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# Puerto Rican Students' Perspectives of Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Giftedness and Talent Development

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Puerto Rican Students' Perspectives of Socio-cultural Characteristics of  
Giftedness and Talent Development

Miriam Morales Taylor  
University of Connecticut, 2013

This qualitative study was conducted to investigate the social and cultural characteristics of gifted and talented students and their perceptions of the educational factors that have contributed to the development of their gifts and talents. Twelve Puerto Rican English Language Learner (PR-ELL) students who are identified as gifted and attend a full-time academy for gifted and talented students were selected for the study. Both ethnography and comparative case methodology were used as the participants completed a questionnaire with 67 questions and then were interviewed and observed in their school. Students' cumulative records were also reviewed and analyzed.

Interesting findings emerged in the study as participants identified the following characteristics that would identify them as gifted and talented: high potential, motivation, commitment, perseverance, self-confidence, maturity, and hard work. The participants believe that they work harder, expend more effort in their academic studies, take school more seriously, and have more enthusiasm for learning than students from other cultures who are identified as gifted and talented. They also reported that their parents encouraged their children to work hard and do well in school. All students agreed that the Gifted & Talented Academy they attended and their teachers provide them with a rigorous, enriched curriculum. The participants also indicated that

they loved being challenged and encouraged by their parents and teachers to work hard and excel. They enjoy being exposed to new curriculum and learning new content, as opposed to the lack of challenge they experienced in their previous schools. This research contributes to new understandings regarding the characteristics of PR-ELL gifted students, family characteristics and educational factors that support and sustain high academic achievement; however, additional research is needed relative to the identification and characteristics of gifted ELL students.

Puerto Rican Students' Perspectives of the Socio-cultural Characteristics of  
Giftedness and Talent Development

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B.A., University of Puerto Rico, 1978

M.Ed., University of Hartford, 1983

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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at the

University of Connecticut

2013

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Miriam Morales Taylor

2013

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Puerto Rican Students' Perspectives of the Socio-cultural Characteristics of  
Giftedness and Talent Development

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2013

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Heartfelt thanks to my husband, Dave, who loves me and encourages me to pursue my dreams. Thanks also to my daughters, Monica and Christine, who have been the two rallying voices in my life whenever I had moments of self-doubt. As a parent, nothing means more than to know that your children are proud of you. Miss Mariposas, thank you for always being my cheerleaders in all of my endeavors.

I would also like to thank the students who took part in this study for generously sharing their thoughts, their ideas and their dreams during our time together. They provided me with great insights about their educational experiences that hopefully will contribute to the identification of other children with high potential currently being educated in urban settings.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the children of Hartford on whose behalf I have had the privilege and honor to work for over thirty years. Every story they have shared, every dream they have articulated, and the resilience they have demonstrated in the face of so many obstacles and great adversity have inspired me throughout my life's work as an educator.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study investigated the school experiences of twelve Puerto Rican English Language Learner (PR-ELL) students who reside in a mid-size urban city, were identified as gifted, and attend a full-time academy for gifted and talented students. The objective of this dissertation was to identify the social and cultural characteristics of gifted and talented students and their personal perceptions regarding the characteristics of students from other cultures who are identified as gifted and talented. Research indicated that Latino ELL (L-ELL) students are under-represented in gifted and talented programs and are frequently placed in special education classes (Linn & Hammer, 2011). Often, they also underachieve in challenging classes (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Reis, Hérbert, Diaz, Maxfield, & Ratley, 1995). Qualitative research methodology and a phenomenological, ethnographic approach were employed in this study. Educational ethnography is generally used for several purposes, such as to describe educational settings and contexts, generate theory, and even to evaluate educational programs (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Educational ethnography produces descriptive data about the educational activities, physical environments, and perceptions of participants in educational settings. The use of educational ethnography involves investigations of a relatively small, well-defined group of individuals in a specific geographic area over an extended period of time, using participant observation as the primary source of data collection. Additionally, using multiple comparative case study methodologies, this study investigated students' perceptions of the common characteristics of all gifted and talented students, including those from their own and other cultures.

It is hoped that this research will provide educators with the tools to seriously consider the social and cultural characteristics of PR-ELL children who are identified as gifted and talented. Since L-ELL students are under-represented in gifted and talented programs (Donovan & Cross, 2002), this study probed whether this underrepresentation may be due to a lack of understanding regarding the characteristics of this group since minimal research has been conducted in this area. It also investigated ways in which educational and personal opportunities can be made available to address the unique needs and characteristics of this group. Ford, for example, emphasized that “We must...improve and increase gifted educators’ preparation to become culturally competent so that they hold high (or higher) expectations for...Latino students” (Ford, 2006, p. 17). Bermudez and colleagues discussed the many recommendations offered by critics of the selection process for gifted and talented students, suggesting that there exists a need for, “the use of non-standardized, more subjective methods such as nomination by peers, family members and friends, the use of characteristics which are valued by the sub-culture, and the involvement of parents in all stages of the selection process” (Bermudez, Rakow, Marquez, Sawyer, & Ryan, 1993, pp. 3-4). This dissertation investigated and described the characteristics, academic needs, and challenges facing academically gifted and talented PR-ELL children.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A critical issue in school systems throughout the United States is the under-representation of L-ELL students in gifted and talented programs (Ford, 2006). Ford and Harris (1999) highlight the fact that demographers find Latinos to be the fastest growing minority group in the United States and project “that this trend will continue; by 2020 Latino Americans are expected to make up 25% of the nation’s school age population” (p. 8). Despite the rapid growth of L-ELL

students, appropriate definitions, lists of research-based characteristics and strategies to both identify and provide services to gifted and talented L-ELL students remain inadequate. The National Council of Teachers of English (2008) defines ELL as “an active learner of the English language who may benefit from various types of language support programs. This term is used mainly in the U.S. to describe K-12 students” (p. 2). The problem is especially acute for gifted and talented ELL Latino Learners (Bermudez et al., 1993). Bermudez and colleagues (1993) believe that a large group of language-minority students are considered by members within their respective cultures to be gifted and talented, yet these talents are often unrecognized due to narrow definitions of gifted and talented, which emphasize language proficiency. There may be direct consequences associated with this failure to identify high potential diverse students. Researchers associated with the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation found that high-achieving students from disadvantaged backgrounds, when compared to their more advantaged peers, are twice as likely to drop out of school and less likely to attend or graduate from college. The same study found that 44% of high-achieving students in primary grades from disadvantaged backgrounds are no longer high achieving by fifth grade (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007).

There is a pressing need to increase access to gifted education for PR-ELL students and to narrow the achievement gap by ensuring that the most capable Puerto Rican students are challenged to achieve at the highest levels. Currently, according to Plucker, Burroughs, and Song (2010), it would take 72 years to close the achievement gap between the highest achieving Whites and Latinos in fourth grade mathematics, 31 years between Whites and African Americans, and 128 years to close the achievement gap between fourth grade ELL and non-ELL students. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study included studying methods utilized to increase the numbers of PR-ELL students identified as gifted and talented, including the need for

a research-based list of characteristics of gifted PR-ELL students and a better understanding of the programmatic interventions necessary to develop the gifts and talents of high ability PR-ELL students.

### **Background of the Study**

This dissertation examined the social and cultural characteristics of PR-ELL students identified as gifted and talented, as well as these students' perceptions of both the systems used to identify this population and their programmatic needs. The term gifted and talented has been widely debated by educators throughout the United States. Many believe that because the population of students is changing demographically, the capabilities and skills encompassed within the gifted and talented realm must be expanded and/or reformed to include other areas of giftedness such as creativity and leadership potential (Bermudez et al., 1993). The background of this study began with a discussion of definitions of giftedness.

### **Perceptions of Giftedness and Talent Development**

Research about gifted and talented learners points to the great diversity among this heterogeneous group of young people as well as to the fact that many do not realize their potential, in part, because of school factors that contribute to underachievement (Reis & McCoach, 2002). In recent years, research about the development of giftedness suggests that personality, environment, school, home, and chance factors all interact with demonstrated potential and whether or not that potential eventually develops into demonstrated gifts and talents (Renzulli, 2006; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Finding one research-based definition to describe the diversity of the gifted and talented population is very difficult, and the numbers of overlapping definitions of giftedness that are proposed in educational research (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005) underlie the complexity of defining with certainty who is and who is not gifted.

In describing this diverse group of learners, many educators interchangeably use expanded definitions of giftedness and talent. This was not always the case; for decades, researchers and psychologists, basing perceptions on the earlier work of Lewis Terman (1925), equated giftedness with high IQ. More recently, however, definitions of giftedness or talent have become more multi-dimensional and include the interplay of culture and values on the development of talents and gifts (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Current research on the multiple perspectives of conceptions of giftedness range from general, broad characterizations to more targeted definitions of giftedness identified by specific actions, products, or abilities within domains (Sternberg & Davidson, 1986, 2005). This collection of research studies conducted over the last few decades supports a broader-based conception of giftedness that combines non-intellectual qualities and intellectual potential, such as motivation, self-concept, and creativity (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005).

Some researchers discuss the need to uphold the traditional requirements and standards of giftedness rather than lower expectations and tarnish the significance and prestige of the gifted and talented label (Bernal, 2002). Discussions about definitions of giftedness, however, must be based upon the most recent available research rather than romanticized notions or opinions. Moreover, as Knobel and Shaughnessy (2002) emphasize, a definition must provide a standard that may be applied to the development of laws, procedures, or identification systems and most importantly, must have clear boundaries so as to provide other researchers with a more systematic approach to verify the validity of the definition. In an interview with Joseph S. Renzulli, Director of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut, Knobel and Shaughnessy discuss the definition of gifted and talented and begin

by looking at the term “intelligence,” which Renzulli defines as being a multi-faceted concept, consisting of three sub-theories based on the work of Robert Sternberg.

Based on these concepts of intelligence, Renzulli (1978) stressed the various classifications for giftedness, but defined it as, the interaction of above average ability, creativity, and task commitment brought to bear upon a special area of interest. The definition set forth by the U.S. Department of Education (1993) in the Federal Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act defines gifted and talented students as being those 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, or environment. These children and youth exceeded high performance capability in intellectual, creative and/or artistic areas and possess an unusual leadership capacity or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by 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. (p. 206)

Gardner’s theory regarding Multiple Intelligence (MI) defines intelligence as, the skill to solve problems and create products that could be valued in one or more cultural environments (Gardner 1993). His MI theory includes eight distinguishable intelligences: “linguistic, musical, logical- mathematical, spatial, bodily- kinesthetic, intrapersonal, and naturalistic” (Reis & Renzulli, 1994).

The central question addressed in these definitions relates to whether the number of ELL Latino students who are identified as gifted and talented in districts or states can be increased by considering their unique characteristics. Increasing cultural diversity in the United States means that more educators should most likely reevaluate their definitions of gifted and talented as well

as their methods of identifying such students. Bermudez et al. (1993) put the emphasis on a vast majority of ELL Latino students who are left unidentified due to language or writing deficiency stating that there are, “7.9 million school-age youngsters whose home language is other than English...3% of a population is considered gifted [and] therefore, it should follow that 237,000 students have escaped identification” (p. 110).

The low number of PR-ELL students identified as gifted and talented is a significant issue for educators in the United States, since it suggests that opportunities for challenge and continuous progress are denied to some exceptional ELL students. With increasing populations of these students, their identification as high potential and gifted should be of concern to educators and administrators. Many of the problems in the identification procedures that prevent the identification of ELL students have been debated for decades, including factors regarding school procedures, home life, school environment, cultural background, and socio-economic status (Bermudez et al., 1993). Beginning with school procedures, for example, Bermudez et al. outline multiple barriers in schools regarding the identification of ELL students beginning with the complete lack of procedures or instructional models to initially identify these gifted and talented students. When identification requirements are actually put into place, they are often uni-dimensional, including grades, standardized test scores, parent nominations, or teacher observations, rather than encompassing all of these aspects (Bermudez et al., 1993).

Bermudez and Rakow (1993), Ford (2006), and Renzulli and Reis (1997) stress that identification based solely on the basis of standardized testing is the major problem in identifying gifted and talented ELL students, noting the bias, environment, and narrow recognition of intelligence or ability inherent in standardized assessment approaches. Moreover, Bermudez and Rakow (1990) acknowledged an absence of both cultural knowledge and sensitivity on the part

of teachers and of appraisers, perhaps due to inadequate training. Equally detrimental to gifted and talented ELL Latino students are teachers who are aware of the students' gifted capabilities; yet due to their low levels of English proficiency, decrease their rigor in evaluating the students' writing and/ or verbal skills. This not only hinders the learning potential of the student, but it also essentially weakens the status and standards of gifted and talented students and programs (Bermudez et al., 1993).

### **Operational Definitions of Gifted and Talented Students**

The term gifted and talented has many different definitions. The National Association of Gifted Children's (NAGC, 2008) definition is:

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).

Bermudez and Rakow (1993) believe that there is a need to broaden and shift the definition of giftedness to not only measure skills beyond language proficiency in English, but other attributes such as leadership potential that seem to align with Renzulli's belief that abilities, creativity and task commitment must be applied to any potentially valuable area of human performance.

Ford (2006) has found that traditional definitions of giftedness focus too much on verbal acuity. She summarized statistics of various studies that she and others have conducted regarding the reasons why a large proportion of Black and Latino students achieve at a lower level than White students. She found, for example, that despite the many legislative reforms such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001, the gap persists (Ford, 2006). For many Latino students,

acquiring a second language can be a challenging task, and because verbal skills are too often used to identify giftedness, students who speak two languages (bilingual) fail to be identified (Ford, 2006).

Considering the various and many opinions surrounding the definition of “gifted and talented,” for the purposes of this dissertation, Joseph Renzulli’s definition will be used. Renzulli, a leading authority in the field of gifted and talented youth and an early proponent of a broadened conception of giftedness that includes more students, recognizes gifted and talented students as having above average general and /or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Renzulli was one of the earliest theorists to propose research-based multifaceted conceptions of giftedness. The theory of his three-ring conception has prompted widespread research and gained popular appeal. It supports the idea that gifted behaviors result from the interaction among distinct interpersonal characteristics, as outlined in the excerpt below:

Gifted behavior consists of behaviors that reflect an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits—above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Individuals capable of developing gifted behavior are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. Persons who manifest or are capable of developing an interaction among the three clusters require a wide variety of educational opportunities and services that are not ordinarily provided through regular instructional programs. (Renzulli & Reis, 1997, p. 8)

### **Characteristics of Giftedness**

What are the characteristics of giftedness that describe PR-ELL students? Bermudez et al. (1993) highlight characteristics of gifted and talented students: good classroom behavior, creativity, originality, inquisitiveness, communicative skills and non-academic skills. In research about gifted students from diverse backgrounds, Frasier and Passow (1994) identified general/common attributes of giftedness, called traits, aptitudes, and behaviors that are consistently identified by researchers as common to all gifted students. They found that the following basic elements of giftedness are similar across cultures (though each is not displayed by every student): motivation, advanced interests, communication skills, problem-solving ability, well-developed memory, inquiry, insight, reasoning, imagination/creativity, sense of humor, and advanced ability to deal with symbol systems. Yet, do these characteristics also express giftedness in PR-ELL students from high poverty backgrounds? Each of these common characteristics may be manifested in different ways by different students; educators should be especially careful when attempting to identify these characteristics in students from diverse backgrounds because behavioral manifestations of the characteristics may vary with context. This study probed whether the PR-ELL participants believe these characteristics adequately describe their gifts and talents.

### **Services and Programs**

Too often, educators who work with PR-ELL students lower their standards and expectations. Which types of programs and services do PR-ELL students need? Some researchers believe that programs that include authentic and productive collaboration, build on strengths, increase public awareness of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and their talents, secure adequate teacher training and professional development, and engage in on-going

evaluation from a variety of sources are needed. Renzulli and Reis (1997), advocate for an integrated continuum of services for talented and gifted students in their Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM). Services provided in the SEM range from general enrichment for both wide-ranging and targeted subgroups to highly individualized curriculum modification procedures for rapid learners and first-hand investigative opportunities for highly motivated individuals and small groups. The model also includes a broad array of specific grouping arrangements based on commonalities in abilities, interests, learning styles, and preferences for various modes of expression. The focus is on enrichment opportunities in the SEM, but the model also includes various acceleration options (e.g., grade skipping, enrollment in college classes) and numerous supplementary program options that provide opportunities for talent development in specialized areas (e.g., Math League, Invention Convention, National History Day Competition, to mention only a few of the hundreds of available options). Other components of the model include performance-based assessment of student strengths, individual and group counseling, and various special placement options (within and outside the school) based on high degrees of proficiency and potential.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study examined students' perceptions about the characteristics of giftedness and talents. It also probed students' perceptions of whether these characteristics align with Renzulli's broadened conception (1978) of gifted behaviors that reflect an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits—above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity, or whether their perceived gifts better match the NAGC definition (2008) of 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. Perceptions of individual participants' characteristics of giftedness were also examined. Do their perceived characteristics match, for example, the general/common attributes of giftedness of Frasier and Passow (1994)? Do they demonstrate the traits, aptitudes, and behaviors consistently identified by these researchers as common to all gifted students? Do students believe that giftedness is characterized by motivation, advanced interests, communication skills, problem-solving ability, well-developed memory, inquiry, insight, reasoning, imagination/creativity, sense of humor, and advanced ability to deal with symbol systems? Do these characteristics, in the opinion of these young people, describe the advanced characteristics of these gifted PR-ELL students?

