leng, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Lim & Lim, 2004). Two additional studies are also applicable, (1) research reviewed by Kelley and Tseng (1992), which found Chinese parents generally to be more controlling, more achievement orientated, and more encouraging of independence than Caucasian and (2) the research of Esther Yao (1985), which found that Chinese families are more structured and provide more formal education experiences afterschool and on weekends. There are many parallels that exist between this research and the descriptions provided by Ann and Alex.
However in the research, the authors tend to use more academic language like conservative, strict, and authoritarian practices to refer to what Ann described as “push” or “pushing.” Likewise, one study mentions formal afterschool learning activities, which in the case of the Chang family is summer tutoring and Chinese school, while additional authors refer to “punishment and strict discipline,” something Ann referred to as “yelling.” Overall, much of the research reverberates through Ann’s distinctions between parenting in the United States and China. At the same time, we begin to see how Ann has adapted to some of the American/western parenting norms creating a parenting balance, on the one side being more flexible, encouraging, and allowing for more unstructured time with friends and activities, and on the other side sustaining more conservative/authoritarian Chinese parenting practices.

It is clear that Ann has certainly adopted many America parenting practices, but it is important to note that there are still many ways that Ann has aligned herself with the more conservative and authoritarian practices of China. One important example can be seen in the fact that Ann does not generally allow Lily to have sleepovers, a common practice among many preteen American girls. As we sit across from each other sharing coffee and conversation, I ask Ann if she allows sleepovers and she responds:

Not really…my neighbor, she went a couple of times but another Aspen Creek student, she went, but now she’s difficult because she uses contacts every night so she need to use her contacts. This time I go to China, she’s going to my friend’s house, whole week.
Even though, Ann has allowed them in the past, her response implies that she is not really comfortable sending Lily to anyone’s house and if she must, she prefers Lily to stay with her friend. I learn later that during spring break Lily stays with Ann’s friend, while Ann and Bob make a quick trip back to China. This is a friend that Ann met through the Chinese school and has become very close with. The mother is Chinese, but she married an America and together they have two children. When asked if she is most comfortable having Lily stay with this family as opposed to others, Ann replies, “I don’t know. I just…what’s family …” Attempting to interpret this quote, I ask Ann to clarify if she is more comfortable having Lily stay with people that she considers family and Ann shakes her head affirmatively. Here we see that Ann is more conservative about allowing Lily to stay the night at other people’s houses, choosing not to adopt the common American tradition of having regular sleepovers.

As Ann and I finish up our conversation, I notice that no sound can be heard from the office where Lily is working on her math homework. I comment that Lily is so quiet; Ann smiles and then shares that sometimes Lily listens to music when she works on her homework. Ann then asks me if I think it is good that Lily listens to music sometimes while she works, clarifying “She (Lily) says she like it, but actually I don’t like it.” I share that some students in my classroom can listen to music while they work and do very well on their assignments, while others cannot because the music becomes a distraction. Ann nods and says again, “Yeah, actually I don’t like, but I know she’s really liking music. I hope she…maybe next time I’ll still say, you can’t…” Ann’s comments here are particularly relevant to the theme of balance as she seems to be weighing
whether she should tell Lily to stop listening to music while she works or not. There is an uncertain tone to her words as she seems to have trouble coming to a conclusion, “I hope she….maybe next time….”

A month later, I follow up with Ann asking her if she spoke with Lily about not listening to music while she works and Ann says, “I tell her to stop, but she still…sometimes I allow it, just not anytime.” In this case, Ann has again chosen the more conservative approach telling her daughter not to listen to music; however what is interesting is that Ann seems to be somewhat flexible in her strictness saying, “Sometimes I allow it.” It is very possible that in the future Ann will eventually allow Lily the autonomy to choose when she listens to music while she works, aligning more with authoritative and American parenting practices.

As my visit has come to an end, I rise and go into the office to say goodbye to Lily. I find her leaning with her elbows resting on the desk, a math worksheet, and her iPod in front of her; she sits like an architect surveying a blueprint. She looks up and smiles. I ask her what she is working on and she explains that she is working on another practice math sheet. I then ask her to tell me about the two charcoal portraits of Alex that hang on the perpendicular wall. She explains that she drew these in the art class she takes on Saturdays. I compliment her on the quality of the portraits and she asks me if I would like to see more of her art. I respond enthusiastically and she leads me out of the office and down the first set of basement stairs to a landing, where a number of her pieces lay stacked against the wall as if the space served as a giant portfolio. She takes each painting and lays it on the floor for me to see and I ask her if she is taking an art class in middle
school. She shrugs her shoulders and then tells me how she wishes she could take art or clay in school, but her mom says, “you already take a painting class on the weekend and what will those art electives do for you’”…. so instead Lily signs up for more academic classes.

In this instance, we once more see Ann employing more conservative and traditionally Chinese parenting practices as she instructs Lily to focus on the academic classes and not on art classes. Through my American parenting lens Ann’s guidance seems limiting and almost harsh at first, but as I consider the entire context of the situation I again see how Ann is constantly working to maintain a balance. Although, she tells Lily not to take the art classes in middle school, she has chosen to pay for an art class on the weekends, something Lily has been doing for a number of years.

Taking Ann’s parenting as a whole, the theme of balance serves as an extended metaphor; there are times that Ann leans more toward the authoritative parenting style of America and other times when she tilts more toward the conservative and authoritarian practices of China. The balance Ann strikes is obvious in a number of ways: pushing some but then offering more freedom; supporting Lily’s school work but also her outside interests; allowing Lily to listen to music but often times telling her to turn it off; giving Lily the freedom to work independently on school work, but telling her when she has worked too long and needs to take a break. Overall, the image emerges of Ann standing at the center of a giant seesaw, shifting her feet to achieve the ultimate balance.
Sometimes It Is Just Part of the Story

“Sometimes it is just part of the story,” Ann says to me during my fourth visit to her home. At the time the words slip pass me and I do not press further to understand the significance of what she is saying, but looking back over all of the interview data, it is these words that strike me as particularly profound. These words casually spoken after Ann has corrected my false presumption that cooking Chinese food is an important tradition that she maintains, telling me instead that she cooks this way because it is the only food she really knows how to make and because her children like to eat it.

In a strictly literal sense, Ann’s statement “sometimes it is just part of the story” speaks to the idea that some things we do are done purely out of habit. Ann cooks this way because she has always cooked this way and her children enjoy the food. However, on a metaphorical level, Ann’s words speak to the complex phenomenon of parenting, the idea that within the seemingly mundane acts of parenting originates a story, a story consisting of many interrelated parts that unite into one narrative whole.

The portrait of Ann’s parenting told above is a narrative of success, illuminating not only the mundane aspects of parenting but also the complex relationship between parenting beliefs, practices, and cultural traditions that coalesce to create a home environment that supports academic achievement. In this case, the academic home environment that is established in the Chang home is one that largely mirrors the research on the subject as many studies have found that parents use a number of strategies to support academic achievement, including: creating academic home environments that mirror school environments; supporting academic motivation, attitudes, and beliefs; high
achievement expectations; greater emphasis on learning opportunities and activities; encouraging curiosity, persistence, and mastery; autonomy support and structure; high levels of verbal interaction; positive affective relationships; and positive discipline and control strategies (Campbell & Verna, 2007; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1997; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Iverson & Walberg, 1982).

These strategies identified in the research resonate throughout Ann’s portrait and align directly with her beliefs, practices, and traditions. For instance, Ann believes that education comes first and creates a work space for Lily to use that mirrors the academic environment of school; Ann initiates encouraging conversations with her children as a means of promoting persistence and building positive affective relationships; Ann has high achievement expectations of her children and pushes them to be better while also encouraging mastery; Ann puts a greater emphasis on learning activities, even enrolling both of her children in Chinese school, etc.

Finding alignment between the research and Ann’s parenting is one effective way to determine whether the academic home environment and parenting practices have successfully promoted her child(ren) to achieve academically. However, an equally valuable determining factor is to check for the proof of the pudding or to examine the child to see if she is indeed finding academic success in school.

In this case, Lily serves as the perfect evidence that Ann’s parenting has nurtured academic success. As a fifth grade student, Lily performed well-enough on assessments and in the classroom to be placed in all advanced or honors courses in middle school. In
fact, she was placed in an honors language arts class programmed for and taught by the gifted and talented coordinator at the middle school. This small class is typically reserved for the top 5% of incoming sixth graders and therefore qualifies as quite an accomplishment for a child of immigrants whose English language proficiency is quite limited. Not only did Lily place into high level courses, she also managed to score all A grades and only one B+ grade each trimester in her first year of middle school while also continuing to score above average on all end of the year assessments (TCAP, MAP, and DRA).

It is also important to note that in addition to her academic success in school, Lily continues to excel in her identified area of giftedness: music. Throughout the school year Lily competed successfully in a number of piano competitions, including the United States Duo Piano Competition held in Colorado Springs.

Ultimately, this portrait leaves us with two simple and powerful conclusions 1) Ann’s parenting is effective and 2) it is possible for a family to emigrate from China and raise two different children to be academically successful in America. Without a doubt, the Chang family embodies “part of the story” that needs to be told about immigrants raising academically achieving gifted children in America.
Chapter Five: Doing the Best You Can

On a late fall day, Alice Benoit waits outside the doors which lead to the fifth grade hallway at Aspen Creek elementary school. Her cayenne curls spiral down and rest on her shoulders. Her crystal clear blue eyes are focused in the distance; she is preoccupied. As the bell rings she motions for her son to go inside, sweeping her hands forward in a fanning motion, “Go,” she whispers. Her porcelain-skinned son hesitates before passing through the open doors and in that moment of hesitation Alice decides that she must have a word with her son’s teacher. As the teacher approaches, Alice waves, steps inside, and stammers, “I…I fear that I am losing him. I…I can see it in his eyes.”

The teacher tilts her head like a small bird in the forest considering a hiker.

“Julian…” the teacher begins, but before she can finish she is cut off.

“He hasn’t been himself lately…the science, he loves the science, but…” Alice sputters, searching for the appropriate words, “I am losing him, he’s shutting down, he’s…he’s…bored.”

There, she had said it, letting the words tumble out onto the floor to rest between herself and the teacher. Taking a long breath in through her nose Alice waited for the women to respond. She knew she had spoken the truth but feared that her words might make matters worse. All she wanted was for her son to be happy, to be excited to go to school, to find joy in learning. She could not take another day of watching him shuffle his way through his morning routine, climbing the stairs endlessly, forgetting this or that,
brushing his teeth for what seemed like hours, seeking out any excuse to delay the inevitable car ride to school.

Her job was to raise the kids; it was the deal she had brokered with her husband long ago. *You make the money and I will make our kids*. And making the kids meant ensuring they didn’t lose the glimmer in their eyes; the spark, the love of learning. Once before in third grade, Alice had seen the spark in her son begin to dim and had advocated for a new math teacher. She feared that at ten years old Julian had reached an age where she needed to be even more attentive to signs of his boredom or disinterest in school because if she lost him now, she might just lose him for good.

Alice had realized long ago that being Julian’s mother would require much more than packing healthy lunches, it would require diligence and direction. She learned that she needed to watch her son carefully, attending to any sign that he might need guidance or affection. Alice knew that it was up to her to help Julian feel in control, as his mind was often so preoccupied with black holes and time travel that he felt as if he was spinning out of orbit.

**Doing the Best You Can and Giving a Sense of Control**

It was 10 days after September 11, 2001 when Alice stepped off a plane from France carrying six-month-old Julian. She spoke almost no English and had never been to the United States, let alone Colorado. She had flown by herself to meet her husband of three years, Jon, who had arrived in Colorado three weeks ahead to find an apartment and start his new job as a software engineer. Alice describes this time as the “adventure.” Before coming to Colorado the Benoit family had lived in Paris, France where Alice had
recently left her nursing job to care for Julian fulltime and where Jon had worked in the
technology industry. Alice shared that it was hard living in Paris with a baby because it
was too expensive to live in the city, so they had to live in the suburbs, which meant a
really long commute and little time at home for Jon. Largely due to these hardships, Alice
and Jon decided to take an “adventure” and try something new. Jon was offered an
excellent position at a technology firm in Colorado and they decided he should take it.

Arriving right after September 11, 2001 was not easy for Alice who spoke little
English. She had studied English in school but had never spoken it regularly. Jon’s
English speaking skills were a little stronger, but he was working long hours, so Alice
was essentially alone during the day with Julian. Alice describes this time saying:

So after two weeks in the apartment I was like, you know what, I need to talk.
There’s no way, I need to function, communicate. So I was looking for a way to
meet people and I saw a form about a group of mothers meeting weekly. I was
like; well this is exactly what I need. I can relate to mothers, little kids. It’s going
to work for me but I don’t speak English so how am I going to do that? So I
thought, well, food, that’s international. So I remember making an apple pie and
literally coming into the group saying, ‘hi, me French, apple pie?’ That’s how it
started. I’m still friends with some of them because that day, they thought it was
really cute.

In addition to the mother’s group Alice also spent a lot of time watching American
cartoons in order to learn more English:
I discovered when I had visual association image words; this is something that you have very strongly in cartoons for kids. Situations, graphic, there’s a lot of sounds and characters at the same time, and it’s very visual in a simple way. Maybe it’s not the most elaborate vocabulary but it works. I’m telling you it really works.

In the end, the mother’s group and the cartoons were instrumental in helping Alice learn English. In fact, she was so devoted to watching the cartoons that she describes watching them every day until she gave herself a headache from trying so hard to understand.

The next hurdle for Alice in her English language acquisition was leaving the home to run errands. She tells of spending a lot of time at the grocery store. Before she left she would research what she was planning to say in English and then she would tell herself, “Well I’m not going to leave that grocery store until I said three sentences to someone, anybody, and I stuck with it. I stuck to it but I’m telling you I spent quite a lot of time in the grocery store at the beginning.” The final step was speaking on the telephone. Alice disclosed that it was, “Very stressful to answer the phone at the beginning because you don’t make sense.” But she was determined to learn English as she felt, “if you move into a country the least you can do is learn the language.” In the end, Alice’s resolve paid off and eventually she reached the stage where, “you can dream in English and when you can express your wishes directly without having to wait a minute and then it’s too late.” Twelve years later, only Alice’s accent divulges that she is a nonnative speaker; her vocabulary and diction are remarkable.
There are many important parallels between the way Alice learned English and the way she parents her two children. Underlying both are a determination and commitment that Alice describes as “not trying to do the impossible, but as trying to do the best you can.” And trying to do the best you can is an apt way to describe what I observe each time I visit with the Benoit family.

On a cold January day, Alice and I first meet in my classroom after school. She bursts in; a fiery ball of energy, dressed smartly in a long black coat embroidered with a floral design, dark skinny jeans, and pastel leather kitten heels. Her red curls rise and fall to the cadence of her brisk movements as she smiles at me and invites her daughter Emma to take a seat at one of the desks and start her homework. From her stylish purse, Alice pulls out a plastic bag holding three pan de chocolate that she bought today at a French bakery located in the city, explaining that on the days Julian has piano lessons, she finds the lessons go much better when she brings him this special treat. I search in my cupboards for some napkins as Alice checks in with Emma about her homework and her day. Earlier in the week, Alice had left me a voicemail saying that she could meet afterschool on Thursday in my classroom as soon as she picked up Emma from the third grade hallway. She explained that on Thursdays, she picks up Julian from his middle school, drives him home, and feeds him a quick snack before his piano teacher arrives. She then rushes over to pick up Emma from Aspen Creek. Julian’s piano lesson typically last an hour and a half, leaving us plenty of time for our first interview.

After finding a napkin for Emma and myself, I sit down across from Alice and she begins to share how Julian’s year is going so far at his new middle school. The previous
spring, Alice and Jon had decided to enroll Julian in a new science and technology focused charter school. They hoped that choosing a school centered on Julian’s interests would help keep him engaged and increase the likelihood of his academic achievement. However, heading into this school year they had a few concerns mostly because this particular STEM school was new and had first opened its doors to students the previous fall. With high hopes, Julian started at the STEM charter school in the fall of 2012.

Alice explained that the year had been okay so far, but she really noticed a difference between the teachers’ involvement at the elementary school level versus the middle school level. She asserted that both she and Julian had a new appreciation for the amount of individualized attention the teacher’s at Aspen Creek had given every student. She shared that on a few occasions she had sent emails or left messages for teachers and it had taken a long time for them to respond, if they ever did at all. Recently and in response to these concerns, the family had begun to talk about sending Julian to the neighborhood middle school next year for seventh grade, but they had agreed to give the STEM school another few months before they came to a final resolution.

Alice and Jon’s conscientious decision about middle school placement is a sound example of their commitment to doing the best they can as parents. They tried very hard to research and chose the top middle school option for Julian and although they had their doubts, they knew that ultimately they had done the best they could. They had chosen a school that in theory would best serve Julian and his unique needs.

Unique is an apt word to describe Julian’s needs, as he is not a typical student. He is incredibly intelligent and creative, but has such fervent interests that he has a tendency
to disengage when he finds content dull. In Alice words, “Julian is more distracted. He’s very intellectual, deep thinker, constructive thinker, scientist type.” She explains that if Julian is bored, “he’s just unbearable. So he just needs to be challenged, it’s very important to him, his need for information.” However, when he is engaged Julian can be highly creative and productive to the extent that a gifted scholar like Joseph Renzulli would likely categorize Julian as a “creative-productive” (2005, p. 8) gifted student for he tends to excel at developing original thought, solutions, or materials.

Julian was identified gifted and talented by the school district he attended for elementary school, specifically in the discipline of science; he is particularly passionate and creative in the sub-content areas of astronomy, physics, and digital animation. An NNAT score in the 90th percentile and achievement test scores in the advanced range evidence his above average intelligence while his high task commitment and creativity is demonstrated in projects he has completed like digital videos and science animations. For example, in fifth grade, he created a movie about black holes, researching information and then using a computer program to create the original animations, which demonstrated and explained the physical properties of black holes.

Julian comes by these passions and creativity honestly as his paternal grandfather is an astrophysicist in France who has had the opportunity to work with the particle accelerator in Switzerland. Jon also has similar interests and as Alice shares, “they (Julian and Jon) have that special connection,” a special connection that nurtures and supports Julian’s interests outside of school. This special connection in combination with
parenting that is education-orientated proves crucial in keeping Julian on a path toward academic achievement later in the school year.

After discussing Julian’s year so far, Alice begins to share about her childhood in France while Emma continues to work quietly on the other side of the classroom, munching away at her freshly baked treat. Alice offers that she was raised in a middle class family and had a “good solid upbringing” in the city of Lorient in the Brittany region of France. She had a traditional and secure childhood filled with long days at Catholic school, playing with her two brothers, taking violin and dance lessons, and going on family vacations. While she was growing up, her father served as the top assistant or aid to the mayor of Lorient, while her mother stayed at home, taking care of Alice and her two brothers.

During our conversation, Alice emphasized that she grew up in a family that was physically active, ate healthy food, and was focused on education; traditions that she and her family maintain to this day. For instance, Alice runs and works out about 10 hours each week: taking kickboxing and Pilates classes at her local fitness center, while her father continues to be an avid cyclist well into his seventies and her two brothers both compete in triathlons. In addition to the physical activity, Alice stresses the need for a healthy diet with Julian and Emma just like her mother did when she and her brothers were growing up:

Very regularly we have a conversation about what you eat, what is in your food, what is good for your body, and do you get enough food for your body...You
only have one body for the rest of your life, you take care of it. So yeah, that type of thing of keeping caffeine from my kids...buying all organic food.

And lastly, Alice highlights the importance of education with Julian and Emma, telling them “homework is not optional” just as she recalls her parents did with her, “not doing your homework was not an option.”

School days in France were much longer when Alice was growing up than here in America today and attending Catholic school meant school days filled with strict and structured learning. Alice recalls, “having to memorize things in school and having my parents making me do the recitation and working on that with me.” Overall, when she thinks back to her school work she remembers “it was a lot of recitation, what we call ‘dictée,’ when you recite,” and when she thinks back to her school days she recollects, “you spend two hours not leaving your desk...I did that when I was little because that’s the French way. You have the same desk, the same place, all year round for every single time.”

After high school, Alice attended nursing school for three years, receiving a national diploma that certified her as a nurse in France. She worked in a variety of nursing positions for ten years during the early days of her marriage to Jon and before they moved to the United States. For now, Alice is content being a stay-at-home mom as she explains, “I grew up with a stay-at-home mom and so did Jon, and we kind of would like that to happen for our kids too. If you’re a full-time working mom you’re not with your kids.” By staying at home and raising her children, Alice feels she is providing the necessary parental involvement and effective support for them. A quality identified by
many gifted scholars as central to the success of gifted and talented children; gifted children do not succeed without the time and financial support of their families (Bloom, 1985; Campbell, 2005; Feldman & Piirto, 2002; Colangelo & Dettman, 1983).

As our conversation turns to parenting, Alice begins to detail the systems she has put in place to help her children succeed in school:

When homework starts in Kindergarten I really underlined the importance of doing your homework, not doing it is just not an option, it’s a routine thing, putting it in place early on. You come back from school you have your snack; you do your homework, that’s it.

As Alice shares this parenting strategy, her daughter Emma sits quietly at a desk in my classroom working on her homework. It seems that this routine is followed no matter the setting, as Emma knows exactly what is expected of her. Months later, I visit the Benoit home on a Wednesday after school and witness the same routine. Emma and Julian come home from school, eat snack, and then get right to work on their homework with only one gentle reminder from Alice. Alice explains that for the first few years of elementary school:

I help them; I sit with them, really involved with the homework until about the end of 2nd grade. Then the beginning of 3rd grade I’m starting that strategy. So for the beginning of 3rd grade, for example it was Emma I was sitting close to her but I’m trying to help her a little less and a little less. So right now she is becoming independent, but she knows if she has any questions she can ask me and I will help her, and I think it’s important.
In this quote, Alice describes the additional parenting strategy of gradually releasing more responsibility to her children, as they get older. On multiple occasions, I witness evidence of this as Emma asks her mom a question about her homework and Alice responds by saying, “Do as much as you can on your own and I will check it when you are done.” In essence, Alice is using both a combination of authoritative parenting, sitting with her children when they are younger and requiring them to complete their homework first thing, and autonomy granting, recognizing when it is necessary for her children to begin taking greater responsibility for completing their work independently. According to the research, an authoritative parenting style that allows for autonomy is an ideal parenting combination for gifted children as numerous scholars have noted that gifted children need the freedom to choose and make decisions, in conjunction with parental support and encouragement (Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Feldman & Piirto, 2002; Karnes, Shwedel, & Steinberg, 1984; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001; Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1995).

Further, Alice details her authoritative parenting style saying, “I’m the mean mom who makes them practice piano, do their homework, eat their veggies and so on,” and, “We’re parents. We’re not friends. They have one set of parents.” During my visits to the Benoit home, I observe many times when Alice demonstrates her parental authority. I frequently witness Alice demanding certain behavior of her children by saying things such as, “No video games,” “Eat your strawberries in the kitchen, not the living room,” and “Emma, put on your coat.” Although these quotes are directive and firm, Alice is never rigid or harsh. She speaks in a calm but determined voice that
commands respectful and responsible behavior. In essence, Alice is in control and by being in control she provides an environment where her children feel safe and secure as well.

During our second interview, Alice explains the importance of being in control by saying, “It’s important to be directive because they (your children) reproduce what they see so it’s important for them but also for the way to be as parents. If you can’t say no to your child, your child’s not going to be able to say no. That’s what I believe…”

Beyond using an authoritative parenting style, Alice also helps give Julian a sense of control by helping him manage his time and set priorities. Alice elucidates a nice example of this by sharing:

Well, when Julian was doing the black belt, it was three times a week and they (both Emma and Julian) were doing music so we had to come up with a plan here. So when we came home she (Emma) was doing her piano and he (Julian) was doing his homework, and when we were leaving for Tai Kwon Do, she was doing her homework during Tai Kwon Do and then back at home and finishing homework.

In this quote, Alice illustrates how she teaches her children to manage their time and prioritize. Further examples of time management and prioritizing can be heard when Alice states, “Homework is the first thing that has to be done, no exception” and “No screen time (video games, surfing the internet, etc.) during the week.” During my second observation in April, I also witness Alice helping Julian to manage his time by telling him to check his teachers’ websites at school and make a list of all the assignments he needs
to complete. After about ten minutes, she then checked over his list and asked him about how long he estimated it would take to complete all of the assignments. Meanwhile, Emma, who had no homework assigned, set a timer for 40 minutes and was working on a reading comprehension website titled Raz-kids. After 40 minutes, Alice instructed Emma to start practicing her piano, so that when Julian was done with his homework she would be finished and he could practice. In this example, it clear that Alice helps both Julian and Emma manage their time, while also maintaining clear priorities, schoolwork then piano.

Enrolling her children in piano lessons is another important parenting practice Alice utilizes to help give her children a sense of control and order. As a child, Alice played both the violin and the saxophone, and when each of her children turned six, she enrolled them in piano lessons. Countless times during our interviews, Alice stressed her belief that participating in music lessons is very important because playing a musical instrument “requires discipline and focus.” Furthermore, during our first interview, Alice explains:

Music is a big thing and it’s also a developmental thing. I think music develops many different areas of your brain, a bit like language, I would say. It’s a mathematical thing too because you have to calculate and it’s a reading tool because before you play your notes you have to read it and where it is, what it does, how to play it. It’s a fine motor skill. It’s actually physically making you bring some extra connections in your brain.

Beyond the cognitive benefits highlighted by Alice, I observe that music serves as an important parenting strategy as well because Julian and Emma must have the discipline to
practice daily and focus on their lessons. Each day, Alice requires both children to play piano for about 40 minutes. During this time, they generally practice the next pieces that they will perform in their duo competitions. Then, once a week each child receives a 90-minute lesson with their piano teacher that is held at the family home. It is in this weekly piano routine that Alice helps foster the important habits of discipline, work ethic, sustained focus, and perseverance. This is worth noting as many research studies have found that gifted and talented children tend to come from more harmonious homes where parents foster the development of psychological dispositions like perseverance and motivation (Silverstein, 2000; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001; Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Freeman, 2000; Webb, Gore, Amend, DeVries, 2007).

The importance of music is also evident the moment you set foot in the Benoit home. On my first visit, I cannot help but notice that as you pass through the entryway the first thing you see is a bright sun filled room occupied by three pianos: an expensive looking grand piano, an electronic keyboard, and an antique piano. Just to the left of the entryway and opposite the formal dining room the “piano” room resides. In the center against the north-facing wall rests the grand piano, while the large electronic keyboard lies against the opposite half wall, and in the space between resides the upright antique piano. Alice explains that the antique piano was rescued from a neighbor down the street who was planning to take it to the dump; she hated to see it discarded, so she brought it home in hopes that it could be restored someday.

In addition to the obvious musical focus in the home, there also seems to be an overall emphasis on creativity and learning as the neutral walls are decorated with
various pictures Alice has painted and copious amounts of books, both English and French, fill a large closet upstairs. In Julian’s room a large desk faces out a big window next to his bed and against the perpendicular wall a bookshelf is filled with various plastic tote trays. Inside these tote trays are collections of items that Julian has amassed over the years: rocks, magnets, scientific tools, etc. On Julian’s desk sits his own laptop computer an example of the access both he and Emma have to technology whenever they need it for their homework; Julian tends to work on this laptop while Emma utilizes the families newer desktop computer located in the living room downstairs. The use of technology also appears to be encouraged as technological resources are plentiful and the use of them for learning is promoted.

Overall, the Benoit home is clutter free and clean. Besides Alice’s art, only a few family photographs decorate the walls. In the living room, there is a large flat screen television, but I never see it turned on during my visits. Numerous houseplants fill the sunlit corners of the kitchen and breakfast nook; seemingly happy with all the natural light they receive facing southeast. The house itself sits in a cul-de-sac that backs up to an undeveloped open space. Alice shared that the nearby open space is the number one reason they bought the house as their large deck overlooks a creek, grasslands, and a running trail. The family often has observed wildlife practically in their backyard including: coyotes, deer, and hawks.

Down the steps, the family has placed a large trampoline that seems to get a good deal of use. On my first visit, Julian and Emma spend 20 minutes or more out their jumping away. As evidenced by the trampoline purchase, physical activity is encouraged
in the Benoit family, although, Alice shares that they have been so busy this year that they really need to get more physical activity back in Julian’s routine, “I could see he’s missing it. The energy level is lower so he’s going to do it next year.”

Up until this year, Julian has been intensely involved in Tae Kwan Do receiving his black belt in fifth grade. In the transition to middle school, Julian had taken a break from Tae Kwan Do, which Alice felt seemed to be fine because he was attending physical education class every day, so he was still getting some physical activity. However, in the winter and spring his elective class schedule changed and he no longer had gym class every day. This is when Alice began to realize he was missing out on not have any physical activity during his day. She recognizes that physical activity, “needs to be there,” and that she needs to reemphasize the “idea of okay, take care of your body in the right way so it lasts.” Alice plans to sign him up for martial arts again this fall and Julian has also expressed interest in running track for his middle school as well. Overall, the encouragement of physical activity in the Benoit family is another important way that Alice helps give Julian a sense of control as martial arts requires discipline, focus, and practice. Alice serves as an important role model in this area because she is very disciplined about working out and eating healthy food. She encourages the same discipline in her children by trying to ensure that they are getting active time and served nutritious food.

In a sense, Alice’s authoritative parenting style and her parenting strategies of enrolling her children in music, encouraging physical activity, teaching them to manage their time and prioritize, autonomy granting, and stressing the importance of homework,
give her children a sense of control in a very holistic way as she seeks to help them feel in control of all aspects of their lives: the physical, the psychological, and the educational. This becomes critical in the spring of Julian’s sixth grade year when he has a major setback at his new middle school.

**Giving a Sense of Control: The Middle School Crisis**

On a cold March morning, Alice and I meet in the conference room of Aspen Creek elementary school for our second interview. It has been over a month since our last meeting and Alice came ready to talk. I could see the urgency in her body as I watched her hurry up the school steps, hardly missing a beat as she rounded the corner, met me in the office, and immediately announced something to the effect of *we have got to talk*. I ushered her into the conference room as she began to explain that two and a half weeks ago she had received an automated email from Julian’s school detailing that he was missing 15 assignments. Up until then, no one at the school had bothered to call or email her and let her know that Julian had fallen so far behind. Additionally, Julian had not said a word to her either, in fact, he kept telling her he was all caught up on his assignments, even at one point modifying an existing webpage to depict that he was all caught up when in fact he was not. Alice had trusted Julian as she had never had a reason not to, but now it had become painfully clear that she needed to take off her “little pink glasses this year” and put them “back in a closed drawer.”