### **Research Methodology**

The goal of this dissertation was to identify the social and cultural characteristics of gifted and talented PR-ELL students. The study also addressed student perceptions of the characteristics of gifted and talented PR-ELL students, and the programming opportunities necessary to have them reach their potential.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this dissertation:

1. Which characteristics do PR-ELL students believe best describe their gifts and talents? How do these PR-ELL students characterize students from other cultures (White or African American) who are identified as academically gifted and talented?
2. What are the family characteristics (home language spoken, home environment, study habits) that characterize these PR-ELL students who have been identified as academically gifted and talented?

3. What educational factors (teachers, subject, and enrichment activities) do these students believe have contributed to their gifts and talents?

### **Research Procedures**

To address the research questions in this study, a qualitative research methodology and a phenomenological, ethnographic approach were employed as well as a multiple comparative case study methodology. Comparative case studies provided the tools to explore “complex social phenomena” (Yin, 2009, p. 2). One-on-one interviews with the students provided the contexts within which conversations explored social phenomena, indicating the applicability of this research approach for this study. A comprehensive case study research cannot be generalized to the larger population; however, it can be generalized to theoretical propositions (Yin, 2009) such as how students personally defined gifts and talents in this study.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants selected for this study included a sample of PR-ELL students who attend a Gifted and Talented Academy in an urban area in a small northeastern state who qualified for admission by application and by achieving high scores on a statewide achievement test. Students who attend the Academy also completed an application that included demographic information, short answer essay questions, parent and teacher recommendations, and an additional teacher evaluation. The teacher-rating instrument used was the *Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students—Revised Edition* (SRBCSS) that is research-based with strong validity and reliability (Renzulli et al., 2002). Students were then selected based on evidence of meeting the criteria suggested from their applications, test scores, recommendations, and transcripts. Members of the academy selection committee reviewed all application packets to

identify potential knowledge, outstanding communication skills, and characteristics including creativity, motivation, maturity, and ability to work independently.

In this study, twelve Puerto Rican ELL students, from grades 6, 7, and 8, were selected from the pool of students attending the academy. To qualify for the study, students must have attended the academy for at least two years and come from Puerto Rican homes in which English is the second language of the family. Moreover, the students were identified as being first or second generation in the United States. It was anticipated that 15-18 students would meet these criteria, and they were asked to complete a demographic survey (See Appendix A) as well as having participated in two or three interviews to examine the constructs identified in the research questions that would uncover common characteristics of the students and their perceptions about the term “gifted and talented.” Institutional Review Board Permission to conduct the study was sought, and parents were contacted. Both parents and students gave permission for students to participate in the study. Students completed the demographic surveys, and interviews were scheduled and conducted. A schedule was arranged, and twelve students were interviewed at the school. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed, and themes from each data source were identified and compared across each case study to analyze commonalities and differences, and to also identify further evidence of findings and themes relating to the research questions. Student artifacts were examined, including portfolios of interests, learning styles, Renzulli Learning, expression styles, and products completed at school. Students’ permanent records were accessed to identify achievement and grade trends as well as other data pertinent to the research questions.

### **Data Analyses**

This research was primarily concerned with the perceptions, beliefs, and home and educational experiences of these students. Thus, the student was the unit of analysis, and each

was profiled in a rich descriptive case study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By comparing a range of similar, yet contrasting cases, the researcher was able to glean findings across case studies. The use of multiple case studies enabled the precision, validity, and strength of the findings to be reinforced, increasing the overall confidence of the study itself (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Observations were coded and analyzed according to ideas and themes in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the common characteristics, perceptions of giftedness, and programmatic and identification needs of PR-ELL gifted and talented students. The different categories that would potentially emerge from open coding may relate to home and school environment, parental support, socio-economic factors, and student self-perceptions of their Puerto Rican background, and their label of gifted and talented. Axial coding was subsequently used to link and identify relationships among the categories that emerged from open coding (Grbich, 2007).

The individual case studies were analyzed and then compared and contrasted. Coding and analysis of case study data were used to identify core categories and common themes. Formal coding included open coding, resulting from the sorting of data and the emergence of categories through comparison and contrast of the data; axial coding, where the categories were weighted and contrasted in order to identify descriptive relationships among them; and selective coding, where core categories were selected and related to the others (Grbich, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To verify the accuracy of the observations, a member check (Tisdell, 2002) was conducted with each student participating in the case study developed for verification purposes.

Qualitative data analysis coincided with data collection using a coding paradigm, including three levels of coding techniques: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open coding is the earliest stage in the coding process, in which the researcher breaks down, examines compares, conceptualizes, and categorizes the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It involves unrestricted coding of all data by the careful scrutiny of field notes, interviews, or any other documents to begin to identify patterns and regularities transformed into categories into which subsequent items are sorted. Open coding: this study might relate to the various behaviors identified by gifted PR-ELL students to demonstrate their giftedness.

The next stage in coding is axial coding, in which codes are examined according to the coding paradigm, and knowledge emerges about the relationships between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding occurs during the early stages of open coding, but becomes more dominant after initial data are collected and analyzed. Axial coding began during the latter stages of open coding, enabling the researcher to specify relationships among the many categories that emerged in open coding and ultimately resulted in the conceptualization of one or more categories selected as the core.

### **Limitations**

In this study, time constraints limited the depth and breadth of the interviews and observations as visits to students' classrooms were time intensive. Miles and Huberman (1994) indicate that with multiple case sampling, generalizations can be made from one case to the next, but not to a large universe. Another limitation was the process used to identify students. Bermudez et al. (1993) emphasized problems that may occur using standardized tests to identify gifted and talented students. Because the students in this study were selected based on their State Mastery Test scores, the pool of applicants did not include students who would be considered gifted and talented in a larger sample of districts that use different criteria. The achievement levels throughout the United States vary from state to state and generally, "achievement tends to

be higher in suburban than in inner-city schools” (Oakland & Rosen, 2005, p. 59). Thus, because the students participating in this survey and who were interviewed were from the same city, the responses collected may reflect a more homogenous, urban setting (Oakland & Rosen, 2005).

Researcher bias is possible when conducting observations (Yin, 2009). Every effort was made to avoid such bias by this researcher throughout the observation and analysis process. When using interviews in qualitative studies, validity and reliability standards are applicable (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). To achieve cross-validation of the qualitative data, “between-methods” triangulation was used, including interviews, survey data and student records. In addition, transcriptions of the information collected from the interviews and surveys were shared with the students to ensure the accuracy and confidentiality of their statements (Wolcott, 2009).

### **Summary**

The last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were marked by educators’ increasing interest in diverse gifted students who can be described as ethnic, racial, and linguistic minorities, economically disadvantaged, gifted females, gifted underachievers, and the gifted/learning disabled. Despite this interest and the recent research cited above that expanded conceptions of giftedness, the majority of young people identified as gifted continue to represent the majority culture, as economically disadvantaged and other diverse student populations continue to be underrepresented in gifted programs (Donovan & Cross, 2002). For example, Frasier and Passow (1994) indicate that identification and selection procedures may be ineffective and inappropriate for the identification of these young people. Educator bias, for example, may occur when preconceived ideas about what constitutes giftedness results in teachers’ failure to recognize and nominate indicators of giftedness in culturally, linguistically diverse (CLD) students with high potential (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier & Passow, 1994). Groups that have been traditionally

underrepresented in gifted programs could be better served (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier & Passow, 1994) if the more expanded notions of giftedness and more flexible forms of identification are translated from research and incorporated in state and local guidelines and regulations. Little doubt exists about the widening acceptance of a broadened conception of giftedness and talent in the research and scholarly literature (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005); however, translating this research into policy and practice continues to remain an elusive goal. This dissertation examined the characteristics of this population, as well as participants' perspectives about their own views of definitions and characteristics of giftedness and the services necessary for gifted PR-ELL students to realize their potential. This study, it is hoped, will lead to a deeper and richer understanding of the characteristics, identification procedures, and programming options that are essential to identify and support increasing numbers of PR-ELL students as they develop their gifts and talents.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH**

**“Schools must eliminate the barriers to participation of economically disadvantaged and minority students with outstanding talents and must develop strategies to serve students from underrepresented groups”** (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 28).

#### **Review of Literature**

This chapter presents a review of related research and literature focusing on three areas that provide the theoretical foundation for this study. In the first section, a review of the research pertaining to the characteristics of minority English Language Learner (ELL) gifted and talented students is presented as is a discussion of how these characteristics compare with those of students from other cultures. In section two, the family characteristics for minority ELL students identified as gifted and talented are explored. In section three, research related to the factors that contribute to the identification of minority ELL students as gifted and talented are discussed.

#### **Underrepresentation of Minority ELL Students in Gifted and Talented Programs**

**“All ethnic, racial, and gender groups possess proportionate numbers of GT individuals”**  
(Ramos, 2010, p. 152).

The mission of Gifted & Talented programs is to enable the capabilities of our brightest students to flourish by giving them access to rich and rigorous exposure to experiences, which will encourage higher level thinking skills, problem solving expertise, and an outlet for creative and personal expression. It is important to provide these opportunities for as many qualified young people as possible. This is the right thing to do for these individuals and an important step for the nation to support its natural resources (Ramos, 2010). The U.S. Department of Education

1993 report on gifted students stated that the, “Underrepresentation of disadvantaged students in programs for the gifted is the ineffectiveness and inappropriateness of the identification and selection procedures that have been and continue to be used” (p. 28). The goal of educating gifted Hispanic or any other culturally diverse students is the same as the goal of identifying and educating gifted students in general: allowing them to participate in a mainstream society, enabling these students to succeed at a high level academically, and helping them to enter and succeed in college and to receive the education of their choice (Frasier & Passow, 1994).

In 1988, Congress passed the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (P.L.100-297). The Javits Act reaffirms that every population has individuals with potential for superior or outstanding achievement whose environments may not recognize or nurture this potential (Frasier & Passow, 1994). Many Hispanic, and in particular Puerto Rican students, are considered educationally at-risk, as data on Hispanic students indicates low achievement levels, high dropout rates, poor school attendance rates, higher placements in special education and underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs (Alvarez, 1992; Bradby, 1992; Melendez, 1986; Passow, 1986; U.S. Bureau of Census as cited in Reis et al., 1995). The achievement gap between Hispanic students and White students has continued to widen. To support these students, many states offer enrichment resources and provide additional academic services. Miller (2004) states that if these young people are not nurtured, it may well result in a lack of interest in school. Some students sit quietly and do their work without giving it much thought. Others display negative behaviors and/or do not fulfill their intellectual capabilities, and others, in particular those who possess attributes of giftedness, underachieve (Miller, 2004).

According to Esquierdo and Arreguin-Anderson (2012), Hispanics make up about one-fourth of the kindergarten classrooms in the country. Due to the uncertainty and ambiguity

surrounding the assessment as well as the need to increase Hispanic student population in gifted programs, the underrepresentation of Hispanics in Gifted and Talented programs has become a national concern for educators interested in gifted and talented students (Bernal, 2002; Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996; Ortiz & Gonzalez, 1998). The National Research Council (2002) has concluded that Afro-American and Hispanic students are almost 50% less likely than White students to be identified for gifted programs.

### **Characteristics of Minority ELL Students Identified as Gifted and Talented**

**“Gifted and talented English Language Learners are unique and challenging students. Like all gifted and talented students, they are curious, creative, observant and sensitive. All gifted and talented students are the best and brightest of any community in which they live, whether in Iowa or abroad”** (Iowa Department of Education & The Connie Belin and Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, 2008, p. 9).

Researchers have identified the characteristics, traits, attitudes and behaviors that appear to be common to a broad base of gifted students (Frasier & Passow, 1994). Some of these characteristics, traits or attitudes include the facility to manipulate abstract symbols systems, early language interest and development, well developed memory, ability to generate original ideas, precocious language and thought, superior humor, moral thinking, independence in thinking, emotional intensity, high levels of energy, early reading and advanced comprehension, local thinking abilities, high levels of motivation, insights and advanced motivation. The task for educators is to understand how these characteristics are manifested in specific behaviors for students from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds (Clark, 1993; Davis & Rimm, 1989;

Kitano & Kirby, 1986; Renzulli, Hartman, & Callahan, 1971; Sternberg, 1986; VanTassel-Baska, 1989).

Leung (1981) argued that certain gifted characteristics exist in students of all cultural backgrounds and thus can be labeled as “absolute attributes of giftedness,” but he also believes that each individual does not have to possess all of the characteristics in order to be considered gifted and talented. Furthermore, Leung states that it is essential that certain procedures be used to identify these particular behaviors “in various cultural, contextual and environmental settings” (Leung, 1981, p. 48) for gifted students from low socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, it is very important to understand that these characteristics can be found in the specific behaviors of students from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. Zappia (1989) suggested that to identify specific behaviors in students of diverse backgrounds, a variety of data should be collected, including language preference, proficiency in different languages, level of assimilation to the new culture, preservation of cultural values, and student demographics.

Over two decades ago, Maker and Schiever (1989) identified absolute attributes of giftedness in Hispanics, relating to language and cultural values. Some of these attributes paired with cultural traits are: high level of verbal activity (traditional language of family), emotional depth and intensity (a physical or spiritual index of personal support), unusual sensitivity to feelings (family structure and dynamic male dominance), conceptualized solutions to social and environmental problems (nuclear and extended family closeness valued), unusual retentiveness; unusual capacity for processing information (traditional culture), and leadership (collaborative rather than competitive dynamic). Cultural specifics checklists and rating scales based on unique behavior of gifted minority students have been developed over time (Frasier & Passow, 1994). “The Los Angeles Unified School District Gifted/Talented Programs’ *Screenings and*

*Instructional Programs for Able Underachieving Students* from diverse backgrounds was adapted to reflect how culture and language impact on the expression of giftedness in Hispanic students and to reflect the learning strategies that best capitalize on the Hispanic culture in developing learning potential” (Perrine, 1989, p. 5). “The checklists of characteristics consist of intellectual, linguistic, and social indicators that are considered absolute attributes of giftedness” (Frasier & Passow, 1994, p. 55).

Bilingual or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students exist in many cultures and ethnic groups. For this reason, educators must seek a more clear understanding of the cultural and environmental influences on these students when they are being considered for gifted programs (Frasier & Passow, 1994). Barkan and Bernal (1991) suggest that the programs for bright bilingual and LEP students must consider their first language, allowing them to build on the “assets” or skills they already possess. Bernal also comments on characteristics of this group, stating that gifted Hispanic students possess the ability to learn and retain information faster than other Hispanic children and will often absorb and understand concepts after hearing them for the first time. Baldwin (1984) believes that these students also possess a “good memory.” Bernal and Reina (1974) also indicate that another characteristic of Hispanic gifted students is the responsibility they assume for taking care of their younger siblings, helping them with homework and supervising them when their parents are not at home.

Joseph Renzulli, who developed the *Scales for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students*, conducted research on these students, finding that many have the ability to promptly and easily master and recall information, have a grasp of principles, and make valid generalizations about events, people, or things (Renzulli et al., 1976). Moreover, Jackson, and Lu (1992) found that bilingual students may be able to read in English better than they can speak it,

and that the lack of fluency in their speaking can sometimes be mistaken for lack of reading skills. They also found that these bilingual gifted students may demonstrate linguistic precocity either in one language or sometimes in two (Jackson & Lu, 1992). Lara-Alecio & Irby (2000) define "... gifted Hispanic students as those who possess above average intelligence, task commitment, and creativity, considering the socio-linguistic-cultural context" (p. 507). Lara-Alecio and Irby used Renzulli's definition of giftedness as a frame to more effectively describe the characteristics of Hispanic ELL gifted students as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of Hispanic ELL Gifted Students

Characteristic	Reference
Motivation for learning	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996 Frasier & Passow, 1994
Exhibiting a desire for learning	Irby and Lara-Alecio, 1996 Brulles, Castellano, & Laing (2011)
Having persistence	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Good attendance	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Demonstrating a keen social and academic language	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Using expressive, elaborate and fluent verbal and written behaviors, both in English and Spanish	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996 Brulles, Castellano, & Laing (2011)
Demonstrating cultural sensitivity	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996 Brulles, Castellano, & Laing (2011)
Having pride in their language and culture	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996 Brulles, Castellano, & Laing (2011)
Possessing values oral and written traditions	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996

Strong familial connections	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Strong interpersonal relationships among family members	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Taking over interpretative caretaker roles among the home, school and community	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Preference for collaboration	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Ability to lead and work with others cooperatively and can make good social adjustments	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Elaborate imagination	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996 Brulles, Castellano, & Laing (2011)
Exhibits oral and written language rich imagery	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
High academic achievement	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Ability to generalize learning	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Creative productivity in the arts and display originality in movement, dance, and other physical activities	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Tendency to prefer older playmates	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Adhere to family responsibilities and demonstrate “street smarts”	Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996
Awareness of other cultures and languages	Brulles, Castellano, & Laing (2011)
Exceptional talent in areas valued by their culture	Brulles, Castellano, & Laing (2011)
Communication Skills	Frasier & Passow, 1994
Well-Developed Memory	Frasier & Passow, 1994
Insight	Frasier & Passow, 1994
Advanced interests	Frasier & Passow, 1994
Problem-solving ability	Frasier & Passow, 1994
Inquiry	Frasier & Passow, 1994

Reasoning	Frasier & Passow, 1994
Sense of humor	Frasier & Passow, 1994
Advanced ability to deal with symbol systems	Frasier & Passow, 1994

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Castellano is in agreement with most of the characteristics presented in Table 1. He stated that these students also have the ability to acquire social English language skills readily, display a tendency to prefer older playmates, and adhere to family responsibilities that demonstrate “street smarts” (Castellano, 1998). Brulles, Castellano, and Laing (2011) identified nine Gifted and Talented Characteristics of ELLs as summarized in Table 2. “Strong desire to learn in English and their native language; Exceptional talent in areas valued by their culture; Interpret and translate for peers and adults with high levels of accuracy; Eagerly share culture; Able to code-switch; Learn a second language at an accelerated pace; Possess an awareness of other cultures and languages; Read in L1 two or more grades above grade level; Strong sense of pride in their own culture” (Castellano, 2011, p. 307) (as in Aguirre & Hernandez, 1999; Winebrenner & Brulles, 2008).

Table 2

Common Attributes of Giftedness

- 
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• motivation</li> <li>• communication skills</li> <li>• well-developed memory</li> <li>• insight</li> <li>• imagination/creativity</li> <li>• advanced ability to deal with symbol systems</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advanced interests</li> <li>• problem-solving ability</li> <li>• inquiry</li> <li>• reasoning</li> <li>• sense of humor</li> </ul> |
|--|---|
- 

(Frasier & Passow, 1994)

In research about gifted students from multicultural and diverse backgrounds, Frasier and Passow (1994) also identified several “general/common attributes of giftedness”—traits, aptitudes, and behaviors consistently identified by researchers as common to all gifted students. They note that these basic elements of giftedness are similar across cultures (though each is not displayed by every student). A listing of these attributes may be found in Table 2.

Each of these common characteristics can be manifested in different ways by different students, according to Frasier and Passow. Educators should be especially careful in attempting to identify these characteristics in students from diverse backgrounds (i.e., disadvantaged, different ethnic or racial backgrounds, etc.) as specific behavioral manifestations of the characteristics may vary with context (Frasier & Passow, 1994).

### **Contributing Factors to the Identification of Gifted PR-ELL Students**

In order to better serve Gifted and Talented ELL Hispanic students, some school districts are using a variety of criteria to screen and identify them (Bernal & Reina, 1974; Castellano, 1994; Garcia, J. H., 1994). Some of these multiple criteria are ethnographic assessment; where the student can be observed over a period of time in different settings; dynamic assessment, the student is asked to transfer newly acquired skills to unique circumstances. Other criteria include parent interviews, use of test scores, behavior checklist, writing samples as well as samples of creativity.

Frasier and Passow (1994) asserted that the use of psychometric evaluations to identify gifted and talented students has been acknowledged as one cause of underrepresentation of Hispanic children in such programs. The desire to find ways to identify the underrepresented economically disadvantaged students has been ongoing, as for many years there has been a concern regarding the causes of low-achievement by minority students and their

underrepresentation in gifted programs. A robust discussion has ensued regarding the causes for these deficiencies, related to the conditions of poverty in which they live or the discriminatory practices of school and society. Frasier argued that formulating specific constructs to identify gifted minority and economically disadvantaged students is not the sole answer to increasing the number of these students identified as gifted and talented. Rather, it is important to apply the same standards of giftedness for these students as it is for the general population, while also taking into consideration that the cultural differences and environmental contexts have a significant impact on behavior and performance. For example, a quality of all gifted people is, “the ability to be highly expressive with words or symbols,” but these skills are exhibited in different ways depending on culture and context. Therefore, a bilingual Hispanic child from the barrio, an African American child who lives in the inner-city, a native American young person living on a reservation, a White youngster living in a rural area and an African American child who lives in the suburbs may very well demonstrate, “unusual communication skills” but in very different ways. As a result, the specific behaviors must be evaluated as displays of the qualities of giftedness. The processes of identification should, therefore, simplify the manifestations of gifted behaviors (Frasier & Passow, 1994). These concerns must be addressed if the quest to increase the number of these students is going to be successful. Some scholars believe that in order to assess the talent potential of ELL Hispanic children, there is no need to devise new theories of giftedness just for minority and economically disadvantaged students, nor should there be a need to weaken the criteria or standards of excellence; rather, students from all socioeconomic backgrounds should be compared on the same scale (Frasier & Passow, 1994).

It is essential to create situations that enhance the possibility for students to reach their full potential by having a nurturing environment that regards the culture and context of the

student's background. Frasier and Passow (1994) described several new paradigms, which are different from the traditional psychometric models, in order to conceive new directions for identification and programming opportunities, including: new constructs of giftedness, absolute attributes and specific behaviors, cultural and contextual variability, more varied and authentic assessment, and identification through learning opportunities. Frasier and Passow also indicated that the search for talent will be enhanced by improving the quality of learning and the learning environment in ways that will open up opportunities for students to demonstrate their gifted behaviors. Passow (1986) supported this idea, citing that these environments foster leadership qualities, creativity, insight and a demonstration of "unusual potential," that might otherwise go unnoticed if the student were in a different environment.

To summarize, Frasier and Passow (1994) assert that new models are needed to re-hypothesize the giftedness construct, emphasizing gifted behaviors, designing innovative approaches to recognize gifted and talented behaviors within the students' sociocultural milieu, and incorporate the identification processes with learning opportunities. As these new hypothesis are constructed, strategies must be formulated, which take into account several factors that have an impact on the behaviors of ELL students who are also economically deprived. Frasier and Passow further conclude finding effective ways to identify and develop talents among minority students will result in, "the promise that *educators will better understand how to identify and nurture talent potential among all learners*" (p. xviii).

Brulles et al. (2011) concurred, stating that all students deserve the opportunity to demonstrate their talents and abilities through the use of multiple measures to help identify this population. They also called on school administrators to reexamine how well they look at gifted ELL students who are being considered to participate in gifted education programs. They added

that by using a definition that emphasizes how the student thinks and learns, the identification process will transform from the “stereotypical views of what a gifted learner ‘looks like’ to a view that will include all children, including ELL students” (p. 306).

Slocumb and Payne (2010) assert that other tests used to identify gifted and talented students include nonverbal tests paired with achievement data, rate of language acquisition, and observed traits. Identifying gifted students from different backgrounds using the same screening procedures will result in the extreme under-identification of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Educators pose the question of how students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds can compete at the same level as those who have the resources to attend quality preschool programs, travel, and have access to literature, computers and educational toys. When all children are identified as gifted using the same criteria, they are being treated equally. However, as Slocumb and Payne indicated, all students are not being treated with equity. They define equal as, “as great as, the same as, like or alike in quantity, degree, and value; of the same rank, ability, and merit; evenly proportioned or balanced” (p. 3). Equity is generally defined as a quality of being fair or impartial, and so the need to identify with equity is critical.

To continue to identify these students impartially, it is important to use a holistic approach that assesses students’ potential and strengths (Brulles et al., 2011). Although procedures for identifying gifted ELLs have improved, these students continue to be underrepresented in gifted education programs. A lack of English development is a prime factor as to why many ELL students fail to demonstrate their abilities when asked to perform at advanced levels (Brulles et al., 2011). Another factor that prevents ELL students from participating in gifted and talented education is the state mandate that all ELL students, including gifted ELLs, receive at least four hours of a structured ESL class. Therefore, ELL students have

limited time to attend gifted and talented education programs. They also raise questions about how educators can help these students access gifted instruction beyond their identification and how they can determine whether or not the additional instruction is appropriate for ELL students.

To summarize, research indicates that all of the above stated factors, which can negatively impact ELL gifted students and their ability to reach their full potential must be recognized and included in the equation when dealing with ELL gifted students. At the same time, it is critical that the criteria for identifying ELL students as gifted not be watered down, which means that a delicate balancing act must be achieved, which requires an understanding of the multiple and complex factors involved in identifying ELL gifted students.

Foertsch (1998) states that second language learning is a key influence in how children learn to read, and the educational experiences of the students in his study support the research. Both cognitive development and academic development in the first language have been found to have a positive effect on second language learners (Bialystock, 1991; Collier, 1989, 1992; Garcia, J. E., 1994, Genesse, 1987, 1994; Thomas & Collier, 1997).

### **Family Characteristics that Characterize PR-ELL Students Identified as Academically Gifted and Talented**

**“Students attain more educational success when schools and families work together to motivate, socialize, and educate students”** (Caplan, 2000, p. 1).

Blazer (2005) asserts that research indicates that active family involvement is a reliable predictor of successful student achievement. Currently, a paucity of research exists regarding family characteristics that influence the identification and development of Puerto Rican English Language Learner (PR-ELL) students who have been identified as academically gifted and talented. This section explores the role that family characteristics, such as home language, home

environment and study habits, play in maximizing students' potential for giftedness. This section also addresses the family characteristics that impedes the success of these students and discusses steps that can be taken to remedy this situation.

For most Hispanic students, their socioeconomic conditions interfere with their academic achievement. Many of these students come from families who lack basic resources to get by and fall under the poverty line. Poverty, defined by Payne (1998) is the extent to which an individual does without resources. Due to this lack of resources, many potentially gifted students remain unnoticed because they score lower on standardized tests and behave differently than their peers who come from a higher economic background. In many cases, these students appear unmotivated and seem to lack goals and planning skills. Social skills are also a struggle for these students, who often have trouble resolving conflicts with peers and adults (Slocumb & Payne 2000). There is a belief that all minority students are economically and educationally disadvantaged, and although many minority families meet these criteria, certainly not all families are economically in disadvantage (Frazier & Passow, 1994). "Cultural deprivation" was first discussed in 1960 as a paradigm to explain the underachievement of minority students, since too much attention is often paid to students' deficits and subsequently, recognizing or identifying student strengths can become very difficult (Banks 1993). ELL students that have excelled or are achieving well in school are generally not recognized as gifted (Frazier & Passow, 1994).

Arroyo and Stenberg's (1993) study concluded that disadvantaged gifted children demonstrate behaviors that allow them to cope with their economic and social issues. They are able to use their cognitive abilities that constitute their intelligent behavior to adapt to their environment. These behaviors are presented in addition to measurable intellectual capacity. Arroyo and Stenberg added that the disadvantaged gifted and talented student maximizes "...

his/her intellectual potential and transcends the impositions of a disadvantaged environment by creating alternative prospects that enrich both his/her personal life and the future lives of others” (p. 29).

According to Soto (as cited in Hine, 1994), some families of Puerto Rican descent provide a nurturing environment for their children and have established a fascinating way to interact with them where they encourage them to be independent, but at the same time discourage them from appearing self-centered or focusing too much on themselves, which may be a conflict with some students identified as confrontational. Soto also found that “family bonds” and “discomfort with cultural stereotypes/reactions to teacher and community expectations” (p. 23) were two factors unique to the families of gifted students who speak English as a second language. She also concluded that the Puerto Rican culture is devoted to sustaining the language and family centered identity, as the cultural values of pride and loyalty promote a more supportive, less competitive environment. Hine added that two factors: strong family bonds and a family centered environment contribute to high achievement in high potential children (Hine, 1994). In research conducted by researchers at The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, Hébert (1993) found that Puerto Rican families living in the United States had a strong sense of cultural identity as Puerto Ricans, demonstrate a strong attachment to the members of their family, and a real concern for members of the immediate family. Hébert also stated that the degree of parental involvement, parental education, educational environment in the home, socioeconomic status were factors that contribute to the student’s high academic achievement. Diaz Rivera (1994) studied the perspectives of three male and three female Puerto Rican high ability underachievers relative to their families, culture, school and classroom. The families of these students displayed similar characteristics, including low-income conditions, low

parental educational attainment and/or formal education, parents working in low-skill occupations, mothers as dominant figures, parental view of schooling as important and parental aspiration to have their children succeed in school and life in general. Diaz concluded that the Puerto Rican culture promotes family unity and a dependence of children on their parents, which can hinder academic performance. Diaz sees the need for specific proactive measures to avoid underachievement among Puerto Rican students including discarding negative stereotypes and recognition of positive cultural strengths. Taking into consideration the research of Funkhouse and Gonzalez (2007), Blazer (2005) discusses effective practices, which result in successful parental involvement programs. A needs assessment must be the starting point. Design programs, which meet the specific needs of the schools. Be clear and specific regarding the best ways for parents to be involved in their children's education. Create a climate conducive to mutual trust and respect. Be understanding and respectful of diversity. Keep an open door policy with families. Keep lines of communication open with families (The Parent Academy 2005).

Baumrind (1989) and others (e.g., Steinberg 1996) suggest that certain parenting practices are directly linked to academically ambitious students, including specific types of parenting practices mentioned in the literature. These include styles such as, "authoritarian—in which parents are often distant, controlling and offer few opportunities for autonomous behavior; authoritative—in which parents are warm, firm, but allow children sufficient autonomy to make choices; and permissive—in which parents allow excessive autonomy without firm guidance" (Lockwood, 2007, pp. 89-90). Of these three categories, "African-American, Latinos and immigrant groups in general tend to be authoritarian, and their children tend to be less successful in school than children whose parents are authoritative, thus confirming how important it is to foster self-efficacy and task mastery" (p. 90). Researchers conclude that it is very challenging to have high

achievement goals, as well as a supportive network of school, family, and friends who hold similar goals (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

Some Latinos who are from low socio-economic backgrounds have high educational goals, which they attribute to “the influence of mothers, but also other significant ‘mentors’ in their lives” (Arellano & Padilla 1996; Gandara, 1995; Lockwood, 2007). Gonzalez and colleagues, in their ongoing work, designed strategies to bring the skills and talents that exist in communities of low income Latino students into the classroom. In these settings, parents are invited to share their skills with children, acting as experts in particular areas of the curriculum. This approach, known as Funds of Knowledge, has as its intent to help Latino students understand the intellectual strengths in their own homes and communities and to increase the credibility of parents as sources of knowledge (Lockwood, 2007). This approach is an excellent vehicle to change perceptions among students themselves and their teachers that their parents are intellectually competent (Lockwood, 2007).

Castellano (2003) found that culturally and linguistically diverse families with gifted children make every effort to assimilate to the mainstream culture while maintaining their own cultural roots. Parents often do not allow their children to attend gifted programs outside of their community; therefore, the students remain in their regular neighborhood schools. Parents then do not advocate for their children’s right to receive a differentiated curriculum or accelerated schoolwork, which include rigor and higher order thinking skills. Many parents recognize giftedness in their children early on and support both their children and the school they attend. At times, they are the first to identify the signs of giftedness and their children’s talents (Castellano & Diaz, 2002). Nevertheless, they do not always communicate their findings to teachers and school administrators (Brulles et al., 2011). Teachers, therefore, must establish effective forms of

communication with all parents, especially those with gifted ELL students. Information sent to the families must be purposeful, specific and clear, free of educational jargon. Equally important, this information should be provided in the parents' native language. Brulles et al. (2011) suggest actions that parents can take to support their gifted ELL children, including promoting opportunities that respond to the child's area(s) of interest, seeking information about what gifted identification means and investigating local opportunities, such as summer and art classes, setting high expectations for conduct, academic achievement and performance, and pairing the child with a mentor to foster his or her strengths and interests. Also helpful in this effort is the provision of a nurturing environment that is conducive to learning, such as a place to study with limited distractions, and providing necessary study materials and supplies.