Ever since she had received the email, Alice remarked that, “things had been crazy.” She and Jon had taken away all of Julian’s screen time (no iPod, video games, or free internet time) during the week; the only exception was if he needed to use his
computer to complete a homework assignment he could. Alice had also implemented a new homework routine. Right after snack, Julian had to go on his teacher’s websites and write down all of the assignments he needed to complete that night. Then he had to show his list to Alice, who had also made her own list; if their lists agreed, Alice then asked Julian to estimate how long it would take to complete all of the assignments. Only then would Alice give Julian permission to sit at the kitchen table and begin his homework, while she sat close by checking in on him regularly and refocusing him if necessary. When he was done, Julian had to show each finished task to Alice as well. Jon and Alice were also requiring Julian to make up all 15 missed assignments, even though it was too late to receive any credit for them, “it’s a consequence. It needs to happen.” Last but not least, Alice had set up individual conferences with each of Julian’s middle school teachers for Friday. She hoped that meeting with each teacher would be a good way to foster communication and motivate Julian to get back on track.

At this point, Alice’s frustration with the situation was quite high. She was disappointed in Julian, but equally bothered by the way the school had handled the situation. She would have appreciated clearer and earlier communication regarding Julian’s missed assignments. Part of the reason for the late notice was that many of the teachers were so behind in their grading of assignments that they did not mark the assignments missing until the last week of the grading period, leaving Julian no time to make them up. Alice also felt there was a lack of care at the school as she believed that none of the teachers cared enough to contact her earlier when Julian had fallen behind. She found the email, which was the only form of communication, cold and impersonal. In
her mind, the teachers were treating the sixth graders like high school students. Alice was “very unhappy with how the situation has been handled.” Consequently, the only productive steps Alice could take were to help reestablish the sense of control in Julian’s life through the formation of consequential and new routines. Months later, Alice reflected on how she handled the situation with Julian: We had gone through a crisis, and I think I needed or we needed to really control on the situation and to make him feel that he, Julian have some sense of control, a little more…because it was out of control, completely, and the way the school is functioning was not giving him the control.

In this reflection, we hear Alice explain in her own words why she thought it was necessary to implement the no screen time consequence and the new homework routine at home. It was a way to help Julian feel in control of his life when he was not getting it from his teachers or his school.

Immediately following the crisis, Alice also shared that Julian had seemed “very depressed.” She assumed this was because he felt bad about lying to her and Jon, but also because he had really spiraled out of control at school and didn’t know how to get back on track. Furthermore, Julian had suffered another emotional setback at the same time when his longtime partner in the duo piano competitions had quit. Julian and his piano partner had spent many months practicing together for an upcoming competition, so this was crushing. Noticing the toll these situations seemed to be having on Julian’s confidence and mental health, Alice explained that she had made a special point recently,
to cuddle with him for ten minutes each morning and to hug him more, so that he knows that he is loved.”

Instinctively, Alice responded to Julian’s middle school crisis with both warmth and firmness. She chose to react by demanding more and better behavior from her son, but also making sure that he knew that she loved him by responding to his needs. In this example, I would argue that Alice models a near perfect example of the authoritative style of parenting, being both firm and warm. This is significant because the authoritative parenting style has repeatedly been shown in the research to positively correlate with academic achievement and higher cognitive abilities in Caucasian families (Chao, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Rudasil, Adleson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013 Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). In fact, the research has found that academic achievement is greatest among children from authoritative homes that combine control, autonomy granting, involvement in school, and parental acceptance. Throughout this portrait, there have been many ways in which Alice has used an authoritative parenting style and autonomy granting to help Julian succeed academically and feel a sense of control in his life. We will now investigate the ways in which Alice nurtures Julian’s motivation and encourages his self-confidence.

Nurturing Motivation and Encouraging Self-Confidence

Following the middle school crisis, Julian did manage to bring his grades back up. The first trimester he had received As and Bs, but during his second trimester his grades had dropped to Cs and Ds because of the 15 missing assignments. By the end of the
school year, he had managed to raise his grades back up to Bs; although, the crisis made it very evident to the Benoit family that the STEM school was not the right environment for Julian and by late April they had decided to enroll him in his neighborhood middle school for seventh grade.

In addition to the decision to change schools, after the crisis, Alice also focused a considerable amount of energy on having conversations with Julian that were meant to motivate and encourage him. In May, Alice shared how these conversations often went:

The message is like okay just see what happens this year and learn about strengths, weaknesses, what can go wrong, and how fast it can happen. We learned things, too; a lot down the road, positive and negative and how to do things so it’s both a learning aspect of it on both sides and it’s okay. Take that now and use it for next year. This is your chance at a fresh start in the new school, these new teachers. You have the advantage of having one year of middle school behind you already. You know how things are working so you’re going to move from there. I’m trying to have that mindset because you know what to do. You can say whatever you want. You know exactly what to do.

In this quote, we see how Alice talks directly with Julian explaining the reality of his school situation in a firm, but also supportive tone. This quote also demonstrates that Alice expects Julian to take more responsibility for his success in school, stressing “this is your chance at a fresh start,” and that she is also trying to promote his autonomy by saying, “you know exactly what to do.”
Immediately following the middle school setback, Alice took more time to have these types of conversations with Julian; however, this parenting practice of having conversations to nurture motivation and encourage self-confidence is something Alice did even before Julian’s crisis. During the winter, Alice detailed how,

We explain things plainly, the way they work. If you don’t have scholarships it’s fine, we’re going to send you to college, but guess what, if you manage to have one, great! It’s great for us, it’s great for you. So you need to realize that. I’m trying to expand his thoughts. Because there’s two years and then he’s in high school.

During these conversations Alice tends to use examples from Julian’s life as a way to make the ideas relevant and real to him. Another example of this strategy can be seen when she imparts:

We at New Year’s talked about this--is the options we want you to have later on. I don’t believe I should have to have these conversations now with you because you’re 12, but this is how the system is working here so therefore we are having this conversation, and there was a very good example of a kid who’s taking piano class with the same teacher as those two, as both my kids, and this kid was coming to U.S., Chinese. He was 11, not speaking English. Dad, a pastor of a very poor church…he started to learn piano, very gifted kid and really worked on his academics, very good academics, and he’s going to Pepperdine on a full scholarship…. I’m your mother so yes, I can see that you have a big filter of what I’m saying right now, true, but this is a kid that you know. You’ve been seeing
him every single recital. You know him personally so this is a true thing. It’s happening so you better get it because it’s there.

Here, Alice shares with Julian the story of another immigrant and fellow pianist who moved to America, worked hard in school, and earned a college scholarship. Alice also explains to Julian that she has these conversations with him even though she recognizes the reality that he is an adolescent, who developmentally is more focused on exerting his independence than taking sound advice from his mother. Later, she again references his developmentally appropriate laissez faire attitude:

As a matter of fact yesterday I had a conversation with Julian where I’ve been trying to explain to him it’s important to have good grades so you can access the good class in high school and in college and all that. So I tried different ways to explain that to him and he was not exactly hearing it.

Although Alice feels these conversations can be fruitless at times, by having them anyway, Alice is encouraging Julian to notice how the education system works in America and to strive to be his best. She uses the relevant example of a fellow pianist in hopes of encouraging Julian that he too is capable of achieving at such a high level. However, she is also clear to point out that she and Jon will make sure that Julian can afford to go to college whether he has a scholarship or not. This is also critical as it conveys to Julian that while they want to encourage his achievement and motivate him to be successful, they accept him for who he is and will support his interests.

Accepting Julian for who he is and supporting his interest is another important way that the Jon and Alice nurture motivation and encourage self-confidence in Julian.
Specifically, Alice explains on multiple occasions the important role Jon plays in showing parental acceptance by encouraging Julian’s scientific interests. She details:

Now my husband is trying to nurture his scientific curiosity, so they will have conversations about whatever new planet they just discovered, particle accelerator in Sweden, and any kind of topics because that’s my husband’s background and he’s glad of his background, and his grandparent’s background. So they’re really showing an interest about that.

Do in large part to her husband’s own natural interests in space and technology, Alice shares that often she feels that she is, “the demanding mom, and my husband is coming back from work, let’s talk about planet da, da, da.” At times, it appears that the natural connection Jon and Julian share is somewhat frustrating for Alice as she feels left out to an extent, “they have that special connection …so maybe I’m left out of it.” Nonetheless, it is obvious that Alice recognizes that Jon’s encouragement of Julian’s interests is very important because it helps to boost his self-esteem but also because Julian’s interest in technology is “an educational thing. It’s extremely complicated too and he’s learning so much doing that…it’s learning, so I see that.”

Although Julian’s technology can get on Alice’s “nerves at times,” she recognizes that her role as Julian’s mother is to motivate and encourage her son, but that ultimately it is up to him to take the actions necessary to succeed. She explicates:

I think the role of mother is to be nurturing on a different level and nurturing on the emotional side, in order for the child to develop the best in life. That leads
ideally to happiness. I think that’s what the role is. It’s showing the path and knowing that they will decide which one they’re going to take.

This quote highlights Alice’s belief that her job is to nurture and support, but also to foster autonomy, so that her children can go out independently into the world and find success. Ultimately, Alice shares that she is trying, “to help them grow with love, be happy, comfortable,” and to help “them understand that school/education, that’s important. It’s going to be determinant in what you’re going to do later on.”

Alice and Jon’s dual emphasis on happiness and success in school surfaces frequently throughout the six months I visit with the family as raising content and academically successful children seem to be the most valued outcomes in the Benoit household. The dual emphasis is evidenced largely by the parenting practices of 1) having motivating and encouraging conversations (detailed above) and 2) fostering self-confidence through warm and responsive parenting.

Warm and responsive parenting that helps to encourage self-confidence is observed largely in the way Alice hugs her children frequently, touches their cheeks lovingly, and uses nicknames like, “monkey.” On multiple occasions, I witness Alice pointing out and praising each child’s strengths as well. In front of Emma, she tells me about the great book she made about volcanoes, spending extensive time illustrating elaborate pictures and researching the text she wrote. While during a visit to the home in late April, Alice makes a point of telling me about the research proposal Julian is writing to submit to a contest sponsored by the international space station. These are just a few examples of warm and responsive parenting that I witness throughout my visits.
Moreover, Alice explains that she often repeats inspiring phrases to her children such as, “I totally believe in you. You can do it. I’ve seen you do it. I know you can.” Further, she adds, “what we’re trying to do is also encourage self-confidence, of building it. Emma knows perfectly that she has very good strengths on her own as does Julian. We’re really making sure that we are equal on that part.” During my visits, I see evidence of this equitable parenting as well, witnessing a strong example in April when I visit the Benoit home after school.

On a cold and snowy afternoon in late April, Emma and I bundled up and headed outside to my car seeing as I had offered to drive Emma home from school. She climbed into the back seat of my car and I waited for her to buckle her seat belt. We chatted about her schoolwork, the Boston marathon that I had just run, and the fact that she did not have any homework tonight. I asked her what she usually did on nights when she doesn’t have homework and she shared that she practices her reading and then her piano. She also told me that they have no “screen-time” during the week, referring to the consequence Alice had given to Julian because of his missing assignments. As Emma explained, she must also follow this new rule. During this exchange, I note to myself that Emma is a very confident and talkative third grader. She has big blue eyes and dark black hair; in appearance she favors her father more than her mother, but in personality the opposite, as she seems to have the same bubbly and chatty disposition as Alice.

Emma and I continued to chat as we drove the 15 minutes to her house through the sprawling prairie of south suburban Denver. When we arrived at the Benoit home, we put up our hoods and hurried inside. Alice welcomed us at the door and ushered us into
the kitchen. In the kitchen, Alice immediately pulled a box of organic snack bars from the pantry and handed one to Emma and one to Julian, who had come downstairs. Alice offered one to me and I declined saying I had already eaten one in the car ride over. She then proceeded to mix hot chocolate and milk for the kids, which was heated in the microwave. Julian and Emma devoured their snack bars and hot chocolate, while Alice explained the usual routine to me; after she drops Julian off at home he has some down time while she drives over to pick up Emma from her school. When they get back around 4:00 PM, she serves snack and then they get right to work on their homework.

As they finished their snacks, Alice instructed Julian to make his list and Emma to work on her reading. Julian ran upstairs to grab his laptop and brought it back down to the table in the kitchen, while Emma headed into the attached living room to work on the desktop computer where she logged on to Raz-kids, a reading comprehension website. I watched Emma set the timer on her iPad and start to work. Meanwhile, Julian checked his middle school teacher’s homepages in order to make a list of all the assignments he needed to complete that night. Alice and I chatted while he did this. After about 10 minutes, Alice went over to check the list she had previously made of Julian’s assignments with the list he had made. The lists matched and they briefly discussed the science experiment write up and the need for it to be in APA style. They then discussed how long Julian thought it would take to complete all of the assignments. At that time, Alice left him to do his work independently at the kitchen table.

In the meantime, Emma continued to work at the desktop computer in the adjacent living room. For about 30 minutes, both children were very focused typing
away, then Emma got up and took a little 5-minute break where she practiced her handstands and backbends on the carpeted floor of the living room. After the five minutes, she got right back to work and there was no exchange between her and Alice.

About two or three times during the hour that Julian was working, he overheard Alice and my conversation in the kitchen and interjected. In these instances, Alice allowed him to speak with us but then quickly redirected him back to his work. After an hour and fifteen minutes, Alice asked Emma to move on and start practicing her piano, clarifying that Julian needed to practice after her and he would still be working for another 40 minutes or so. Emma responded by stopping the timer on her iPad and moving into the piano room to practice.

Seen in this vignette, Alice’s parenting is very much a balancing act as she attends to and directs both Julian and Emma throughout the afternoon. It seems to be the norm in the Benoit home as the interactions between Alice and her children is natural, supporting the notion that it is a common practice for Alice to encourage and motivate each child equally. Although Alice is the first to admit that this spring, Julian has required a little more of her parenting energy than Emma; a switch from previous years when the opposite seemed to be true.

It is herein that an important nuance lies; the parenting balance Alice maintains is not a level balance. At times, being an equitable parent to Julian and Emma requires that she give more attention to one than the other. So it is more accurate to say that Alice meets her children’s needs equally and the reality is that at different times one child may
be in more need than another. In our first interview, Alice points out the differences between her children that in turn require her to differentiate her parenting:

    Julian is a boy and he has his own strengths and personality, and they’re very different from Emma’s who has strengths too. I have two kids different physically, personality wise, and academic strengths, everything is different about them. So I would say that Julian is more distracted. He’s very intellectual, deep thinker, constructive deep thinker, scientist type. We talked about it, you know him. So we’re trying to work on the practicability of life, getting organized, and all that. Emma’s very organized; she’s strict in reading, writing, things like that so I’m trying to influence her advancement, but right now it’s about going through the slow part of the beginning of the book to access the rest of it. That’s a great thing. When she learned to write she does a lot of stories at home, things like that. The way that Alice describes her children is not unlike how a teacher might look at the strengths and weaknesses of particular students in her class. Like a teacher, Alice finds it necessary to differentiate her parenting so that she encourages and supports her children equally, which implies that equitable and balanced parenting has more to do with meeting unique needs than it does with treating each child the same way.

    In our final interview, I ask Alice whether nurturing motivation and encouraging self-confidence in her children are parenting practices that are specific to the United States; in essence would she use this same practice in France. She explained that the way she encourages and supports her children’s afterschool activities is something that is U.S. specific, but the actual motivating and encouraging are not. She would use the same
practices if she lived in France; the difference is that her children would not be involved
in afterschool activities like they are here and her motivation and encouragement would
be directed solely at school related activities.

She clarifies that in France the school day is so intensive that children have no
time for activities outside of school and there are few opportunities to participate in, even
if they could find the time. Alice detailed, “In high school, I had to take the bus at 6:30 in
the morning and I was not back until 6:30 in the evening so there’s no time for activities,
and if you want to do any, it’s on weekend.” Further, Alice shares that she appreciates the
opportunities here but that she believes some families have their children doing too much,
saying, “we moved here and we’re like wow, we can do this and that and then we also
realized that…I’ve seen a lot of kids that do it too much.” Therefore, Alice has chosen to
limit her children’s activities; she has adapted to the American tradition of afterschool
activities “to a point,” and applies her parenting practice of encouraging and motivating
her children as they participate in their activities. However, here, we begin to understand
how Alice has adapted to parenting in the United States, but only “to a point” as she also
focuses on maintaining those traditions from France that she feels are worthy. We will
now explore the next important theme of this portrait: embracing good traditions from
both cultures.

**Embrace the Good for Your Family**

Meeting Julian for the first time, it is impossible not to notice that he is tentative
in social situations. He is not the child who will immediately approach an unknown adult
and begin a conversation. Instead, Julian keeps his distance, standing back, somewhat
hiding his eyes behind his wavy ash brown hair. When spoken too, it is not uncommon for Julian to mumble or half smile in greeting. He is shy by nature and in some instances can even seem uncomfortable in his own skin. However, if you get him talking about science or technology, he comes alive, nearly bouncing in place as he tells you about what he has read or seen in a documentary. Even his dark brown eyes seem to widen beneath his bangs and his sinewy body vibrates like a plucked guitar string.

In addition, when you meet Julian there are also subtle hints that he is a first generation American. Although, he does not have an accent, the way in which he forms his words in the front of his mouth and the fullness of his lips when he speaks hint at the fact that French was his first spoken language. Likewise, Julian is beautiful in a way that seems European as his masculine facial features are tinged with the slightest femininity. His body is muscular and very lean thanks to his parents’ emphasis on healthy eating; he is nowhere close to being overweight, an all too common reality among American youth his age.

Nevertheless, the influence of American culture is also apparent, as Julian dresses in the clothing typical among middle school boys in Colorado, athletic shorts, t-shirt, and tennis shoes. Additionally, the precision with which he speaks English also seems to identify him more as American, yet, when responding in French to his mother, it would be difficult to tell which culture he favors more. Julian’s ability to speak both languages well is something Alice has worked tirelessly at as she explains in the following quote:

We’re raising French kids in an English speaking country so we wanted to keep the French language alive, and yet we wanted them to learn English because that’s
essential. The English part was very easy because of the school and everybody around them. Kids are sponges so we didn’t have to really work on it. The French part we came up with strategies. Before Julian was going to preschool, because I was a stay-at-home mom, he was with me all the time and I was just speaking French to him constantly; bedtime stories are in French and they still are in French, we just stopped doing them with Julian because he’s almost 12, he doesn’t want to anymore. But until then, until 6 months ago every evening, systematically, it’s French stories. We’ve tried for a bit Rosetta Stone, but essentially it’s speaking, showing, trying to teach your kids, doing face time with the family, that’s going to France, all kinds of things like that. But you need to work on it, it’s not that easy. And they don’t like to work on it.

Here in this quote, Alice details how she has had to work deliberately with her children to keep the French language alive. She also shares that Julian and Emma do not seek out opportunities to speak French and in fact, “don’t like to work on it” something that research has found to be true among immigrant children; They tend to gravitate to the language of their peers as opposed to the language spoken at home (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). Nevertheless, Alice has them practice and work on their French language skills in addition to their English language skills as she tries to help them embrace the good of both cultures. All the same, practicing both languages is a parenting strategy that Alice has to monitor carefully as it easy even for her and Jon to slip into a pattern of speaking mostly English. She shares, “It comes and goes. Sometimes we’re catching ourselves speaking English to our kids and we’re like whoa, whoa, let’s get back to French.”
When I visit the Benoit home, I see the way in which Alice has to manage her use of language with her children. She tries to speak to them using French, however, they will most often respond in English. At times, I even witness entire conversations between her and her children spoken in English. Nonetheless, it seems that when Alice really needs their attention or wants to direct them she uses French, almost as if the French language serves as the more authoritative means of communication in the family.

Further evidence that the Benoit family embraces the good of both languages can be seen in the family library. Upstairs the shelves of a large closet have been filled with English and French picture books and novels. During one of my visits, I bring my 2-year-old son along and Alice reads him a French picture book; Though throughout the remainder of my visits, I observe Julian and Emma reading English chapter books and English web content exclusively.

Overall, it seems that Alice views learning English as a positive and important step to living in America. However, she also wants to ensure that her children maintain their French language as well. I would argue that this is an excellent example of what Harrison, et al. refer to as promoting biculturalism and acceptance of both cultural traditions or what Ogbu and Simmons refer to as having a “positive dual frame of reference” (Harrison et al., 1990; Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p.170).

A second important way that Alice embraces the good of both cultures can be seen in the food she prepares and the emphasis she places on being healthy and active. I observe a great example of both during a visit I make to the Benoit home in February with my son and husband.
On the Saturday of President’s Day weekend, Alice invites my family over to visit and have lunch. She says, “This way you can be with your family on the weekend and Julian will not feel as shy.” We arrive around 12:00 PM on Saturday and are welcomed at the door by the entire Benoit family. We introduce Griffin to everyone and then Alice leads us into the living room where she has brought up a number of Julian’s old toys from the basement for Griffin to play with. He sits down right away and starts playing. Julian is being a little bit shy but begins to warm up as he watches Griffin play. Eventually, Julian sits down next to Griffin and helps to show him how the wooden car track works. While they play, I ask Julian a few questions about school and my husband chats with Jon in the dining room. Meanwhile, Alice heads into the kitchen to finish preparing lunch. I leave Julian and Emma to play with Griff in the living room and follow Alice into the kitchen where I notice that she has already cleaned and cut fresh beef, shrimp, and vegetables. My husband and I chat with Jon and Alice about various topics as Alice begins chopping the raclette cheese. We spend some time talking about France as both my husband and I have visited Paris; my husband and Jon swap stories of when France won the world cup in 1998. As the adults talk, Emma and Julian come in and out of the kitchen, snacking on the celery, tomatoes, cheese, and Greek yogurt dip that Alice has set out on the kitchen island.

After about 15 minutes, Emma and Julian ask if they can take Griffin down to the trampoline in the backyard. Both Alice and I reply, “Yes,” and I proceed to help Griffin put on his shoes and jacket as Alice reminds both of her children to put their coats on and to watch Griffin carefully. After another 20 minutes or so, lunch is ready and Alice calls
for the children to come back up. As Alice sets the dining room table, I help carry in the plates of food, water, and fruit juice for everyone. We all sit around the table, while Jon sets up the raclette grille. Jon explains that raclette is a traditional meal served in parts of Switzerland and France. Similar to fondue, a miniature electric grille sits in the middle of the table with six individual pans underneath where Alice demonstrates how to place the raclette cheese to melt. On top of the grille, Jon shows us how to place our meat and vegetables using small skewers. When the cheese has melted I watch as Jon takes a tiny spatula and scrapes the cheese onto his plate. He then retrieves his roasted meat and vegetables from the grill and proceeds to dip them into the melted cheese. My husband and I follow his lead.

Even though the food is delicious, Griffin is not in much of a mood to eat, so my husband and I take turns playing with him in the living room, while everyone else sits at the table. During the meal, Julian and Emma display excellent table manners, placing napkins in their laps, handling their utensils properly, and using please and thank you. They also seem very comfortable listening to and even participating in our adult conversation about work, the economy, and recent holidays. After a generous meal, Emma and Julian ask to be excused. They then head into the living room to play with Griffin who seems to be getting tired. Julian offers to turn on the television show Thomas and Friends. For a second, Alice thinks Julian is turning on the television to play video games and she starts to tell him, “no screen time,” until he explains that he is finding a show for Griffin to watch. Understanding, Alice consents and all the children sit on the couch to watch.
Meanwhile, I help Alice clear the table as Matt and Jon chat about work in the dining room. Alice sets out some fresh strawberries and blueberries for the kids on the kitchen island instructing them to only eat the fruit in the kitchen. After the dishes are put away, she suggests we take Griffin upstairs to see Julian’s room. Upstairs Griff jumps on Julian’s bed and plays with his stuffed animals while Julian shows me an animation project he is completing on his laptop. Alice’s brings in a French picture book and reads to Griff in French, she pauses on each page to translate into English for him and point to pictures. Shortly thereafter, we thank the Benoit family for a lovely lunch and take our very tired two-year-old home.

In this vignette, we see how Alice embraces the good of both French and American culture in the way that she serves a traditional French meal with food bought at the very American Costco. In the kitchen, while she is cutting the cheese, she explains that she has found that the best organic produce and meat can be bought at Costco. She also shared that she tries to feed whole and organic foods to her family as much as possible because eating healthy and organic is a tradition influenced by both her upbringing in France and the farm to table movement in Colorado. She explains that the emphasis on healthy eating is “very strong. It’s an important thing. When I grew up my mom wasn’t healthy. There have been some issues with my family and so I grew up eating very healthy.” Likewise, in casual conversation Alice credits the way people eat in Colorado as being a strong influence as well, with Whole Foods, Sprouts, and the local Parisian bakery she frequents. Another example of the blending of these two cultural traditions comes in the way Alice serves her raclette cheese with Naked fruit juice as the
beverage; raclette cheese representing the whole foods tradition of France and Naked fruit juice epitomizing the organic food movement in Colorado.

During this visit, we also see the French tradition of serving a more formal meal for lunch where the family sits around the dinner table with napkins in their laps, eating slowly, and participating in polite conversation. This is a tradition that can only be maintained at dinner or on the weekends in America because of school and work, but obviously a tradition that the Benoit family values and chooses to maintain. Furthermore, we observe the emphasis the Benoit family places on being active in the way that Emma and Julian ask to take Griffin out to the trampoline, despite it being a chilly February day. Likewise, Alice is quick to limit screen time, encouraging instead more physical activities like jumping on the trampoline. As mentioned earlier, the importance of physical activity is a tradition Alice has maintained from her own upbringing and one further encouraged by the active lifestyle in Colorado. Overall we see in this vignette that the Benoit family seems to blend and embrace what they value in American and French culture: healthy foods, physical activity, and bilingualism.

One more American tradition that Alice has embraced is volunteering in her children’s elementary school. She explains that, “We don’t volunteer in France. You can’t do that they don’t want the parents in the classroom. So that’s definitely different…” Volunteering in American schools has given Alice a lot of information about, “what was taught to my child, and how.” Furthermore she stresses that “The best way to learn about something is to go and see.” From what Alice shares it becomes
apparent that in order for her to embrace the good, she must first observe, evaluate, determine what is not good, and then advocate accordingly.

Consequently, Alice’s parenting practice of seeking out and embracing the best opportunities for her children can be applied not only to cultural traditions specific to France and America, but in general to all aspects of raising her children. We see evidence of this at the end of May, when Jon and Alice have made the decision to move Julian out of the STEM school and into the neighborhood middle school for seventh grade. This is a decision that the Benoit’s consider carefully, setting up meetings with the assistant principal and gifted and talented teacher at the new school in order to advocate for Julian’s learning needs and appropriate class placement. Alice shares:

I contacted the GT person there (at the new middle school) and then came back with Jon and pretty much made a fuss, and we had good receptive answer… We had an extended talk about what was going on and why and what he did, that they (the STEM school) did not believe in my child. We’re here and if you can’t do that, you’re not the right school for him… So anyway, that’s why it was really important for me to go and Jon to go to Crestview (the new middle school) and say listen, I need someone to believe in my child because he’s smart.

By meeting with the staff at Crestview, Alice was attempting to seek out the best for Julian academically in hopes of embracing the best opportunity for him. Through her meetings, Alice felt that she got “good receptive” answers to her questions and she seemed very optimistic about the new school. Similarly, from this quote, we also sense
how important it is to Alice and Jon that they provide their children with the best education possible; a practice strongly representative of the last theme of this portrait, education is about having choices and giving yourself options.

**Education is About Having Choices and Giving Yourself Options**

After Julian’s missing assignment crisis in the early spring, Alice and Jon seemed even more committed to supporting Julian’s education in every way that they possibly could. During the month of March, Jon and Alice met with each of Julian’s teachers at the STEM school, and in May they set up meetings with the gifted and talented teacher and the assistant principal at the neighborhood middle school Julian was enrolling in for seventh grade. Meanwhile, at home Alice continued the more authoritative and structured homework routine with Julian. Overall, the new routine implemented post-crisis seemed to be working and according to Alice, Julian appeared to be “more on top of things. What we did put in place at home seems to be helping…” Alice and Jon’s efforts to meet with the staffs at the two schools along with their continued commitment to the new homework routine underscore Alice’s core belief that “Education is important.” A belief she further details when telling me about an encouraging and motivating conversation she had with Julian that spring:

As a matter of fact yesterday I had a conversation with Julian where I’ve been trying to explain to him it’s important to have good grades so you can access the good classes in high school and in college and all that. So I tried different ways to explain that to him and he was not exactly hearing it. So this morning I was like, bottom line, it’s about giving yourself options. The more options you have the
better chances you have to succeed in whatever you want to do later on in life.

You have to think about how hard your life would be. There’s nothing wrong with
being a waitress. I’ve been a waitress several summers and all that. Did I want to
be a waitress for the rest of my life? No, it’s hard, it’s difficult, it’s demanding,
and it gives you no options. If he wants to be a waiter later on fine, but I want
them to have choices. Education is about having choices; it’s about intellectual
development.

In this quote, Alice expresses her view on why education is so important, primarily
because it offers choices and gives you options. As she details, doing well in school by
getting good grades provides you with “more options” which gives you a better chance of
succeeding in whatever career path you choose. Likewise, by getting a good education
you actually give yourself a choice as to what career you would like to pursue, instead of
having to settle for whatever job is available. A particularly interesting point is that Alice
seems to express that she does not wish to push Julian into one career path versus
another, in fact she says, “if he wants to be a waiter later on fine.” What appears to be
more important to Alice is that Julian receives a good enough education so that he can
choose whatever career he wants later in life and does not have to settle. For Alice,
education is important because it opens doors.

Perhaps, the greatest evidence of this belief can be seen in the way that Alice and
Jon researched and eventually open-enrolled their children at Aspen Creek elementary
school. In Colorado, if you prefer to send your child to a school located outside of your
home school district you can generally apply for open enrollment to a specific school
within a neighboring school district. If your application is accepted then you can attend the school applied for with the small caveat that you must reapply each year and provide transportation to and from school for your child.

The year before Julian was supposed to start kindergarten, Alice began researching the best schools in proximity to their neighborhood. Eventually, she and Jon settled on Aspen Creek elementary school located about a 15-minute drive away in the neighboring school district. They felt Aspen Creek would be the best school for their kids even if it meant that they would not be going to school with the other neighborhood children. In reflecting on her and Jon’s efforts to find the best schools for her children, Alice shared, “We questioned our choices all the time, like we decided to put our kids here at this school (Aspen Creek) in another district. That may isolate them…” In the end, they felt that enrolling their children in a stronger elementary school was more important than sending Julian and Emma to the neighborhood school with the other children in their cul-de-sac.

In addition, to seeking out the best schools for their children, Alice and Jon are very proactive in making sure the school is meeting their children’s needs as we have seen in the numerous examples above. In fact, education is so important to the Benoit family that Alice devotes most of her energy into making sure her children are achieving, content, and in the best schools. In short, she treats her children’s education as her job.

In the mornings, she wakes up, helps her children get ready for school, and then drives Julian to his middle school 15 minutes west before turning around and driving Emma back east another 15 minutes to Aspen Creek. While her children are at school,
Alice works out and takes care of her errands so that she is fully available to drive them to their activities and oversee their homework when she picks them up after school; she then repeats a similar driving routine in the afternoon, spending at least an hour and a half driving her children to and from school, something that she never complains about.

The rest of the afternoon and evening, she shuffles her children to gymnastics or piano lessons, supervises homework completion, and cooks dinner. In effect, Alice’s days are scheduled around driving her children to and from the best schools that she has researched for them. Her children’s education is so important that Alice allows it to dominate her daily schedule, something she and Jon agreed upon a long time ago, when they decided she would be a stay at home mom.