Brulles et al. (2011) also stressed that it is essential for parents to maintain high standards and high expectations and not to accept excuses for academic failure, such as biases, stereotypes or prejudices from those within the school or community. According to Slocumb and Payne (2000), school personnel should closely examine the conditions of the home environment, which may negatively or positively affect learning. Some of the reasons why it is important to study the home environment are to identify resources in the home, to investigate giftedness versus opportunities, to probe the role of enriched experiences from innate abilities, and to recognize the elements within the home environment that contribute to the identification of students who differ from the norm (Slocumb & Payne, 2000). High academic achievement for Puerto Rican students is influenced by level of parent educational attainment, level of socioeconomic status, home perceptions of education, and the degree of parental involvement (Frasier & Passow, 1994). Parental involvement is essential to support students as parental experiences can and will enhance children's learning potential (Ford & Harris, 1999). When families are involved in their

children's education, their children tend to earn higher grades and perform better on standardized tests (Ford & Harris, 1999). Teachers can invite students and families to participate in enrichment activities in the community to support their learning in the classroom.

To summarize, as stated at the beginning of this section, the research literature regarding family characteristics that characterize PR-ELL students identified as academically gifted and talented is very limited, almost non-existent. The research literature does state that parents encourage their children to do well and are often the first to recognize giftedness in their children. Beyond that, however, there were few specific characteristics that the literature listed and described and its effect on gifted PR-ELL students.

### **Educational Factors Contributing to Students' Gifts and Talents**

**“Every student comes to school with a story and a unique personal history”** (Walker 2011, p. 1).

This section examines the educational factors that students believe have contributed to their gifts and talents. These factors include family characteristics, teachers, subject and content knowledge and enrichment activities. According to Walker (2011), teachers and counselors should work together to meet the academic, emotional, personal and social needs of multicultural gifted students. Walker stresses that, “It is important for teachers and counselors to be able to identify gifted students in need, particularly those who experience life with heightened sensitivity and culturally diverse students who may be at various stages in their cultural identity development” (p. 1). Walker asserts that counselors can play a pivotal role as advocates of culturally diverse students, who often are underrepresented in gifted programs. (Walker, 2011)

In *Funds of Knowledge*, Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) highlight that, “people are competent, they have knowledge, and life experiences have given them that knowledge” (pp. ix-

x). Their research conveys the message that teachers can use students' prior knowledge from their home life experiences and should include these experiences in their instruction, so that children can better understand and benefit from the lesson. Ladson-Billings (1992) discusses relevant pedagogy that is directed "toward empowering students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impact knowledge, skills and attitudes" (p. 382). She has found that to achieve teacher-student connections, teachers must show respect for the students and their communities and believe in the potential of all students. They should be required to utilize strategies that allow students to make connections between what they are learning and their communities, family background, and worldwide issues (Ladson-Billings) Another factor that contributes to the identification of minority children as gifted and talented, is having teachers who are equipped with the necessary knowledge and understanding of how to identify abilities and traits of giftedness and fostering talents in their students. (Brulles et al., 2011) Teachers should participate in professional development in gifted education that will enable them to identify ability and develop the talents of ELL gifted students. It is imperative that teachers learn how to identify characteristics in gifted ELL students and become "talent scouts" for those students who display gifted characteristics (Brulles et al., 2011).

At times teachers question the need for gifted education for students with seemingly average academic achievement; however, this achievement level could merely be due to students' lack of instruction appropriate to their learning, academic potential, or instruction that matches their learning abilities and style (Brulles et al., 2011) They also point to the deficiency of academic language in these students as an issue because these children often think at high levels but cannot work with the same efficiency as compared to how they think. Jo Ann Robisheaux, an elementary school teacher, stated that when she was teaching children whose

first language was not English, her perceptions of these students' abilities were influenced by their limited English proficiency. However, her experience with a fourth grader named Carla, who had two years of English and low grades, changed her mind (Robisheaux, 1997). When she was assigned to write acrostic poems about her native country, Carla wrote about her life in Honduras:

Carla's imaginatively and emotionally evocative use of language provoked Robisheaux into a whole new understanding of students with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds... She began to broaden identification procedures in her school so that LEP students would not be labeled 'slow learners'; or be consigned to low-level knowledge, with scant opportunities to exercise their talents. At the same time, she began investigating the teaching strategies that were recommended for gifted students and adapted these strategies for LEP students. (Robisheaux, 1997, pp. 4-5)

Despite this educator's commitment to do right by LEP students with gifted talents, there are far too few educators, who advocate for the talents of these children. Although some educators from gifted education and some from bilingual education work to expand gifted education parameters and work hard to improve the quality of education for LEP students, others find that this problem is too complicated to solve, even though they would like to see improvement in this area (Robisheaux, 1997). When they enter American schools, LEP students face a new environment quite different from the one they left behind, and there is a scarcity of strong, progressive bilingual education programs. Another contributing factor to the achievement gap is that there are much larger percentages of Hispanics that grow up in low socioeconomic (SES) circumstances than their White and Asian counterparts. Low SES students are generally

much less likely to be high academic achievers by traditional measures than middle class and high SES students (Hafner, Ingels, Schneider, & Stevenson, 1990; Persky, Daane, & Yin, 2003).

Enrichment is also lacking for some ELL students who cannot access after-school enrichment programs outside of the community because of financial challenges and also because many parents rely on older siblings to provide care for younger siblings while they work. Since (Brulles et al., 2011) these extracurricular activities provide opportunities for students to enhance their abilities, community-based organizations should reach out to parents to explain the benefits of having their children take advantage of these educational opportunities. Beasley (2011a) found that it is important to provide guidance, encouragement and mentoring in social situations to students who participate in enrichment activities, so that they can take full advantage of the benefits of these programs.

Researchers have also pointed out the importance of having teachers understand the unique characteristics of Hispanic bilingual students. When teachers are not aware of these unique characteristics, they are less likely to regard the students as gifted (Strip & Hirsh, 2000). Few teachers of gifted and talented students receive academic preparation to work with culturally diverse gifted students (Ford & Trotman, 2001). These conditions leave bilingual gifted students at a disadvantage; therefore, it is imperative for teachers to receive professional development in gifted education and become aware of the characteristics of bilingual gifted and talented students (Esquierdo, Lara-Alecio, & Irby, 2008). Moreover, teachers trained to work with bilingual students must receive professional development in gifted education, gifted education philosophy, instructional approaches and best practices (Esquierdo et al., 2006).

Bernal (1974) recognized the relationship among traits presented by gifted students and those valued by the community of the same cultural background (Bernal, 1974; Irby & Lara-

Alecio, 1996). In the Hispanic community culture has a powerful influence on the way that gifted traits are exhibited. Cohen (1988) and Bermudez and Rakow (1990) point out that students tend to be more open toward teachers and staff who accept their culture and language without placing much attention to the students' nationality. They further state that culture should be included in any screening instrument used to identify gifted ELL students. According to Castellano (1997); Cohen (1988); and Kitano and Espinosa (1995), using criteria that are not rigid and allowing for a multiplicity of sources to determine unique gifts in students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are essential tools for the identification and nurturing of students' exceptional capabilities (Kloosterman, 1997).

Another factor that can support gifted and talented students is the mindset of educators. As Dweck's (2006) research indicates, two mindsets exist about intelligence: fixed or growth. The first refers to those people who believe that skills are carved in stone and can never be changed; the second refers to those who believe that qualities can be cultivated with effort. This latter point of view aligns with the research of Resnick (2000) who states that ability is open-ended. In directing students to think intelligently—solving problems, thinking logically, and making sense of the world - intelligence can be taught and it can grow (Resnick & Williams-Hall, 2000). Beasley (2011b) points out that Dweck's fixed mindset can lead to underachievement, tuning out, students believing that they have no control and a loss of academic integrity. Dweck's (2006) growth mindset is what needs to be instilled in gifted children. Rather than telling young people that they are smart, praise perseverance and a strong work ethic; assessments should be on-going and frequent; create an environment, which values collaboration rather than competition. For Beasley and Dweck, growth mindset is an invaluable tool to creating a classroom environment, which fosters student learning and growth.

To conclude, the research indicates that ELL Gifted and Talented students can develop their potential and succeed if they are identified appropriately, and if they are provided with the opportunity to develop their giftedness. “The identification and nurturing of talents in linguistically and culturally diverse children will benefit not only from new research about the personal, affective and cognitive needs of this population, but also from the recognition that a constantly changing society celebrates and promotes the diverse expression of talents in its youngest generations” (Kloosterman, 1997, p. 4).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, the methodology used in this study is discussed. The setting, participants, procedures, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis are summarized. Qualitative research methodology and a phenomenological, ethnographic approach were employed in this study. Educational ethnography is generally used for several purposes, such as to describe educational settings and contexts, to generate theory, and even to evaluate educational programs (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Educational ethnography produces descriptive data about the educational activities, physical environments, and perceptions of participants in educational settings. The use of educational ethnography involves investigations of a relatively small, well-defined groups of individuals in a specific geographic area over an extended period of time, using participant observation as the primary source of data collection. The interpretive description and explanation of the educational interactions of the participants are usually the main focus of the researcher. Ethnography, according to Spradley (1979) is “the work of describing a culture” (p. 3). The goal is not merely reporting what is observed, but in understanding another way of life from the point of view of the students. An ethnographer is essentially interested in the meanings of activities, and the research involved in this type of qualitative work is inductive, generative and constructive.

In order to obtain the most accurate image of the participants’ perceptions, a combined methodology of ethnography and comparative case study were used. An ethnographic study was conducted involving multiple hours of observation in the naturalistic settings of the classrooms in the Academy as well as other spaces in the school, and the use of questionnaires and interviews with open-ended questions to probe the subjects’ perceptions of their talents and

school experiences. The critical considerations guiding this methodology and these questions were drawn from the review of literature, and the preliminary observations and informal conversations students conducted over a three-month observation period. Multiple comparative case study methodology was used in this study to investigate students' perceptions of the common characteristics of gifted and talented students, including those from other cultures. The combination of these two qualitative methodologies was used in this study to investigate the ways in which specific types of educational and personal opportunities addressed the unique needs and characteristics of this group.

When using comparative case study research, each of the individual cases share a common characteristic (Stake, 2006) but are also “categorically bounded together” (Merriam, 2009, p. 49). Students participating in this research all share a Puerto Rican heritage, are all English Language Learners (ELLs), and have all been identified as gifted and talented (Merriam, 2009). In multiple case studies, the number of cases enables the researcher to investigate a phenomenon, in this case, a special population or a general condition (Stake, 2005). In this study, Puerto Rican ELLs were selected to investigate unique characteristics of academic talent and the characteristics that describe academically talented ELL students.

This study was conducted after securing permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). In order to collect the data, parental consent was obtained as was the consent of the students. To ensure that parents/guardians had an appropriate understanding of what they were signing, the letter was written in both Spanish and English. The data were collected using qualitative methodologies, as stated earlier including: data from a questionnaire completed by the students, ethnographic observations of the school setting, student interviews, and review of students' school records. In this section, data collection procedures used for this research are

described. For the purpose of this study, an academically achieving student is defined as one who has displayed above average potential as measured by a standardized achievement test.

### **Setting**

The Academy for academically talented students that these participants attend opened its doors in September of 2009 and is located in a mid-size urban setting in the North East United States. The Academy includes a dozen classrooms, a cafeteria/auditorium, with large center hallways and walls decorated with student work. It is a cheerful, small building in a neighborhood surrounded by modest homes and apartments. A small playground is across the street from the academy in a part of a city that ranks as one of the poorest in the nation, whose residents are overwhelmingly in the low end of the socio-economic scale. Approximately 43% of the population is Hispanic, with the vast majority coming from Puerto Rico. In a state where the median household income in 2009 was \$67,034, the city's median household income was \$28,300. Presently, there are 115 students enrolled in the Gifted & Talented Academy, in a district where the student population is over 19,000.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated the school experiences of twelve Puerto Rican English Language Learner (PR-ELL) students that were identified as gifted and who attend a full-time academy for gifted and talented students. The objective of this dissertation was to identify the social and cultural characteristics of gifted and talented students and their personal perceptions about characteristics of students from their own and other cultures that are identified as gifted and talented. For the purpose of this study, the personal characteristics of academically talented students is defined as the general/common attributes of giftedness, traits, aptitudes, and behaviors consistently identified by researchers as common to all gifted students. Frasier and

Passow (1994) indicate that these basic elements of giftedness are similar across cultures, although not every trait will be displayed by each student.

### **Definition of Gifted and Talented**

Renzulli (1978) describes gifted behaviors as consisting of behaviors that reflect an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits—above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. He also states that individuals capable of developing gifted behavior are those who possess or are capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance (Renzulli & Reis, 1997).

### **Criteria for the Selection of Participants**

Selecting the appropriate sample is a crucial step in the qualitative research process (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). For this study, a parallel sampling design was used, beginning with the established criteria that were used to select students to participate in the Academy and then the subsequent criteria that were used to select students for this study. The twelve students who participated in this study who attended the Gifted and Talented Academy were selected based on the following criteria:

1. They obtained score levels of 4 (Goal) and 5 (Above goal) on the State Mastery Test.
2. They were Puerto Rican English Language Learners (ELLs).
3. They were either born in Puerto Rico and/or had at least one parent who was born in Puerto Rico.
4. They were identified as gifted and talented and attended the gifted and talented academy for at least 2 years.

The students were identified and recommended by the Director of the Gifted & Talented Academy using the stated criteria. The students who met the criteria were contacted by the researcher to discuss the purpose of the study and to answer any questions that they may have had regarding their participation. For students who were willing to participate, they were asked to take a packet home, including a letter to the parents written in English and Spanish regarding the purpose of the research (See Appendices B and C). The packet also included a letter of consent that had to be signed by the parent or guardian and student. The first 12 students who returned the packets with the appropriate authorization were those who participated in the study. Twelve students were selected, six females and six males, in grades 6 through 9.

### **Data Collection**

The structural systems and strategies employed for data gathering during this study included the completion of a questionnaire, observation of classes and activities in the school, interviews, and document review. In order to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained in the study, all interviews were taped using a tape recorder.

### **Questionnaires**

Each student completed a questionnaire and was assigned a student code to maintain confidentiality, and all students participated in a classroom discussion in which the purpose of the research was introduced. Students were encouraged to ask questions to clarify the intent of their participation in this study before the questionnaire was distributed. The questionnaire included 67 questions, 50 of which were multiple choice formats, and 17, which were open-ended. The first 30 questions dealt with demographics to extrapolate information relative to home and family life, parents, employment status, family members' level of education, language, and living arrangements. Additionally, several questions addressed levels of parental academic

support, such as helping with homework and projects, having a quiet space for students to do their work and having a computer with internet access. Participants were also asked to respond to questions about the comparisons between the previous school(s) they attended and their Gifted & Talented Academy. Further, students were asked to describe their experiences and interactions and their perceptions of peers from different races and ethnic backgrounds. They were also asked questions about their study habits and career aspirations.

### **Interviews**

Kvale (1996) defined qualitative research interviews as efforts to comprehend the world from the participants' perspective, to reveal the meaning of peoples' experiences, and to unfold their world experiences before scientific accounts. Interviews encourage understanding of the phenomenon being studied, and in this dissertation, the second component of the data collection process included individual student interviews that took place at the school in a casual setting. An interview protocol (See Appendix D) was designed that included 41 questions. The protocol was explained to the students as was the purpose for the interviews, to better understand their responses on their questionnaires regarding Puerto Rican English Language Learners. The goal of this study was to gather information on the social and cultural characteristics of gifted and talented students as well as to understand how they define giftedness and what it means to them. The students had the choice of being interviewed in Spanish or English. They were informed that the interviews would be taped to accurately analyze their responses, and a small tape recorder was utilized to tape the students' interviews. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each, and all the students seemed eager and enthusiastic about participating in this project. The interviews were transcribed, and the data were analyzed and coded by the researcher.