Over the six months I spend observing and interviewing the Benoit family, one thing is certain; Alice and Jon are committed to helping their children succeed academically. Using an authoritative parenting style and the parenting practices of giving a sense of control, nurturing motivation, encouraging self-confidence, and embracing the good from both French and American culture, Jon and Alice create an academic home environment that supports the academic achievement of their gifted son Julian. Although, Julian falls victim to his own disorganization, disorganization that runs wild in a poorly functioning middle school, it is the Benoit’s parenting that reals him in and guides him as he makes up 15 missing assignments and brings his Cs and Ds back up to Bs. Without the support of his parents, it is almost certain that Julian might have headed down a path of underachievement in middle school. Ultimately, Alice and Jon demonstrate that parenting a gifted and talented child often times takes vigilance, diligence, and advocacy. Modest
by nature, Alice and Jon would most likely brush aside my conclusions about their parenting as simply “doing the best they can,” but sometimes doing the best, ends up being the best. In this case, the parenting practices and beliefs that Alice and Jon constitute as “doing their best” seem to play a crucial role in nurturing the academic success of their gifted child.
Chapter Six: Promoting the Good

I ring the doorbell and even before I step inside, the earthy scent of cumin fills my nose and the toasted flavor tempts my tongue. Instantly, I realize it is more than just cumin that is inviting me in; it is also the citrusy taste of coriander, the heat of mustard seed, and the peppery warmth of turmeric. Slowly, the door opens to reveal Suma and Shana standing, with huge smiles on their faces, welcoming me in from the cold.

“It smells wonderful,” I say.

And they both laugh, as laughter is the universal language spoken in the Rangan home. I follow Suma and Shana through the formal living and dining room into the bright and airy kitchen where Suma spends much of her time, as her passion is cooking.

I sit down at the kitchen table to take my notes, as Shana darts off to grab her laptop computer, and Suma begins her work in the kitchen, laying out her instruments: blender, frying pan, mixing bowls, spices, and Tupperware containers filled with previously washed and prepped ingredients. Captivated, I watch as she slices a fresh cucumber, washes blackberries and blueberries, retrieves plain yogurt from the refrigerator and combines them into her blender with no recipe in sight. She moves rhythmically back and forth across the countertop from cabinet-to-refrigerator-to-stove. Within minutes, she presents Shana and me with our first course: fresh smoothies, served in small aluminum cups brought from India.
Placing the blender jar in the sink, Suma turns and asks Shana to find some Indian music on her iPod for us to listen too. She then explains that Kathak is the name of a fast-moving and energetic type of classical Indian dance that she and Shana enjoy. Shana turns the iPod on and returns to sit on the carpeted steps that lead down to the family room. Laid out in front of her are three library books and a notebook as she is in the beginning stages of researching and writing a nonfiction paper for her advanced language arts class. She scans the assignment sheet, bobbing her head to the strumming of traditional Indian string instruments and asks her mom, “Should I do the platypus or global warming?”

From across the kitchen, Suma responds, “Your choice,” but probes further, “Do you have enough information on the platypus?” Shana answers by explaining that she looked on the database and there is enough. Seemingly satisfied with this answer, Suma returns to her work, starting the oven, removing a cookie sheet lined with aluminum foil from inside, and placing it on the back burners of the stove. She then retrieves from the refrigerator a container of Ghee and showing it to me, explains that Ghee is the primary fat used in most Indian cooking. It is made by melting butter, cooking off the water and separating the clear, golden butter fat from the milk solids. She takes a spoonful and drops it onto the frying pan warming on the front burner of the stove. She then removes the cover from a Tupperware container holding the pancake like batter for dosa (a traditional Indian flatbread resembling crepes). Using a ladle she scoops some of the batter onto the frying pan and turning to me asks, “Would you like to try a snack?”
“Sure!” I reply as she pulls from a cabinet two containers of Indian snack foods, both made with fried garbanzo flour. She explains that these are often sold as street food in the cities of India. Placing what looks like roasted chickpeas in one bowl and a light colored bran cereal in another for me, she turns back to the dosa she is frying and flips it over. After a few moments, she flips it again, inspecting it to determine that it is done and then places it on the cookie sheet.

Meanwhile, Shana continues researching on the Internet, bobbing her head to the music, and listening to our conversation. Suddenly, the phone rings and Shana races to answer it. One of Shana’s friends has called to see if she can have a play date tomorrow, as it is President’s Day and there is no school. Shana holds the phone to her shoulder and begins speaking to her mom in Kannada. They banter back in forth mostly in Kannada, but at one point in English, Shana asks her mom if her friend should bring her swimsuit so that they can go to the pool. Suma responds in Kannada and then translates for me, explaining that she told Shana she must finish her language arts project first, which is due the following Friday, if she wants to have her friend over to go swimming tomorrow.

During the entire exchange, Suma continues ladling, flipping, and transferring the dosa to the cookie sheet. When the stack appears to reach 12 or more, she turns off the burner and places the dosa inside the oven to stay warm, meanwhile she reheats individual containers of curry and dahl in the microwave, sharing that she made them earlier in the morning. From the refrigerator, she retrieves a Ziploc bag of chopped spinach and a container of paneer cheese that seems to be marinating in a mixture of spices. She then turns on the burner and begins browning the cheese cubes in the frying
pan. She slides over to a cabinet and retrieves a number of spice jars, and slowly begins adding what looks to be garlic, onions, chili, and ginger to the frying pan. She sautés the mixture for about 15 minutes until it is evenly toffee-colored, in the meantime, Shana continues researching on the computer.

Simultaneously, Suma begins telling me about her childhood in India and how she learned to cook as she rinses dishes, places them in the dishwasher, and retrieves more spices from the cabinet, tossing them into the mixture along with the spinach. Again, the house is filled with the scent of cumin, mustard seed, coriander, turmeric, and chili pepper. After another five minutes, she turns the burner off and adds yogurt to the steaming mixture. Finally, she asks Shana to set the table, removes the dosa from the oven, and begins placing all the various dishes before us. Smiling she declares, “It is time to eat.”

Here and throughout this portrait, Suma’s cooking will serve as a metaphor for her parenting. Like her cooking, Suma’s parenting is filled with spice: a curry mixed with the flavors of light-hearted, spirited, open-minded, organized, and strong. Additionally, she is both structured and open; within her kitchen, there is discipline, but there is also the flexibility and playfulness associated with the risk-taking of throwing ingredients together and trying out new dishes or combinations. Furthermore, Suma’s kitchen is spirited and light-hearted; while she cooks, she sings, laughs, and banters with Shana almost as if they were peers, but not quite. And like her parenting, Suma always begins her dishes with a base, providing a strong foundation of spices and raw ingredients, just as she and her husband do for their daughter.
Giving the Right Foundation

The first day I drive south to the Rangan home, it is a cold and snowy Sunday. Sunil and Suma had agreed to meet with me for our first interview in the early afternoon after Suma has picked Shana up from her Kathak dance class that she attends each Sunday for 2-4 hours. I navigate the snowdrifts blowing into the street and park my car as close to the sidewalk as possible. The sidewalk and stairs have been cleared of snow and I walk up the staircase to the front landing. At the top of the stairs, two barren flowerpots sit waiting for the first sign of spring.

The Rangans, like the other families in this study, live in a typical middle class suburban neighborhood of the greater Denver metropolitan area. The homes in the development are painted various shades of brown and sit close together like chanterelle mushrooms under the shade of a pine tree, as the yards are small, but manicured and well maintained. Each home has a garage and driveway in front and the winding streets are wide and lined with sidewalks.

I ring the doorbell and Shana greets me, standing in the entryway barefooted with a big smile on her face. I take off my shoes, leaving them on the mat and ask her how school is going and what she has been up to. She seems to have lengthened and thinned since I last saw her and is now about my height, five feet two inches. She is what some might refer to as a “beanpole,” tall and slender for her eleven years.

Her dark brown hair is pulled back with a black headband and she wears a colorful tunic over leggings, an outfit typical of fashionable middle school girls these days. Her teeth sport braces and as we chat I am reminded of how subtly confident and
mature Shana is for her age. She is like a bright beam of sunshine, smiling, laughing, and almost dancing as she leads me down the stairs to the family room. Suma joins us having a seat on the opposite leather sofa as she calls to Sunil who is working in the basement. Sunil makes his way upstairs and shakes my hand with a great big smile. The whole family spreads out around me like the late afternoon sun, Shana sitting next to Suma and Sunil sitting next to me on the smaller leather sofa. The entire family is barefoot and smiling, and I cannot help but smile myself.

We chitchat about their weekend and NFL football. I learn that Sunil took Shana skiing in the mountains yesterday, something he does often in the winter, but today, other than Shana’s dance class, the Rangan family has stayed around the house relaxing, watching American football, and preparing for the week ahead. Before we begin the formal interview Suma steps into the kitchen and blends fresh watermelon juice. After a few short minutes, she returns with a serving tray and places the glasses before us and we begin.

Both Sunil and Suma grew up in the Southern state of Karnataka in India, where the primary language spoken is Kannada. Suma was raised on a rice and areca (type of nut) plantation in a small village called Megaravalli, while Sunil was raised in a small town. Unlike Suma’s father, Sunil’s father had chosen not to continue farming and had moved away from the small village he was raised in to work for an organization called the Coffee Board, whose main charge was promoting the coffee industry. Although, both Suma and Sunil came from modest small village backgrounds they expressed that their
mothers’ main goal was to provide them with a strong education as they believed that education would open the doorway to a better life for their children. Sunil shared:

My mom was very particular that...we (Sunil and his brother) have a very good education. So even though she came from a small village background she wanted to put us in convent so that we could go to English medium school and get the best education that’s possible. So that was her goal, to make sure that we got a good education; that was the primary goal…Coming from a small farming community…our parents wanted to make sure that we got the best education and did well. They probably did not want us to continue in farming.

Likewise, Suma shared that since she was raised in a small village and her mother was originally from a big city, “my mom badly wanted us to study, so me and my sister and brother, most of the time we grew up in a dorm.” Further, Sunil explained that because India was ruled by the British for so long, the best schools were run by Christian institutions and many students were sent far away to boarding school; like in Suma’s case 300 kilometers across the state of Karnataka. Suma expressed that she felt like her parents were “kind of extreme” when it came to her education and she shared that they really “forced” her to go to boarding school and “almost forced me and put me in dental college but I didn’t go.” Interestingly, Suma now regrets “that she didn’t do what they wanted her to do.”

The fact that Suma was a female heightened the pressure put on her schooling, as her parents also wanted her to get a solid education so that she could find a good husband. They believed that “if you study you’ll get a good husband.” As the oldest child
in her family, Suma ended up receiving a bachelor’s degree in biology, while her younger siblings went on to become a businessman and a coffee planter. Suma worked for one year, but then she met Sunil, they were married and she chose to stay home.

The year Suma finished school, a friend of her family approached Sunil’s parents in an attempt to arrange a marriage between her and Sunil. The friends “wanted to see if we’d (Sunil’s family) be interested to talk to the girl (Suma).” Sunil explained that in families who hold a more progressive view of arranged marriage the children are given more say in the matchmaking:

Basically the process is they are short-listing, seeing somebody for a year. So basically they make sure that they know the family, they know the family background. They won’t tell about such a prospect unless they know for sure that we could form a family. So basically they do the short-listing for a year but they make sure they are from similar backgrounds, both socially and also in terms of education.

Sunil clarified that after his family agreed that he and Suma should meet, they were allowed to first meet without their families present at a casual gathering with friends. This being unlike the more traditional process of arranged marriage, which according to Sunil goes something like this: “You see a girl in a temple, and you ask both the families to come to the temple. And the first meeting is...the whole family included so everybody has to see the girl” and then maybe if “they are a little bit social forward then they will ask the girl and the boy to meet” on their own. The more progressive approach that Sunil and Suma’s families followed goes more like the woman and man meet separately first
and then on their own are allowed to decide if they think they would be a good match. Specifically in Suma’s case, her father asked her, “What would you choose?” and gave her “full permission” to decide.

During their first meeting, Sunil detailed that they “talked for about half an hour. I felt right and I kind of immediately said yes, the next day actually.” Suma on the other hand shared that she didn’t really have any specific criteria in a husband, but since three of her best friends had married engineers, she agreed. In most cases, after both parties agree the marriage is planned within one to two months, but Sunil decided he did not want to get married right away because he was working on a nine month engineering project in a different part of Karnataka and he wanted to finish the project first, so that he didn’t have to uproot Suma from her family. For her part, Suma was willing to wait, so instead of following the traditional marriage timetable, Sunil and Suma did things, “totally different.” They waited 11 months and then got married in April of 1993. Sunil was 27 and Suma was 24. After their marriage, they lived with their parents for about a year and then moved 40 kilometers away to the city of Hosur where Sunil had a job as a civil engineer.

Working as an engineer and living in Hosur, Sunil and Suma began to consider moving to America, so that Sunil could pursue a Master’s degree. When he was in college, many of his friends went on to further their studies in the United States and Sunil had briefly considered it, but since he was not one hundred percent sure that he wanted to come to America he never pursued taking the TOEFL (test of English as a foreign language). Sunil explained:
I continued to work there for about six, seven years, but then after I got married to her we started thinking about maybe I should have gone to the U.S. and did my Master’s. So I kind of rethought that and decided that we should probably do that. In a sense, it was probably Suma’s willingness and adventurous nature that served as the final catalyst that motivated Sunil to take the TOEFL and apply to graduate schools in the United States. Part of the reason Suma was so open to the idea was that she had many cousins who had previously moved to America. In the end, Suma’s “Okay, why not?” attitude tipped the scale and Sunil committed to coming to the US for graduate school. In this instance and in their unique marriage timetable, Suma and Sunil show a willingness to do things differently and openness to new experiences. We will later see how these qualities are central to their parenting practices and beliefs.

Consequently in 1996, Sunil accepted a scholarship to attend graduate school in Construction Management at Arizona State University, a scholarship that served as an additional driving force behind their immigration:

Otherwise the expenses would be too much coming from India. And coming from a background, I would say, low middle class family it would’ve been really difficult to come. So basically that changed the situation for us. So getting the scholarship really made it a lot easier to come.

Sunil and Suma decided that Sunil would spend the first year in Arizona alone, so that he could completely focus on his studies and hopefully get a graduate assistant position to pay for their living expenses. Indeed, after his first year, Sunil was offered a teaching internship and Suma came to join him in June of 1997. The graduate program was only
two years, so after Sunil graduated he took a job with a heavy civil contractor and the Rangans moved to Dallas in December of 1998. They spent two years in Dallas before Sunil accepted a job in Colorado. He then applied for a work visa and after four years applied for a green card, obtaining permanent resident status.

As the Rangans shared their brief autobiography, Shana chose to stay in the living room and listen quietly; neither Sunil nor Suma seemed to mind her presence. And so, like a mirror image of her mother, Shana sat with her legs folded on the couch, drinking her watermelon juice, and turning her head back and forth as her parents took turns speaking. For the most part, Sunil did the majority of the talking with Suma interjecting when she disagreed or when Sunil asked for her concurrence. As we moved on to discuss their parenting, Shana slowly stood up stretching her long legs, placed her glass on the coffee table, and bounded ever so quietly up the stairs to her bedroom. For the next half an hour, not a sound trickled down from the second floor as Shana was partaking in one of her favorite pastimes, reading for pleasure.

I asked Suma and Sunil as to whether they felt that they stressed education as much as their own parents had and they explained that like their own parents education is their primary focus. Sunil went on to elucidate that they are so strongly focused on providing Shana with the best education that they actually make it a priority to save for her college fund before their retirement:

That’s where we put more emphasis. In the U.S. there’s more emphasis on trying to make sure you are good for retirement, but in our thinking that becomes secondary compared to a kid’s education.
Suma concurred saying, “I agree with saving your money for their college. College is the most important thing.” This led me to wonder if the Rangans expect Shana to help them monetarily in the future when it is time for them to retire and Sunil shared,

Well in the Indian system that’s how it is. They take care of the kids, kids take care of the parents, but we know in changing times, we know that’s not going to happen for us. So that doesn’t matter. We still would like to make sure that Shana gets the best education.

In essence, Sunil and Suma share the parenting belief that it is their duty to provide Shana with the best education. This is perhaps their most important parenting belief, as they, like their own parents, trust that education offers the foundation necessary to succeed in life.

The sun begins to lower in the sky, angling golden light through the sheer drapes as I ask the Rangans to share what parenting practices they use to give Shana the right educational foundation, and Sunil summarizes:

The first thing we do is we make sure we tell our daughter that that is her primary focus. So emphasize that. Obviously we do believe that she needs to get a well-rounded education and other skills to survive, but we try to stress that education takes precedence over anything else. Two, we try to keep track of what she does and help her as best we can. So basically we try to create an atmosphere, which is helpful for her studies, like taking her to the library, putting her in activities, which we think will help her.
Suma clarifies that in the past they have enrolled Shana in programs such as Montessori school and Kumon, a Japanese based after-school education program, as a means of promoting her academic development. Also, from a young age Suma worked on academics at home with Shana before even enrolling her in preschool, “like the ABCDs.”

In addition to providing Shana with the best educational foundation, the Rangans also believe it is important for Shana to participate in activities outside of school, so that she is well rounded. Sunil explains,

One of the reasons for that is, for us, we never had such opportunities. I mean, probably our parents would have…but they were not economically well off… We go that extra step to give that exposure to different things and give her that opportunity to know different things.

This is indeed the case as Shana participates in many activities; She has martial arts two days a week, piano one day, student council one day, traditional Kannada singing one day, Kathak dance class for 2-4 hours on Sundays, and skiing and hiking whenever Sunil can take her.

Perhaps most indicative of the Rangan’s belief that it is important for Shana to be well rounded is the fact that Suma’s daily schedule revolves around driving Shana to and from school and shuttling her to her various afterschool activities. In fact, some days Suma spends almost two hours just driving Shana to school and to her lessons or classes. Sunil explains this dynamic at length:

Most of our schedule is structured around her schedule actually. So whatever we do is dependent on what she is doing. In a way, we don’t have a little bit of good
balance. Of late, we’ve been talking a little bit, like making time for ourselves a little bit. But as the only child, we kind of look at it as our responsibility to keep her engaged and give more importance to her schedule. And also, I think, I am realizing that she’s growing up, our time, our interaction with her is kind of reducing. Of course, we do a lot of mandated things, like maybe I take her to drop her for music. We do a lot of things, not too much interaction, or stay with her, so I am kind of getting a little worried and realizing that, that we don’t have too much time. I think we do a little bit of conscious effort, or at least I do; I think about it, I talked to one of my colleagues about the same thing, and try to spend a little bit more time with her…I think we tend to put a little bit more importance to doing what’s helpful for her.

In this quote, Sunil reinforces the fact that Shana’s schedule dictates the Rangan’s daily routine, but perhaps what is more interesting is that we also hear Sunil articulate that he views enrolling and driving Shana to and from her activities as his “responsibility” and that these activities are “mandated.” We can only infer that Suma believes the same, as she does not interject when Sunil shares these thoughts. This quote and particularly the word “responsibility” speak volumes of their commitment to providing Shana with the right foundation. They are not simply presenting what they think is best; they are fulfilling their duty. In the same breath, the fact Sunil expresses that Shana’s activities are “mandated” implies that Shana’s participation in these activities is critical and not purely elective. In essence, the Rangans believe that in order to provide Shana with the right
foundation she must receive the best education, but also have the opportunity to participate in various activities to help her develop into a well-rounded individual.

Interestingly, the Rangan’s dual emphasis on academics and extracurricular activities mirrors Western values more than Indian values as American families tend to see both school and extracurricular activities as formative, while in India, according to Sunil and Suma, the sole focus is on education as there is neither time nor opportunity for anything other than schooling. Suma explains, “You can kind of imagine what homework they give there (in India). So, hardly kids will have any time to do any other activities other than studies.” Later, when I ask the Rangans if they feel they have adapted to more of an American style of parenting Sunil agrees saying, “We like the American base definitely. All the good things we like. We want her to... we try to stress that. We try to stress hard work, discipline, respecting others, so all the good things about the American culture and life, we try to promote that.” Suma agrees adding, “Not just studies, go and do other stuff also. We give the same priority to that,” and Sunil furthers:

So that is one thing we have tried to do, tried to expose her to various activities like we try to put her in as many activities as possible like she went to Tae Kwon Do, swimming, ballet, singing, dance, tennis, mixed martial arts, hiking. So we have tried to...we have not tried to insist it, we haven’t tried to tell her that you need to do this, we are just trying to show her these are the things you can do.

However, it is important to stress that the Rangans still believe that education comes first. In fact, the number one priority for Shana is school followed by extracurricular activities and last helping with chores around the house. Sunil elucidates:
So we try to emphasize in terms of importance of education. We do tell her she has to do the homework. If she misses homework that would be a big deal, that’s a big no-no and she knows that. So we try to stress that that’s the important thing and if she doesn’t do any chores at home we’re okay with that. As long as she focuses and does her thing first. It’s a little flipped. The emphasis if you look at it the first thing is education, the second thing is her activities, like if she wants to play on iPad or look at the web for something. So education is first, her activities are second, and then chores become third or the nonexistent kind of thing.

Overall, the Rangans believe that it is their duty and responsibility to “give her the right foundation for being the best person she can be.” In order to fulfill this belief, Suma and Sunil allow Shana’s activities and schooling to dictate their routine. This unwavering support is what Benjamin Bloom concluded was critical to the success of gifted and talented children, specifically, he found in his research that children who had “been supported enthusiastically by their families throughout their developing years” were more likely to be imminent (Bloom, 1985). This is indeed the case in the Rangan family as Shana comes first and her education takes precedence.

**Education Takes Precedence**

On a rare day in April when Shana does not have any after school activity planned, I drive south to the Rangan’s home to meet Shana and Suma. It has been an unusually cold spring, so instead of driving with the windows open, I find that I must actually run the heat in my car as I roll through the hilly prairie that is now suburban Denver. I park out front, grab my laptop, and climb the stairs that lead up to the front
stoop. I ring the doorbell and Shana promptly opens the door. She and Suma have just arrived home a short time before as middle school lets out at 3:00 PM and it generally takes about an hour for 1) Shana to make her way to parent pickup and 2) for Suma drive the ten miles back home.

As always, Shana is dressed stylishly wearing a black-feathered headband in her shoulder length brown hair, a colorful beaded tunic, and black leggings. I ask Shana about school as we walk into the kitchen where Suma is emptying the dishwasher. Suma is wearing an embroidered pink silk tunic, which she purchased on her most recent trip back to India, over her blue jeans and she is barefoot, just like Shana. Suma’s dark brown hair falls to her shoulders and her big brown eyes are magnified and accentuated by her thick maroon rimmed glasses. She smiles and laughs as I compliment her on the tunic. She explains that on her most recent trip to India, she purchased a number of traditional clothing items as well as some silk fabric. This is first the time, I have actually seen her wear more traditional Indian clothing and she shares that she wore it especially to show me.

She motions for me to sit at the table and then proceeds to make Shana and I another one of her delicious smoothies, using blueberries, yogurt, and ice. Meanwhile, Shana goes to retrieve her laptop, math notebook, and a copy of a Shakespeare comedy her language arts class is reading. She sits across the table from me, while Suma sits next to me. I ask Suma if she has been to see any Bollywood movies recently as I know that both she and Shana enjoy going to a local cinema that shows Indian movies once a week. Her eyes grow big and she laughs explaining that she actually just figured out that one of
the local libraries also carries a pretty extensive and recent collection of Bollywood films. Turning to Shana, she asks her to go put in one of the DVDs they had checked out from the library so that I can watch some of the music videos that are typical of these features. Shana jumps up from her chair and hurries down the small flight of stairs into the family room where she turns on the large flat screen television and inserts the DVD. She then skips through the disk until she comes to one of the first dance/music sequences. She turns up the volume and then returns to her chair in the kitchen.

While Shana does this, I notice the way the bright southern sunlight fills the kitchen, streaming in through the shear silk window coverings. Suma notices my gaze and explains that she made the curtains out of the fabric she brought back from India. I compliment her on them and she explains that the next time she visits India, she hopes to buy more fabric so that she can fashion window coverings for the bedrooms upstairs.

The inside of the Rangan home is painted in neutral beiges, but is livened by artwork from India and the American southwest. A bundle of dried chili peppers hang in the kitchen and a few colorful acrylic landscapes decorate the living room walls, including a recent still life completed by Shana at a birthday party. As always the kitchen appears spotless, although the remnants of Suma’s early morning cooking scent the air and her cooking instruments sit in the dish rack drying.

In the entryway a small side table serves as a resting place for a number of Hindu idols and a bamboo plant, while a large jasmine plant rests in the kitchen alongside several other tropical plants. The kitchen is the only floor that is hardwood, while the rest of the home is carpeted. The mantle and built-in bookcases hold a number of family
portraits as well as small mementos collected from India and their years spent living in Arizona. The representation of both India and the American Southwest in the home seems to attest to Suma’s love of both places. In a later visit, Suma shares that she liked living in Arizona because the climate reminded her of India, as did the spicy cooking.

Suma turns to Shana who seems to be messing with her laptop and says in Kannada, “You need to finish your math.” Shana closes the laptop and takes out a worksheet while Suma and I continue to chat and the Bollywood movie plays in the background. Despite these distractions, Shana manages to stay focused and complete her math worksheet in 20 minutes without any assistance. She puts the worksheet away in her math folder and then opens her paperback copy of the Shakespeare comedy she is reading for her language arts class. Suma turns and questions in English, “You are still working on this?” Shana explains to her mom that they are still reading and performing the play in class as she proceeds to open her laptop and look at an assignment sheet. She then begins to type responses to what appears to be comprehension questions.

Never once during the hour or so that Shana works on her homework, does Suma do more than verbally check in with Shana about her progress. She does not even look over her shoulder or ask to see her completed assignments. This is most likely because Suma trusts Shana’s ability to complete her assignments independently. Later, when I ask Sunil and Suma if they feel that they give Shana independence and allow for autonomy with her school work, Sunil explains, “We let her do it first. If she doesn’t understand something or doesn’t finish something go through certain things (with her).” Suma agrees explaining that “now days she (Shana) doesn’t like” her parents to check her work and
that they only help her when she comes to them and expresses that she doesn’t understand something. Further, Sunil shares that it has also become somewhat difficult to help Shana, especially with her math homework, because in India he learned to do math in such a different way. He elucidates:

What happens is in the school she learns it in a particular way… and I may have learned it in a different way. I try to tell her and we have a big fight actually. She doesn’t like it; she says this is not right, so we argue. So it’s not a good thing. So I try to avoid that as best as possible. So if she doesn’t know something I teach her the way I know it.

From these explanations, we see that Sunil and Suma give Shana a great deal of autonomy when it comes to her schoolwork, however, as we see in the description above they also maintain a certain level of authority over Shana’s completion of her homework. Suma always seems to have an idea of the assignments that Shana is working on and with her comments such as, “You need to finish your math,” or “Do you have enough information on the platypus?” she exerts her authority over the completion of these assignments in a subtle, but effective way.

In my earlier visit to the Rangan home, Suma even tells Shana that she must finish an assignment before she can have a play date. Again, this shows that education takes precedence in the Rangan home, but also that Suma demands Shana complete her assignments first before seeing her friends. In the same breath, there is also a level of freedom within these demands as minutes before, Suma responds to Shana’s question about what topic she should do her language arts paper on with, “It is your choice.” The
duality of autonomy and control seen in this vignette are a perfect example of Baumrind’s authoritative parenting style, which has repeatedly been shown to positively correlate with academic achievement (Chao, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Rudasil, Adleson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992).

The control and freedom employed equally by Sunil and Suma is effective at reinforcing their belief that education takes precedence. By demanding that schoolwork be completed before anything else, they establish that education is the most important priority for Shana and by allowing her freedom to complete her assignments independently; they also convey to Shana that they trust her academic abilities and that she is capable of achieving on her own. This in turn ensures confidence and self-efficacy; two critical psychological dispositions that research shows support academic achievement in gifted children (Silverstein, 2000; Olszewski-Kubilius; 2001).

An equally valuable way that the Rangans convey to Shana that education takes precedence is their careful choice of schooling. Like two other families in this study, the Rangans chose to open enroll Shana into the neighboring school district for both elementary and middle school. Suma explained that they had researched online and heard repeatedly from a number of other Indian families that Aspen Creek was an excellent elementary school. After visiting the school, they decided to apply for open enrollment. Shana was accepted and started kindergarten. However, even at five years old Shana’s academic abilities were so clearly above those of her classmates that at the end of the first trimester the principal proposed having Shana finish the year in first grade. Sunil shared:
Mr. Howard had a talk with us...he said she is ready because she went to Montessori school and she was a little advanced for her age and we talked about how it might be a little bit different when she goes to college and she is physically the youngest in the class. But we felt that she...she has been very mature for her age.

Despite their concerns that Shana might be the youngest in her college class someday, the Rangans decided “that (grade skipping) would be the right thing to do for her so she can push herself.”

Looking back, it definitely appears that they made the right decision as Shana continues to outperform many of her classmates academically despite the fact that she is a full year younger than most of them. In fact, while at Aspen Creek Elementary School, Shana was identified gifted and talented in the academic areas of reading, writing, and math. Additionally, she scored high enough on all summative academic achievement tests to be placed into the most advanced classes offered at her middle school. By and large, Shana demonstrates what Joseph Renzulli refers to as “schoolhouse giftedness,” (2005, p. 8) as she excels at lesson learning and test-taking. However, Shana also demonstrates the three interacting clusters of traits, Above-Average Ability, Task Commitment, and Creativity, which Renzulli defines in his Three Ring Definition of Giftedness (Renzulli, 2005). Shana’s above-average ability is observed in the advanced test scores she receives on state and district achievement assessments (TCAP and MAP tests), while her task commitment and creativity is witnessed in some of the creative writing projects she has completed. Specifically, in fifth grade, Shana wrote a twenty page typed encounter story.
in which the explorer Vasco de Gama met the native people of India for the first time, only she told it from the perspective of a giant tree in the forest observing the meeting.

When I ask Suma and Sunil about Shana’s gifted and talented label, they share that they do not feel that Shana is any different than other kids, but they are happy she is identified because she gets placed in harder classes and is challenged. Sunil summarizes, “That prospect to get more of the education, that’s where we feel good that she is in that program, but we don’t necessarily feel that she is any different.” However, they do go on to share that Shana, “has a very good memory; she writes well. She picks up things...she is a very quick learner,” and that “she did everything very early actually. At age 10 months she would walk around pretty well, she could talk, identify several animals, and make sounds, and all kind of things. So it was hard to believe she’s just still not 1.” Suma even goes on to share how when Shana recently had a break from her piano lessons, “instead of doing this, that and the other, she was crisscrossing her hand and doing it (practicing her pieces) left handed...”

The special attention and careful decision-making that Sunil and Suma have given to Shana’s schooling clearly demonstrates their belief that education takes precedence. A belief they have continued to adhere to as Shana has moved on to middle school. Akin to what they did for elementary school, early in Shana’s fifth grade year Suma and Sunil began researching all of the middle school options and again chose to apply for open enrollment into the neighboring school district for sixth grade. However, they also made sure they had a backup plan and applied to one of the better middle schools in their home district as well. Fortunately, Shana was accepted into their first choice during the open
enrollment process and was able to begin her sixth grade year with many of her peers from elementary school.

Another parenting practice that the Rangans use to stress the importance of education is helping Shana to manage her time. As we saw above, Suma is always aware of what assignments Shana is working on and when they are due; so that she knows they are completed in a timely manner. Suma does not check the school website to find out Shana assignments, she trusts that when she asks Shana what assignments she has to complete that week, she will be truthful and keep her informed. Suma explains:

If she tells me that’s what’s going on in the school, I want her to be doing more than would be asked to do it. So I don’t mind taking her to the library and whatever resource she wants to take, and all that stuff. Only thing is, I am scared that if I don’t tell her, I know she will do it. But it is always in the last minute. So again, I’ll be the one who’ll be taking her and I’ll be mad.

In this quote, we hear how Suma exerts her authority when it comes to Shana’s schoolwork by helping her to manage her time. She asks Shana what assignments she has and the due date; she then helps Shana gather her resources in a timely manner so that she is not leaving the assignment until the last minute, something Shana has been known to do. Suma also helps Shana to do more than would be asked, like taking Shana to the library to gather extra resources or helping her tackle a more difficult concept for a science fair project or research assignment. Similarly, Sunil explains how both he and Suma exert their authority over Shana’s schoolwork, but stop short of becoming too controlling or demanding:
We help the kid, but to a point. Where if she is writing something, we don’t tell her you need to write about this, this, this, you write. Whatever you can think of, you write. We want to make sure that she writes. So we are sitting, making sure that she writes, but not writing for her. So that’s something, we just help.

This quote accurately summarizes what I observe on many occasions, Suma holds Shana accountable for completing her work on time, if not ahead of time, but she gives Shana the freedom to choose how she completes the assignments.

I learn later, that the primary reason the Rangans employ the parenting practice of helping Shana manage her time is because both Suma and Sunil feel Shana has a tendency to procrastinate and lose motivation. Sunil explains:

The thing is unless we tell her, okay you do piano, and then you do reading, and then you do your homework, otherwise she will kind of just wander off. She will finish her stuff but then she doesn’t know what to do and then she will go and play her games. It’s not like we don’t want her to play but I think she needs to be told, she needs a little bit of guidance that way in terms of what’s next, or challenge her all the time. That’s a problem for us, like how to find activities to keep her busy all the time. Because she is good in some things so she will finish her stuff and then doesn’t know what to do.

In this quote, we hear how Suma and Sunil help Shana manage her time so that she doesn’t just go and “play games.” The Rangans express that they must work to keep her “busy all the time” and “challenge her.” From what I observe, they do this by helping her prioritize or basically telling her what she needs to complete first. During my visits, I also
get the feeling that Suma has the same procrastination tendencies as Shana and has had to learn to be regimented as well. At one point, Suma shares with a laugh that, “If I am not strict, than we will both end up watching TV.”

In a sense, the Rangans provide the “push” that helps to keep Shana focused, motivated, and working in a timely manner on her schoolwork and extracurricular activities. Sunil summarizes this parenting practice as providing, “some kind of push from the back, from your side, from the school, or from the teacher…she needs that all the time. How to get her interested in the next thing, how to do better things.”

This “push” exemplifies what researchers have found is typical of home environments that produce gifted and talented children. These homes are often harmonious places where the parents demonstrate a balance between challenge and support, while also fostering important psychological dispositions like motivation (Albert, 1978; Bloom, 1985; Campbell, 2005; Chan, 2005; Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Feldman & Piirto, 2002; Freeman, 2000; Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962; Groth, 1975; Howe, 1990; Karnes, Shwedel, & Steinberg, 1984; Landau & Weissler, 1993; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001; Silverman & Kearney, 1989; Silverstein, 2000; Snowden & Christian, 1999; Weissler & Landau, 1993; Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1995). In essence, the Rangans practices of pushing, being strict, and helping Shana to manage her time describe the same strategies researchers detail in academic language as “challenge”, “support”, and “motivation”. Additionally, these parenting practices also hint at two equally important dimensions that flavor the Rangan’s home environment: balance and open-mindedness.
Open-minded and Balanced

When the Rangans decided to move to America for Sunil to pursue his Master’s degree, they took an enormous leap of faith as neither one of them had ever been to the United States. All they really knew was that a number of their family members had found great success here in the 1960s and never left. In 1996 when they arrived, the Rangans had no real intentions of staying in America after Sunil finished his graduate program, but since he was offered a good job and they enjoyed their time living in Arizona they decided to stay. Sunil explains:

We never had a big plan. Some people think that, okay, I’ll go to the US and my kids are going to have a good life, be able to do this, this, this. We never had a plan or never talked that way. It was very short-term. We thought at that point it was important for me to… study…

Shortly thereafter, Shana was born and during Shana’s early childhood years, the Rangans continued to be fairly content living in the United States, although they still had not committed to staying long-term. In fact during these early years, there were many times that they considered going back to India, especially when Sunil’s brother decided that he was moving back. Suma shared, “his brother was here the same time, he also came, and he didn’t apply (for a green card), and after six years he went back…so we were almost thinking that we would do the same thing, but we didn’t do it.” Despite this indecision, Sunil continued to establish a successful career and they applied and received their green cards, which gave them permanent resident status.
Up until recently, Sunil explained, there was no real reason to leave the United States, but there was also no real reason to apply for American citizenship either. However, in the past few years, Suma and Sunil have begun to think again about applying to become U.S. citizens. Sunil imparts:

Currently we are going through the citizenship process right now, so what our thought was is we’ll get the citizenship, and then see what happens. So basically, we want to give a little bit of permanence. Until now, we never thought in a permanent way that we are here…

Further, Suma explains that in the last few years, they have begun to think more permanently about living in the United States because:

When you go to India, like, of course, every time they force us, why are you there? Come back, and all that stuff. And since I have seen most of my uncles now retired and they have family, their kids are married and gone out and they’re alone. You feel, do you want to do this for yourself, or…I don’t know, again, we think, maybe she’ll be happy here and she’ll get more opportunities here. At the same time, I want her to learn all the Indian languages and know all the stuff. Again, we are at the crossroads.

Further, Sunil agrees with Suma disclosing:

Until recently, we never, we talked about it but we never had a sense where we would end up kind of thing. It was almost like, well, we could go back, or maybe stay here. So I think we want to stop that vacillating part a little bit, so we recently applied for citizenship. So at least that gives us kind of an anchor. Then we’ll see.
If opportunities come and everything works out, probably we could go back to India. Again, it may not be a permanent kind of thing. What has happened is like we have lived here for so many years we are used to the lifestyle, culture. We have changed, really. In India, you never do anything on your own kind of thing. You have people who do stuff. But here, everything is a do-it-yourself culture, so we kind of like that, actually. So we are very Americanized, but culturally and certain times, you feel a little out of sorts.

It is in these quotes that we begin to hear the openness and balance that permeates the Rangan’s parenting like the spices in Suma’s cooking. We find that Suma and Sunil were open to the idea of moving to America. In turn, this open-mindedness or their ability to welcome new experiences allowed them to embrace certain qualities of the American culture including the “do-it-yourself” attitude, which in turn encouraged them to stay, even after Sunil finished his schooling. However, we also hear in these quotes that they are still open to the idea of moving back to India as they miss their family and worry about being left all alone like Suma’s uncles. Their openness in turn seems to create a balance: a balance where on one side sits their life in America and on the other side the life they left behind in India. It is this balance between both lives and their openness to both cultural traditions, which seems to flavor their parenting. And the most obvious place that these two spices season their parenting is in their discipline practices.

Raising Shana in America, the Rangans have embraced the notion that they are in “this country.” Emphasizing the fact that differences exist between India and America and since they are currently living in the United States, they must be open to adapting to
what is acceptable here. Interestingly, many of the parenting adaptations they have made, they have actually welcomed, as they prefer them to the alternative typically practiced in India. This is certainly the case with discipline. Sunil explained that in India his parents would hit him when he did something wrong, they would also yell at him, “when we did something wrong, something egregious, that’s when we would get hit.” He went on to explain, how this is a big difference between how he and Suma parent:

In terms of discipline we do follow certain things that our parents followed, but at the same time we have tried to be a little bit different. So even in terms of placing the emphasis on education, not just making sure she does it, but we try to help her as much as possible. We want to discipline the same thing, not only telling her how it should be but try to reason, and give explanations, and make sure she understands.

The key difference that Sunil points out in this quote is that he and Suma try to “reason” and “give explanations” to Shana instead of yelling or hitting like their own parents did. Further, Sunil shared that “hitting” was the common discipline practice used in India when he and Suma were growing up and when Shana was younger they used physical punishment a little bit with her. But, they did not feel right about it and eventually stopped as Sunil disclosed, “We did a little bit when she was younger but we were really cognizant of the fact that that’s not the right thing. So we tried to avoid that as best as we can, physical discipline.” And it wasn’t just the fact that they were living in America which caused them to feel that physical discipline wasn’t the “right thing.” It had more to do with their open-mindedness. When I asked them if being in America led them to
change their discipline style, Sunil explained it was “not just being here, but we have been a little open minded I would say. So we knew…it wasn’t the right thing to do.” Sunil and Suma also went on to explicate that in India today parents do not use physical punishment as much as they used to. Sunil described in greater detail:

People are more encouraging, and more reasoning, a little bit open. So that’s what has helped with ideas of discipline. Sometimes when she was very young we may have used the physical discipline kind of thing but we stopped when she was young. Mainly because we are not that type. We would do it just instinctively sometimes but immediately after that we would feel very bad. That’s not our style.

Suma agreed and shared that another reason why she reverted to using physical punishment with Shana at times when she was little was, “Because we were not used to time out also. Because I could never give her a time out and I never thought she would sit there.” She went on to explain that the concept of “time out” was completely foreign to her. She had never seen it used before until Shana started having play dates at friend’s houses, but she was open to the concept, especially as an alternative to physical punishment and together she and Sunil adapted to a more balanced and less punitive form of discipline, what researchers would refer to as more authoritative and less authoritarian style (Baumrind, 1968).

The discipline strategy that the Rangans have chosen to use instead with Shana is speaking and reasoning with her. Sunil explains:
So most of the time I would talk to her actually if she did something that was not right, I would talk to her. Even though she might have been very young I made it a point to explain to her why we are not okay with what you did or we are angry, why she should not do that, or try to not do that.

Talking and reasoning with Shana seems to have been an effective discipline practice as she responds well to the strategy. Sunil explains that Shana “likes that actually” and Suma shares that when they talk with her “she would feel sorry” for what she did.

Something that Sunil reiterates:

I think sometimes she feels bad because she knows she did something bad. And maybe we did discipline her; we just told her...we would tell her that what she did was wrong, we definitely don’t like what you did but we’re not going to do anything, we just want you to think about it and not do it next time. So she would feel that, okay she would think about it and realize.

Here, we get the sense that reasoning with and talking to Shana seem to be an effective parenting strategy as it leads her to think and realize what she has done wrong. This balanced and open discipline approach is also evident in how they communicate with Shana in general.

Both Sunil and Suma keep very open lines of communication with Shana. They do not shy away from conversing with her about difficult topics and it seems that Shana is therefore very comfortable sharing most everything with them. For example, in fifth grade when Shana was learning about human reproduction the Rangans did not refuse or ignore Shana’s questions, in fact as Sunil shares, “We always try to make sure that we are
very open with her. We talk to her openly. Like even when in Aspen Creek, when the school was introducing education related to the human connection, sex, and all.” Sharing openly and talking with Shana about topics such as sexual reproduction is a strategy that Sunil views as being different than “traditionally Indian” parenting practices. He imparts:

We are pretty open with that so we don’t mind talking to her about that. So I think that’s the difference we are trying to do is we have tried to be very traditional Indian in terms of emphasizing education and trying to help them as much as possible but at the same time we have kept a very open mind in terms of exposing her to the different things.

From this quote, we can conclude that Sunil views his open-mindedness as a more “American” parenting strategy while the focus he and Suma put on education is in his mind a more “traditionally Indian” practice. However, Suma shares that she believes her openness actually developed back in India and was not necessarily an adaptation to a more “American” approach to parenting as she elucidates:

That (open-mindedness) is mainly because of my Mom I think since at that time she started in a big city... she didn’t have a mother so she grew up with her cousins, her uncle took care of her, so she was exposed to everything and she was very open minded. When I was going to college it’s like you’re not, other than any boys, you’re not supposed to talk or something like that. But she was very open-minded and she was very free. That’s what I learned from her I think.
This quote seems to imply that Suma’s mother used more “American” or “Western” parenting practices with her when she was growing up, almost as if she had seen what the future held for Suma and was preparing her for her inevitable move to America.

In a sense, the Rangan’s general tendencies toward openness and balance naturally align better with more “Western” and “American” parenting practices, which is exactly what one research study found, that Asian Indian mothers living in the U.S demonstrate more authoritative (open, responsive, and demanding) parenting styles while Indian mother’s living in India use a more authoritarian (punitive and controlling) style (Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002). Interestingly, it seems that Suma might have used more open and authoritative practices than typical Indian parents even if they were living in India, although it is hard to know for certain if that would indeed be the case.

Nonetheless, one of the main reasons the Rangans continue to stay in the United States is because they value the greater balance children have in their lives and the freedom parents have to be more open with their children. In his own words, Sunil states:

There is more balance. In India, they are getting there. People are realizing that they need to be more balanced, so they are spending more time; spending more resources on things they like to do. But when we were kids, it was not like that. We were allowed to play and stuff, but… (Suma finishes Sunil’s sentence) there was no profession other than doctor in India.

Overall, the Rangan’s appreciate the fact that American children do not have to focus solely on their schoolwork and becoming a doctor. Instead, they are encouraged to participate in all sorts of extracurricular activities. Sunil reiterates:
So we like the fact that people are more well-rounded, appreciate other things. In India, they do, too, but again, it depends on things and families; I don’t know. Certain families we have seen encouraging their kids to do something more. Our family, it’s not like they stopped us from doing anything; it was just that they did not have the wherewithal to allow us to do all the things, which probably we may have done.

As Sunil shares here, in general, families in India do not have the “wherewithal” or time to think beyond school and schoolwork. A fact that Suma confirms when she states that in India school “is very intense studying; it’s 24/7.” The intensity of schoolwork in India also means that parents do not spend as much time with their children as many children are sent off to boarding school or must work so intensively on their studies when they get home each day that there is very little free time available to spend with loved ones.

Therefore, it is the greater opportunity for a more balanced and well-rounded childhood that seems to keep the Rangans in America. They realize that if they were to move back to India Shana would not “be able to do all the things she is doing here” both because “there would be a lot more pressure at school” and also “because everything is close by. Everything’s convenient. Like within two miles, you can go and find a music teacher, martial arts, piano teacher, dance maybe ten miles away. In India, that would never happen.” Additionally, the Rangans recognize that if they moved back to India they would have to be more “strict” with Shana and “wouldn’t be able to spend so much time with” her. And so, the Rangans continue to stay in the United States embracing the more open and balanced approach to parenting and trying to promote what is best for Shana as
Sunil reiterates, “I think, at least I am subconsciously thinking that it’ll be best for Shana if we are here. And I think she would have more options here, so I would kind of lean towards staying here, long term.”

Essentially, the Rangans assume a more open and balanced parenting approach in an attempt to encourage Shana to achieve and reach her fullest potential. Their goal is simple; to provide the best opportunities for Shana as is illuminated in this profoundly deep and personal quote from Sunil:

I think she is at a very crucial stage in her life where its formative years. It’s really important how she gets prepared for college and everything else. So I kind of worry a little bit that, at this crucial stage, will she let off? One of the things I feel bad about myself is, I always had a lot of potential, but did not have any direction, nobody to guide, nobody to tell me what are the options. So it is just like, okay, I want to be a doctor or an engineer, okay? Doctor…I don’t want to be a doctor, so I’ll be an engineer. So I kind of took the easy way out. Same thing, even doing my master’s, many of my friends joined for master’s right then and there after engineering, but I was, I don’t know whether I want to do that. I like teaching, so I was a lecturer in a college for a couple of years. I was just not sure what to do. I knew that I was capable of doing things…I knew I had the potential but I did not use it properly. I worry the same thing about her, like we think that she has the potential, but I don’t think I am capable of telling her or guiding her towards all the available avenues for her. So I’m kind of hoping and praying that teachers and other resources will kind of mold her and help her in making those choices. That’s
my biggest worry; if I go to India, I don’t know whether she will just let up on
certain things and not do what she could do.

One thing is for certain, you cannot deny that the Rangans want the best for their child
and are doing all they can to promote what is good for her.

Promote the Good

It is a clear spring evening when my family and I drive south out of the city to
have dinner at the Rangan’s home. Suma has invited my family over for a traditional
Indian meal, which I have accepted graciously both with my heart and my stomach. As
we drive further south and west, the sun is just dropping below the mountains so that the
bright colors of the sunset paint our view. I imagine that there are many views in India as
beautiful as this and I wonder if the beauty of Colorado elicits memories for the Rangans
or if the two places are kept entirely separate in their minds.

Arriving a little before six, we park out front, climb the stairs, and ring the
doorbell. Shana promptly opens the door with Sunil and Suma following close behind.
They welcome us in, standing in the entryway barefooted and smiling. Sunil wears blue
jeans and a casual knit tee shirt with thin-wired glasses framing his face. He is of average
height and is slim, managing to stay fit into his mid-forties, most likely do to Suma’s
healthy Indian cooking and the hiking/skiing he enjoys with Shana. Similarly, Suma
wears a casual outfit of blue jeans and a knit shirt, while Shana fashions her usual
leggings, tunic, and headband. Their overall attire and appearance is that of a typical
American family hosting a casual get together on a Saturday evening.
In physical appearance, Shana seems not to favor one parent over the other as both her mom and dad have large umber eyes magnified by glasses, definitive noses, thick chocolate brown hair, and caramel complexions. In stature, Shana is slender, almost lanky like I imagine both her parents were in their youth, and as for her personality, she is bubbly and lighthearted like her mother, but also sincere and serious like her father. Essentially, she is the perfect blend of both, fun and focus, like the purposeful combination of sweet and spice in the Indian dishes Suma creates.

I present Suma with a bright bouquet of flowers as I take in the culinary scents wafting in from the kitchen. Suma takes the flowers, giggling her thank you, while Shana, a natural with young children, intercepts my son Griffin and shows him her keyboard piano. Meanwhile, Sunil leads my husband and me down into the family room, offering us water, juice, wine, or beer. As soon as we sit, Suma appears carrying plates displaying two typical Indian “street foods” she has crafted: one, similar to American fried onions, but more elaborate and served with a dipping sauce and the other, chicken served on a stick with a peanut dipping sauce. They are delicious and we are sure to compliment the chef.

Suma joins us and we eat and chat with her and Sunil about India. My husband asks Sunil about the Cricket World Cup matches that are currently being played and for the moment, Shana and Griffin are perfectly content upstairs in the piano. After a few minutes, Suma takes the empty appetizer plates into the kitchen and begins the final preparations of her meal as Sunil brings out a coffee table book on southern India for us.
to look at. We flip through the pages, oohing and aahing, as he describes some of the beautiful places to visit and the most important landmarks in Karnataka.

Sunil makes a point to share that the main city of the state of Karnataka, Bangalore, is known as the city of gardens and from the pictures in the book, it is obvious why this name was chosen. I walk into the kitchen to offer my assistance to Suma and she explains that she has made a separate meal for Griffin of pasta and vegetables in case he does not favor the spicy dishes. I thank her and we decide to serve it to him now as it is getting late. Suma calls for Shana to bring Griffin down and we sit with him at the round kitchen table while he eats the special dinner Suma has warmed up and served in a plastic bowl just for him. We catch up about school and summer plans while my son picks at his food, too distracted by all the chatter to really eat.

“I’m done,” Griffin states, climbing down from his chair and heading into the family room where the toy trucks he brought with him are waiting. Shana starts to follow after him, but Suma calls her back to help set the table.

Unlike previous meals where we ate at the kitchen table, tonight Suma has inserted the extra leaf in the formal dining room table for our meal. She directs Shana to layout the placemats, napkins, dinner plates, and the aluminum cups filled with ice water. Hearing the change in activity, Sunil excuses himself from the conversation with my husband in order to help Suma. We follow the family into the dining room where Sunil motions for us to sit as he helps to carry in various sized serving dishes filled with
colorful creations. Suma brings in the last plate and sits down at the table next to Sunil, across from my husband and me.

Sunil begins passing around the large bowl of rice, while Suma explains each of the dishes to Matt and I, “This fish curry is very spicy...this is a dahl made with red lentils...this is Saag Paneer, etc.” I note that the largest container on the table holds the rice, while the dahls and curries are served in small portions, unlike many American restaurants where usually huge oversize portions of the main dish are served. Glancing at the table, I notice that there is no silverware as it is and Indian tradition to eat with your fingers, using the rice, dosa, or naan as your utensils.

My husband and I watch as the Rangan family loads their plates each with a large serving of rice surrounded by smaller servings of the various dishes. They then cup their hands into tiny shovels, using their fingertips to sweep the rice through their curry or dahl and then lift the combination up into their mouths. They do the same with the naan, breaking off a piece and then using it to scoop up some fish or Saag Paneer. The process is very graceful and they chatter about the various dishes as they eat. Suma explains that tonight she has made a number of dishes she knows that I enjoy as well as some traditional Southern Indian staples. She explains that it is typical to have so many dishes on the table and that this is her first time cooking naan as in Southern India dosa is the bread that is traditionally served. But knowing that I favored naan, she found a recipe and attempted cooking it. She explains that she loves to try cooking new things and often watches the cooking channel during the day for inspiration.
My husband and I follow their lead scooping large portions of rice onto our plates and using the naan and our hands as utensils. The conversation continues comfortably as Griffin sits on the floor in the corner playing with his trucks and watching a movie on the iPad. Everyone opts for seconds and even thirds of their favorite dishes, scooping more rice onto their plates first and then the curry, dahl, fish, etc. Slowly, the last fork is laid to rest and Sunil compliments Suma on the meal, “We actually never go out to Indian restaurants because her cooking is better!” he boasts. Suma giggles and Sunil rises to help clear the dishes. Suma does the same motioning for us to stay seated, as she has made a special traditional Indian dessert. With the last dish cleared, Suma returns from the kitchen carrying a clear casserole dish filled with a pudding. She explains that dessert is not commonly served in India, but that it is a tradition to have elaborate dessert buffets at weddings. She places a spoon next to each of our placemats and then proceeds to scoop small servings of the pudding into delicate dessert bowls. I take a bite and the dessert is sweet and custard like, almost like rice pudding, but sprinkled with cashews and raisins. Everyone devours their small servings as Sunil and Suma describe some of the traditional Indian desserts served at weddings, most of them made with cashews, mango, and/or rice.

Our conversation naturally fades to polite smiles signaling that the evening is coming to a close. My husband and I help the Rangans clear the table, thank them for the delicious meal, and excuse ourselves as we are nearing Griffin’s usual bedtime. They walk with us to the entryway, where we put on our shoes and descent the stairs into the warm spring evening. We climb into the car and wave to the three of them, smiling and standing on the landing, as we pull away.
This evening accurately captures how the Rangans promote the good of both American and Indian culture by blending the two like key ingredients in a recipe. Specifically, in the above vignette, we see how Indian tradition continues to dominate Suma’s cooking, but that American/Western food is promoted as well, like the special pasta dish Suma prepares ahead of time for my son. In previous visits, Suma shared how she likes to cook all types of foods, although she cooks Indian food the most often. Further, she explained that in India, food is very important and that you spend a lot of time eating.

Suma actually taught herself to cook when she and Sunil moved to America because growing up her family had servants on their rice plantation that did all of the cooking and cleaning. Therefore, Suma never learned how. These servants received a one-pound bag of rice each week as part of their payment for their work. Interestingly, Suma explained that all of the rice grown in India is either red or brown and must be processed by machines that grind off the red or brown coating in order to make it appear white. The servants traditionally did not have the money to pay for this process, while Suma’s family did, delineating their higher caste. Further, according to Suma, in India, the color of your rice is a sign of your social standing within the caste system. However, like in the United States, there has been a big movement back to whole grains because of the health benefits, especially, in the urban centers of India.

Suma did learn a few things about cooking from her mother, but most everything else she acquired from the Internet or watching the cooking channel on television. Suma certainly enjoys cooking and is an excellent cook, preparing dinner and lunch for the
family every day. On occasion, the Rangans get together with a large circle of Indian friends, hosting and cooking traditional meals. They use to have dinner parties with this group almost every weekend, but it got to be too much, so now they just have friends over for dinner sometimes or go out to eat at different restaurants around the greater metropolitan area. Essentially, both American and Indian foods are promoted in the Rangan home, although Indian food more prominently, as the family typically has American cereal for breakfast and traditional Indian food for lunch and/or dinner.

In contrast, the appearance and attire of the Rangan family is dominated more by American influences as Suma and Sunil always wear blue jeans when I visit and Shana wears outfits typical of stylish middle school girls in the United States. Although, from the family pictures displayed on the mantle and the refrigerator, it is obvious that at times the family wears traditional Indian clothing. However, it appears that this happens mostly when they are back in India visiting family or attending special events, like Indian weddings here in America or multicultural days at school. On the one occasion that Suma wore a traditional silk tunic, we discussed the typical attire worn today in India. She shared that today India is becoming more “Western” and that most people in the metropolitan areas wear blue jeans and more American style clothing, although in the small towns and villages you will still see people wearing more traditional attire. I asked what the family wears when they travel to India and she shared that they wear the same clothes as they would here, unless there is a special occasion that requires more traditional dress.
Similarly, the Rangan family enjoys American entertainment as well as Indian. They love watching American professional football, especially the Patriots, and a variety of different primetime television shows. However, as discussed earlier, Suma also loves Bollywood movies and regularly attends showings at a local cinema or checks out videos from a nearby library. We see a similar appreciation of both cultures in the music that the family listens to too. Suma and Shana love listening to the top American billboard songs on the radio, but also stay current with new music in India as well. As for print media, Shana does all of her reading in English, while Suma reads one Bangalore newspaper everyday online. During my visits, I notice that the bookshelves contain literature representing both cultures and in fact Suma shows me a number of books that one of her uncles actually authored in Kannada. Clearly, the influence of both cultures is represented in the media accessed in the Rangan home and the same is true about their use of language.

During my time with the family, the Rangans spoke both English and Kannada. Specifically, most of the conversations I observed between Suma and Shana were a mixture of both. Generally, Suma would address Shana in Kannada and she would respond by speaking first in the native language and then quickly after a word or two switches back to English. These conversations were fascinating to listen to, as the ease with which Shana and Suma moved in and out of both languages was similar to the ebb and flow of the tides. Equally impressive was Suma and Shana’s impeccable English pronunciation and Sunil’s English vocabulary, which could rival most native English speakers. During my visits, I observed that Suma certainly tried to promote her native language, but was not militant in her approach, managing to keep the language alive in
subtle ways. When I asked her about this, she explained that during the school year she allows Shana to speak in English more, “but during the summer holidays, I will insist” that she speak Kannada. And when they call their relatives back in India, “she can speak in that pure Kannada.”

A fascinating detail that Suma shares is that in her opinion Shana “speaks better Kannada than my sister’s kids,” who live in India. A notion that Sunil agrees with, elaborating, “Most of the kids there, they can’t speak the local language now… If you look at the (Indian) families here, culturally, they are giving their kids more than what they would get in India.” This is yet another reason why Sunil believes the family will stay in America because Shana is getting more exposure to Indian culture here than if they moved back. He shares:

So we have a saying, the grass is greener on the other side, so sometimes that’s what we really don’t know, whether we’ll stay here or go back to India. But the more I think; I think we’ll be here. That’s more likely. It’s not the same as how it was 20 years ago. If we went back, it wouldn’t be the same.

At the same time, Suma expresses greater enthusiasm for moving back to Karnataka so that Shana can connect further with her Indian heritage, sharing:

Whenever she (Shana) tells me that she wants to go. (I think) Oh my god, if we go there, she might learn the language, she might do more of all this Indian activities from the professionals there, good teachers. That’s why I am telling him, look for a job and we’ll go and stay there for at least 2-3 years and let her learn all that stuff.
Only the future will tell whether the Rangan’s will decide to move back to India for a few years or stay in America. Nevertheless, whether they decide to stay or leave, it is certain that they will continue to promote the good aspects of both cultures as they parent Shana.

Ultimately, the Rangan’s have embraced many aspects of American culture, including: media, clothing, food, and activities. However, more importantly, they have also tried to promote what they feel are the positive facets of American parenting. One key practice is spending time and doing activities with your children and family. Sunil explains:

So I think coming here was in a way, helpful, because we kind of fell into the way we are but it made it more easier to go down that path, but definitely, from my side of the list, that’s what I feel like, the do-it-yourself culture, spending time with yourself, with the family. You kind of put family first (in America), but in a slightly different way. It’s like some of the focus is slightly different. Here, family first is like you are spending time really doing things. Whereas in India, it may be mostly in terms of providing or being there; that sense of the family.

In this quote, Sunil describes what he sees as the more American practice of spending time with your immediate family and doing things together as a family unit. This practice is something both he and Suma appreciate here in the United States as in India there is greater pressure to spend time with extended family. Suma details, “On the weekends, they have to go with their in-laws, their parents, friends; some will go there and there’ll be hundreds of weddings and hundreds of rituals.” Not only is there greater pressure to spend time with extended family and to attend traditional festivals and celebrations, but
Sunil also expresses that there is a cultural difference in regards to time spent with your children. In his opinion, in the United States there is the practice of spending quality time with your children and sharing activities:

It may be a generational thing, actually. What has happened over the years is, we knew that our parents loved us, but maybe they did not have the skills or the time; I don’t know what it is, but we felt they did not spend too much time with us, at least mine. I mean, they helped us. My parents, they would make sure that I got what I wanted to pursue my study, and they made that this whole focus; and whatever they did was to help that. But they did not have the skills to necessarily interact and make that a more better experience. So the amount of time they spent with us, I felt, in my case at least was, less. Probably they could have spent more. It may be a cultural thing. That’s how it was. Like all the parents, they were not supposed to do some things. That’s how the Indian culture was. In the sense of they provided for everything, but not necessarily participated in so many things.

So in contrast to his own upbringing, Sunil makes a greater effort to do things with Shana. On the weekends, during the winter he will often take her skiing and in the summer they enjoy hiking together. In short, he makes a conscious effort to spend quality time with his daughter, “I think about it…and try to spend a little bit more time with her.”