### **Review and Analysis of School Records**

Students' cumulative records were also reviewed and analyzed to access and analyze essential information about the academic history of the students, including the age at which they entered school, the number of schools they attended, their attendance records, the number of times the students changed residence, and their home language. These records provided year-end comments from all of the students' teachers, which yielded meaningful information regarding the students' aptitude, motivation, effort and attitude. Equally important, a pattern of their development emerged including information about their acquisition of a second language, essential reading patterns, writing and math skills, social and emotional growth, and how this data informed the characteristics they possessed, which resulted in their selection for the Gifted and Talented Academy. The records included report cards, issued four times during the school year that detailed the academic improvement of the students, their communication skills, their personal, physical and social development, their learning behaviors, their homework completion rates, and the skill sets attained in reading, writing, math, science and social studies. The results of the state mastery tests were also available for review and analysis and, in most cases, the results of the tests aligned with both students' grades and their teachers' comments.

### **Data Collection, Coding, and Analysis**

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) defined qualitative data analysis as “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145). Patton (1990) added that researchers who conduct qualitative studies generally use an inductive analysis of data, which means that important themes will arise from the data. In this study a questionnaire was designed to gather information about the participants, interviews were

conducted, and the students' records carefully analyzed, providing the researcher with rich and valuable information from all participants. Once the students responded to the questionnaire, the researcher prepared a database, which included student identification code, gender, age, years of attendance at the Gifted & Talented Academy, and all questions included in the questionnaire in the same order in which they appeared on the original document. This system enabled the researcher to manage the raw data, which according to Sanders, Wright, and Horn (1997) can be an overwhelming task. Once the researcher created a system to organize and record the data, the analysis began with the identification of themes, which emerged from the raw data, a process defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as open coding. In the open coding process, the researcher identified and began to name the abstract groupings where the phenomena that are observed can be organized. Similarities of incidences and phenomena were analyzed to find similarities and differences. Then, similar phenomena were given the same name. Once this step was completed, essential to this process was the, "concept indicator model where analytical concepts are drawn from empirical indicators in the data by comparing indicator to indicator" (Grbich, 2009, p. 74). The researcher then developed a "conceptual code" by which the indicators continue to be compared; changes were made as appropriate until saturation occurs and no new information is extracted relative to, "the properties of the category and code" (p. 74). At times, the categories that emerged from the participants' responses were words or phrases used by them. The dominant responses by the participants are what Strauss (1987) labeled in vivo codes.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the large amount of data generated in a qualitative study needs to be conducted in a thoughtful and conscientious manner. Data analysis was conducted using techniques designed by Strauss (1987), and Strauss and Corbin (1990). As suggested by these

researchers, data analysis coincided with data collection and affected the collection of additional data. These techniques include the use of a coding paradigm as well as coding techniques advocated by the same researchers including three levels: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. As the coding of data occurred, this researcher conferred with other researchers to confirm the decisions made about initial coding and emerging categories and theory.

### **Open Coding**

Open coding is the earliest stage in the coding process in which the researcher breaks down, examines, compares, conceptualizes and categorizes the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It involves unrestricted coding of all data involved by the careful scrutiny of field notes, interviews, or any other documents. In open coding the researcher tries to identify concepts that seem to fit the data and “open up” the inquiry (Strauss, 1987). This involves a search for “patterns and regularities which then are transformed into categories into which subsequent items are sorted” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p 237). The researcher consciously remains “open” to the data for possible new categories and also may draw upon category topics from the review of the literature and from experiences in the field.

While involved in open coding, the researcher consistently analyzes which data are pertinent and which categories are most closely related to various incidents. In open coding, data are analyzed minutely and coded in order to verify and qualify the theory that is emerging. During this phase, the researcher often writes memos to him/herself regarding preliminary ideas that may further direct the research and begin to form the initial thoughts about the generation of grounded theory. In open coding, many distinct codes may emerge, which represent related data that will later be combined into broader categories. Open coding occurs after initial data has been collected, but well before data collection is finished. The researcher is then able to focus on those

areas in particular that appear to be most significant. As the researcher attempts to verify codes and determine relationships among and between codes, a determination is made about the relationship of a code to a category.

### **Axial Coding**

The next stage in coding is axial coding in which each category is intensely examined according to the coding paradigm, and knowledge emerges about the relationships between categories. The coding paradigm involves looking at the elements of each category in terms of conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). An axis is a center line or central structure to which other parts of a structure may be referred. In axial coding, concepts are drawn together based on commonalities. Axial coding rarely occurs during the early stages of open coding, but becomes more dominant after initial data are collected and analyzed. Axial coding can occur during the latter stages of open coding, often being done alternatively while open coding continues. During the open coding phase of analysis, this researcher identified 43 codes, with the following areas originally coded as separate categories: work hard, focus hard, interesting subjects, very full day, learning new and challenging things, and teachers care. In the axial coding stage, it became apparent that relationships existed between and among these concepts, and they were eventually merged into a category labeled Positive Academy Features and Experiences. Axial coding enables the researcher to specify relationships among the many categories that emerge in open coding and ultimately, results in the conceptualization of one or more categories selected as the “core.” Axial coding is a data analysis complex process, which entails an examination of the identified categories to determine how they are linked (Strauss & Corbin 1990). As the researcher sought to

discover the overarching theme, the distinct categories, which were identified in open coding were compared and combined in new ways.

### **Selective Coding**

When a researcher codes systematically and purposefully for the core category, selective coding occurs. In this stage, a core category is selected, and coding is conducted to limit coding only to those areas that relate to the core category. The core category “becomes a guide to further sampling and data collection” (Strauss, 1987, p. 33). In this study the category “Future Aspirations” was identified as a category, resulting from the first few interviews and observations. Particular school activities and the actions of teachers and administrators that related to this axial code became more obvious and warranted further investigation. These comments and incidents formed the basis for this category that became the core category. During selective coding, the conditions, interaction among the actors, strategies and consequences are sought and coded.

### **Core Category**

The core category is the “central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). It is that category which is more closely related to all of the other categories than any one of the other categories is to each other. “The core category must be the sun, standing in orderly systematic relationships to its planets” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 124). In the development of grounded theory, a goal is the generation of theory that accounts for behaviors. A core category accounts for most of the variation in a pattern of behavior. Researchers using the methods of data analysis discussed by Strauss (1987) consciously attempt to identify a core category while coding data. Strauss suggested the following criteria to verify the use of a particular category as the core category:

1. It was a central core related to most other categories more than any other category.
2. It appeared frequently in the data.
3. It related easily to other categories.
4. It has clear implications for a more general theory.
5. As the details of the core category emerge through analysis, the theory advances.
6. The core category enables the researcher to build maximum variation to the analysis as the researcher used the coding paradigm.

### **Limitations**

Do the findings presented in a study reflect the reality of the participants in the natural setting? How have the initial biases of the researcher affected the study, and how has the researcher addressed his/her biases in the study? Do the implications or recommendations made by the researcher have any connotation outside of the setting in the study? Researchers must address these and other concerns when designing, conducting, analyzing and theorizing about their study. These considerations are called the limitations of the research, and Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four alternative constructs that address the soundness, the “trustworthiness” of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Credibility**

To ensure that data is truly reflective of the situation or subjects being researched, the researcher must strive for credibility through prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve the aspect of credibility through prolonged engagement, the researcher spent several days per week at the school that the participants attended. Persistent observation engaged the researcher in multiple observations under a variety of situations and enabled interviews to take place. Through numerous observations and

interviews, the researcher witnessed a range of responses in the students' natural environment that helped the researcher to fully explore factors influencing student characteristics and talent development. When observations and interviews with students did not result in corroborative findings, further observations and interviews were scheduled to probe the areas of inconsistency. Authenticating the research findings through multiple sources (student questionnaire responses, student interviews, observations of students in several settings, examination of student records) will provide the triangulation necessary for the credibility of this research.

### **Transferability**

The generalizability or "transferability" as Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommend it be called, was accomplished by providing very complete, comprehensive descriptions of the students and their home and school environments. In doing so, other investigators will be able to determine to what degree the findings, implications and grounded theory will apply to his/her situation. This concept of transferability is related to external validity in the positivist tradition, but is not focused on the power of replicability of the study by another researcher, as is external validity.

### **Dependability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define dependability as the "means for taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change" (p. 299). Accounting for the changing conditions in the setting and subjects as well as changes in the design of the research created by deeper understanding of the topics and concepts emerging from the research requires operational considerations. The examination of data collected from participants over time provides a process for internal triangulation and helps determine the dependability of particular informants. In this study, for example, one of the students gave conflicting responses

regarding his father's involvement in his life and his whereabouts. Another student provided conflicting information relative to her after school activities. These discrepancies place their credibility in jeopardy. Also, the techniques used to ensure credibility mentioned above, also aid in the establishment of dependability. Lincoln and Guba also recommend an "inquiry audit" (p. 317) by another researcher, to examine both the research process and product.

### **Confirmability**

Any researcher undertaking ethnographic research must be concerned with the problem of researcher bias. Researcher bias was addressed by continual reflections on the daily occurrences and records of these thoughts and feelings in a journal. As the researcher became aware of any biases she held, she was able to be more objective in the interpretation of the field notes and interview questions. A constant search for negative instances, seeking out alternative hypotheses, value free note taking, and research field notes were used to record appropriate impressions during interviews. A further check included challenging the researcher's analysis by her colleagues playing the role of "devil's advocate."

### **Conclusion**

The integrity of a study is based on the quality of the constructs being examined. In qualitative research, this translates into considerations of whether the population and setting chosen for the study are truly representative of the general situation: if a good fit exists between the problem of the researcher and conditions in the field. Other aspects involving the integrity of a study are the methodologies of the data collection, analysis and theory generation. When these internal components of the study are trustworthy, those who read qualitative research are able to decide about the research findings and generative theory, and to decide whether they have

applicability in another setting or to another population. In this study efforts were undertaken to ensure integrity that may lead to transferability for others.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **NORTHEAST CITY- SCHOOL DISTRICT- GIFTED & TALENTED ACADEMY— STUDENT PROFILES**

The first section of this chapter provides a description of this northeastern mid-size city, the school district, and the Gifted & Talented Academy. The second section includes case studies of the participants who attend the academy. The third includes the results and core categories that emerged from the data collection and analysis.

#### **Northeast City Profile**

The city in which the study was conducted is located in the Northeastern region of the United States. The city government operates on a mayor and council form of government. Every two years, nine council members and the mayor are elected in partisan elections. With its establishment dating back to 1637, the city is imbued with a legacy of traditions that transcend the history and formation of the United States. The city was the residence and point of influence for historical and renowned figures such as Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher-Stowe, Joseph Winchell and Samuel Colt. It is also home to the Wadsworth Athenaeum, the oldest public art museum in the United States, as well as Elizabeth Park & Rose Garden, one of the oldest public gardens in the nation. The performing arts are also well represented by the City's Symphony Orchestra, the City Opera, the Hart School, a top-tier performing arts academy, and Bushnell Theater for the Performing Arts, a theatre that host a variety of performances year-round.

The city experienced a series of industrial transformations that gradually changed the landscape of the city and population. It hosted manufacturing innovations such as Pioneer Bicycle, automobile makers such as Pope and the largest producer of firearms in the 19th and 20th centuries, Colt's Manufacturing Company, LLC. Toward the latter half of the 20th century,

the city became the “Insurance Capital of the World” as it was the Headquarters for most of the major insurance companies such as MetLife, Aetna, CIGNA, Travelers, and Lincoln Financial. By the 1950’s the population in the surrounding suburbs was increasing, so that by the late 20th century, the majority of workers employed in the city were commuters. This fact remains and is beginning to have a more negative impact as many of these large insurance companies are now moving their headquarters to the suburbs where overhead and rental costs are more cost effective. Therefore, the income that the city’s local businesses enjoyed during the city’s workforce heyday is presently and continues to be negatively impacted as an increasing number of those employed at these companies no longer work in the city.

According to 2010 Census statistics, the city’s population was 124,775 with 44,986 households and 27,171 families, making it the state’s third-largest city. The racial makeup was 56.57% persons not of Hispanic or Latino origins and 43.43% persons of Hispanic or Latino origin. The majority of the population was and continues to be Hispanic, chiefly of Puerto Rican origin. The same census revealed that of the 44,986 households, 34.4% had children under the age of 18 living with them. With regard to marital status in these same households, 25.2% were married couples living together, while 29.6% had a single female with no husband present to support the household.

Although home to the headquarters of many insurance companies, the city is one of the poorest in the United States with 3 out of every 10 families living below the poverty line. In 2004, the metropolitan area ranked second nationally in per capita economic activity, only behind San Francisco. The city is ranked 32nd of 318 metropolitan areas in total economic productivity. This capital city is also ranked 19th in the United States’ annual national crime

rankings. Per the 2010 Census, the median income for a household was \$20,820 and \$22,051 for a family. The average per capita income for the entire population of the city is \$13,428.

The city is divided into seventeen neighborhoods and while the permanent residence status of each neighborhood is transient, there is a constant trend of African Americans living in the North End, while the majority of Hispanic inhabitants live in the central and South-End of the city. The Caucasian community, comprised of the most affluent of the city's population, is typically located in the West-End.

### **The School District**

The Public School District in the city is the second largest district in New England behind Boston, Massachusetts and the largest in the state. There are forty-six schools, including primary, elementary, and secondary levels. Eighteen of these schools are magnet schools, which can serve students from other districts throughout the county. These magnet schools, besides receiving local funding from the city budget, are also recipients of additional funding from the State Department of Education. Students from this city's county are selected to attend these magnet schools through a lottery application process, in which students must apply to attend. The remaining twenty-eight schools are identified as neighborhood schools and serve students within their respective neighborhoods. Of the students who attend these neighborhood schools, there are those whose parents, for several reasons, did not submit an application to enroll in a magnet school on behalf of their children and those who did and were not selected. This has created a two-tier educational environment, where the students attending magnet schools receive more resources and have smaller student to teacher ratios, while students in the neighborhood schools are educated with lower per pupil funding and have larger class sizes. The percentage of special education students and English-Language Learners attending magnet schools is typically 4-6%

versus the percentage of those same demographic students attending neighborhood schools, which is typically 14 to 16%.

A new set of curriculum changes have recently been made through the collaboration of local businesses and the community. These changes include the addition of apprenticeship programs, a magnet school, advanced courses in science and math technology, and a strong emphasis on creative problem solving to encourage career readiness. Supported by the local government, the allocation of funding in the city's school system has increased exponentially in recent years, resulting in the average funding per pupil to be \$15,635. In 2011 the graduation rate rose to 60%, which is double that of the percentage recorded five years earlier in 2006. Also in 2011, the district demonstrated a fourth consecutive year of overall gains as measured by the state's Mastery Test and the state's Academic Performance Test (CAPT) scores. While this year's gains are smaller than what the city has experienced in the past three years, it was measurable progress. However, the overall scores remain considerably lower than state and national averages, particularly for those students attending neighborhood schools.

### **Gifted & Talented Academy**

The Gifted & Talented Academy selected for this study opened its doors in September 2009 and is located in a mid-size urban setting in the North East United States. When the school was designed in 2008, it was incubated within a district school, and called a school within a school. The academy housed 60 identified Gifted and Talented students, including English Language Learners (ELLs), in grades 4-6. The academy was housed in the north side of the building and had six classrooms. Although the academy was a school within a school, the staff and students had access to all areas of the building, including the library, computer labs, art and

music classrooms, gymnasium, and cafeteria. In September 2010, the academy expanded to grades 4-7.

In September 2011 the academy was moved to a renovated building in a quiet and scenic section of the city. Throughout the school students' academic and artistic work are prominently displayed, which reflect the pride of the school community. The building is warm and inviting; it is immaculately kept and equipped with state of the art technology. The Academy utilizes the School Enrichment Model (SEM, Renzulli & Reis, 1985; 1997). The SEM provides enriched learning experiences and higher standards for all children through three goals: developing talents in all children, providing a broad range of advanced level enrichment experiences for all students, and providing follow-up advanced learning for children based on their interests. The SEM emphasizes engagement and the use of enjoyable and challenging learning experiences constructed around students' interests, learning styles, and product styles. The Academy curricula are research based and include, in addition to the SEM, the Schoolwide Enrichment Model in Reading (SEM-R, Reis, Eckert, McCoach, Jacobs, & Coyne, 2008; Reis et al., 2007; Reis & Housand, 2009), M<sup>3</sup>: Mentoring Mathematical Minds Curriculum (Gavin et al., 2007; Gavin, Casa, Adelson, Carrol, & Sheffield, 2009), Inquiry Based Science, and Project Based Social Studies.

Academy teachers focus on student learning by encouraging strong literacy and writing skills, while building students' understanding of rigorous content in all areas. Student centered instruction is inquiry-based, as students learn to think and solve problems in real world applications, leading to service learning culminating projects. Task commitment and creativity are engaged across the content areas. Major focus in curriculum design include the use of curriculum maps for each content area that will provide the scope and focus of instruction,

articulated learning outcomes linked to specific state and national standards, interdisciplinary units, and learning goals aligned with the Advanced Placement benchmarks to adequately prepare students to continue their accelerated and advanced education.

English Language Learner students are supported through the implementation of the Sheltered Instruction Approach. Students are guided to construct meaning by scaffolding the instruction starting at the instructional level of each student. The students have the opportunity to demonstrate understanding of concepts and skills through different modalities such as: hands on activities, group tasks or projects, performance-based assessments, and SEM-R and oral fluencies.

The community and business partners provide opportunities for hands-on exploration and experiential learning, curriculum development, and extended day programming. Some of these community partners are: School Psychology Interns, Connecticut Invention Convention, CT-Public Television, Future Producers Academy, Connecticut Association of the Gifted, where the Academy served as an Action Lab for the New England Conference on Gifted and Talented, Talcott Mountain Science Center, The Bushnell, Symphony Orchestra and Symphony in Schools Ensembles.

The academy also provides highly focused academic and career counseling to eighth graders, including exposure to high school and college options. Prior to completion of tenth grade, each student completes actual and virtual visits to college campuses. Visits include tours and an admissions overview, which explain university expectations for freshman admissions.

Lastly, the academy promotes a culture of academic excellence. Learning deeper content is expected of all students, parents and staff in order to support the mission and vision of the school. The school environment is safe for both teachers and students to experiment with new

ideas. The school has a strong partnership among teachers, parents and students who work together to ensure student achievement.

### **Participant Profiles**

#### **Anibal**

Anibal is a ninth grader at the Gifted & Talented Academy, who lives with his mother and his younger sibling in an urban setting in a neighborhood that has seen its share of problems. His mother was born in Puerto Rico, graduated from high school, and attended college but failed to graduate. Anibal reported that his father was born in Puerto Rico but he knows very little about him beyond that. After he moved to the United States at age eight, Anibal entered the third grade, adjusted easily and did well in his school. At home his mother speaks to him in Spanish and English, and he and his siblings communicate in English only.

As a new arrival to the United States in third grade, Anibal was reading at a second grade level. By the end of the school year, he had advanced to the 3.2 reading level. The following year, his teacher reported that Anibal was making excellent progress in all academic areas. By the end of his fourth grade school year, Anibal had mastered all of the fourth grade content areas. Anibal is very social and makes friends easily; however, this trait also resulted in his losing focus at times. Anibal has consistently met the state goal in all areas of the state's Mastery Tests and has performed at a higher level than district and state averages. In the three years reported, Anibal improved steadily, scoring at goal and above goal in the first year and at goal and above goal in the subsequent two years. A very sociable and intelligent young man, Anibal has been very successful at the academy. His teacher described Anibal as an insightful student, always willing to share his deep knowledge of science with his classmates, explaining that Anibal is "... is a creative problem solver in the science classroom."

His mother always stressed the importance of doing well in school to him. Growing up, Anibal's mother read to him regularly and was encouraged to read on his own. He spends more than one hour daily to complete his homework. Sometimes, because he procrastinates, however, Anibal has to stay up late to complete all of his work. He has a computer but no internet access, so he often stays in class during lunch or stays after school to do research and complete other assignments, which require the use of the internet. He appears to be motivated to do well, explaining that he is anxious to renew his library card because he wants to get started on his paper for the National History Day. His mother wants Anibal to attend college and regularly stresses the importance of striving to get a scholarship to help with college expenses. She tells him to choose a career that will make him happy, but his career path is his own choice. He hopes to attend MIT or UConn and study to be an engineer. His first choice is MIT, but he worries about having too many school loans.

Anibal is very impressed with the SEM-R Program at the academy. He states, "I never really had a reading program like SEM-R. It is more in-depth than other reading programs at my other schools." In sixth grade he was extremely disappointed with his education before he attended the academy, as he believed that they did not do much, and most of the time, they had substitutes. At the academy he has to work hard, and he spends more time on school work. As he puts it, "They give us a lot more work, but it's good; it keeps us on our toes." Anibal also loves the field trips because he finds that they are relevant to what he is learning in his classes. The visit to the State Capitol was very interesting because he learned a great deal about Connecticut and its history. At the academy Anibal has met and become friends with peers of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. He does not compare his work with that of his peers, and he and his peers share similar experiences. There are two areas where he and his friends differ: he can

communicate in Spanish and English, and some of his peers cannot. He also believes that their behavior is a little bit rougher than his.

Anibal appears to be a very kind and caring boy who enjoys playing baseball and also collects baseball cards. He is very proud of his grandfather who played on the Puerto Rican National Baseball Team. His stepfather taught him to play baseball, and he longs to play baseball again but has not played on an organized team since moving to the state. Although he understands that it is a dream, Anibal would love to play professional baseball if the opportunity becomes available to him.

Anibal does not regard himself as gifted but more as someone who chooses to make the right decisions and work hard and who is able to comprehend material faster and better than the average student. Being in a gifted school allows him to be enrolled in more advanced classes, and Anibal says that at the academy he strives to do his best. Anibal describes gifted students as, “Willing to work hard and achieve your goals, especially if you want to go to a good school, you want to keep those grades up. You want to be able to take time from playing video games or watching TV and make the right choice and do your school work and take any opportunity you can get.” He believes in himself and his academic efforts and pursuits and is confident that he will achieve his goal of becoming an engineer.

### **Alejandra**

Alejandra lives in the north-end of the city with her mother and five siblings; her two older siblings attend high school. She does not see her father often but speaks to him on the telephone in Spanish. Her mother was born in Puerto Rico and graduated from high school. Alejandra speaks in both English and Spanish with her mother but speaks mostly English with her siblings. Alejandra reads every day, a habit that she acquired from her mother, who read to

her daily. She has a quiet space to complete her homework and spends an hour and a half on her work most evenings. She uses her computer to complete assignments and to answer research questions, and at home she accesses Academy Learning, a program which Alejandra describes as very helpful. From very early on, both of her parents instilled in her the idea that she was going to attend and graduate from college. Her parents have always encouraged her to do well in school, so that she can go to a good college. They have great confidence in her ability and tell her she can become a lawyer or the President of the United States, if that is what she wants. Although she has never been to Florida, Alejandra reports that she wants to attend college there.

Alejandra has a library card and visits the library weekly with her sister and reports that she enjoys being a student at the Gifted & Talented Academy because she is able to study subjects she did not at her previous school. She had a positive experience in her previous school, but she was not challenged academically. It took her only a few minutes each day to do her work. Then, she had to wait for everyone else to catch up, so she spent a great deal of time, by her own admission “much time doing nothing.” At the academy she does not complete her work in three minutes. Although the work is difficult, she is learning many new things and likes being challenged. She enjoys the field trips, which are very helpful because they are aligned with the curriculum.

In the three reported years on the state’s Mastery Tests, Alejandra scored Proficient in math met Goal in reading and scored Advanced in writing. In the second year, she met Goal in all three areas. In the third year, Alejandra met Goal in reading and writing, and scored Proficient in math.

Throughout her school career, teachers have commended Alejandra for her academic performance, her scholarly skills, her excellent attitude, and for being a positive role model for

other students. Her extra-curricular activities include running cross country and playing the piano. One of her favorite pastimes is writing poetry. In first grade Alejandra struggled with reading comprehension, but she worked very hard to improve “Alejandra is the ideal student,” her third grade teacher wrote on her report card. “She loves learning, has a wonderful attitude, gets along well with everyone, always willing to help, very dependable, hard worker and focused.” Her teacher also indicated that she “grasps new skills easily,” which is a testament to her overcoming her early struggles with reading comprehension.

At the academy, Alejandra earned her highest marks in math and science, with an A- and A respectively, and continued doing well throughout the school year, earning final grades of A- and A. Although she consistently puts forth her best effort, early on Alejandra struggled with social studies, earning a C in the first marking period, but with hard work and perseverance, she turned things around, earning an A- the next marking period. She loves history because, “it explains people’s lives and what sacrifices they have made for us to have freedom.” Alejandra admits that her least favorite subject is geography. She explains that, “It’s hard to study all the places and everywhere that I don’t know and then we move from places to different places and it’s hard to memorize them.”

For Alejandra, being identified as gifted means, “to be noticed as highly educated.” It’s about children that are interested in learning something and she believes that they have to come to the academy to learn and develop their potential. “Being gifted means to be acknowledged as being someone that can do things or activities that take a lot of time, but they do it correctly.” At the academy Alejandra has met students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and she says that she spends time with them, and they are friends. She doesn’t know much about their home environment, but she feels they are similar to her because they are all talented. However,

regarding their behavior, she says that, “Most get offended and fool around a lot.” Alejandra says that she loves the Gifted & Talented Academy because she feels that she is challenged and has more opportunities than in her previous schools. The teachers listen and encourage her to do her best. She is both idealistic and pragmatic, as is evidenced by some of her responses to questions during the interview. For example, when asked about her dream job, she responded that, “I want to be a poet and publish a book of poems, and I want to be a lawyer so I can be in a good place.”

### **Ana**

Ana has been attending the Gifted & Talented Academy since the sixth grade. Presently, she is a ninth grader and continues to make steady progress. Prior to being accepted to the academy, she attended one other school. She lives in the south-end of the city with her mother and three siblings. Her father lives in the Bahamas and is not present on a regular basis in her life. Her two older siblings graduated from high school but are not in college. Ana is determined and excited to be the first in her family to attend college. Ana’s mother was born in Puerto Rico and came to the United States at age 10. She graduated from high school and attended college for one semester but was unable to continue because of financial constraints. Presently, she is unemployed. Ana’s father was born in the Bahamas. He is a high school graduate and completed two years in a community college and has a full time job. At home the family communicates primarily in English.

Ana is a highly motivated student who works very hard to fulfill all of her academic requirements in a timely manner. She devotes at least two hours each evening for homework, despite the fact that she does not have a quiet space to work. She states that her mother helped her with homework when she was younger; now, Ana says that she can do the work on her own and requires no help. She uses her computer to access the Academy’s Learning Program and

does research to find information related to her school studies. At an early age, her parents spoke to Ana on the importance of attending college. In fact, she states that her parents started a college fund for her when she was born. She would like to attend UConn or Penn State. Her parents want her to have a successful career, but it is important to them that she chooses a career that she will enjoy.

Ana liked her previous school but added that she was not challenged. Whatever was being taught, she felt that she already knew it. Most of the time, the teacher had to simplify the lesson to accommodate her classmates. She was often enlisted to help her classmates with their work. At the academy Ana has had to work much harder, as the curricula are challenging, and her days are very full. The SEM-R was brand new to her, and math at the academy was much more advanced. As a result, Ana realized that she had to put a great deal of effort in her school work and that the academy experience has been very positive. As she aptly puts it, "I feel like in my other school they didn't really have one on one time with all the students, just the ones that were having trouble. Here I feel I am getting all the attention that I need." Ana enjoys the field trips in which she participates because they enhance her educational experiences, and she also enjoys hands on activities that the school provides. Her extracurricular activities include soccer and playing the flute. Due to transportation issues, Ana was not able to play soccer this year. She loves to write and enjoys photography in the natural environment. She has formed a neighborhood book club, which meets monthly to discuss a chosen book. During the summer, when she visits her father who lives in the Bahamas, Ana participates in the Atlantis Camp where she enjoys taking care of animals.

Her school records indicate that in her early school years, Ana had difficulty learning to read. However, she was described as a hard worker, focused on improving her learning. By the

end of first grade, her reading skills improved significantly. Teachers consistently describe Ana as mature and considerate of others and as a wonderful role model to her peers. The three years of reports of her scores on the state's Mastery Tests, Ana met goal reading, writing and math. In the second year she scored above goal in writing. By the end of grade 6, after seven months at the academy, Ana scored advanced in reading and met goal in writing and math. Ana attributes her success on the CMT's to the SEM-R courses, and her teachers' encouraging her to read every day. At a Board of Education meeting after she had completed her first year at the academy, Ana spoke with confidence and pride about the great improvement in her fluency test scores and attributed her success to the rigor and instruction at the Gifted & Talented Academy.

Ana attends school with peers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and interacts with ease with her classmates. Even though she does not have a great deal of knowledge about her classmates' home environment, she does not see any differences among them, believing that they similar to her because they all feel special in their own way. When asked about her experiences at the academy, Ana stated that the school allows her to continue to develop her potential by supporting her and helping her to grow. The school has taught her to stay focused and to be patient when dealing with difficult tasks. It has shown her that she can work toward being all that she can be. Although Ana is progressing nicely in her studies, her teachers continue to make her aware of areas where she has work to do. "Ana has a hard time completing writing assignments in the time allotted," said one teacher. Others added that Ana always has plenty of ideas but sometimes gets caught up in them instead of getting into the writing assignment. One teacher noted she tends to 'day dream' in class occasionally. Also, in grade 8<sup>th</sup>, Ana failed to earn an overall grade of 'A' in any of her classes. Her writing grades were impressive, however, as she improved her grades from a B- to a B+ and to an A- by the

third trimester. Many teachers attributed her lower grades to her handing in assignments late or not handing in some at all. Anna is well intentioned and quite capable, but she has to deal with these issues that impede her to achieve at full potential. She is making progress, and her teachers continually work with her to overcome these areas that need improvement.

When asked about what it means to be gifted, Ana said, “I don’t feel that it makes me better than anybody else. I just feel it means I’ve been recognized for how hard I work,” and added that she believes that she has worked hard during her time at the academy. For Ana being identified as gifted, “shows that someone believes that I am meant for greater things.” She describes her dream job as “a writer of novels.” This career choice seems to suit Ana’s strengths. She has quite an imagination and excels in writing. “I don’t know, I’ve always wanted to be an author ever since I can remember,” she said.

### **Charitin**

Charitin is an eighth grader at the Gifted & Talented Academy who lives in the north-end of the city with her mother. She has an older sibling who graduated from high school and is attending college. Although she was born in the United States, her mother always spoke to her in Spanish, so English is her second language. At home Spanish continues to be the main language. Her mother is enrolled in nursing school. Charitin does not know much about her father. During her primary grades, she lived and attended school in Florida; she moved to state in March 2010. Although the record shows that Charitin completed all of her assignments, her transcripts from Florida indicate that she was underperforming, as most of her grades were D’s and F’s with a B in science.

Growing up, her mother read to her on a regular basis, and Charitin continues to read daily. Her mother has been very involved in Charitin’s education and regularly stresses the

importance of doing well in school, so that she can be accepted to a good college and then have a good job. She would like to study to be a registered nurse or a doctor and is considering attending Stone Academy, which her mother has recommended to her because it specializes in health careers. At home Charitin has a computer and internet access, with a quiet space to do her work. She reports that she spends one and one half hours completing her assignments.

At the academy the school days are longer than in her previous schools, but Charitin does not mind because it enables her to get extra help from her teachers, if she needs it. She has to work harder than she ever did because the expectations are more advanced. She enjoys her classes at the academy, in particular her foreign language class. As mentioned earlier, in Florida Charitin's grades were poor, and her behavior was a detriment to her working to full potential, yet in the Florida state tests, she consistently scored at above grade level. Charitin readily admits that she did not extend a great deal of effort in her work and was distracted by outside forces. Her favorite subject is math, and she does very well in the subject. However, she continues to struggle with reading. "Reading is my least favorite subject because it has a lot of words, and sometimes there are big words, and I can't pronounce them, so I end up getting frustrated. But I am getting help on it, so I am learning more." One area of concern has been Charitin's lack of effort. Although she is very bright, her grades do not always reflect her intelligence. In her first year at the academy, her grades in the content areas were B's and C's. Her teachers were concerned that Charitin "lacks motivation" and is "uncooperative and disrespectful at times." With minimal class participation and an inconsistent work ethic, Charitin has yet to work to her full potential and needs to use class time more effectively. Since moving to the state, in the two years of reports on the state's Mastery Test, Charitin met goal in reading, writing and math, and she surpassed the school and district averages.

At the academy Charitin is in an academic environment where she interacts with peers from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Although she does not see her peers outside of school, in school she states that they are her friends. She believes that her schoolmates spend a great deal of time studying and are more focused than she is. When asked about her experiences at the academy, Charitin says the school makes her want to do better in her studies. However, “They don’t support my talents and creativity because they don’t know that I have them.” Charitin does not participate in extra-curricular activities, but she loves to sing. When asked if she plays a musical instrument, Charitin replied, “My voice is my musical instrument.”