It is also worth reiterating, that the Rangan’s have embraced the very “American” custom of participating in after school activities, while still emphasizing the supreme importance of education. Unlike their childhoods in India, Suma explains, “We give the same priority to do other stuff also… Not just studies.” Over the sixth months I met with
the family, the Rangan’s continue to mention this parenting practice in our interviews, drawing my attention to the fact that this is an important difference between how they would parent in India and how they parent here in the United States. Their overall intent is to give their daughter experiences and to expose her to all the opportunities that exist in her world. They have no further intentions as Sunil explains:

We have tried...to expose her to various activities like we try to put her in as many activities as possible like she went to Tae Kwon Do, swimming, ballet, singing, dance, tennis, mixed martial arts, hiking. So we have tried to...we have not tried to insist it, we haven’t tried to tell her that you need to do this, we are just trying to show her these are the things you can do. From the smile on her face when she talks about her recent ski trip or dance recital you can tell that Shana has embraced all of these activities, finding joy in the opportunities she is fortunate to have.

Last but not least, the Rangan’s have also embraced the “do-it-yourself” culture of America. This applies both to their parenting and their behavior as individuals. In regards to parenting, they have tried to let Shana struggle to accomplish tasks independently instead of instantly rushing to rescue her when she faces an impasse. This is in contrast to how Indian parents tend to raise their children as Sunil shares, “Indian parents have a tendency to help their kids to get everything. We kind of stayed back from that.” This applies to both schoolwork and to chores around the house. Suma shares that when Shana was little she put greater emphasis on helping her learn things like the ABC’s, but when she enrolled her in Montessori school she realized a major culture difference between
American and Indian parenting. American parents tend to place greater emphasis on teaching their children to do common tasks independently, like fill a cup with water or tie one’s shoes. Suma details:

What I noticed, Indian kids they are very smart in everything, like reading, writing, and all; like smart in day-to-day skills like tying your shoes that comes later… No, Montessori teaches you that because what happens is Montessori’s basically a station, everything is in a station. So it’s kids in the moment. She can choose whatever she wants to do. So what I noticed, sometimes I used to go and volunteer, so Indian kids what they more tend to do is all this working at home which they don’t allow, parents don’t allow them. Basically when you are three years old are not totally drilled to ask them, okay go, and pour the milk to your cup.

Sunil agrees summarizing this difference, “The Indian kids’ life skills were a little lacking,” or as Suma simply states, “we do a lot of things for our kids.” In the end, the Rangan’s chose to embrace the American way of teaching your child to be more independent and to do things for herself.

This is also evident in how Sunil and Suma have chosen to live their lives in the United States. Unlike in India, Suma does the cooking and cleaning, while together she and Sunil do the yard work. Shana also contributes as Suma shares:

Most of the time I ask her to help, so it’s not the same chores she will do all the time. But, like yesterday, since I was cooking, so I wanted her to clean the house and keep it pleasant for them (friends coming over for dinner), so I was very
proud of her. She did the whole house. She did vacuuming and usually she never
did till now. She usually does only her room or something like that, but the whole
house without any grumbling, I don’t know; she did everything.

This practice of doing things around the house stands in stark contrast to life in India
where people are generally hired to do everything from cooking, cleaning, to yard work.

Sunil emphasizes this difference explaining:

What has happened is like we have lived here for so many years we are used to
the lifestyle, culture. We have changed, really. In India, you never do anything on
your own kind of thing. You have people who do stuff. But here, everything is a
do-it-yourself culture, so we kind of like that, actually.

As Sunil details, he and Suma have embraced the American “do-it-yourself” culture.

They have also tried to promote this can do/will do spirit in their daughter. By
encouraging these key aspects of American culture, the Rangan’s have embraced their
role as American citizens, while at the same time maintaining important Indian cultural
and parenting traditions. Sunil shares that they are focused on “being American, but still
continuing to value things” from India. When I ask if they view themselves as Indians
living in America, Sunil clarifies, “I would put it the other way around, actually. So I
would put it as what we come to you in the traditional sense, being in America. So we
don’t look at it the other way around, actually.”

Essentially, the Rangans have embraced the “overall American way,” while still
maintaining key cultural traditions, mirroring what has been found in previous research
that immigrants tend to adopt a bicultural orientation. This biculturalism tends to occur in
two dimensions: The first, accommodating to the host society, and the second, relinquishing and/or retaining characteristics of the culture of origin to find a place where one can function in more than one cultural context (Harrison et al., 1990). Likewise, many immigrants feel they contribute to their host society by modeling better behavior of children and focusing on educational achievement, family unity, and stronger discipline (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). We see evidence of all of these research findings in the way that the Rangans have mixed together Indian cultural traditions and American parenting practices to create a recipe for a home environment that nurtures the academic achievement of their gifted daughter in the United States.

Ultimately and undeniably, Sunil and Suma are committed to promoting the best that the world has to offer their daughter; they seem to glow when they talk about raising her:

We look at it as a kind of a two-way street. She (Shana) is a joy because she is, how to say, she is forgiving, she is loving, caring, all those things. And also she is…so the two-way street for me is, you know, we would like to, how to say, give her the right foundation for being the best person she can be. And we look at it as kind of a responsibility, but at the same time, we get a lot in return, so it’s kind of natural. We don’t think of ourselves as really doing anything above and beyond what we should be doing. At least in my mind there is no, how to say, there is no expectation that we are doing so much for her.

But the truth of the matter, as we see in this portrait; they are “doing so much for her.”
Chapter Seven: I Plant and Now I Harvest

Planted in the midst of a tired strip mall stands the Sunflower Daycare and Preschool, a bright spot amongst other tenants that include: a payday loan shop, a walk-in nail salon, a Chinese restaurant, and a few abandoned store fronts. Above the corner unit, a small sign hangs with the words Sunflower Daycare and Preschool painted in colorful block lettering. The sign itself would be easy to miss if you were not looking for it.

I park my car and watch people come and go from the various businesses. The nail salon appears busy, as does the payday loan shop. I check the address, step out of my car, and walk toward the glass door of the corner unit. I glance at my reflection in the large glass windowpanes that frame the adjacent and empty storefronts as I pull open the door, jingling the tiny bells tied to the handle. The door opens into a small white hallway, dimly lit, and carpeted. On the right wall hangs a bulletin board announcing the daily schedule, the breakfast/lunch menu for the week, and a number of other preschool related policies.

At the end of the hall, a tall counter stands acting as a barrier between the outside world and the warm classrooms inside. Behind this counter, waits an umber skinned woman wearing a colorful hijab (headscarf) and a bright white smile.

“Good morning,” she greets, broadening her smile as I approach.

“Hi, I am here to meet Mrs. Ahmed,” I reply glimpsing down at the desk hidden behind the counter, which is covered with piles upon piles of paper and office supplies.
“Oh you are the one… the one here for that thing with Rana,” she speaks in precise but heavily accented English.

“Yes,” I reply assuming she is referring to my research project.

“Let me call her…she went to get groceries,” she states picking up the black cordless phone and pressing the speed dial. Seconds later, she begins speaking into the phone in Arabic. The cadence of her speech is rapid and she nods her head and smiles toward me as she talks.

“She is on her way, only another five minutes…” she explains, hanging up the phone, unlocking the gate that separates the classrooms from the hallway, and motioning for me to sit on a metal folding chair she has retrieved from a closet down the hall.

“Thank you,” I reply and sit. She introduces herself as Mrs. Fayad (Mrs. Ahmed’s partner in the daycare business) and shares that they are very busy today as one of the nearby school districts is on vacation this week and so, they have a surplus of school age children in attendance. The bells on the door jingle as a fair skinned mother wearing a hijab arrives to drop off her darker skinned son who dressed in western style clothing. She stops at the desk and signs in. Mrs. Fayad excuses herself to attend to the mother and child. She and the mother banter back in forth in Arabic as the little boy’s eyes dart around the room, finally falling on me, and returning my smile shyly. As his mother kisses her son goodbye, Mrs. Fayad takes the boy’s hand and ushers him through the gate and down a long hallway that turns to the right. The boy looks back and smiles one last time, his big brown eyes draped in heavy eyelashes.
As I wait for Mrs. Ahmed, the din from the classrooms crashes through the small separation that exists between the temporary walls and the ceiling and cascades like a waterfall down into my ears. The indistinguishable mixture of play and fight replicates the sounds of a playground; the intermittent adult voice praising or commanding interspersed with the occasional wail of a child.

Again, I hear the jingle of the bells on the front door as a tall tawny skinned woman swathed in a brown hijab and tob (similar to a sari) hustles in carrying plastic grocery bags. She quickly sets her bags down in front of the counter and apologizes to me, “I am so sorry that I am late…” going on to explain as her partner had previously that they were very busy and she needed to make sure they had enough food for the rest of the week.

“I will be five more minutes. I just need to unload my van.”

“Of course, of course, take your time,” I respond as she picks up her bags and hurries down the hallway into a small kitchen. A minute later, she returns with three school age boys following her like a gaggle of geese. She leads them down the hallway and out the front door, minutes later they march back by me carrying gallons of milk and bulk size containers of applesauce, fruit cocktail, and tomato sauce. The parade of groceries proceeds for another ten minutes until finally the last bag is unloaded. I watch the procession as the symphony of play continues beyond the walls and Mrs. Fayad busies herself at the front desk shuffling papers around and making phone calls.

Finally, Mrs. Ahmed returns, wiping perspiration from her brow, and ushering the boys back to their classrooms.
“Nice to meet you,” she smiles, holding out her hand to shake mine, and then grabbing another metal folding chair from the closet. She apologizes again and like a dutiful student sits, facing me with her full attention, “Please tell me about your study.”

As I explain my project, Mrs. Ahmed nods her head and asks a few clarifying questions. Minutes into our conversation, she shares that her father is a professor of education at a university in Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan, and that he was thrilled to hear that she had been asked to participate in an educational research study in America. Further, she explains that she has a degree in early childhood education from a local community college and hopes to pursue her Master’s degree someday and maybe even her doctorate. Suddenly, Mrs. Ahmed’s cell phone begins to vibrate and she removes it quickly from her pocket, looks at the screen, and offers, “It is my husband.”

“Please, go ahead,” I say motioning for her to answer it. She presses the button and begins speaking in rapid Arabic. Minutes later, she hangs up and turns her attention back to me, explaining that her husband was calling to tell her that he was staying at work until 8 o’clock tonight. She shares that he manages a small grocery store nearby and tends to work long hours.

“Now, where were we?” she questions as I retrieve the study consent forms from my bag and proceed to explain the purpose of the forms. She listens intently and then rises to retrieve a pen from her desk. While, she does this, the phone at the front desk rings and she answers it speaking in English.

“A mother is coming to pick up her son early, I will be just a moment,” she explains as she opens the door to one of the preschool classrooms and steps inside. I
notice that the noise level from the classrooms has gradually lowered as the teachers prepare students for naptime. Through the wall, I hear a little boy begin to cry for his mother, followed by soothing whispers from Mrs. Ahmed. The door opens and she steps out with the little boy, kneeling down to help him put on his coat and explaining, “Your mama is on her way, she asked me to get you ready to go.”

The little boy’s cries soften into whimpers as Mrs. Ahmed continues to whisper quietly in his ear, “Now, now, it’s okay. Your mama is coming.” She zips up his coat and softly pats his cheek. The bells jingle on the door as an African-American woman rounds the corner and approaches the locked gate. “Come on baby,” she calls motioning for her son to come forward as she simultaneously signs him out. Mrs. Ahmed and the woman share a brief exchange while Mrs. Ahmed unlocks the wooden gate and ushers the boy out toward his mother. She grabs his hand and rushes him out the door.

Immediately, the bells jingle again and in walks a tall thin young man dressed in blue jeans, a black hooded sweatshirt, and carrying a heavy backpack. He smiles at me as he sets his backpack down behind the desk.

“Amir, meet Mrs. Wiles, she is the one doing the research on Rana.”

Amir approaches holding out his hand in greeting. His palms are smooth with long thin fingers and he shakes my hand like I imagine an Imam might, soft and reverent.

“Nice to meet you,” I smile, presuming this must be Mrs. Ahmed’s son, who is a sophomore at the local high school. I stand up to speak further with Amir as Mrs. Ahmed steps aside to check in with her partner. I ask Amir about school and his classes and we chat at length. His speech mirrors his handshake, his words polite and deliberate, and he
bends toward me like a young birch tree when he speaks as he stands a foot taller than I. We spend most of our time talking about college and local scholarship organizations, and at one point we even go over to the computer so that I can show him a few of the scholarship websites. From our conversation, it is obvious that Amir is quite studious as he is taking many Advanced Placement and honors classes this year: AP biology, AP government, Honors English, Chemistry, and Pre-Calculus. He also shares that he chose to attend summer school last summer so that he could place into higher courses this year and that he dreams of attending the University of Chicago to major in pre-med. After about ten minutes, Amir excuses himself to do his schoolwork and Mrs. Ahmed returns, smiling, and taking her seat once again; I return her smile in awe of all that I have witnessed. In the length of just a short hour, I have watched Mrs. Ahmed tend to all of her various gardens: business, wife, caregiver, and mother. It is clear from the exchanges I observe that she cultivates each with the utmost care and attention, nurturing them so that they grow and blossom.

I Plant and Now I Harvest

Attending to others is Mrs. Ahmed’s life work and watching her saplings grow and prosper fulfills her. In many ways, the fruit of her labor is both her children and her growing business. And this is exactly what she hoped to plant in her life, fields of successful children marching toward the rising sun.

As a young child growing up in Sudan, Mrs. Ahmed was the oldest of six children, raised in an academically focused home. She and her sister were born in Lebanon because their father was studying for his master’s degree at the American
University of Beirut at the time. Consequently, Mrs. Ahmed completed the first two years
of elementary school in Lebanon before the family moved back to Khartoum, Sudan
where her father obtained his doctorate in education from the University of Khartoum
and later became a professor of education there.

Do in large part to her father’s position at the University of Khartoum; the
remainder of Mrs. Ahmed’s elementary schooling was completed at a laboratory school
affiliated with an educational institute that her father partnered with. According to Mrs.
Ahmed’s description the school appears similar to the University of Chicago’s
Laboratory school:

For elementary school, it happened in another town. In this town was an
education institute where my dad used to work. So our type of education over
there is a little bit different from the other parts of Sudan because all the school
over there, the elementary school especially, was the institution education. So
everything new they asked an opinion of our school, and after tests to see how the
kids like it, how is the teacher coming forward with that education and then they
sent that to the other schools so I…I have good school at that time.

Indeed, we can assume that the education Mrs. Ahmed and her siblings received was
excellent as they all went on to pursue and obtain advanced degrees:

I have one sister, and I have four brothers. So in my family I have six, yeah. Two
of them are doctors, family physicians, and I have…one of them is an electrical
engineer, he has his Master degree from Boulder…one has his bachelor’s degree
from Sudan in computer sales, and I have the youngest one. He just finished university two years ago… He’s a pharmacist.

Mrs. Ahmed herself earned a Bachelor Degree in Electrical Engineering from Sudan University of Science and Technology, although, she has never actually practiced as an electrical engineer because she married her husband directly out of university and they moved to Saudi Arabia where women are only permitted to work in medical or educational fields. Instead, Mrs. Ahmed stayed home, taking care of their firstborn child, while her husband worked as an accountant for a nearby shipping company.

Once they arrived in Colorado, Mrs. Ahmed completed a two-year program at a local community college to become certified as a childcare director, while her husband nearly completed his medical lab technology degree. He currently has two semesters of schoolwork to finish, but has had to take a break from his studies because he is so busy with his current job as the manager of a grocery store.

Interestingly, Mrs. Ahmed’s own mother only completed elementary school in Sudan, which seems particularly remarkable considering the high level of education attained by all of her children. Although, she had little formal education, Mrs. Ahmed shared that her mother was definitely “the boss” of the household, managing all of the finances and most of the childrearing. Mrs. Ahmed explained:

She’s (Mrs. Ahmed’s mother) strong. I always tell her that you strong woman…because in Sudan all the…what we call it. What I have to say…let me think about that…the woman is like the boss of the house…She managed her house so she has more power because for the men, most of the time they’re out
for work so the mom knows everything about the kids…They (housewives in Sudan) manage the finances. They manage the family in the same time. Only for the huge stuff the men come.

As we will see later in this portrait, Mrs. Ahmed assumes a similar role as her mother did, being the “boss” of the house, while also working fulltime at the preschool. She details:

I’m a working woman, and I’m a mom…I manage the house because most of the times, I stay with my kids, not my husband because he has to work; he has to go to college, and sometimes he comes home at 8 o’clock so he didn’t have all the details about what happened. So when we sit together, I give him what happened during the day.

Before their application to immigrate legally to the United States was granted, Mrs. Ahmed and her husband lived in Saudi Arabia for seven years. She explained that they applied for the lottery four times before they were finally granted a green card:

I had been to Saudi Arabia for 7 years, and here in the United States they offered the lottery for people to fill out and migrate. So me and my husband seeing that there are school opportunity for our kids--we didn’t think about ourselves, for our kids because you know the education here’s better. So we decided to fill that. We fill it for four times. The fourth time we got it.

Finally in 1998, Mrs. Ahmed and her husband immigrated to the United States with their 2-year-old daughter and 3-month-old son. They lived first in Alabama for two years before moving to Colorado in 2000 where they have lived ever since.
In Colorado, they settled in a suburban community that has a significant African and Islamic population, bringing much of Sudan with them in the form of traditions and family. In fact, in the immediate years following their arrival, both Mrs. Ahmed’s brother and sister moved to Colorado. Furthermore, the Ahmed family continues to celebrate Islamic holidays, eat traditional food, and preserve the Arabic language. It seems that their ability to maintain so many religious and cultural traditions is mostly due to the proximity of the mosque and the great number of Muslim families living in the immediate vicinity. In fact, in their neighborhood, it is fairly common to see woman shrouded in hijabs waiting at the bus stop, men speaking Arabic as they head into ethnic grocery stores, children covered with headscarves playing at the park, and devout Muslims by the hundreds parking and walking sometimes miles to attend holy services at the local mosque during Ramadan.

The custom of immigrants settling in areas already populated by similar ethnic groups is one well documented in the research. According to Ogbu, voluntary immigrants or minorities tend to seek out communities where they will find support in the acculturation process (Ogbu, 1998). Further, Ogbu’s voluntary minority title is an accurate label for the Ahmed family as they see opportunities for success in the United States and maintain the folk theory of “making it,” that hard work, following the rules, and getting a good education lead to success in the United States (Bogus, 1998). As we will see throughout this portrait, Mrs. Ahmed and her husband are hard workers who have an optimistic and practical outlook about life in America as Mrs. Ahmed shares, “you know the education here’s better… so our target to migrate here was our kid’s
education.” And, Mrs. Ahmed like many of the families Ogbu studied has high academic expectations of her children and holds them accountable. Specifically, we will see below how she gives unequivocal support to her children learning English, expects high grades, and has strong control of her student’s time, insuring that homework is completed.

It is a Thursday evening in late spring when I drive four miles east into the suburban neighborhood where the Ahmed family lives. Although, just a few short miles separate my neighborhood from theirs, the differences are akin to many of America’s urban corridors as crossing one major thoroughfare is more like crossing the border into a neighboring country where the people, languages, and religions are foreign. As I drive, I notice that the signs above the storefronts are calling out the various ethnicities that live there: Middle Eastern, African, Vietnamese, and Korean. I turn right off a busy road into a quiet and well-kept development. I make a few turns, checking the addresses painted on the sidewalk, and finally come to the Ahmed family home. The home sits in a cul-de-sac tucked quietly away at the back of the development and behind the house resides an open space that provides a nice barrier between the neighborhood and an adjacent strip mall.

I arrive shortly after 6:30 PM and it appears that Mrs. Ahmed has just pulled into the garage. I watch as her two youngest daughters Rana and Rukiya carry their heavy backpacks up the front stairs and into the house. I park and Mrs. Ahmed emerges from the open garage, her arms weighed down by heavy bags of groceries. She smiles at me and motions for me to follow her up the staircase that leads to the front door, explaining that she has just arrived home from work. As we climb the stairs, I notice that the home, though a rental, is well cared for. The paint is fresh, the grass is mowed, and the plants in
front are trim and tidy. Rana waits for me like a little kitten just inside the door, shy yet playful. She wears her hair in two long braided pigtails that frame her dimpled cheeks and braced teeth. She is dressed in blue jeans, a purple hooded sweatshirt, and colorful Jordan high top sneakers; an outfit that is typical of youth her age but stands in stark contrast to the sandy headscarf her mother wears over a muted long sleeve shirt and pants.

I greet her and she smiles and nods her head, leading me through the kitchen and dining room into the living room where she takes a seat on a brown loveseat, placing her backpack on the floor at her feet. The loveseat rests in front of a large picture window draped in silk curtains, to the left resides a fireplace surrounded by build-in bookshelves covered with family photographs and artifacts from Sudan. I sit on the larger brown couch cattycorner to the loveseat, setting my notebook on the coffee table that is covered with ornate lace runners and doilies. I ask Rana how school is going as Mrs. Ahmed unloads the groceries. Rana speaks softly, smiling and shrugging her shoulders up after every utterance as if that tiny movement might actually bring forth her words. We chat about school, her teacher leaving for a new job at the end of the year, and her upcoming Young Ameritowne field trip. After five minutes, Mrs. Ahmed returns carrying a desert tray with small dishes filled with nuts and pastries complimented by two crystal wine glasses that hold a drink commonly served in Sudan and made with fresh: lemon, orange, mango, and guava juice. She places the tray in front of me, explaining each dessert, and then excuses Rana.
Mrs. Ahmed assumes Rana’s place on the loveseat and I ask her about the beautiful fabric pieces that cover the windows and coffee table. She explains that they were wedding gifts and that it is a tradition for Sudanese women to sew the ornate floral designs with metallic thread onto the fabric as part of their wedding gifts, or dowry. While she describes the traditions of Sudanese weddings, she walks over to a bookshelf and brings forth her wedding photograph album. She hands it to me and I begin flipping through the pages, commenting and asking questions,

As we sit and chat about wedding customs, Mrs. Ahmed periodically calls each of her children by name:

“Amir!”

“Rana!”

“Rukiya!”

“Are you done?”

As she calls each child by name, there is little response from upstairs. It seems that she does not expect an answer, but is more so letting her children know that she is monitoring them and that she expects them to be back downstairs shortly. I ask her what they are doing and she shares that they take a shower, change their clothes, and pray when they get home. Once they complete these three tasks, they come back downstairs and work on their homework at the kitchen table. Following this explanation, she excuses herself, sharing that she needs to pray and change her clothes as well. I wait downstairs on the couch for about 15 minutes while Mrs. Ahmed and her children complete their routine, sipping the sweet mango juice and munching on salted nuts.
As I sit in the living room, I look up through the slats of the open staircase into the upstairs hallway where the three bedrooms are located. The only sounds that drift down are doors opening and closing, and the water running in the shower. Eventually, Rukiya makes her way back downstairs, grabbing her backpack and sitting down at the kitchen table that occupies the space between the kitchen and the living room.

After another five minutes, Rana follows, grabbing a DARE notebook from her backpack and having a seat at the table next to Rukiya who is finishing a math worksheet. Rana takes out a pencil and begins writing, leaning into the paper and angling her head down as her pencil works rapidly from left to right. Looking over her shoulder, I see that she is finishing a DARE essay. She works silently never uttering a word as Rukiya puts away her completed worksheet and Mrs. Ahmed makes her way back downstairs.

“Are you done?” she asks Rukiya in English.

Rukiya nods, “Yes,” looking up with her big brown eyes and questions, “Can I draw Mommy?” Like her older sister, Rukiya also wears her hair in pigtails; however, while Rana is small and angular, Rukiya is tall and still softened by baby fat.

“Go get your book, it is time to read.” Mrs. Ahmed states circling into the kitchen and beginning to remove Tupperware containers from the refrigerator.

“Yes,” Rukiya responds as she simultaneously removes a Magic Tree House book from her backpack.

“You need to read for 30 minutes and then you can draw,” Mrs. Ahmed directs and then questions, “Where is Amir?”
Concurrently, Amir comes quietly down the stairs carrying three enormous binders. He shakes my hand and then takes his place at the kitchen table, sharing with me that he is getting ready for finals and that these are his AP binders and he wants to get them organized.

To my right, Rana remains focused on her paper, periodically using the dictionary on her iPod to check her spelling, while in the kitchen Mrs. Ahmed heats a frying pan with vegetable oil in order to fry falafel. As she waits for the pan to heat, she chops tomatoes and onion, adding them into a Tupperware container holding previously cooked fava beans. While she works, Mrs. Ahmed shares that her oldest child Fatima, who is studying for a Pre-Calculus exam downstairs in the basement, has recently started helping prepare meals. Mrs. Ahmed imparts:

Yeah, every day now since she off, every day she prepare the dinner. Only if something has to be cooked, I start that but because most of the stuff I prepared on Saturday or Sunday, I put it right in the refrigerator, she only has to prepare the salad. Yeah, she cut the tomato and all the vegetable and mix it together.

At the kitchen table, Rukiya’s eyes have begun to wander from her book into the kitchen where I stand talking with Mrs. Ahmed.

“Mama, can I draw now, I finished one chapter?” Rukiya pleads, batting her eyelashes.

“Yes,” Mrs. Ahmed responds as Rana stands and walks into the other room to retrieve a pocket thesaurus. She takes her seat again and begins flipping through the pages. I look down at her paper and see that she has written four paragraphs in her essay
so far, each about four or five sentences long. She uses her DARE notebook to guide her work, but otherwise works independently the entire time.

Amir continues organizing his binders, the process consisting of flipping through and moving or discarding pages. He and I chat about his honors English class and Rukiya without prompting helps clean up a little in the kitchen before she begins drawing with crayons in a spiral notebook. We talk about the books he has read this year and Mrs. Ahmed chimes in from time to time as she fries the falafel and prepares a noodle dish to compliment the fava beans and salad. More than an hour passes as we continue our animated discussion about the books we love and school in general. Everyone contributes at times, but no one abandons his or her main task of writing, organizing, drawing, or cooking. Amir shares his affinity for To Kill a Mockingbird and Rana shares how much she enjoys reading the Rick Riordan books. As it nears, 8:00 o’clock, Mrs. Ahmed packs up her fava bean dish and some falafel for me in Styrofoam boxes and the entire family walks with me down the stairs and out into the warm spring evening. I climb into my car and drive off, with the Ahmed family waving goodbye in my rearview mirror.

In this vignette, we begin to see how Mrs. Ahmed plants the seeds of success in her children. The subtly of her authority is an exemplar of authoritative parenting as she maintains high expectations for her children and establishes a routine that allows them to succeed without yielding and iron fist. The routine that is established is one in which schoolwork remains the priority, specifically, each child knows that they must meet at the kitchen table to finish their schoolwork as soon as they have showered, dressed, and
prayed. In fact, the routine is so well established that Mrs. Ahmed does not have to utter more than each child’s name in order to remind him/her of what is expected. And what she expects is that they will work hard in school and get a good education. She explains:

They come from school, take the shower, and eat…do their pray first, then come eat (a snack), and after that we set the table for more (work) so each one has his own chair that he knows. Everyone when he sits in his chair, it’s please, no talking. Only if you want to ask question or somebody to help you, and after we finish work…after they finish their homework, now they’re allowed to come with me and talk about what happened during the day, if they have any question about something else either their work or homework or the school. So we can have time for that.

As Mrs. Ahmed describes, their daily lives revolve around school and their schoolwork. She recognizes that this is “hard for them” but believes that this is the way they must live in order to succeed. She places the emphasis on school and tells her children, “no fun… I need you to work hard so you can get the opportunity in this country.”

However, Mrs. Ahmed is not overly controlling as she allows each child to take their time and work independently on their school assignments. Although, the expectations are very clear, schoolwork first:

When they come home, because they have been at daycare, so they start the homework there, and what they have left, they’re going to finish here, once we entered the home, they know. They go there to the bathroom, take their shower, pray, and come down, want to eat…Sometimes they say okay mommy, we are not
hungry. We cannot do that stuff until their dad coming so they sit at the table and during that time, they finish their homework. I stand in the kitchen preparing the food, and I’m watching them the same time they’re doing their homework.

Though there is a heavy emphasis on schoolwork, there is also time for fun in the Ahmed household, but the understanding is clear, there is a time for work and a time for play. In effect, play is the reward for hard work as Mrs. Ahmed describes:

When you go outside, you can have fun; you can play, and if you manage your time, you’re going to have time for each part of…so you can enjoy it because you start homework…you start, you go play and you still…you have homework. You play but your mind with the homework so finish first your homework and then go to play. So like that you can divide your time and you can enjoy it.

Although, Mrs. Ahmed insures that all schoolwork is completed, she does not check over her children’s work, she trusts that they are doing what needs to be done and her children give her no reason to question this trust as all four of them excel academically. Both Amir and Fatima are taking all the AP classes offered at their high school and Rana, who was identified gifted and talented by her elementary school, receives gifted programming for language arts and math. Overall, Mrs. Ahmed approves of her children’s performance in school sharing:

I’m satisfied because when I find my girl (Fatima) has advanced class, okay; I’m working in the right direction. So I can take the same tools and use this with the other ones. When I find them, every time we have awards at school, my kids usually have two or three awards. Yes, so that makes me happy. I say okay, now I
have something back. What I work for now, I plant and now I have to harvest nice stuff so that’s what always I think.

By establishing the expectation that schoolwork comes first, Mrs. Ahmed has prepared a fertile field for her children to grow and like the mother tree she towers above her saplings, modeling the work ethic needed to flourish.

**Perfect Is the Target**

Nearly twelve hours a day five days a week Mrs. Ahmed works at the Sunflower preschool and daycare. She rises early each morning to greet the children who arrive at 6:30 AM and is usually the last to leave in the evening at 6:30 PM. She and her business partner take turns checking children in, answering the telephone, cooking meals, substituting teaching, and attending to any and all administrative and financial matters. And as if Mrs. Ahmed wasn’t busy enough running the daycare, she is also the primary caregiver for her four children as her husband works even longer days. Generally, Mr. Ahmed makes sure that their four children get off to school and then drives to the grocery store where he works until at least 8:00 PM.

After school, Rana and Rukiya walk to meet their mom at the daycare where they stay until the preschool closes at 6:30 PM. The oldest children take the bus to the daycare as well, however, both Amir and Fatima are involved in afterschool activities and generally do not arrive at the daycare until later. Once they arrive, it is expected that they will have a quick snack and then get right to work on their homework in one of the empty classrooms and work until they are finished or it is time to go home, whichever occurs.
sooner. If the younger girls have activities afterschool, like Destination Imagination, than Mrs. Ahmed picks them up and brings them back to the daycare. While on the weekends, she and her husband take turns driving the children to any activities they may have.

The Ahmed family is also very involved in the local mosque and Islamic community. Most Sundays, the four Ahmed children attend school at the local Mosque where they learn Arabic and most Saturdays the family gets together with other Sudanese families for parties or to celebrate Islamic holidays. The weekends are also the time where the family does chores around the house. Mrs. Ahmed explains:

Saturdays they have their household stuff so Amir and Fatima, they have to do the laundry. I prepare the clothes in the basket so each one has his to go down to the laundry, and if they have some clothes need to iron, Amir and Fatima is their work. For cleaning the house, we divide it so each one has his own place to clean. We have Amir bathroom, Fatima’s with the cloth. Rukiya, she has to clean the table and put all the stuff and she help also. The girls (Rana and Fatima) help me in the kitchen especially during the weekend.