When asked about what being gifted means to her, Charitin stated that being gifted means that you have more of a good thing in you that helps you to be able to absorb more. She describes academically talented students as well educated. Charitin looks forward to the challenges that lie ahead. In the future “I would hope to achieve bettering myself and being able to still have the knowledge as I had as a kid and reinforce it with the knowledge as an adult but still being able to absorb more and more information to help me throughout my life.”

### **Diana**

Diana is an eighth grade student at The Gifted & Talented Academy in her fourth year at the school. She began preschool when she was four and one half years old. She was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the United States when she was two years old. She lives in the city with her mother and father, two younger siblings and her grandmother. Both of her parents were born in the city and are high school graduates. Currently, her mother has a full time job, but her father is unemployed. Her mother speaks to her in English and Spanish, while her father speaks to her exclusively in English. Her grandmother speaks to her in Spanish, and she and her three siblings only speak English to each other.

At an early age, Diana's parents read to her and encouraged her to read independently because they believed it would improve her IQ. She also indicated that other adults read to her in Spanish. She continues reading daily and spends one hour each day doing homework in a quiet space. She states that her parents will help her with homework if she needs it, but that most of the time, she can figure things out on her own. Her parents encourage her to work hard in school and want her to go to college and choose a career which interests her. In addition to her parents, Diana's teachers give her information about different colleges and tell her that if she continues to work hard, she will do very well. She also goes on-line to research colleges, which have programs in her career choice, which is to be a psychiatrist. She states that she wants this career to help people, to tell them that there is nothing wrong with them and it's just something they have. "Like I've been through a lot of deaths in my family and a lot of depression about the deaths and I just get them through it." Her mother is very supportive of this choice but tells her that she also needs to have a little back up plan. Diana has a computer and internet access at home, and she states that she uses these tools daily, and that they are very helpful for her to complete her work.

Diana is highly motivated to succeed in school. Reviewing her kindergarten report card, her teacher stated that she made excellent progress in all areas and was a conscientious worker. She read beginning storybooks with confidence. As she progressed to the next grades, her teachers continued to commend her motivation and her work ethic, which enabled her to meet and exceed appropriate benchmarks. The three year reports of her scores on the state's Mastery Test indicate that she met goal in reading, writing and math. In the second year of the test, scored above goal in math and exceeded school and district scores in math. Her teachers also indicated that because she is a social person, she tended to get distracted and did not complete her work in

a timely manner. When she entered the academy, her social interactions and behavior were a detriment to her academic progress. This behavior was immediately addressed by the school staff, who implemented self-Regulation strategies with her. Diana stated that in her previous school, the teacher had to stop teaching her lessons every ten minutes because there were so many distractions and misbehaviors that she had to address, so “they never really got anything done.” She also indicated that in her previous school, they did not offer social studies and science, subjects that she likes. Once her self-regulation took hold, Diana became more engaged and worked hard to fulfill her potential. She believes that the academy has challenging curricula in reading, writing and math, and she loves the field trips, which are not random but purposeful. She enjoys SEM-R because she feels that her teacher encourages her to read challenging books appropriate and relevant to her interests.

Diana participates in several extra-curricular activities. She plays basketball and baseball and is the only girl on the baseball team, which is a great source of pride for her. She can hit home runs and catch fly balls as well as any boy on the team. During the summer she takes swimming lessons and has taught her sister to swim. She also plays the drums and piano and hopes to learn to play the guitar from her grandfather.

For Diana, being identified as gifted and talented means having the potential to be whatever she wants as long as she pushes herself to work harder to achieve her goals and become what she wants to be. She describes a gifted student as someone who has determination and motivation. She has realized that she cannot pay attention when others tell her that being identified as gifted and talented is weird, as she does not think it sounds weird. “We are gifted and talented students—that means we have special education, and it wasn’t the kind of special education that they thought of, it was more advanced. So I just think we need to be motivated to

work hard and determined to get those grades to succeed, and if we are not, then I don't think this program is the right place for you." Diana has reached a level of maturity, which has enabled her to appreciate and take full advantage of the opportunities given to her as a student in the academy. It speaks well of her that she understands and appreciates that, "It's a very good thing to be a gifted student. You're not really focused on what's outside; you're focused on what is in front of you."

### **Damaris**

Damaris is in eighth grade at the Gifted & Talented Academy. She lives with her mother and father and a younger sibling in the south-end of the city. Her mother was born in the United States and graduated from high school. Her father was born in Puerto Rico and came to the United States as a young boy. He also graduated from high school. Her mother is a homemaker, and her father has a full time job. At home they communicate in both Spanish and English. She and her sibling speak mostly English with each other. Her parents have instilled good study habits in Damaris. She has a quiet space to do her work and spends one hour on homework. She likes to listen to music while she is doing her homework because it motivates her. Presently, her computer is broken, so she has to use the computer, when she needs to, at the academy.

Her parents expect that Damaris will attend and graduate from college. She hopes to study and have a career in journalism. Although she has no specific colleges that she wants to attend, Damaris is researching to find colleges with good journalism programs. Her parents support her becoming a journalist and believe that this is a good choice for her. When she was younger, her parents read to her often. Now, she reads on her own because she reads faster than they do. Damaris loves to read on her Kindle and occasionally goes to her neighborhood library.

Damaris attended one school until she was accepted at the academy. She thrived in her previous school and was described by her teachers as a very likable and hardworking student, who stood out for her effort and achievement. Throughout elementary school, Damaris performed at a high level and always strived to improve. Damaris has always had a passion for writing; both her kindergarten and first grade teachers nurtured her talent. It is this innate ability to write well that fuels her desire to become a journalist. Throughout her school years, Damaris' grades have been exemplary. Although math poses a challenge to Damaris, she works very hard to improve. Her teachers are confident that with her work ethic and motivation, she will do well in her math classes. Damaris came to the academy two years ago and has flourished in her new environment. With hard work and determination, she has earned B's in math. Her teachers describe Damaris as a conscientious student who is self-directed and confident in her academic classes. She has improved in both participation and effort during seventh grade year; her personal comportment is exemplary, and she is a pleasure to have as a student.

Damaris has always excelled at writing and reading and says she enjoys a good book and writing short stories in her spare time. On the three year reports on the state's Mastery Tests, Damaris has consistently scored at the goal or advanced levels. She scored in Level 5 Advanced category for reading and writing and, in math, she achieved at Level 4 Goal category, well above the school, district and state averages. Damaris scored an impressive 367 in writing and 310 in reading, again surpassing school, district and state averages. This young lady's continued improvement in all academic areas is reflective of the hard work and effort she puts forth in all of her studies. As an eighth grader, Damaris continues to work hard and stays focused on her school work.

When asked about what it means to be gifted, Damaris replied that gifted students “Go over and beyond what they are expected to do and are hard workers that want to succeed.” She loves her classmates and states that each has different strengths in various subjects. They are focused and hardworking like she is. She believes that she and her classmates have many similarities, even though they are from different backgrounds. She sees them socially outside of school and enjoys spending time with them. This young lady makes a very strong impression and is well-spoken and displays enthusiasm for school. She has made great strides, harnessing her energy and talents to realize her full potential to achieve the success she deserves.

Damaris’ maturity and love of learning are evident in her transcripts. Beyond that, her understanding of how to achieve success through effort in school is remarkable for a girl her age. She says, “For a student to be academically talented, he or she must have a passion for learning and be open minded. You don’t have to have intelligence. All you have to do is to be a hard worker, and you have to actually want to work.”

### **Felix**

Felix has attended the Gifted & Talented Academy since its opening four years ago. He lives in a street at the center of the city with his mother and four siblings, three of whom are older. His oldest sibling completed college, and the other two graduated from high school; one is presently attending college. His mother was born in Puerto Rico and came to the United States when she was twenty years old, having graduated from high school; she currently works part-time. His father is also a high school graduate. Unfortunately, Felix does not know much about his father. At home, Felix speaks mainly Spanish with his mother and English and Spanish with his siblings. He has a quiet space to do his homework and takes his work seriously. Felix has a computer and internet access to assist him with his work, and he reports spending over an hour

each evening doing his homework. Sometimes, he added that he works up to two hours at night doing his work. His mother does not often help him with homework, but she supports his academic efforts and often encourages him to consider attending college. He aspires to a career in criminal justice, and his parents both support his career choice and encourage him to work hard to realize his goal. It is his dream to attend Harvard University. In his free time, Felix enjoys painting ceramics and playing video games, and in the summers he and his family go camping. He also enjoys playing baseball.

In kindergarten and during the primary grades, his teachers recognized that Felix was a bright, mature, and hardworking young man. As a kindergartener, Felix was in a bilingual classroom. By the end of the first marking period in first grade, his teacher recommended that Felix be transferred to a mainstream class since he had successfully acquired his second language and was reading at third grade level in both Spanish and English. Academically, Felix was a strong student who performed at or above grade level in all academic areas. However, one concern that emerged in both third and fourth grades were his tardiness and his absences. All of his teachers cited this issue as a hindrance to his achieving his highest potential. As one teacher stated, “Absences are a concern that affect his grades...would have seen more progress if he was in class more.” Similar concerns were expressed by his fourth grade teacher who explained that absences were a problem. Despite his absences, Felix made sufficient progress in fourth and fifth grades. His teachers were pleased with his solid effort, raising his grades, particularly in mathematics and reading, to a level that exceeded expectations. When he was admitted to the Gifted & Talented Academy in sixth grade, Felix was doing average work but not realizing his full potential. His sixth grade teacher pointed out that he was struggling to keep up with homework and that he, “needs to concentrate on completing assignments and turning them in on

time.” Although there were concerns relative to Felix’s being distracted and not staying focused, his teachers also described him as having, “a contagious, positive attitude” and as being a hard worker.

In the 3 years of reports on the state’s Mastery Tests, Felix performed very well in the first year, scoring at the state Goal or Advanced category in all areas. In the second year, his scores in math, reading and writing went down. He scored at proficient, but below his scores of the previous year. In the third year, he rebounded, scoring at goal in all areas. These inconsistent scores reflect Felix’s teachers’ concerns that he is not consistently putting forth his best effort.

When asked about his experiences at the academy, Felix states that the assignments are harder because the curriculum is advanced. “The academy has helped me set goals for my future, to have a successful lifestyle,” and added that both he and his teachers are constantly pushing him to better himself, which is something he likes. He sees being identified as gifted as, “an honorable label to be given.” He added that some of the characteristics that describe academically talented students are a higher knowledge in class as compared to other students, they excel more, and they achieve at a higher level in math, reading, social studies and science. He enjoys the field trips, especially visiting museums. Regarding his peers from different backgrounds, Felix says he does not see a difference, but rather that he enjoys their company in and out of school and considers them his friends. He also plays sports with them. One difference he recognizes is that he speaks Spanish, while they don’t. Felix would like to pursue a career in criminal justice and mentioned that he might want to be a police officer to “stop all the violence, if possible, that goes on.”

**Iván**

Iván is a fourteen year old student who is currently in grade 9 at the Gifted Academy. He lives with his mother and father and an older sibling. His brother graduated from high school and is presently attending college. His mother was born in Puerto Rico, graduated from high school and has a full time job. His father was born in Puerto Rico and came to the United States after he turned eighteen. He did not complete high school but has a full time job. The parents communicate in both English and Spanish, but he and his sibling communicate mostly in English. In their community he communicates in both English and Spanish. Iván lives in the south-end of the city, in a safe and well maintained neighborhood and has lived for most of his life with his family.

His parents have talked to him about college since his pre-school days and told him that everything he does will affect whether or not he goes to college. It is his goal to go to Harvard, Yale or the University of Hartford to study Business Law, so that in the future he can start his own business. His parents have always encouraged him to read although they did not read to him when he was growing up. He states that he reads once in a while at home, but he reads at school and on his way home from school. His parents encourage him to work hard in school, so that he can go to college. He devotes more than one hour every evening to his homework. He has a quiet space in which to do his work, but his parents do not help him with his work. He has a computer and internet access at home, which he reports using to do homework and projects.

His school records reveal that Iván attended the same school for six years until he was accepted to the academy. In reviewing his report cards beginning in kindergarten, his teachers consistently reported that he is an excellent student, a gentleman, and a joy to have in class. His academic progress was above grade level, and his comportment was a source of pride to his

teachers. One teacher encouraged Iván to do more reading in order to hone his vocabulary skills. He also participated in extracurricular activities, including a school play, where the teacher stated that he did an outstanding job. She also recognized his willingness to help his peers and stated that he could be counted on to take charge as the occasion warranted.

In the three years report on the state's Mastery Tests, Iván scored above district and state averages. In math, he demonstrated well developed conceptual understanding, computational skills and problem solving skills as well as the ability to solve complex and abstract mathematical problems. His reading scores demonstrated an exceptional ability to read and respond to grade appropriate literacy. Ivan met goal in all three areas of the test each of the three years. In the second year, he scored advanced in reading but scored proficient in writing.

When asked about his experiences at his previous school, Iván stated that he understood the lessons and mastered the lessons' objectives in half an hour, and the rest of the time he helped other students. He also stated that in his previous school, he received no social studies and no science instruction. At the academy he has to work much harder because the lessons and activities are more rigorous and challenging. He added that in each subject they do "more in-depth," work, so he has to work harder, which he likes. However, he also indicated that some of the field trips have not been helpful to him because, unlike his classmates, he had already visited those places.

In his spare time, he does cross country running, plays the violin and his favorite hobby is buying and selling things to make a profit. He goes to auctions where he buys and sells different items. These activities are not only enjoyable, but they will also help him with his career plans. Iván is highly motivated and self-directed. He stated, "My dream job is to start my own business, open a second-hand shop, because mostly nowadays everyone's buying secondhand." With the

poor economy, he understands that people don't have the luxury of buying brand new items.

During the summer he volunteers at a Senior Center and enjoys it.

Iván believes that being identified as gifted means being that you are special in your own way and that being identified as gifted can mean different things for different students. He also believes that one of the characteristics of academically talented students is that they are hard workers and can accomplish things faster than others. They also have to write a great deal and are not afraid to use detail. They are also unafraid of spending their week-ends and multiple hours trying to accomplish what they need to complete.

Iván attends school with students of various ethnic groups. He relates well with peers of different cultures and backgrounds. He believes that they have similar academic ability; however, he stresses out over homework and tests, and they don't. The only difference between him and his friends is their background; however, he feels that they are like family. As he puts it, "We share the pain, and we share the happiness."

Overall, Iván explains that he enjoys the academy and the challenges it offers. He loves and excels in math and science but has to work harder in social studies, his least favorite subject. Iván believes that the academy has enabled him to work to his potential due to the rigor of the curricula, and he feels challenged but was positively overwhelmed by all the support he received. Iván has an insightful understanding of his role and his teachers' role at the academy: "I had the motivation to learn, but they were the ones who gave me the building blocks to set it in motion."

### **Javier**

Javier is a high-energy student who is exceptional in mathematics, and is an eighth grader at the Gifted & Talented Academy. Javier lives with his mother, step-father and two siblings in the north end of the city, where his older brother attends high school. His mother was born in

Puerto Rico, graduated from high school, and completed two years of college, although she is currently not working and staying at home with her children. Her mother came to the United States when she was 32, and her stepfather was born in Puerto Rico and came to the United States when he was eighteen years old. He is a high school graduate and has a full time job. Javier and his mother communicate in Spanish, but his stepfather communicates with Javier in both Spanish and English. Javier and his siblings speak English to each other. His parents encouraged him to go to college to pursue a career as an engineer, as he really likes architecture, building, and designing things and sees the parallels between these two disciplines. After he graduates from the academy, he would like to attend UConn.

Javier loves to read and reads every day. When he was younger, his mother read to him. Javier spends one hour every evening completing his homework assignments. He has a computer and internet access, which he finds are very valuable to complete his work. He moved to the state when he was in fourth grade. Javier's fourth grade teacher reported that he was reading above grade level and that he was a pleasant and motivated young man with excellent manners. He was conscientious about his work, and although not consistently, he did his best to improve his learning. His grade 5 teacher commended Javier for his, "exceptional progress." He was achieving in all academic areas; however, it was her belief that he had the potential to achieve at an even higher level if he were not distracted and stayed focused and put more energy into his school work.