On the weekends, Mrs. Ahmed also does a great deal of cooking and prepping meals for the week ahead. She explains that she often spends Sundays prepping falafel batter and other noodle or bean dishes that she then stores in the refrigerator for easy reheating. Additionally, she makes delicious desserts that can be stored and served throughout the week. Many of these deserts resemble shortbread or baklava; the main difference being that the pastries Mrs. Ahmed makes are often filled or adorned with pistachios or cashew nuts.
In essence, Mrs. Ahmed never stops working. Her weekends are spent driving her children to their various activities, cooking food for special celebrations, or prepping for the week ahead. As a result, she consistently models for her children that in order to be successful you must work hard and be disciplined. In turn, Mrs. Ahmed’s children replicate these attributes working hard on their schoolwork during the week and helping around the house on the weekend.

In fact, the hard work and discipline equate to a level of perfectionism in the Ahmed family. This is a perfection that both she and her children recognize. Mrs. Ahmed explains:

I like everything perfect that’s what my kids say. Mommy wants everything perfect. Maybe I am like that because my parents taught us and our culture over there…you have to be responsible for the other. If you manage, you take the position, so I love everything to be perfect even for my children. I have the reward.

In this quote, we hear that Mrs. Ahmed believes that both her parents and her Sudanese culture taught her to strive for perfection and therefore she expects her children to strive for perfection as well, explaining further:

My kids now, always complain, mommy you want everything perfect, even my husband. I said yes, I love…since I’m little I love to organize everything. Even with my sister and brother, they always when we talk about or discuss the relation
between all the siblings, the first thing they’re concerned about…Mrs. Ahmed wants everything to be perfect.

Mrs. Ahmed extends this desire for organization in her life to her home, sharing, “This is our house. We have to do something. I said yes, you can do something. I need everything to be in its place.” However, it is important to note that Mrs. Ahmed equates perfection not with absolute precision, but with always aiming to do your best. As she explains:

My kids say mommy want everything perfect, and I said okay, if you set perfect as a target, you will be successful in your life…because when you say okay perfect is my target so you try your best to reach that…when Fatima change the bed, so if she puts the sheet and sometimes it’s like this, down, and so I say it’s not fixed good, and she said mom you want everything perfect. I say okay you put your target perfect and you work hard to reach that so you’re going to be a successful woman. Yeah, because if you just try for okay then you get okay, okay… you have to keep reminding them and especially this age, sometimes the age of teenagers…

Essentially, Mrs. Ahmed teaches her children to aim high and to work hard to reach their target. By encouraging perfection and holding high expectations, she instills self-efficacy, motivation, and perseverance in her children, three important achievement dispositions that research has found support talent development and overall achievement in gifted young people (Silverstein, 2000). According to the research, two important ways that parents develop these achievement orientated dispositions is by demonstrating a love of work and learning and showing that success takes a great deal sustained effort over a long
period of time (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001). This is exactly what Mrs. Ahmed models for her children by pursuing the opportunity to come to America, completing her childcare director certificate at the local community college, working hard to build and grow her daycare business all while raising her children and maintaining their home. Particularly, it is the way that Mrs. Ahmed promotes motivation by focusing on effort as opposed to innate ability that encourages the achievement disposition in her children.

Another way that Mrs. Ahmed nurtures motivation in her children is by having encouraging conversations with them. For example, she often asks her children if anyone else is getting better grades than them in class, “Does anybody have in your class? Why he can and you can’t?” She then responds by refocusing the responsibility back on her children and their effort, “You need to study. You need to because this is for your opportunity.” And when they lose motivation momentarily and feel like giving up saying, “Mommy it’s hard.” Mrs. Ahmed lectures:

Teenagers sometimes they say that they need to relax and I say… I say no... don’t spend your time watching movie and you have a test because there is time coming after test, please don’t let the other stuff interrupt your education. You have your life coming. When you finish your degree, you’re 25 or 27. You have your full life to do what you want.

Mrs. Ahmed’s lectures seem to be effective as all of her children work hard in school and have noble goals. Amir dreams of attending the University of Chicago and majoring in premed so that he can go to medical school. While, when asked what she wants to be when she grows up Rana replies, “a doctor,” grinning from ear to ear.
A final way that Mrs. Ahmed helps her children seek perfection is by teaching them how to keep organized and stay focused. Specifically, this can be seen in the routine followed by her children when they arrive at the daycare afterschool.

On a Thursday afternoon in late March, I arrive at the Sunflower preschool and daycare just before 4:00 PM. I park my car and notice that the parking lot of the strip mall is much busier this afternoon than in previous visits. People are coming and going from the tobacco store, nail salon, Chinese restaurant, and grocery store. I walk to the front door, listening to the cacophony of hammering and drilling coming from the empty storefront next door. It appears that construction workers have begun renovating the neighboring space for the daycare expansion project.

As I open the door and round the corner, Mrs. Ahmed and her partner are standing by the front desk offering a warm smile. I step aside to allow the mother who has followed me in to approach the desk and sign out her child. The noise of childhood mixed with machinery echoes off the walls as Mrs. Ahmed offers me a metal folding chair near the front desk to sit on, explaining that Rana will be just a few minutes. I sit and chat with her partner who shares, “It is spring break and two teachers are home sick!”

Sounds travel over the partial wall that separates the front desk from the four classrooms and I hear a variety of different aged children laughing, singing, playing, and shrieking. I listen as a woman’s voice comforts a whimpering child and the sound of a television program echoes. I wait while Mrs. Ahmed walks to the kitchen to prepare a snack for Rana and Rukiya, returning minutes later carrying two bowls of ice cream and explaining that Rana is in the bathroom and will be just a few more minutes.
Meanwhile, Amir arrives from track practice dressed in typical adolescent attire: a black and blue hooded sweatshirt, baggy jeans, and headphones. I greet him and we talk in the hallway and like a young tree branch laden with snow, he bows toward me sharing that school is going well and that he is running the 400M for his high school track team this spring. As always, he offers his words carefully. He excuses himself to go study and I take my seat again as Mrs. Ahmed calls, "Rana" and then opens the classroom door stating, “They are ready for you.”

I enter the second classroom to the left of the office and Rana and Rukiya are just sitting down at the table with their backpacks. They smile at me and we talk a little bit about school, but from the way they keep glancing down at their book bags, I can tell that they want to get to work. I encourage them to get started and not to let me keep them and they both immediately turn to their backpacks removing their binders.

Rukiya pulls out an Everyday Math worksheet about decimals and then unzips her pencil bag to remove a freshly sharpened pencil. She then begins scribbling away at her paper; while Rana carefully retrieves a reading comprehension worksheet from a folder and begins reading, pausing momentarily with her pencil resting on her lip before she answers each question. For the next 20 minutes, this is the way the sister’s work, each girl’s process mirroring her personality: Rukiya playful and energetic, Rana careful and meticulous.

In the room where they work, only a half wall separates them from the chaotic classroom next door, where kids of various ethnicities and ages are playing hand games, jumping rope, building with Lego’s, or watching a Disney movie. During this time, Rana
works on her homework, never looking up once, even as kids pass through the classroom to go to the bathroom, peek over the wall, or adults come to pick up their children. In fact, she is so focused on her work that she does not flinch even when Rukiya packs away her math worksheet, puts her binder back in her bag, stacks her chair, and heads next door to join in the fun.

Another 10 minutes pass and Rana finishes her reading worksheet, signaling that she is done by putting it away in her reading folder and taking out a fraction common denominator worksheet. Mrs. Ahmed walks in and asks Rana, "Where is Rukiya? She done?"

Rana responds, “She is done,” without even looking up or pausing her work. However, the verbal interruption does cause her to stop long enough to take a few bites of her ice cream snack that has almost completely melted in the bowl beside her.

After another 30 minutes, Rana puts her math worksheet away in her binder as I ask, "Who taught you to keep your binder so neat?"

Smiling she responds, "My mom."

She then stacks her chair and we walk back into the office area where Mrs. Ahmed asks Rana to give me a tour of the rest of the daycare center. As she leads me down the hallway toward the kitchen I ask her what she usually does when she finishes her work and she explains that she gets to play when she is done, but that she always saves her reading homework for when she gets home because it is too loud at the daycare to do her reading and reading log. We turn right down a shorter hallway that runs parallel
to the four classrooms and leads directly to two bathrooms with child-sized stalls and sinks.

We turn left and facing a set of double doors that open up to a fenced in outdoor play area, equipped with a small jungle gym, toy cars for driving, and a sandbox. We say hello to the two teachers, smiling beneath their hijabs, who are outside monitoring a group of multiage children.

We then turn back around and return to the front desk where Amir is sitting at the computer. I ask if he is doing homework and he explains that he is actually helping his mom type. I notice that he has a yahoo search engine up. I ask if they use the computer a lot for their homework and he replies, “Yes,” but Rana says, “Only sometimes, because they have a computer with Internet at home they can use also.”

I then offer to show Amir a few nonprofit organizations that offer college scholarships to students in Colorado. He sits at the computer, while I stand beside him telling him what to type into the search engine. Rana stands next to me listening intently to everything we say.

As we look at the eligibility requirements for one scholarship application, we see that the applicant must be a citizen of the United States and neither he nor I can remember if they are citizens yet. Just then, Mrs. Ahmed walks back into the office and I ask her and she answers emphatically, "Yes, since 2003." I then explain to her about the organizations that I am showing to Amir and she nods, smiles, and says, “Thank you.”

Subsequently, Mrs. Ahmed's partner comes down the hall, motioning that she needs to get into the office, saying, “"This is why we want a bigger office!" Amir and I
step into the hall and talk further about scholarships, course choices, AP tests, postdoctoral work, and medical internships. Rana continues to stand by soaking in everything we discuss as Mrs. Ahmed works the front desk, checking out children, and answering the telephone, which seems to ring incessantly. I look at my watch and realize that it is almost closing time for the daycare. Not wanting to disrupt their evening routine, I say goodbye to everyone and head back down the hallway to the front door.

In this vignette, we see that Mrs. Ahmed has taught her children how to be organized and how to stay focused. The organizational skills she has taught them is evident in the binders kept by Rana and Rukiya. Both girls retrieved and replaced their homework in a folder that corresponded with a specific academic subject area and each folder was labeled and clipped into the binder along with a matching notebook. Additionally, each girl had a pencil bag filled with sharpened pencils, erasers, and pens. However, most importantly, the girls maintained an organizational process in which they removed their homework from a folder, completed the assignment, and then replaced it in the same folder. This process was also repeated for each different assignment and when they were finally finished the binders were immediately returned to their book bags.

According to Rana, this is a process that Mrs. Ahmed has taught them and we can assume from the fact that the process is upheld that Mrs. Ahmed continually reinforces this procedure and/or checks in with the girls to make sure they are maintaining their organization.

We also see evidence of the focus Mrs. Ahmed has taught her children in the way that Rana and Rukiya sit amidst the noisy daycare environment and complete their
homework with little to no monitoring by their mother. It is obvious that Mrs. Ahmed has made her expectations clear to the girls and in turn, they have risen to the perfection she expects, learning to attend to their schoolwork first and foremost no matter the location. Additionally, the neatness and order of their work including their binders, folders, pencil cases, and book bags demonstrates the organizational skills Mrs. Ahmed has taught them and expects them to maintain as well.

In fact, it is remarkable how attentive and organized Rana is amidst the chaos. Remarkable enough, to remind us of Renzulli’s Three Ring Definition of Giftedness. Rana’s attention to her work accurately demonstrates what Renzulli titled Task Commitment, having a refined form of motivation that allows one to focus intently on tasks they deem important (Renzulli, 2005). Additionally, like Renzulli found in other creative-productive children, Rana also demonstrates the interrelated “clusters” of Creativity and Above Average Ability. Specifically, Rana’s above average ability or performance at the top 15-20% in both specific or general areas is validated in three ways: 1) her gifted and talented identification in reading and writing, 2) her placement in the gifted and talented math and literacy classes, and 3) her above average scores on the state’s and school district’s achievement tests (TCAP, NNAT, MAP). Her creativity, on the other hand, can be witnessed in the performances she creates at home and her participation in Destination Imagination.

The fact that Rana exhibits her creativity through performances is quite surprising seeing that Mrs. Ahmed describes her as reserved:
She is kind of the shy at home especially at home. All of us know she is like that. She’s shy. She does not talk a lot. I call her my catty because she walks so light here. Sometimes I didn’t hear her moving around, just like a cat.

Moreover, her identification as gifted and talented came as a surprise to Mrs. Ahmed as well, who shared that, “when Mrs. Alton tell me that she been chosen for that (identified Gifted and talented), I get surprised. So she has another side. I didn’t know this, but after that I try to…[pay attention].” And by paying attention, Mrs. Ahmed began to notice Rana’s creativity and leadership qualities:

Last Saturday, I was going down the basement to take something and I hear them (Rana, Rukiya, and their cousins) so I stand behind and I listen. She (Rana) made a program for them, like we’re going to do a fashion show. She tells what type of clothes, let’s see what the color for the year; I didn’t hear that before because I told you she’s shy. She manages the group. She puts the details, she tells them where, how to put everything. I didn’t know that she could do that. I immediately think about what her teacher said, Mrs. Alton.

Similarly, Rana has represented her school on a Destination Imagination team, allowing her creativity to flourish in the performances the team has written and staged. In essence, Rana is a gifted student who has a creative mind, above-average literacy skills, “a good imagination,” and leadership qualities. She is not the type of gifted child who seems to wear her intelligence on her sleeve, raising her hand, seeking adult attention, using a precocious vocabulary, or making mature jokes. Instead, she is stealth with her gifts, keeping them tucked up her sleeve, only revealing them to those who pay close attention.
Further, it seems that the apple did not fall far from the tree as Mrs. Ahmed displayed similar traits as a child:

I think she takes after me. She gets that from me because I love to read. When I was in elementary school, I write a play. So when my relative came we have a theater at home. We make a theater at home, and we play that, and also I have like…we call it in Sudan class magazine. So each class has its own magazine. Each week we have to publish a small magazine inside our class. As I told you at the laboratory school so we have that skill. So I’ve been the director for the class, I collect the pieces together and put the stuff; I publish that every week with my other friend.

This quote along with the biographical information provided earlier demonstrates what many gifted researchers have found, both heredity and environment influence intelligence. This is certainly the case in the Ahmed family as Mrs. Ahmed creates a home atmosphere that nurtures success while also displaying high intellectual capabilities herself with her electrical engineering degree, intense work ethic and perfectionism, and creative pursuits (painting, writing poetry, and making jewelry).

Essentially, Mrs. Ahmed has created a home environment that supports the academic achievement of her children by teaching them to strive for perfection in all that they do. She maintains high but realistic expectations and supports their academic pursuits by teaching them how to stay focused and organized. And last but not least, she uses encouraging conversations to motivate her children and provides the necessary parental and monetary support necessary to pursue their academic goals. We will now see
how Mrs. Ahmed has harvested these parenting practices from a garden planted in Sudan and nurtured in American soil.

**Take the Good From Both Sides and Make Our Own**

In 1998, Mrs. Ahmed and her husband immigrated to the United States because they believed it would offer greater opportunities for their children, however, many of the parenting beliefs and practices that have helped their children succeed in American schools are rooted in Sudanese soil and only cultivated in America. Foremost, is their belief that education is most important, Mrs. Ahmed explains:

In the Sudan community, the education is the first priority for every family because over there if you have good education, you’re going to have good job so you’re going to take care of your family, so usually in Sudan, education is a top priority for all families. Even we have some families who are from the original place who come to the capital because... Better schools...they leave their farm and they move here...You leave your farm; you leave your life. They said okay, my kids now.

In this quote, we hear Mrs. Ahmed explain how in Sudan many families believe that education is the most important goal for their children and they do everything they can to make sure that their children get the best education possible, even moving from the family farm to make sure their children receive the best schooling. Fundamentally, this is what Mr. and Mrs. Ahmed did in 1998, but on an even grander scale, immigrating to America for the sake of their children’s education. Although, many American families also consider the quality of the local schools when buying a home, there are still many
more American families who place equal or even greater emphasis on sports, music, dance, art, or other extracurricular activities that their children participate in besides school. And herein lies a subtle but very important difference, Mrs. Ahmed believes that “education is the first priority for every family” in Sudan, where in the United States education is important but “not always the only priority”. In the Ahmed family the belief is “Education comes first and everything (else) can come (after).” In fact, at one point I ask Mrs. Ahmed if she believes that her culture stresses the importance of education more than American culture and she responds:

Yeah, because you know what? In Sudan if you didn’t have good education, you didn’t have good life. Because you have good education, you can have good job so your family can benefit from that. Your kids benefit from that so the education is their first priority in Sudan.

The belief that education is the first priority seems to influence almost all of the parenting practices employed by Mrs. Ahmed. For example, Mrs. Ahmed limits the use of technology during the week. She does not allow any of her children to watch television shows Monday through Thursday and her oldest children are only permitted to use their cell phones for important matters. As she explains:

Yeah, during the week, we have limit. During week…only on the Friday night, they can watch their favorite show or movie. The phone only Amir and Fatima has phone, almost like a phone for emergency so not doing your homework and send message to your friends is not going to be…Not texting during… homework time. You finish your homework; if there is something necessary you can text.
You have been with your friends at the school so now you focus on your homework; focus on the family issue when you come home. As we hear in this quote, limiting the use of technology is a practice rooted in the belief that education comes first and therefore anything that might get in the way is not permitted.

Another important parenting belief rooted in Mrs. Ahmed’s Sudanese upbringing is her belief that everyone must treat each other with respect. Mrs. Ahmed details:

From my home culture, the first thing is respect. You have to respect each other at home. That’s what I said. Now when they fight I say okay respect first and then we can talk about what difference was going on. They fight on the clothes, they fight on the book, I say okay you respect. You are not raising your voice. Respect each other, listen to each other and after that, we can solve the problem. Specifically, in this quote we hear that Mrs. Ahmed believes respect is communicating with each other and making sure that you are listening and sorting out your disagreements in a thoughtful and constructive way. She also believes that respect extends outside of the family and she teaches her children to be respectful of all people:

So for my kids, the first thing when we see that talk at the meeting or we have to talk about something. I said, the first thing you have to believe that all people are equal and you have to respect each other, and we have to deduce people not with their color, not with their religion, (but) how they deal with us, so we do the same.
Essentially, Mrs. Ahmed educates her children to be good students as well as good people. She wants them to respect others and to make a positive contribution to the world.

The Islamic religion is another key aspect of Mrs. Ahmed’s parenting that comes from her Sudanese heritage. In fact, Mrs. Ahmed’s Islamic faith seems to intertwine with her beliefs about education to create an academic home environment that supports achievement by teaching discipline. Specifically, Islam teaches discipline in the way that Rana and her siblings are expected to pray five times each day and to fast during the month of Ramadan, practices that Mrs. Ahmed requires:

We have to pray five times a day. We all practice and we have our holy months; Ramadan we have to fast for 30 days. That’s for women when they…for their boys and girls when they turn to be men and women, they have to do that. Before that just practice…like Rana she practices in the weekend because you stay home so she can practice from the sunrise to sunset. So sometimes like 14 hours, you fast 12 hours end of the time because that’s related to the moon calendar.

In addition to the praying and fasting, the Ahmed children attend Islamic classes at the local Mosque most Saturdays and Sundays for two hours each day. It is at these classes that Rana and her siblings learn about Islam and how to read and write in Arabic while also connecting with extended family members and good friends. And so it is that on the weekends the focus shifts momentarily away from school and toward religion and family.

I arrive at Mrs. Ahmed’s house on a sunny Sunday morning in May. Over the phone Mrs. Ahmed had mentioned that her children would be at the Mosque for their
Arabic classes when I came for my visit, but in fact their classes were canceled today and so, after ringing the doorbell, Rana greets me.

Walking past the kitchen and through the dining room, I notice that the house is clean and orderly, every item in its place like in previous visits and as I enter the living room, sun burst through the large picture window spilling onto the floor. I take a seat on one of the three couches that sits in a u shape around the coffee table. As I sit I see that the coffee table holds trays filled with homemade butter cookies and nuts that are covered with the same delicate cloths Mrs. Ahmed embroidered for her wedding day. As I take a seat, Rana sits down next to me on the couch holding a soft cloth that she is using to help her mother clean around the house. We chat for a few minutes mostly about her spring break. She shares that she and Rukiya had mostly stayed home to watch their grandma and had slept over their cousin’s house two times. She tells me that her favorite part of spring break was that her mom had bought some new books for the daycare that Rana enjoyed reading. After five minutes or so, Rana excuses herself to continue her chores, replacing an empty tissue box beneath one of the lacey cloth coverings that serves as a tissue box holder, before she heads up stairs to continue her dusting.

As Rana departs, Rukiya comes down the stairs and takes her place on the couch holding a pink stuffed Tasmanian devil that she won at a local arcade over break. She and I sit discussing school, while Mrs. Ahmed works in the kitchen making coffee. Before long, I hear another, slower set of footsteps coming up from the basement as an older woman wearing a hijab around her caramel colored skin walks into the room. As she
enters, Mrs. Ahmed comes back into the living room and introduces the woman as her mother-in-law who is visiting from Sudan. I introduce myself and she smiles as we shake hands, nodding her head in acknowledgement because she speaks little English.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ahmed explains that her husband’s mother and father are visiting the United States for a couple months and will be staying downstairs in the basement guestroom for a month. As quietly as she appeared, the mother-in-law excuses herself as Mrs. Ahmed addresses Rukiya in Arabic, prompting her to leave the room and head up stairs, presumably to complete her chores.

Mrs. Ahmed momentarily walks back into the kitchen to retrieve a tray carrying traditional Sudanese coffee that she pours into tiny delicate china cup and places on a saucer. She shows me the traditional metal coffee-serving pitcher and explains that drinking coffee is a very social and daily occurrence in Sudan as she serves us I notice that this time her fingertips are painted with what looks like henna. I ask her if it is henna and she replies, “Yes,” taking off her shoes to show me that the tops of her feet are painted as well for a friend’s wedding celebration. She then takes a seat on the adjacent couch, placing the tray on the coffee table and uncovering the nuts and pastries. I take one of the desserts made with wheat flour, coconut oil, and sugar from the tray and place it on my napkin as we begin our interview.

About ten minutes into the interview, Fatima arrives home, ringing the doorbell to be let in. Mrs. Ahmed excuses herself and goes to unlock the door as Fatima, who is wearing a reddish hijab, bursts into the room, seemingly unaware of my presence. She chatters away in English like a happy typewriter, explaining to her mom that at the
Mosque she heard that someone’s mother had died and that she wished to go with her mother to the house to visit with the family…On and on she goes until Mrs. Ahmed finally laughs, nods her head yes, and says something to Fatima in Arabic that seems to appease her. At last, Fatima notices me and smiles. She shakes my hand as Mrs. Ahmed introduces us and then quickly heads up stairs to help her siblings with the chores. As she departs, Mrs. Ahmed shares that Fatima had been at the Mosque helping paint new classrooms for the religious school. As she explains this, I hear a vacuum running on the second floor in one of the three bedrooms that the family shares: Rana and Amir in one room, Fatima and Rukiya in the other, and Mr. and Mrs. Ahmed in the master bedroom. We continue on with our interview, enjoying the coffee and snacks, until sometime later, when Amir comes down from upstairs to say hello.

As Amir and I talk, I hear what sounds like Al Jazeera rising up from the basement where Mrs. Ahmed’s in-laws are staying. Amir walks with me into the kitchen where Mrs. Ahmed is packing some fresh falafel and pastries in a Styrofoam container for me to take home, explaining that she had done all of her cooking for the week this morning and that there is plenty to share. She places the goodies in a plastic bag and walks with me out the door and down to my car, where we wave goodbye.

In this scene, we see how the Ahmed family turns their focus inward on the weekend, spending time together at home or at the Mosque. Specifically, Mrs. Ahmed shares and I witness that the family cooks, completes chores, attends classes/events at the Mosque, and eats traditional meals together on the weekends. Further, Mrs. Ahmed explains that on Sunday, she likes to serve a traditional meal around 3:00 PM, the time in
Sudan when the largest meal of the day is typically served. She shares:

Usually during the weekend, I prefer to eat culture food. We have our main dish usually…because we have no lunch, but between lunch and dinner…back home around 3 o’clock so we have main dish we call kisra. That’s like a tortilla. We make it at home with…a special sauce, make some type of ground beef, sometimes okra, sometimes okra mix. I did okra mixed with spinach for this week so this is going to be the main dish. I love always during the weekend [to eat a traditional meal].

However, on Friday or Saturday night the family will typically try cooking something different like Mexican or Chinese food. In fact, cooking is one activity that the family enjoys together. Mrs. and Mr. Ahmed will typically ask their children, “What would you like (to cook)?” and then they will make it together. Mrs. Ahmed details:

Last week they said we need Chinese food so we cooked Chinese food…sometime Mexican food, yeah, Tortilla and the beans and all that stuff and sometime different…the recipe from the Internet. They bring it out and say mom this is the recipe to try. We all together in the kitchen. We started doing that together.

As Mrs. Ahmed details, cooking is one way that the family spends time together on the weekend along with doing household chores, which from the smiles I see during my visit seems to be less of a chore and more of an activity that the children do together to benefit the family.
Religion, the other main focus we see in the above vignette, is also something that the family participates in together. On the weekends, all of the children attend classes at the Mosque where they learn, “the holy book and Arabic,” while Mrs. Ahmed and her husband attend lectures or “open day,” which is when, “They ask everyone to bring some dish and they sit together, eat, and talk about what’s going on.” Additionally, the children often participate in community service at the Mosque, “They go volunteer to clean the Mosque. They are fixing, cleaning, all that stuff,” as Fatima had been doing in the above scene. Essentially, in the Ahmed family, the focus on the weekends becomes more about spending time together, doing tasks that help the whole family, and practicing/learning about Islam. This is very different than the focus during the week when almost all of the family’s time and energy is devoted to work and school.

Ultimately, what we see in the Ahmed family is a perfect blending of parenting practices and beliefs that are rooted in Sudanese soil, but nurtured within the American parenting culture. From Sudan, Mrs. Ahmed brings her beliefs that education and respect are most important and waters them with the discipline taught by Islam. She then plants these in the more “democratic” American soil, which allows her children the freedom and autonomy to express their opinions and feelings. Mrs. Ahmed describes the way she has blended both cultures together in her parenting, stating:

I want them to take the important stuff from this culture and the important stuff from my teaching and mix it together. Yes, I always tell them that. Yeah, even in my culture I have some stuff I didn’t like it. That system you have to take it or leave it, and also here in the United States they have some culture we didn’t like
it, so what we have to say take the good things from both sides and make our own one.

Additionally, Mrs. Ahmed shares how when she first came to the United States she received some valuable advice:

When I first came from Alabama I had a teacher come to my house. With our conversation I thought she said, you know what you’re lucky. I said why is it? Because you come with different culture, and you know which one kind we used here, and you can take from this culture and mix it together, and this mix is going to help your children to be different, and always having understanding. I always remember how well, and I notice that.

And as we see above, this is exactly what Mrs. Ahmed has done. She has mixed together the best of both cultures to create a home environment that encourages her children to succeed academically, but also to have their own voice.

**Learn From Kids and Listen to Them**

In June for our final interview, Mrs. Ahmed proposes that I bring Griffin along to the daycare so that he can play while we talk. So a little before 11:00 AM on a bright and sunny Thursday morning, Griffin and I drive the short distance to the Sunflower Preschool and Daycare. Parking the car, I unbuckle Griffin from his car seat and together we walk holding hands across the parking lot. The bells ring as we enter and Mrs. Ahmed greets us at the end of the hallway wearing her traditional attire, only this time, teal accents are present in both her hijab and her long dress.
Immediately, Mrs. Ahmed bends down so that she is on eye level with Griffin. She then asks him if he wants to play and when he nods his head yes, she ushers him down the hall to the right and into the bathroom to wash his hands. I follow them into the bathroom and watch as she helps him turn on the water, squeeze soap into his hands, and trigger the motion controlled paper towel dispenser. I intervene momentarily just to keep him from grabbing excess paper towel from the machine and to help him dry his hands thoroughly. Mrs. Ahmed then leads back into the hallway where she opens a closed door bearing a sign that reads, “All staff and children must wash their hands.” The door opens into a colorful preschool classroom with child size furniture and a variety of play areas: a kitchen, painting easels, dress up clothes, etc. In the middle of the classroom, stands a tan skinned brunette woman wearing a black hijab over khaki pants and a bright knit long sleeve shirt. On the carpet in front of her sit various shades of two and three year-old children with their hands folded and their legs crossed. The teacher immediately comes over to greet Griffin as Mrs. Ahmed explains that he will be joining the class for a little while. The teacher smiles and spreads her arms, telling him that they were just getting ready for free playtime. Griffin seems comfortable to go play and so Mrs. Ahmed and I exit. Mrs. Ahmed leads me to the closet where we grab metal chairs and move them into the hallway to sit and talk. But before the interview starts, Mrs. Ahmed excuses herself as the sound of an upset child can be heard coming up and over the partial wall of the Pre-K classroom. She rises from her chair and enters the classroom. Through the door, I can hear her helping a teacher calm down a boy who seems angry, tired, or upset. I listen as she remains calm using a soothing voice. And although I cannot see, I imagine that she is
kneeling down in front of him, possibly lifting his chin with her hand to help him make eye contact, while she lets him speak.

Allowing children to have a voice and to be heard is a parenting practice I witness Mrs. Ahmed use countless times with her children. In this vignette, we see that this is in fact a practice that she uses with all children. From the first moment she meets my son, she bends down and looks him in the eye, conveying the message that she respects him and that she will listen to him. And although a wall prevents us from seeing if she does the same with the boy who is upset in the Pre-K classroom, I do hear her use a calm and soothing voice, which conveys the same message of respect. The practice of listening to and making eye contact with children both young and old is one that Mrs. Ahmed speaks about on multiple occasions, sharing, “The eye contact’s the most important. Because it makes you pay attention, when you have eye contact, so I love that here (in the United States) because I think they (children) have to do that.” She goes on to explain that this practice stands in stark contrast to what is considered appropriate in Sudan:

Eye-to-eye conversation is not acceptable back in our culture, but here it is acceptable, and I think they benefit because when I talk, I learned that from, especially from my work… and from the classes I used to have in ECE that the most important thing is eye-to-eye conversation… because especially for the children they focus; they understand what you say because they focus when you talk eye-to-eye, but in our country this is disrespect. All the people are taught you have to lower your eyes and don’t raise your voice and that. I think that shows some respect because the culture has that so we
cannot tell them to change that, but the kids going to benefit more especially at the small age when we talk eye-to-eye, that’s the focus, and when I go back and search in Prophet Mohammed Allah and he would tell them he’s saying that now keep on and the people has to teach it to the next generation. He has said…he said when you talk to your kids or when you talk to small kid, try to let them focus. Look to their eyes. Touch their hands so they can feel comfortable. Touch their head. They feel comfortable and pay more attention to you.

Here, Mrs. Ahmed details that children are not permitted to make eye contact with elders in Sudan because it is seen as disrespectful. Additionally, she explains that she has embraced this American parenting practice and believes that the Prophet Mohammed would endorse this practice as well. Specifically, she details that in studying Mohammed’s original teachings she has found discrepancies between his beliefs and the way many Muslims parent their children today:

When we go back to the first…original teachings, it’s very different from now they practice. Even I talk with my dad because he has PhD in education and he said yes in education when you have to educate someone especially the small kids, first you have to let them feel comfortable, yeah, so they can pay attention to what you say, how you make them more comfortable, look to their eyes, touch their hands or their heads so they feel that you a person that they can trust so they can take your word, and that’s what the prophet said, and I don’t know why now we go away from that.
The interaction between adult and child that we hear Mrs. Ahmed describe in this quote is what researchers would categorize as an authoritative style of parenting because the adult is warm and responsive, but also maintains clear standards for appropriate behavior. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that Mrs. Ahmed has easily adopted the American parenting practices of making eye contact and listening to children most likely because her own parents used a more authoritative style of parenting to raise her and her siblings:

I’m lucky because my dad has good education, and he went in that field. He made many decisions I feel, and I told them that when my dad raised me, he’s a similar like here. He taught us to talk, to look at us. If there was something going on in the house, he sit with us and tell us there is so and so and so, I want your opinion before I decide what I have to do so I have that opportunity that my dad taught.

Another authoritative parenting strategy that Mrs. Ahmed uses today and that her parents utilized when raising their children in Sudan is allowing for “open discussions.” Below, Mrs. Ahmed describes how her parents allowed for “open discussions” in their family unlike most other Sudanese families:

In our culture, as I grow…this not happen to me but I notice my other part of family, my cousin (s), they have no open discussion with their children. In our culture, that assumes disrespect. You have to obey all the time. I didn’t like that. You have to have time to discuss, to tell your idea, but as the way I was raised because my dad has good education so usually if there is anything that happen with the family or they have to have a discussion for anything, they ask us to sit
and have family meeting, discuss all things. Everyone have his idea. Who agrees with it? Who not? So I grow in a family like that, but I notice my uncle’s family, my aunt, my relative, they didn’t have that…even sometimes when we sit like…when I’m a teenager with my peers …my cousins and talk about that, they say you have to appreciate what you have.

As we hear in this quote, Mrs. Ahmed’s parents used the authoritative practice of open discussions with their children, which in turn taught their children to express their opinions respectfully while also promoting the positive psychological dispositions of autonomy, self-regulation, and cooperation. This being the opposite of most Sudanese parents, who as Mrs. Ahmed explains, use more authoritarian styles of parenting, expecting their orders to be obeyed without question and monitoring their children closely with a rigid, harsh, and demanding presence. Naturally, we can only assume that Mrs. Ahmed’s experience growing up in a home that supported open discussions has led her to easily adopt the authoritative parenting style predominantly used in America and other western countries. Below, Mrs. Ahmed reflects on how she has embraced the warmth and responsive style of many American parents, specifically the practice of allowing children to speak openly and express their opinions:

So this is most important here. I think that especially for the Middle East that Africa we have learned that parents have to be open, have to let their children talk, and share and make a family decision and even if they are small. I know and they just started life but sometimes they have idea better than us… when you give him opportunity to explain himself to make a decision, that make him to grow
positive I think. He can stand up for his rights. Yeah, he can raise his voice and say no, I didn’t like that. I wish that and that habit so he has his own opinion, not be the follower.

Furthermore, Mrs. Ahmed not only allows her children to have a voice, but also tries to learn from them as well, as she details:

Also, the second thing is the language. Even if we talk the language you see we have accent. But still we have limited resources, not like them (Mrs. Ahmed’s children) because now they cite society more than us, so they have more idea about what’s going around because sometimes they come home and said, did you hear that and I said what. So and so happened…where, I didn’t see. Okay let’s go to the computer, see mommy this happened here, this happened here. This has to be there. So when we sit down and talk about that, not only the kids’ benefit, I benefit also too. I know (being) this way helps them here. (Her children say) Mommy, Americans they are not doing so and so, and so if you do that, they think you are so and so. When I go to any place, I remember okay I have to do that because it’s acceptable here, may be acceptable back home but here is not acceptable. I think this (about) most things. The most important opportunity we have here as a migrant, as the first generation because they are…I call them second generation because they’ve been here…So the people who came out here or migrated here, they have background filled with what we have (seen) from the media about America, but our children because they’ve been in the society, they’re exposed to the culture more than us, the culture here. They know what (is)
different and they can guide us also, so this is going to be nice opportunities for us to sit and discuss with them all the time and listen from them, learn from them. Not only we tell them to do so and so, we give them chance to talk about themselves, about their ideas, make their own decision. We just have to help.

This practice of learning about a new culture from your children is one well documented in prior research investigating the parenting practices of immigrants. As Mrs. Ahmed describes here, her children often teach her about acceptable customs and traditions in America. Researchers Ochocka and Janzen, refer to this practice as “reversal of power” in which children speak better English than their parents, make more demands, and express their views in ways they had not done previously (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). However, the reversal of power in the Ahmed family is by no means viewed in a negative light most likely because Mrs. Ahmed was raised in a home where children were respected and listened to. Hence, she maintains the same open lines of communication with her children and in fact encourages them to share their opinions with her.

However, Mrs. Ahmed does recognize that if she were raising her children in Sudan she would have to “limit” her current parenting practices to use inside the home as making eye contact and allowing for open discussion with adults is not permitted there. Mrs. Ahmed reflects on how she would have to parent in Sudan, “It’s not going to be that different but also is going to be limit[ed] because over there I have my culture and also my society have more for me or tied me down than here.” In this quote, Mrs. Ahmed implies that not only would her parenting be different, but her life as a woman would be
as well. We can only assume that she means living in America has allowed her greater freedom and opportunities in her professional and familial roles.

Later, I ask Mrs. Ahmed if her husband has a similar open parenting style, as his work schedule did not allow me the opportunity to observe him. She shared that at first he did not, but living in the United States has led him to embrace a more authoritative style as well:

He’s open but not as much as us (Mrs. Ahmed and her parents), yeah, but when we came here and we see what’s going around us, so we see like programs so we need to raise our kids the positive way so we took from the American culture what make us satisfied, and take from us what we make us satisfied with our kids to be healthy kids.

Again in this quote, we hear how Mrs. and Mr. Ahmed try to combine the American parenting practices they feel are good with the positive practices they have brought with them from Sudan. Mrs. Ahmed refers to this combining of cultures as a “change” that happens when you move to a new country. A change that she views has been for the better:

There is some change happen in your life. That’s what happened to me. I learn more how to be patient to listen to my kids. I learn more about to give them time so they can discuss the stuff with me and I’ll say no, I say that so, it’s final. No, I give him that space.

And this is certainly what we see, Mrs. Ahmed has high expectations of her children, but by using an authoritative style of parenting, she allows them the autonomy necessary to
develop the key psychological dispositions of self-efficacy and motivation that many
gifted individuals demonstrate. Essentially, Mrs. Ahmed teaches her children to strive for
perfection and to stay focused and organized by using routine, discipline, and
encouraging conversations, while also allowing them the freedom to have their own
opinions and make their own decisions:

When they start to choose their classes, I didn’t choose for them. I tell them this is
the classes and see what you like because if I force you to take AP biology and
you didn’t interest in that, so you’re not going to study and I said okay mommy I
didn’t like that but you forced me so the choice…give them the choice and
advice… I think because if you force them and they do something they didn’t like
because of you, they cannot succeed but if you give them some advice, like Rana
has said mom I’m going to work for a newspaper. I want to be a reporter. I said
okay though you don’t talk a lot, okay. So it’s important that somebody love to
talk and somebody like to…not be shy but be outgoing, not like you so think
about something else. Think about what you like. If you like to write, if you like
math, if you like something…

Only time will tell what career Rana will ultimately pursue, but whatever she does we can
be certain that she will have chosen it herself and received the guidance and support
necessary from her parents and academic home environment to succeed.
Chapter Eight: Analysis and Implications

From the outset, the purpose of this study was to illuminate the parenting practices and beliefs used by immigrants raising academically achieving gifted children. Through the literature review, we learned that the academic achievement of white middle class children in the United States is positively related to an authoritative parenting style operating within home environments that maintain specific parental attitudes, expectations, behaviors, and interactions. Additionally, the literature review disclosed that similar parenting beliefs and strategies are employed in homes where white middle class parents raise gifted children, as these parents generally allow for autonomy, provide parental support, maintain high expectations, encourage specific dispositions like intrinsic motivation, act as first teacher, value learning, and interact verbally with the child from a young age. However, the literature review also revealed that less was known about successful parenting practices and beliefs for diverse ethnic groups, especially immigrants. Moreover, studies that looked specifically at immigrants raising academically achieving gifted children were few and far between, which provided a rationale for this study.

Using the methodology of portraiture, chapters four through seven captured the experiences of four immigrant families raising at least one academically successful gifted child in suburban Denver, Colorado. Specifically, each portrait unveiled the parenting
practices and beliefs of these immigrants by focusing on the following research questions:

• What are the cross-cultural parenting practices of immigrants raising academically achieving gifted children in the United States?

• What role do these parenting practices play in nurturing the academic success of gifted children?

• What cross-cultural beliefs guide the parenting practices of these immigrants? How do these beliefs nurture academic success?

• How do the traditional values of the country of origin influence the cross-cultural parenting practices and beliefs?

• What implications, if any, can be drawn in order that immigrant parents can effectively foster the academic achievement of their gifted children?

The portraits convey meaningful themes - “Sometimes It Is Just a Part of the Story,” “Doing the Best You Can,” “Promoting the Good,” “I Plant and Now I Harvest” - themes that illuminate the parent’s beliefs and practices that nurture the academic achievement of their gifted children and also the influential role of traditional values. In this final chapter, the reader will find that my analysis is unconventional in the sense that the themes contribute meaning as well as supplying scaffolding for the paper. In fact, each of the four themes serves as a supporting beam that buttresses the key sections of this chapter, whereupon I answer each of my research questions. In other words, the themes offer insight into the research questions, while also providing the final chapter with the initial structure needed to ultimately build the case for my most important findings (i.e., Appendix C).
To date, many parents, educators, and researchers alike are unaware of the educational home environments and parenting taking place in immigrant homes that successfully support the academic success of gifted youth. Given that the immigrant population in the United States has seen a dramatic increase over the past few decades, it is necessary for the greater educational community to develop a better understanding of how immigrants are supporting the academic achievement of their gifted children. From these portraits, immigrants raising gifted children in the United States, as well as researchers studying giftedness and educators teaching gifted immigrants, will have a better understanding of the cross-cultural parenting belief and practices employed in immigrant homes and the influential role of traditional values.

In this final chapter, I first investigate the similarities and differences in parenting illuminated in the four portraits. In particular, my analysis focuses on the parenting belief and practices that appear to cross cultural boundaries, meaning that the same belief and practices resonate in all four of the portraits despite the fact that the families have emigrated from diverse countries of origin. Next, I explore the ways in which the cross-cultural parenting belief and practices nurture the academic success of each gifted child. Finally, I examine how the traditional values of the country of origin influence the belief and practices, while also detailing my concept of a Bicultural Academic Home Environment. The reader will find that the analysis builds upon itself and ultimately highlights the most significant findings or big idea of this research paper, which emerge from the portraiture data (i.e. Appendix C).

Central to this overall analysis are the four major themes - “Sometimes It Is Just a Part of the Story,” “Doing the Best You Can,” “Promoting the Good,” “I Plant and Now I
Harvest.” Although, each portrait is characterized by a particular theme, this analysis shows how each theme is in fact relevant to all four of the portraits as together they encapsulate the cross-cultural parenting belief and practices of these four families and the influential role of traditional values. Additionally, my theoretical framework - based upon previous research done on parenting for academic achievement, parenting and home environments of gifted and talented children and immigrant parenting practices - is used to further analyze the portraiture data and to illustrate how theory can provide insight into the participant’s parenting. At the same time, I examine how data from these portraits enrich and extend existing theory.

The chapter ends with an examination of how the portrait themes might resonate with recent immigrant parents living in the United States who seek to foster the academic achievement of a gifted child. Also, I explore the implications of these themes for researchers studying giftedness and educators teaching gifted immigrants.

**Education Takes Precedence: A Cross-Cultural Parenting Belief of Immigrants**

**Raising a Gifted Child in America**

“I Plant and Now I Harvest” is a theme that flows throughout all four of the portraits presented in this study. We first hear the phrasing in Mrs. Ahmed’s portrait when she speaks of how her children take the most advanced classes and receive academic accolades at school award ceremonies. On a metaphorical level, “I Plant and Now I Harvest” expresses how Mrs. Ahmed has planted her children amongst her parenting beliefs, used her parenting practices to nurture them, and in turn harvested academically achieving gifted children. From this simple phrase emerges an extended metaphor that encapsulates the unified parenting belief exhibited in the four immigrant
homes. Let us now explore how this extended metaphor resonates with all of the families in this study.

At the literal root of the statement “I Plant” lies the one and all important cross-cultural parenting belief which each parent embraces in this study: education takes precedence. In the opening portrait, we observe how education is always the first priority in the Chang home. Lily spends the majority of her time in the family’s office working on school assignments that are often not due to be handed in for another week. We also witness a short but significant exchange between Lily and Ann regarding a play date, where Ann clearly shows that education comes first by telling Lily she must finish her schoolwork on a Friday night before her friend can come over. The importance of education is further supported by the fact that Ann has sought out the best schools for Lily, open enrolling her in the neighboring school district and driving lengthy distances to ensure she receives the best education. Later, we discover that the Changs’ belief about education stems from the tough reality they faced living in China; a reality in which education was the only way out of poverty. Further, we find that the emphasis on education in the Chang family extends even beyond the typical school day as Lily attends Chinese school on the weekends and Ann hires a summer tutor to improve Lily’s English language skills. Ann’s beliefs that education is the first priority manifests itself directly in her children’s behavior as Alex and Lily work incredibly hard in school to achieve at the highest academic levels.

The same can be seen and heard in chapter five as Alice stresses with her children from an early age that, “homework is not optional.” In fact, it is the number one priority, “you come back from school you have your snack; you do your homework, that’s it.” We
witness this routine repeatedly in the Benoit home: Emma and Julian come home from school, eat snack, and then get right to work on their homework at the kitchen table. Alice has chosen to be a stay at home mom so that she can make sure her children get all the support they need to do well in school; Her most important job shift starts on weekdays at 3:00 PM when she picks up her children from school, takes them home, and supervises homework completion. And like Ann, Alice also seeks out the best schools for her children and drives up to two hours each day so that they can receive the best possible education. This belief shows itself during Julian’s middle school crisis when he fails to turn in 15 assignments. Alice and Jon’s four-step response to Julian’s slipup reflects the importance that they attach to education.

Similarly, in chapter six, Sunil and Suma speak often about the importance of education, expressing that everything is “secondary compared to a kid’s education,” something they make sure Shana understands, by telling Shana “education takes precedence over anything else.” Of course, statements like these are not the only evidence of this belief in the Rangan home as Suma and Sunil, like Ann and Alice, have researched the best schools in the area, open enrolling Shana in the neighboring school district for both elementary and middle school. Similar to Alice, Suma has also chosen not to work so that she can provide Shana all the support she needs to excel in school.

Further evidence of this belief is apparent in the ways that Suma supports Shana’s schoolwork on a daily basis, taking her to the library and generally keeping track of when her assignments are due. Additionally, the small act of driving 20 minutes to and from school, when a neighborhood school is 5 minutes away, demonstrates that education is the number one priority in the Rangan home.
The importance of education is also apparent in chapter seven, where we learn that Mrs. Ahmed and her husband actually chose to leave their family and home country in order to pursue a better education for their children. However, the Ahmeds, like the other families in this study, do not seem to think of their great efforts to pursue a better education for their children as a sacrifice; but as their duty, believing it is their responsibility to provide their children with the best education possible. Mr. and Mrs. Ahmed work long hours to provide the resources necessary for their children, while at the same time finding a way to supervise their children’s academics. The result is a home environment where going to school and completing schoolwork defines the family’s daily schedule. Rana and her siblings know when they arrive at the daycare after school that they must start working on their homework immediately. They also know that anything that they do not complete must be finished at home after they pray, shower, and change their clothes. During my visits, my casual conversations with the children always turned to schoolwork, classes, books being read, summer school, or applying for scholarships. It appeared as if there was nothing else worth talking about as education takes precedence over everything else.

Thus, we see how each of the families believes that education is most important above all else. In particular, we observe how this belief manifests in the ways in which the parents seek out the best educational opportunities for their child, travel great distances for their child to attend the best schools, require homework to be completed first and foremost, supervise the completion of homework, and emphasize the importance of getting a good education in conversations with their child. In turn, this belief nurtures academic success in the gifted children by fostering what previous research by Campbell
and Verna (2007) identified as “Academic Home Climates.” According to Campbell and Verna, “Academic Home Climates” mirror the environments found in schools and emerge only where effective parenting is present. Specifically, these “Academic Home Climates” support attitudes, beliefs, and motivations that lead to higher achievement. However, as I will explore later in this chapter, the concept of “Academic Home Climates” does not adequately capture all that is going on in these immigrant homes as traditional values from the countries of origin also play a significant role. Though, given what we have discussed thus far, the term “Academic Home Climates” will suffice, as it adequately defines the academic aspect of the environment present in each home.

The way in which parental beliefs influence academic achievement also resonates with the research of Hess and Holloway (1984) who found a link between family and school success when parents expect achievement from their child and maintain certain beliefs and attributions about the child. Clearly, the research of both Campbell and Verna (2007) and Hess and Holloway emphasize the idea that parental beliefs impact the academic achievement of gifted children; however, neither study seems to specify what these parenting beliefs might be, the assumption being that parents hold “beliefs” about academics and achievement, which in turn foster higher academic performance. Through the portraits in this study, a specific belief (education takes precedence) emerges from the observation and interview data giving the reader a concrete example of how parental beliefs may nurture greater academic performance. In particular, below I explain how this specific belief maintains a structural connection with the academic success of the gifted children in this study as it provides the foundation for the immigrants’ five cross-cultural parenting practices. This belief alone does not foster the academic home environment; we
will now look at the cross-cultural parenting practices, which surface from the portraits and how they nurture the academic achievement of the gifted children.

**Five Cross-Cultural Parenting Practices of Immigrants Raising an Academically Achieving Gifted Child**

Returning to our themes, let us now explore “Doing the Best You Can.” This theme expresses how each parent is quite simply doing their best to raise academically achieving gifted children by employing five specific parenting practices. As we look at these five practices, listen for how the theme “Doing the Best You Can” resonates throughout the description of each practice as all of the parents are essentially trying their best to use strategies that will nurture their gifted child toward academic achievement.

**Using an Authoritative Parenting Style: High Expectations, Priorities, Routine, Diligence, and Warmth.**

Research on parenting that supports academic achievement focuses on the effectiveness of an authoritative parenting style. As reviewed in chapter two, Diana Baumrind (1967; 1968; 1991) concluded in her seminal research studies that an authoritative parenting style supports competent children, while subsequent research found that an authoritative style is also positively correlated with academic achievement and higher cognitive abilities within Caucasian families and white families raising gifted children, whereas permissive and authoritarian parenting styles are found to be negatively correlated (Baumrind, 1968; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, & Evans, 2006; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Chao, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Rudasil, Adleson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg,
Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Moreover, the impact of authoritative parenting on non-white youth is less significant and in fact, minorities living in the United States often report higher levels of authoritarian parenting (Steinberg, et al., 1992; Dornbusch, et al., 1987). This, in particular, is a finding worth noting as below I will detail how the portraits in this study present evidence to the contrary: minorities using an authoritative parenting style to raise their children in America.

We find evidence of authoritative parenting in every portrait presented in this study as each parent uses four specific strategies that contribute to an overall authoritative atmosphere in the home: 1) the parent demands high expectations in behavior and academic performance; 2) the parent establishes priorities and routines for each child; 3) the parent demands academic focus and diligence; and 4) the parent responds warmly to each child’s needs.

Foremost, we see that each parent maintains high expectations for her gifted child. For example in chapter four, Ann shares that she wants “her kids to be the best.” Specifically, she wants Lily to “try” to “be her best” in everything she does, whether it is piano, school, or tennis. However, Ann is not concerned that Lily be the “best” as compared to others, instead she wants Lily to try to be her “best.” The stress placed on the effort and not the outcome. Essentially, Ann demands that Lily put forth her best effort in school and that she presents polite manners and respectful behavior at all times. The same is observed in chapter five, where in the Benoit home Alice and Jon hold high expectations for Julian’s education and behavior. As Alice explains, she expects Julian will attend a four-year college telling him, “it’s important to have good grades so you can access the good classes in high school and in college.” In this quote, we hear how
attending college and getting a good education is in fact a presupposition in the Benoit home. Alice and Jon expect that Julian will go to college and this expectation is embedded in their parenting as hardly a week goes by that Alice is not mentioning college.

Similar to the Benoit home, there is also the same presupposition in the Rangan family, a presupposition that in fact dictates the family’s finances as Sunil and Suma believe that “college is the most important thing” and saving for anything else is “secondary compared to” Shana’s education. Additionally, Sunil and Suma expect that Shana will always complete her homework. Likewise, they expect Shana “to be doing more than would be asked” on her school assignments and consequently, take Shana to the library and provide any resources she may need to go further than her teachers would require. This even includes enrolling Shana in Kumon to strengthen her mathematical and language arts skills.

Along with the assumption that Shana will attend college is the expectation that she will behave in a responsible and respectful manner; an expectation that Sunil and Suma reinforce by reasoning with Shana when she does something egregious. Generally, Suma or Sunil sit down and talk with her explaining why they do not like the choice she made. The Rangans’ strategy of explaining their behavior expectations to Shana instead of using physical force with her is one important parenting modification they have made in the United States. Likewise, the Benoits have high expectations for Julian’s behavior as well and this becomes particularly evident when he falls behind in his schoolwork.

The same of course is seen in the Ahmed home where it is apparent that high expectations are set for both academics and behavior. Of course, the evidence of these
high expectations is heard often in the comments made by Mrs. Ahmed in chapter seven like, “You need to study,” or “Don’t spend your time watching movie and (when) you have a test.” Additionally, we find the same presupposition in the Ahmed home that each child will attend college, as this presupposition seems to be a natural byproduct of the high academic expectations set by each family. Likewise, in regards to behavior, Mrs. Ahmed expects that her children will treat all people with respect and that they will behave in a responsible manner.

One way that all of the parents assist their gifted child in meeting these high expectations is by establishing routines and setting priorities. In general, from a young age all of the parents put in place an afterschool routine for their child. These routines are detailed in chapters four through seven and for the most part consist of the child arriving home, having a snack, completing homework, participating in some sort of practice (piano or religion), and then having free time. In these simple routines, the parents’ priorities for each child are also clearly defined. Homework always come first followed by some sort of activity and then if time permits free time to read, use the Internet, or play. Additionally, we see that the benefit of instilling these routines and priorities from a young age is that by fifth and sixth grade they have become so entrenched that the parents hardly need to monitor their children.

These routines and priorities are further strengthened by each parent’s demands for academic focus and diligence. In each portrait, these demands are largely seen in the way that each parent expects their child to remain focused and productive during homework time, even when distractions are present. In the case of the Benoit and Chang homes most distractions are physically removed from the environment ensuring academic
focus, where as in the Rangan home and at Mrs. Ahmed’s daycare distractions are present and still the child is expected to concentrate and attend to their work. As for demanding diligence, each parent expects that her child will complete his or her assignments with care and persistent effort. This is something we hear in the interviews; that the parents paid greater attention to when the child was younger, sitting with them while they completed their homework and checking it to ensure that each assignment was done well. Now that the child is older, all of the parents seem to have given their child greater autonomy in the completion of her homework assignments, however, the demand for diligence remains.

As detailed in the research, these demands, routines, priorities, and high expectations are coupled with warmth and affection creating an overall authoritative parenting style. For the most part, this warmth and affection shines through in the subtle way that each parent responds to their child’s needs: cooking homemade meals, driving the child to and from his or her after school activities, keeping his or her clothing clean, and providing a warm tidy home. Additionally, warmth and affection is witnessed in the overall warm family bond. In each case, the bond is impossible to miss as affection and warmth are demonstrated frequently in 1) the tone of voice used by each child when addressing his or her parent, 2) the way each child momentarily hugs, hold hands, or sits close to a parent and 3) how each child shares a good laugh or smile with a parent on multiple occasions.

By doing the best they can to raise their children, each of the parents in this study unknowingly developed the optimal parenting style to support academic achievement in their gifted child by blending warmth and affection with high expectations, routines,
priorities, and demands. This in turn created an overall authoritative parenting style in each home that is both responsive and demanding. Previous research tells us that in order for a gifted child to achieve parents must balance challenge and support, giving the child the freedom to choose and make decisions, in conjunction with support and encouragement (Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Feldman & Piirto, 2002; Karnes, Shwedel, & Steinberg, 1984; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001; Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1995). However, as mentioned previously, these findings are conclusive for white families alone. Therefore, it is the Benoit family in particular who provide further evidence of these findings. While, the other three portraits in this study, in fact broaden previous research, suggesting that an authoritative parenting style can also support the academic achievement of nonwhite gifted children as well. However, before any further conclusions can be drawn about the use of an authoritative parenting style to support the academic achievement of nonwhite children, additional studies need to be done looking at a larger sample and using varying methodologies. This being said, the possibility that minority gifted children may find academic success in authoritative homes is promising as it could offer parents further means to raising academically achieving gifted children in the United States. Nevertheless, the purpose of this study is not to generalize, but instead to create an authentic account of the parenting in the four immigrant homes. Ultimately, we see in these portraits that the parents presented in this study use an authoritative parenting style to nurture their children: demanding mature and responsible behavior and responding to their needs with warmth and affection.
Encouraging and Motivating Conversations.

Again, the literature reviewed in chapter two tells us that gifted children excel in agreeable homes that provide a balance of challenge and support. The parents in this study achieve this balance by using an authoritative parenting style to make demands of and respond to their child with warmth and affection. Additionally, the research reviewed in chapter two details how the parents of academically successful gifted children act as first teacher, encourage learning, and promote academic challenge (Albert, 1978; Bloom, 1985; Campbell, 2005; Chan, 2005; Colangelo & Dettman, 1983; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Feldman & Piirto, 2002; Freeman, 2000; Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962; Groth, 1975; Howe, 1990; Karnes, Shwedel, & Steinberg, 1984; Landau & Weissler, 1993; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001; Silverman & Kearney, 1989; Silverstein, 2000; Snowden & Christian, 1999; Weissler & Landau, 1993; Yewchuk & Schlosser, 1995). We will now look at how the parents in this study accomplish these three tasks through the use of encouraging and motivating conversations.

For the most part, each parent repeatedly describes in the interviews how she has conversations with her child that are meant to teach the ways of the world and to encourage learning and academic achievement. In Ann’s portrait, she details how at dinner she will frequently have conversations with Lily that are meant to motivate her to work hard in school and to encourage or teach her how to be successful. Particularly, in these conversations, Ann likes to point out real life examples of success, using the likes of Jeremy Linn to encourage and motivate Lily to achieve academically.

In chapter five, we see that Alice also uses the same strategy. In one particular instance she relays a conversation she had with Julian where she used the real life
example of a Chinese immigrant, Julian knows from piano competitions, who worked really hard in school and eventually earned a college scholarship. Having motivating and encouraging conversations is a parenting practice Alice uses a great deal with Julian. Throughout our interviews she references many different conversations she has with Julian that are meant to teach him about how the academic world works and to motivate and encourage him to work hard in school and achieve academically.

Similar conversations are held in the Rangan home, although, Suma and Sunil do not mention using specific examples like Alice and Ann. They do however describe encouraging conversations they have with Shana where they make sure she understands that getting a good education is her primary focus. Further, they detail the talks they have with Shana that are meant to teach her how to use her time wisely and what her priorities should be. Last but not least, the Rangans use these conversations to motivate Shana to improve her schoolwork and to encourage her to make good choices in her life.

Likewise, the use of encouraging and motivating conversations is mentioned frequently in Mrs. Ahmed’s portrait. On many occasions, Mrs. Ahmed describes the talks she has with her children that are meant to motivate them to work hard and to encourage them to seek perfection in all aspects of their lives. Additionally, Mrs. Ahmed also uses these conversations to steer Rana and her siblings toward success stating, “you need to because this is for your opportunity,” or “please don’t let the other stuff interrupt your education.”

In each case, we see how one parent in every home is doing their best to have conversations with their gifted child that teach how the world works, while also motivating and encourage them to seek academic excellence. Essentially, the parents act
as their gifted child’s first teacher by using these conversations as mini life lessons that help to motivate the child and foster an academically orientated outlook.

**Role Modeling: Perseverance, Motivation, Persistence, Self-efficacy, and Self-confidence.**

The gifted and talented literature reviewed in chapter two, also shows us that parents are crucial in helping gifted children develop psychological dispositions that foster talent development and academic achievement (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2001). Olszewski-Kubilius found that the main way parents foster these achievement-orientated dispositions is largely by modeling the desired behavior. For example, parents demonstrate a love of work and learning, how to take risks and cope with failures, and that success takes a great deal of hard work and sustained effort over a long period of time. In turn, their children replicate the same behavior in their own lives.

In the four portraits presented in this research study, role modeling is a vital parenting practice as it nurtures the following achievement orientated dispositions in each gifted child: perseverance, motivation, persistence, self-efficacy, and self-confidence.

All of the parents in this study serve as role models for their gifted child, modeling important behavior tendencies that their child then replicates. In each portrait, we find that the very act of immigrating to the United States alone models many of these psychological dispositions. For example the first disposition, perseverance, is demonstrated in the way that each parent struggled to learn English well enough to converse with native speakers, to navigate American culture, and to establish new homes and careers after immigrating. Similarly, at least one parent in each family models the perseverance needed to succeed in the work place, laboring long hours and struggling in
new professions to provide the necessary monetary resources to support the family. Moreover, each portrait offers distinct examples of perseverance as well. For example, Alice’s portrait details the determination needed to learn to speak English, while in Mrs. Ahmed’s and Ann’s portraits we witness the daily challenge of two parents working long hours in low paying jobs to meet the needs of the family. Finally, in the Rangan home, we see the steadfast commitment Sunil made to completing his master’s degree and finding a good paying job in America.

In each portrait, we also observe how every parent models motivation for their child in the way that they accomplish tasks and maintain goal-orientated behavior. Again, the act of immigrating to the United States serves as an excellent example of this disposition as motivation was the driving force behind each parent’s desire to immigrate. Likewise, each parent models motivation in slightly different, but equally valuable ways. For example, Ann and her husband hope to open their own Chinese restaurant someday and therefore work long hours to save the necessary money they will need to make this goal a reality. In the Benoit home, Alice models motivation through her active lifestyle, literally pounding the pavement each morning, while Mrs. Ahmed demonstrates the will to act in the completion of her daycare licensure and the opening of her own business. Furthermore, in the Rangan home, Sunil works long hours at his job to provide great opportunities for his family at the same time that Suma models goal-orientated behavior through her cooking, teaching herself to prepare new meals almost daily. Overall, each parent models the will to attain certain goals, whether this is running a marathon, buying a home, owning a business, or learning to cook new recipes.
Going hand in hand with motivation is persistence as it is generally difficult to attain a goal without persistent effort. In each portrait, the parents show not only the will to act, but also the persistence to follow through and therefore accomplish their goals. Once more, the act of immigrating serves as an overall example of this disposition as each family demonstrated the motivation and also the persistence necessary to make a successful move to America. Moreover, in each family the parents model persistence on a daily basis in their commitment to doing everything it takes to give their children the best opportunities: driving lengthy distances, working long hours, cleaning, cooking, and helping with homework. As we see in each family, sustained effort is demonstrated consistently in the day-to-day tasks that each parent performs to meet the goal of raising academically successful children.

Of course, at the roots of these three dispositions lie self-efficacy and self-confidence, as it is nearly impossible to persevere, motivate, or persist if you do not believe you can achieve a goal or trust that you have the ability to do so. And like roots, self-efficacy and self-confidence are often difficult to see, tending to lay hidden beneath the more action orientated dispositions. Therefore, in order to find evidence of these it is necessary to look instead for the outcomes they initiate. In terms of self-efficacy, we must look for goals that have been accomplished in order to establish that a person believes she can achieve and in search of self-confidence we must find examples of risk-taking so as to ascertain whether a person trusts her own abilities. In each portrait, we see many examples of risk-taking and goals that have been accomplished. Once more, we can look to the act of immigrating to see evidence of self-confidence, as moving to the United States required an enormous leap of faith, faith that each family would be able to start a
new life and find success. Likewise, for every family, immigrating to the United States was a goal that the parents set and accomplished, although in each case for differing reasons: the Benoits wanted a new experience, the Changs were looking for a better quality of life, the Ahmeds came in search of better opportunities for their children, and the Rangans immigrated for Sunil to attend graduate school. Regardless of the reason, immigrating was a goal set by each family that required self-efficacy. Additionally, the Benoits, Changs, and Rangans have realized the goal of buying a home in America, while Mrs. Ahmed has achieved the goal of owning a daycare business. Coincidently, the pursuit of these goals is also an example of risk-taking as buying a home or business always represents the possibility of lost assets. However, in each case, the families had the self-efficacy and self-confidence to bring these goals to fruition.

Interestingly, the final example of self-efficacy and self-confidence that these four families share is their choice to be parents. More specifically, bringing a child into the world is in and of itself an enormous risk. However, it can also become a goal, especially when parents have high academic and behavioral expectations for their newly born child. Essentially, the four sets of parents in this study did not merely choose to have children, instead they set the goal of raising academically successful children. Herein, lies perhaps the most significant example of self-efficacy and self-confidence as the parents in this study believe and trust their abilities enough to strive to raise academically successful children. And in these portraits we observe that they are “doing the best they can” to accomplish this goal.

Ultimately, we find that the parents in this study do their best to model five of the important achievement orientated dispositions that previous research has found to support
the development of gifted and talented children (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993). Just as Csikszentmihalyi et al. detailed in their work, by modeling key psychological dispositions the parents in this study help to foster autotelic personalities in their gifted child, developing ten and eleven year old children who are self-motivated and self-directed. As we saw in chapters four through seven, Lily, Julian, Shana, and Rana are autotelic gifted children who achieve academically in school, thanks to the persistence, motivation, perseverance, self-efficacy, and self-confidence that their parents continually model and foster in them.

**Supporting Interests and Passions.**

In addition to fostering achievement-orientated attributes, the parents in this study also provide support, resources, and opportunities for their gifted child. The necessity of continued and enthusiastic support during a gifted child’s developing years is also a finding detailed in chapter two, as both Benjamin Bloom (1985) and James Campbell (2005) concluded that gifted and talented children do not succeed without the time and financial support of their families. In each portrait, we find specific examples of how every parent makes a sustained effort to support the interests and passions of his or her gifted child.

On numerous occasions, the parents in this study detail the various after school activities that their children participate in. Specifically, Ann drives Lily to piano lessons, tennis, and a drawing class. Alice does the same for Julian, taking him to piano, and martial arts, while also supporting his passion for technology at home. Sunil and Suma transport Shana to many different activities, even sharing that their schedule is structured around her commitments. Less of this can be seen in the Ahmed home, possibly because
of time and financial constraints, as there are four children in the family as opposed to only one or two. However, Mrs. Ahmed does support Rana’s participation in school related activities like destination imagination.

All of these activities require transportation and/or financial support that the parents must provide. They also require a great deal of time and effort on the part of the parents. However, in none of the portraits do we hear any statements expressing resentment or annoyance. Instead, we hear the parents enthusiastically embracing their child’s participation in his or her various activities as if supporting his or her interests is in fact a parental duty.

Additionally, each parent emphasizes that participation in after school activities is an important cultural difference between their home country and the United States. In fact, all of the parents in the study express at some point that they appreciate the balance between schoolwork and activities that their children are afforded living in the United States, as in their home countries long school days and ultra-competitive education systems require children to focus solely on their studies. Although the parents in this study value the greater “balance” between school and activities here in the United States, they also suggest that many American families put too great an emphasis on the activities and perhaps should emphasize school more.

Nonetheless, the way in which these four families enthusiastically support their gifted child’s interests and passions mirrors the sustained, coordinated, and effective parental involvement needed to support a gifted child’s development as detailed in the literature review (Bloom, 1985; Campbell, 2005; Feldman & Piirto, 2002). Essentially, in
each portrait we see yet another way that every parent is doing the best she can to raise successful children in America.

**Enhancing Discipline, Mastery, and Intrinsic Motivation.**

Previous research tells us that positive discipline and control strategies link families to school achievement and by encouraging mastery parents can enhance intrinsic motivation in a gifted child (Hess and Holloway, 1984; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994). The ways in which discipline and mastery enhance a child’s intrinsic motivation are of particular relevance to this study as we find that in two of the four families playing piano serves as a positive control strategy, which by supporting mastery increases intrinsic motivation. While in the remaining two homes, Kathak dance (a form of Indian classical dance) and Islam serve a similar purpose. As we look at the role piano lessons, Kathak dance, and Islam play in raising these gifted children, we will think of discipline as a regime that develops a particular behavior or skill and mastery as the comprehensive knowledge or talent in a subject area. In particular, we will think of piano, Kathak, and Islam as the specific subject areas that the parents in this study use to encourage discipline and mastery.

Early into the data collection process it was evident that piano lessons served an important role in the Chang and Benoit families. In each home, the gifted child practiced piano daily for 30-60 minutes and received direct piano instruction once a week. In the Benoit and Chang homes, practicing piano was a part of the gifted child’s daily routine, as both Ann and Alice required that Lily and Julian practice after they finished their homework. For Julian, Alice expected 45 minutes of practice; while Ann did not specify an exact time, but expected Lily to practice all of the pieces her teacher had given her at
the previous lesson. It is in this requirement for daily practice that we see evidence of a positive discipline strategy as both Alice and Ann establish a regime that supports the development of Julian and Lily’s piano skills. The fact that this regime is built into each child’s daily routine encourages mastery in a way that is not forced upon the child, but expected, similar to the way that it is expected homework be completed each night. And as with homework, both Ann and Alice demand diligence and focus from Lily and Julian while they are practicing, but also allow for a great deal of autonomy. For example, both Ann and Alice leave Lily and Julian alone to choose what pieces to practice and for how long they will spend on each piece.

Ultimately, Ann and Alice established the routine of daily piano practice at such a young age that both Lily and Julian need little guidance and seem to enjoy the discipline and mastery piano offers. Enjoying it enough that they both continue to choose to participate in competitions, perform at school related events, and play for personnel pleasure. The joy Lily and Julian find in piano coupled with their general enthusiasm for practicing each day equate to intrinsic motivation. At the root of this intrinsic motivation lies the positive discipline and encouragement of mastery that Ann and Alice employed early in each child’s development.

Interestingly and worthy of note, Shana also takes piano lessons and plays very well. However, I did not witness Sunil and Suma using piano as a positive discipline strategy, instead I observed that Kathak dance served this purpose within the Rangan home. As detailed in chapter four, I visited the Rangan home on three different Sunday afternoons when Shana had just returned home from her Kathak dance class, exhausted and hungry. Prompting Suma to explain that Shana’s Kathak teacher requires her to
attend dance class every Sunday for two to four hours at a time. And, when they are preparing for a recital the teacher expects Shana to come at least once during the week as well. Here, we see how the regime of practicing Kathak dance each Sunday is used as a positive discipline strategy within the Rangan home. Although, the practice does not take place physically at home like piano, learning this classical style of Indian dance requires the same level of technical mastery and routine practice. Therefore, we find requiring Shana from a young age to attend Kathak dance class each week is a positive control strategy in the Rangan home. In turn, this discipline has led Shana to enjoy mastering this classical dance form. A joy that can be seen in her happy exhaustion each Sunday afternoon, the way she listens to Kathak music while doing her homework, and the smile on her face when I catch her practicing her dance moves around the house. Similar to what we see in the Chang and Benoit homes, by employing this positive discipline strategy and encouraging mastery of a skill, Sunil and Suma enhance Shana’s intrinsic motivation. Shana has now grown to love Kathak dance and seeks out additional opportunities to practice and perform.

In the Ahmed home, we find evidence of a different positive discipline strategy. Instead of an art form like piano or dance, Mrs. Ahmed uses the regime of Islam to develop Rana and her sibling’s knowledge of the religion and their Arabic reading and writing skills. As we read in chapter seven, Mrs. Ahmed established a routine when her children were young that required them to pray immediately when they got home from school or the daycare. Likewise, Mrs. Ahmed insists that Rana and her siblings attend classes at the local mosque every Sunday for two hours where they learn about Islam and
how to read and write in Arabic. She also requires that they fast on the weekends during the holy month of Ramadan.

Reminiscent of what we saw above with piano and Kathak dance, Islam serves a similar role in the Ahmed family as there is an established regime for practice and technical skill is mastered in order to read the Quran and recite prayers in Arabic. The only major difference here is the fact that Islam requires mastery of knowledge, while piano and Kathak dance necessitate the mastery of a particular talent. Nevertheless, using Islam as a positive discipline strategy and to encourage mastery has the same effect, enhancing intrinsic motivation. In fact, Rana and her siblings look forward to their classes at the mosque and attend to their prayers with the same focus and diligence as their homework. Rana even seeks out additional opportunities to do community service at the mosque. Similar to what we see in the other three families, by requiring the daily practice of Islam from a young age, Rana in turn attends to her prayers independently and seems to find joy within her practice. Consequently, intrinsic motivation is indicated in the way that Rana seeks out additional opportunities to participate in community service at the mosque, the initiative with which she prays each night, and the enthusiasm in her voice when she talks about her religion.

Essentially, we find that in the four portraits presented in this study, each family uses a positive discipline strategy, which encourages mastery and in turn enhances intrinsic motivation in the gifted child. This cross-cultural parenting practice is one that supports but also extends the previous research linking 1) positive discipline and control strategies to school achievement and 2) mastery to enhanced intrinsic motivation in gifted children (Hess and Holloway, 1984; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994). In particular,
we see evidence in these portraits that positive discipline strategies and encouraging mastery are not mutually exclusive and actually work in tandem to enhance intrinsic motivation. Additionally, in these families, we find that a positive discipline strategy consists of a regime of *expected* practice within a particular subject area. In all four cases, this regime is initiated early in the gifted child’s life becoming a part of his/her daily or weekly routine in much the same way that homework is. The fact that the regime is started at a young age and treated as an expectation leads the children to embrace the practice instead of resent it. In turn, this continued practice leads to mastery, which all of the gifted children in this study welcome, finding joy in the process of practicing the particular skill. Here is not to say, that the children will not rebel or resent the positive discipline strategy later, but for now they seem to accept and find pleasure in the regime. Ultimately, the joy found in practicing develops the important achievement orientated disposition of intrinsic motivation, a benefit that is valuable in and of itself, even if the children decide later to abandon the discipline.

As referenced in the literature review, Hess and Holloway (1984) noted that positive discipline and control strategies link families to school achievement; here we see how this could be possible as the positive discipline strategies used by the parents in this study fostered the development of intrinsic motivation in each gifted child. Additionally, Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried (1994) found that a mother’s motivational strategies have a positive impact on children’s intrinsic motivation and academic performance. Again, the portraits in this study offer the reader a specific way in which mothers use a positive discipline strategy as a technique to enhance intrinsic motivation. There is no way to ascertain with certainty that this intrinsic motivation in turn leads to greater academic
performance, however, it seems likely that an increase in intrinsic motivation could have a positive impact on academic performance as all four of the gifted children in the study excel academically in school. Further research will need to be done looking specifically at the relationship between the academic achievements of gifted children and using positive discipline strategies to encourage mastery and enhance intrinsic motivation before any conclusions can be drawn. Nonetheless, we can all agree that each of the parents in this study is doing the best they can to encourage mastery and enhance motivation in their gifted child.

**The Role the Five Cross-Cultural Parenting Practices Play in Nurturing the Academic Success of Gifted Children**

We now have a clearer picture of the five cross-cultural parenting practices used by these four families: an authoritative parenting style, encouraging and motivating conversations, role modeling, supporting passions and interests, and enhancing discipline, mastery, and intrinsic motivation. The discussion now turns to the role these practices play in nurturing the academic achievement of the four gifted children. Essentially, these practices serve two significant roles in nurturing the academic achievement of the gifted children: 1) they constantly direct and redirect the children toward academic achievement and 2) they foster the development of specific habits and qualities of mind that support academic success.

Looking first at how the practices direct and redirect the gifted children toward academic achievement, we find that three of the practices- an authoritative parenting style, encouraging and motivating conversations, and supporting passions and interests- specifically serve this role. The overall authoritative parenting style directs the children
toward success by constantly demanding academic focus and responding to any needs that may arise in the pursuit of academic achievement. Similarly, the practice of having encouraging and motivating conversations with the child constantly serves to remind him or her of the ultimate goal, academic success. Whereas supporting passions and interests provides further responsive parenting, continually conveying to the child that the parents will do whatever takes to support the child’s achievement in school as well as areas of particular passion. Together these three practices serve as a blueprint; the parents use them to show the children the ultimate goal they are building toward and to refocus them when necessary.

The remaining two practices - role modeling and enhancing discipline, mastery, and intrinsic motivation- nurture academic achievement by fostering the development of specific habits and qualities of mind that are necessary to succeed in school. Specifically, as I detailed at length above, role-modeling develops five qualities of mind- perseverance, motivation, persistence, self-efficacy, and self-confidence- which create an overall achievement orientated disposition that support the development of gifted and talented children. While, the parenting practice of enhancing discipline, mastery, and intrinsic motivation develops the habits of disciplined practice and pursuit of mastery, in addition to cultivating the mentality of intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation being yet another key quality of mind that contributes to an overall achievement orientated disposition. Collectively, these habits and qualities of mind nurture the academic success of these gifted children by giving them specific tools, which help them achieve in school.

Returning once again to the theme, “Doing the Best You Can,” we now see the two specific roles- directing the children toward academic achievement and developing
habits and qualities of mind that support achievement—these five cross-cultural parenting practices play in nurturing academic achievement in the gifted children. The role these practices serve in nurturing achievement is the ultimate example of how these families are quite simply doing their best to raise academically successful children. We will now explore how traditional values from each family’s country of origin directly and indirectly influence the cross-cultural parenting belief and practices detailed above.

**The Influence of Traditional Values on the Cross-Cultural Parenting Belief of Immigrants Raising an Academically Achieving Gifted Child**

In chapter six, the Rangan family introduces the theme “Promoting the Good.” For Sunil and Suma, “Promoting the Good” denotes encouraging the positive aspects of American and Indian culture in raising their daughter. Similarly, in chapter five, Alice uses the phrase embracing the good to describe the same practice, while Mrs. Ahmed and Ann extend this theme, explaining how they each look for balance in their parenting, taking the good from both America and their respective countries of origin.

In effect, all of the families describe what previous research has defined as a bicultural orientation toward the acculturation process or a “positive dual frame of reference” (Harrison et al., 1990; Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p.170). Meaning that each family undergoes a complex process of sorting through the cultural values and traditions of their home country and those of the United States in order to establish a new bicultural identity, one in which they are able to function well in both cultural contexts. Research has also found that parents begin this acculturation process with a particular parenting style that when filtered by the host country context leads to important parenting
modifications or changes that are a direct result of living in the new country (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008).

In all of the portraits, we certainly see evidence of how each family has retained and relinquished specific cultural values and traditions from their home country in order to adopt a new bicultural frame of reference. Specifically, in chapter four we see this in the theme “Balance: A Little Push, a Little Freedom,” in chapter five in “Embrace the Good for Your Family,” in chapter six in “Promoting the Good,” and in chapter seven in the theme “Take the Good From Both Sides and Make Our Own.” However, what is most interesting and detailed below is how one common traditional value from each family’s home country directly and indirectly influences the cross-cultural parenting belief and practices in important ways.

First, looking at the cross-cultural parenting belief, education takes precedence; we find that this belief in fact arises from the traditional value that each family’s country of origin places on education. We hear from every parent that all of the home countries (China, France, India, and Sudan) value getting a good education above all else. In fact, three of the four families (Benoit, Chang, and Rangan) expressed that they felt the value placed on doing well in school in their countries of origin was in fact too great as the long school days, extreme amounts of homework, and high stakes testing placed excessive stress on children and parents. Consequently, the parents explained that they greatly appreciate the more balanced schooling environment in the United States. Additionally, three of the four families (Chang, Rangan, and Ahmed) also spoke of how education was the only path to success or way out of poverty in their home countries.
The significance placed on schooling is a traditional value that all of the parents in this study have retained from their home cultures. More importantly, this value establishes the cross-cultural parenting belief that education takes precedence. Herein, we find a perfect example of the bicultural orientation that each parent has assumed in her acculturation process; as the traditional value each home country places on education is filtered through the American context, which generally maintains a greater balance between schoolwork and extracurricular activities. In turn, this establishes the cross-cultural parenting belief that education takes precedence. We will now examine how a home environment that is both bicultural and academic emerges from this belief.

**Bicultural Academic Home Environment.**

Perhaps the most important finding of this study is how the cross-cultural parenting belief (education takes precedence) provides the foundation in each home for what I will call a Bicultural Academic Home Environment (BAHE). In effect, a BAHE is an extension of Campbell and Verna’s “Academic Home Climates” as education takes precedence and is most important in the home. However, a Bicultural Academic Home Environment is also one where parents maintain important traditions (e.g., food, language, customs) and values (emphasizing education) from their countries of origin while also embracing positive American customs (extracurricular activities, clothing) and principles. Essentially, a BAHE is a balanced environment between two different cultural orientations, which influence the parenting practices in positive ways in order to create a home that is both bicultural and academic. Building upon this concept of a BAHE, we will now examine how the traditional value (emphasizing education) influences the five cross-cultural parenting practices utilized by each parent.
The Influence of Traditional Values on the Cross-Cultural Parenting Practices of Immigrants Raising an Academically Achieving Gifted Child

Previously in this chapter, we looked at how each parent used an authoritative parenting style to raise their academically achieving gifted child, blending responsiveness and demandingness to create a home environment that maintains high expectations for behavior and academic performance, but also allows autonomy. For the Benoit family, the use of an authoritative parenting style was not in fact a significant parenting modification. Specifically, in chapter five, Alice shares that her parenting would not differ greatly if she were raising her children in France as opposed to the United States. This is not surprising, seeing as the French culture is considered European American and previous research done on parenting practices has found that the majority of middleclass European American families raising academically successful children use an authoritative parenting style (Chao, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Rudasil, Adleson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013 Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Therefore, the fact that Alice uses an authoritative parenting style supports previous research findings.

However, in the other three homes, using an authoritative parenting style was an important modification that each parent made upon moving to the United States. In each case, Ann, Mrs. Ahmed, and the Rangans share that they would not be able to use the same parenting style if they were to move back to their home countries, citing that they would need to be stricter with their children. Again, the literature reviewed in chapter two supports Sunil, Suma, and Ann’s claims finding that Asian American parents tend to use more authoritarian and conservative parenting practices (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey,
In the case of the Ahmed family, there is a dearth of research looking at parenting in Sudan. However, there is evidence that parenting style in Arabic countries is not as distinct as in the West (Dwairy, Achou, Abouuserie, Farah, Ghazal, Fayad & Khan, 2006). For example, parents may use a blend of authoritarian and authoritative styles, what Dwairy et al. coined as a controlling-orientated parenting pattern. This controlling-orientated parenting pattern sounds similar to the parenting Mrs. Ahmed claims is most prominent in Sudan. Nonetheless, there is clearly not enough research to support Mrs. Ahmed’s assertion that she would need to alter her parenting if she returned to Sudan, however, it would not be surprising as there is evidence of authoritarian parenting styles in other Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia (Dwairy et al., 2006). Evidently, this is an area where further research needs to be done.

Nevertheless, the reality that the authoritative parenting style is a modification for only three of the four families does not alter the fact that the value placed on education by each of their home countries indirectly influences their parenting style. Essentially, this study provides an example of how the traditional values from the immigrants’ home countries influence the parenting modifications they make in their acculturation process to the host country. Specifically, the traditional value (emphasizing education) when filtered through the American context leads to the cross-cultural parenting belief (education takes precedence). In turn, this cross-cultural belief provides the foundation for the authoritative parenting style used by the families (see Appendix C). The same is true for the remaining four cross-cultural parenting practices employed by the parents in
this study, as the cross-cultural belief, influenced directly by the traditional value, ultimately provides the foundation for the remaining four cross-cultural parenting practices as well (see Appendix C).

Furthermore, this traditional value indirectly influences the five cross-cultural parenting practices in another equally valuable way. Yet again, we find it is the direct relationship between the traditional value and the cross-cultural belief that is crucial as the value establishes the belief; the belief in turn serves as the foundation for the Bicultural Academic Home Environment. Here, the indirect influence of the traditional values on the five cross-cultural parenting practices lies in the fact that the BAHE is the medium in which the parenting practices operate within. Meaning that the five cross-cultural parenting practices- using an authoritative parenting style, encouraging and motivating conversations, role modeling, supporting passions and interests, and enhancing discipline, mastery, and intrinsic motivation- operate within the BAHE that the traditional value indirectly influenced.

Here, it helps to look at Appendix C, as the traditional value (emphasizing education) when filtered through the American context establishes the cross-cultural parenting belief that education takes precedence. This belief serves as the foundation for the Bicultural Academic Home Environment and the five cross-cultural parenting practices. Ultimately, the parents nurture their children using the five cross-cultural parenting practices within the BAHE. In other words, the BAHE is the medium that the practices operate within influencing them in much the same way that climate and weather shape a gardener’s craft. A gardener must choose practices that will be effective within the constraints of the present climate and prevailing weather patterns in order to promote
optimal growth, just as each parent in this study has developed parenting practices that are effective at raising academically successful gifted children in their bicultural and academic American homes. Essentially, the BAHE and the cross-cultural parenting practices that arise from the cross-cultural parenting belief represent the way each family “Promotes the Good” from both their country of origin and America.

Implications: Sometimes It Is Just a Part of the Story

Now, we will look to the last of the four themes “Sometimes It Is Just a Part of the Story” seeing that it metaphorically expresses the complex phenomenon of immigrants raising an academically successful gifted child in America. “Sometimes It Is Just a Part of the Story” speaks to the overarching idea that within the seemingly mundane acts of parenting arises a story, a story consisting of many interrelated parts that unite into one narrative whole. This dissertation has attempted to tell the story of four immigrant parents raising an academically achieving gifted child in a way that is authentic for the reader, the participants, and the portraitist. In telling this story, I used three themes to unite the cross-cultural parenting belief, practices, and influential role of traditional values into one ambient narrative. A narrative that I hope will resonate with the reader.

Central to this ambient story are the three themes “I Plant and Now I Harvest,” “Doing the Best You Can,” and “Promoting the Good” as they encapsulate the cross-cultural parenting belief, practices, and the traditional values influences on each. Within this story, the theme “I Plant and Now I Harvest” captures the cross-cultural belief that education takes precedence. Metaphorically, this belief serves as the foundation that the parenting practices and home environment are built upon. The theme “Doing the Best
You Can” expresses how each gifted child is nurtured using the cross-cultural parenting practices within a Bicultural Academic Home Environment. Lastly, “Promoting the Good” signifies the way in which the traditional value (emphasizing education) when filtered through the American context establishes the cross-cultural parenting belief (education takes precedence) and how this belief ultimately serves as the foundation for the five cross-cultural parenting practices and the Bicultural Academic Home Environment.

Within these themes, lies the story that is this dissertation; a story with implications for immigrant parents, educators, and researchers alike. These portraits suggest that other immigrant parents may also be able to foster the academic achievement of their gifted children by 1) maintaining the cross-cultural belief that education takes precedence 2) using this belief as the foundation for a Bicultural Academic Home Environments and 3) employing the five cross-cultural parenting practices detailed in this chapter. However, it is important to note that this is not meant to serve as recipe for immigrants to parent gifted children, but instead to suggest themes, which may resonate with other immigrant parents, and in turn offer a means of fostering academic success in their children.

For some immigrant parents, specific themes or cross-cultural parenting practices may resonate more than others. Either way, there is power in the possibility that the themes and ambient narrative that emerge from these portraits might suggest ways for other immigrant parents to foster the academic achievement of their gifted child. My hope is that by reading this study other immigrant parents may be better prepared to do the best they can, promote the good, and harvest academically achieving gifted children.
As for educators, this study offers a detailed look at how four different immigrant parents raise academically achieving gifted children. This alone is important, as limited research has been done looking at the relationship between academic achievement and parenting practices of diverse ethnic groups. For now, these portraits offer educators working with gifted immigrant populations a window into four worlds that are rarely represented in the research and therefore, a better understanding of how immigrants are supporting the academic achievement of their gifted children.

As for researchers, this study enriches what is already known about 1) parenting and home environments that support gifted development and 2) the connection between parenting style and academic achievement. Specifically, the concept of a Bicultural Academic Home Environment that emerges from these portraits ties together the research on immigrant parenting practices with the research on home environments that support giftedness. By linking these two bodies of research, the concept of Bicultural Academic Home Environment enriches both fields. Additionally, these portraits suggest that ethnically diverse parents raising academically achieving gifted children may employ parenting practices and styles similar to European American parents, whom have dominated previous research sample populations. This justifies the need for further research on the parenting styles of ethnically diverse parents raising academically achieving gifted children.

At the very least, it is my hope that these portraits will resonate, recognize, or inspire other immigrant parents, educators who work with ethnically diverse gifted populations, and researchers studying parenting and giftedness. If these portraits
accomplish no other task than this, I daresay that I have at least adequately told the story of these four immigrant families.
References


Chan, D.W. (2005) Family environment and talent development of


Psychology, 37(3), 1-18.


University of Chicago Press.


http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=129236,00.html


Special Issue: Parenting Styles in Diverse Perspectives, 35(3–4), 21–43.


Appendix A

Interview Guide #1
(This guide will direct the interview, however, follow up and clarifying questions may be asked for clarification and/or to ensure understanding).

Autobiography

1. What is your country of origin? Please describe the specific region and or town.

2. How old are you?

3. Are you married? How many years have you been married?

4. Describe the education you have received, including years and level.

5. What is your profession?

6. Do you practice a religion?

7. What are your interests or hobbies outside of work?

8. How many children do you have?

9. What are the ages, gender, and birth order of all of your children?

10. Describe for me what your life was like in your home country. Specifically, can you describe your childhood, education, and work experiences.

11. Describe when and why you immigrated to the United States.

Parenting practices and beliefs

12. What are your parenting beliefs?

13. Can you describe what parenting practices you use to support and encourage the academic achievement of your child?

14. How do you think your parenting practices nurture the academic success of your child?

15. Do you use the same parenting practices with each child? If not, in what ways do your parenting practices differ between children?
16. Do you feel that your parenting has improved with each child? If so, can you provide specific examples?

17. Do you use similar parenting practices as your parents used when raising you? If so, in what ways are your practices similar? If not, in what ways do your practices differ?

I nfluence of traditional values

18. What similarities exist between your parenting and the way your parents raised you?

19. What differences exist between your parenting and the way your parents raised you?

20. Do you believe any traditions from your home country influence your parenting?

21. Please describe specific traditions from your home country and how they are present in your parenting.

G iftedness

22. How do you define the terms gifted and talented?

23. Tell me why you believe your child is identified as gifted and talented?

24. Describe your child’s specific parenting needs and any ways that they differ from other children.

25. What is most challenging about parenting your child?

26. What is most rewarding?

27. Is there any additional information you would like to share regarding your background, parenting, or child?

28. Do you have any questions for me?
Interview #2

General questions focusing on the observations (additional questions will be generated during the observations). In addition, follow up and clarifying questions may be asked for clarification and/or to ensure understanding).

1. Do you have any thoughts from the first interview or first observations that you would like to address?

2. During the observations, I noticed you used _______________ parenting practices. Are these practices you use? If so, can you explain your reasons for using these practices and how they encourage the academic achievement of your child?

3. During the observations, I also saw evidence of _______________ parenting beliefs. Are these parenting beliefs that you hold? If so, how do you believe they encourage the academic achievement of your gifted child?

4. During the observations, I saw evidence of _______________ traditions from your country of origin. Are these traditions that influence your parenting practices and beliefs? If so, in what ways do you believe these traditions influence your parenting practices and beliefs?

5. In what ways has immigrating to the United States influenced your parenting?

6. Do you believe that you would use different parenting practices if you lived in your country of origin? If so, what would the differences be?

7. Do you have any additional information you would like to share on you parenting or about your child?

8. Do you have any questions for me?
**Interview #3**

*This guide will direct the interview, however, follow up and clarifying questions may be asked for clarification and/or to ensure understanding.*

1. Do you have any thoughts from the previous interviews or observations that you would like to address?

2. During the observations, I noticed you used ____________ parenting practices. Are these practices you use? If so, can you explain your reasons for using these practices and how they encourage the academic achievement of your child?

3. During the observations, I also saw evidence of ____________ parenting beliefs. Are these parenting beliefs that you hold? If so, how do you believe they encourage the academic achievement of your gifted child?

4. During the observations, I saw evidence of ____________ traditions from your country of origin. Are these traditions that influence your parenting practices and beliefs? If so, in what ways do you believe these traditions influence your parenting practices and beliefs?

5. What words or metaphor would you use to describe your child?

6. What words or metaphor would you use to describe your role as a parent?

7. How do you think parents can better foster the academic achievement of their gifted children?

8. Do you believe that my presence or the research process had any impact on your parenting? Please describe.

9. Do you have any additional information you would like to share on your parenting or about your child?

10. Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix B

Observation Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family:</th>
<th>Date and Time of Observation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of Parenting Practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of Parenting Beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of Traditional Values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Academic Home Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

The Influence of Traditional Values on the Parenting Belief and Practices of Immigrants Raising an Academically Achieving Gifted Child

Bicultural Academic Home Environment

Five Cross-Cultural Parenting Practices

Cross-cultural Parenting Belief:
“Education Takes Precedence”

Filtered Through the American Context

Traditional Value:
“Emphasizing Education”