Javier was accepted to the academy as a sixth grader and has made steady academic progress in all areas. His teachers recognize that his lack of good organizational skills and his inconsistent work ethic are areas on which Javier must improve. A deep concern is Javier's inability to control his anger, which often leads to his being disrespectful and disruptive. At

times he does not get along with his peers, which creates a negative classroom environment. Another problem area for his teachers is his absences. Although they have not been a serious hindrance to his academic success, his teachers see this as a problem area on which he must improve. Javier's three year report on the state's Mastery Tests, his scores have been consistently impressive, scoring at Goal but mostly Advanced in reading, writing and math for each of the three years. His scores were well above school, district and state averages. Javier continues to excel in math, his favorite subject. Although he scored well on the writing portion of the state test, he earned a C- in writing at the academy. He finds that the field trips are valuable and educational and loved going to the Science Center.

When asked what being gifted meant to him, Javier replied that it means that you have power to become what you want in life and do great things. To him, it also means that you are intelligent and can do things that other people cannot do. When asked about his thoughts regarding his being identified as gifted, Javier replied, "I am very intelligent. Since I was little...my brother started teaching me Algebra and my uncle started teaching me challenging stuff...That's why I think I'm intelligent." In reference to his peers being identified as gifted, Javier stated that they are very intelligent and different from everyone else. Compared to his friends' work, Javier believes that he puts more effort into his work, which he deems as neater than his friends' work. His classmates of different backgrounds are his friends, and they seem to have a more positive attitude than he since they have been at the academy longer. Some, however, do not appear to prepare sufficiently in Javier's opinion. He keeps in touch with his friends outside of school through Facebook.

One of Javier's favorite pastimes is playing the guitar, and a favorite hobby is collecting stamps. When asked about his dream job, Javier explained that he has decided to be either an

engineer or an architect. He sees a connection between these two fields and believes that he can study both and have a career that will put both skills to good use.

### **Rosa**

Rosa is a very intelligent student who has consistently performed at an academically high level. She lives in the center of the city with her mother and her older brother, who is a senior in college. Her mother was born in Puerto Rico and came to the United States when she was twenty years old and after she had completed high school. She is a homemaker. Rosa speaks exclusively in Spanish with her mother, and with her brother she communicates only in English. With her neighborhood friends, she speaks English and Spanish. Every evening Rosa spends an hour completing her homework in a quiet space where she has both a computer and internet access that she often uses to complete her assignments. Rosa's mother speaks to her about college frequently but also tells her that college is overpriced. At the same time, she tells Rosa that she will pay any amount for her to go to college. Her mother wants her to have a career that is "high class," such as a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher or a professor. Rosa would like to be a professor. As she puts it, "I want to become a professor; I want to teach students in all grades. "My goal is to teach students in all grades. And I want to travel too, and learn different cultures and work with students from different countries." Rosa hopes to follow in her brother's footsteps and attend the University of Hartford.

Rosa's mother read to her daily from her early childhood, and this ritual instilled a love of reading in this young lady, who continues to read on a daily basis. Throughout her school years, Rosa has wowed her teachers with her native intelligence, effort, and outstanding grades. In kindergarten and first grades, Rosa was an outstanding student, achieving well above average; she was quiet and well mannered. In first grade she was reading at the second grade level and

continued reading at a higher grade level as she progressed to successive grades. By fourth grade Rosa was performing above grade level in all academic areas. An examination of her school records reveals a pattern of outstanding academic achievement, and her personal comportment as exemplary. Her teachers describe this young lady as a “role model” and a “model student” for her peers.

Rosa was accepted at the Gifted & Talented Academy when she was in seventh grade. At the academy, she continued working very hard, earning excellent grades and positive comments from her teachers. In her second year at the academy, Rosa’s work ethic and cooperative nature continued to flourish, and her teachers stated that she is a pleasure to have in the classroom. Rosa lists her favorite subject as math, citing that “math is everywhere,” and sees math in everything. Social studies, on the other hand, is her least favorite subject because of all the memorization involved. She likes attending the academy because she is challenged. She loves the field trips that the academy plans because they help with her learning. For example, for National History Day, there was a field trip to the library to learn about different periods and times in history.

In the three years report on the state’s Mastery Tests, Rosa performed well. In the first year she scored Proficient in reading, at Goal in math, and Advanced in writing. In her second and third years, Rosa’s scores were stellar, scoring at Goal and Advanced in all areas, well above the school, district and state averages.

When Rosa was asked, “What does identified as being gifted mean to you?” She responded that it means that others see that she has the potential to succeed in life. When asked what characteristics describe academically talented students, she replied, “They are smart for one, open-minded people who aren’t afraid to learn new things, students who like to challenge themselves,” She agrees that she fits this category. It’s also having a passion, such as she feels

about playing the piano, which she hopes to do professionally in the future. At the academy, Rosa has met students of different backgrounds and thinks of them as friends. She acknowledges that some have different attitudes than she; however, “We are all similar because we make the best of every day.” She also notes that she and her peers have different traditions.

Rosa runs cross country, and in her free time she enjoys playing the piano and the violin; she also likes making t-shirts. During the summer, she likes to go to amusement parks such as Lake Compounce and Six Flags. Rosa believes that attending the academy has changed her life. In her words, “Basically it’s changed my view of things, to challenge myself more because things aren’t always easy and you have to see that there’s always that one challenge that you have to work hard at.”

### **Orlando**

Orlando is a sixth grader at the Gifted & Talented Academy. He lives with his mother, father and three younger siblings in the south end of the city. His mother was born in Puerto Rico. She is a high school graduate and holds a part-time job. His father was born in Puerto Rico and dropped out of school in ninth grade. He currently has a full time job. At home his family communicates in both Spanish and English. Orlando states that while he was growing up, his parents did not read to him, and he does not read independently. He spends two hours every evening, completing his homework, where a quiet has space to do his work and has a computer and internet access. He states that he uses his computer to do research for social studies. His parents have always encouraged Orlando to work hard and do well in school so that he can go to college to have a good job and to earn a lot of money.

Orlando possesses the attributes of a gifted student, but it took him time to get himself under control and to harness his talents and put them to positive use. In his early years of school,

Orlando under-performed academically and was reading below grade level. In fact, he repeated first grade. As he progressed through school, his attitude towards academics changed, and he began to work harder. His teachers often commented that Orlando was eager to learn, especially in math where he always performed very well. However, they were also concerned because he was very easily distracted and took an inordinate amount of time to get back on task. A key factor in his underperforming was due to the fact that his family moved several times, and Orlando did not adjust well to his new schools. In reports from his teachers, a pattern emerges as his teachers reported that he was often off task and could not respond well when told to maintain focus on the assignments at hand. At times, he was also defiant of authority figures.

By the fourth grade, Orlando began to turn things around and achieved at higher levels. He met and exceeded expectations, a testament to his changing in a positive direction. As his teacher explained, she was “blown away with his growth and progress in the academic year. Has made good progress to move away from distractions, which demonstrates how much he wants to learn.” In the three year reports on the state’s Mastery Tests (CMTs), Orlando scored Proficient in reading and met goal in writing and math in the first year. In the second year he surpassed school, district and state levels by scoring Goal in reading and Advanced in math and writing. His third year scores were of concern to his teachers, since Orlando met goal in math, scored Proficient in reading and scored Basic in writing.

In his first year at the academy, Orlando continued to make progress; however, all his teachers agreed that he needed to focus and work on not being so easily distracted. When asked about his experiences at the academy, Orlando replied that he likes being part at the school, and he especially likes his science and social studies classes, which he did not take at his previous schools. He gets along very well with his peers and Orlando believes that he and his school

mates have a great deal in common. He feels that his friends are doing better than he because they have been at the academy longer. When asked what it meant to him to be identified as being gifted, Orlando replied, "It means that I am talented in learning." He added, "I am a special kid with many skills and talents, and I have the potential to succeed in life. Orlando is a very active young man. He loves skateboarding, riding bikes and scooters and playing NERF games with his friends in the neighborhood. He enjoys playing football and in the summer swimming in lakes and water parks.

It is obvious that Orlando has a clear view of his potential and what he must do to realize his dreams and goals. He knows he must work hard to be successful in high school and college, so that he can achieve his dream to become a doctor. In a moment of self-reflection and self-awareness, Orlando made a wise and thoughtful observation, stating that he understands what it means to be gifted, and that it cannot be taken for granted.

### **Paloma**

Paloma is a seventh grader at the Gifted and Talented Academy who has consistently impressed her teachers with her native intelligence in all academic areas. Equally important, from her earliest school years, her teachers described Paloma as well-rounded and balanced, with a love for learning and a desire to challenge herself to achieve at higher levels. She lives with her mother, her older sister and her niece in the west end of the city. Her mother was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the United States when she was seventeen years old. She is a high school graduate, completed two years of community college and holds a full time job. Her father was born in Puerto Rico, but came to the United States when he was eighteen years old. At home the family communicates in Spanish. With her friends Paloma speaks both English and Spanish. As she was growing up, her mother read to her on a regular basis and to this day Paloma loves to

read. After she completes her homework, on which she spends more than an hour each evening, she always makes time to read. She has a quiet space to do her homework, and a computer and internet access, which she uses to complete her assignments.

Paloma's mother has always supported all of her efforts to excel in school, and they talk about her going to college often because it holds the key to her future. Her career choice is to become a pediatrician, but she understands that it will take many years of school, but she looks forward to the challenge. Although she is not sure which college she wants to attend, she is researching schools that have a program of studies related to medicine. In her previous schools, Paloma excelled academically, and her behavior was exemplary. Her teachers described her as a "standout." In kindergarten and first grades, she was enrolled in a bilingual program. By second grade she was mainstreamed, successfully meeting all the criteria for being exited. Throughout her years at school, Paloma met and exceeded all expectations for achievement; yet, she constantly pushes herself to do better and asks her teachers for extra help, even though they believe she does not need it. During her first year at the academy, Paloma performed very well, earning straight As in SEM-R (reading) and an A- in math, her favorite subject. All of her teachers at the school commend her on her active participation in class and describe Paloma as a highly-motivated student who wants to learn and achieve beyond expectation.

Paloma enjoys attending the academy compared to her previous schools and said, "Well, here I have the challenge I need, and in my other school, I'm not saying they didn't challenge me, but it was not the same amount of challenge I get here, and I feel more appreciated here." In the three year reports of the state's Mastery Tests, Paloma met Goal in math and writing but scored a surprising Basic in reading. In her second year her scores were impressive: Advanced in math and writing and Goal in reading. In the third year she met Goal in all three areas.

When asked what being identified as gifted means to her, Paloma replied, “Being over the limit of excellence, having a unique talent in all that you do.” When she was asked about gifted students in general, Paloma stated, “They are the types of students that like to try harder in what they do and like know that they would never give up and go for their goals. They keep on trying, and want harder levels of work.”

In her free time Paloma enjoys dancing, and during the summers, when she goes to Puerto Rico, she has participated in dance competitions. She has designed the choreography for her dance routines and loves jazz and hip-hop dances. She has also gone to ConnectiKids summer camp. Paloma believes in herself and her abilities to succeed in life. She possesses the talents that she described talented students have. When she was asked to describe her ideal job, Paloma replied, “My dream job is being a pediatrician. And like, I’d like to be that cause like my mom told me it’s better to help people rather than helping yourself, so I decided that I wanted this job ever since I was 5. I have kept that dream going on. During this whole year in the academy, I tried my best to get good grades so when I go to college, my record is good.” Paloma is a very bright and positive student, who has the potential to be and do anything she wants in life.

The Tables that follow represent sample questions and participants’ responses to the questionnaire and interviews. Table 3a focuses on parental encouragement and school schedule at the academy. Table 3b asked participants about study habits, experiences at the academy and their previous schools’. In Table 3c students discussed their afterschool routine, what it means to them being identified as gifted and talented, how the academy has changed their expectations of themselves. Table 3d asked students to evaluate the ways in which the academy supports their

continued developing potential, their task commitment, their motivation to learn and the development of their creativity and talent.

Table 3a

Parental Involvement & School Schedule

<b>Name</b>	<b>Years at Renzulli</b>	<b>... when did [your parents] start talking to you about going to college and what did they say to you?</b>	<b>Do your parents encourage you to have a career or job in the future? If so, what type of job or career do they discuss with you?</b>	<b>Describe your school day at Renzulli Academy.</b>
Diana	4	They talked to me about it in fifth grade, they said that I have potential to make it first and Renzulli will help	Psychiatrist and doctor because these two careers are what I want so they stick by me	We do work all day, we focus hard and get amazing grades. We have 20 minutes to talk
Rosa	2	We started talking about college when I started seventh grade, they told me that college is over-priced but they would pay anything for me to go.	My parents do encourage me to have a career/job. They want me to have a job that is more high-class	A school day for me in Renzulli I would say educational, interesting, and (at times) surprising.
Paloma	2	They started talking to me about college ever since I was 9. They told me that college is the key to my future	Yes, well I chose to be a pediatrician but they agree because I can take good care of my family	First I go to homeroom and complete DGP, then head off to my scheduled classes. At 12 I head to lunch then go to other classes. At the end of the day I go to homeroom, pack up then go to the cafeteria.
Ivan	4	They started as soon as I went to pre-school by saying everything you do effects whether or not you go to college	Yes, to start to have my own business	Come in, daily grammar, math/science, lunch, homeroom, special, SEM-R, SS
Javier	3	They told me that I had to study so I can have a good job and not be like them	I decided I should be an engineer on my own but they encourage me to do it though	Boring, Time goes by slowly. Fridays can sometimes be fun/interesting
Damaris	2	They started talking to me about college in 6th grade and said it will help me succeed in life	They discuss my dream career of becoming a journalist	At Renzulli Academy I do block in the mornings, lunch, blocks in the afternoon and specials and homeroom

<b>Name</b>	<b>Years at Renzulli</b>	<b>... when did [your parents] start talking to you about going to college and what did they say to you?</b>	<b>Do your parents encourage you to have a career or job in the future? If so, what type of job or career do they discuss with you?</b>	<b>Describe your school day at Renzulli Academy.</b>
Ana	3	They started to talk to me about it at around third grade but they started college fund when I was born	Yes, my parents do want me to have a great career in the future but they just encourage me in whatever I do	My school day at Renzulli Academy is very full so that we are able to cover every subject through the week
Alejandra	2	My mom says she wants me to have a good life and succeed in life and to become a lawyer or someone important	They explain that I have the potential to be a president or lawyer	I first do a little brainteaser then we switch and go to specials
Felix	4	They said it is never too early to plan for college. I was told a few years ago	Yes, I've always told my parents that I would like a career in Criminal Justice and they have encouraged me to do so. A career in sports has been discussed as well	A bit of hands-on work in science, chatty lunch, challenging yet helpful math curriculum, interesting social studies classes throughout the week, with a somewhat relaxing SEM-R period
Anibal	3	Every now and then my mother tells me to work hard and do good in my studies so I can get a scholarship	My mom does encourage me to have a career but she doesn't specifically mention any	Grammar in the morning, following either math or science, depending on the day. Maybe a special after lunch and SEM-R or social studies depending on the day
Orlando	2	They said that if I go to college that I would have a good job and a nice house with a lot of money as long as I study hard	They encourage me to have a job of whatever I want	It is fun and I have to read and write so much
Charitin	2	They started talking about college when I was in the fifth grade. They said that it's good for studies and it helps get a job later on in life	Yes, they encourage me to have a career or job. They talk about being a RN (registered nurse) or a doctor which is very interesting to me	The day is long because of the time in each class, but it allows me to get help from the teacher if I needed

Table 3b

Study Habits and Academy Experiences

Name	Years at Renzulli	What study strategies would you use if you were going to prepare for a challenging test?	What subjects are you studying at the Renzulli Academy that you did not study at your previous school?	Do you have to work harder at the Renzulli Academy than you did in your previous school?
Diana	4	I will read notes, chapters from the book, as questions and quiz myself	Social Studies and Science	Yes but it's worth it cause I'm learning more here than there
Rosa	2	I have note cards that I go over with a little bit of information on each one so that when I have the little pieces I put them all together and then I'm ready	Social Studies, Science and Foreign Language	Yes , I do need to work harder
Paloma	2	I would make other people jot down questions for me to answer. I would jot down notes in class to study them at home	Science, Foreign Language	Not really for me, it seems just the perfect amount of effort I want to put in my tasks
Ivan	4	None	SEM-R, Grammar	Yes because it's a harder curriculum but, no because once I get it I'm done just like my old school however Renzulli is harder
Javier	3	Looking through my notes, review problems from the textbooks, etc.	Foreign language and Type 1	Not really, about as challenging except in math because I had to be moved to a more advanced class
Damaris	2	What I do is take good notes then I use the notes to quiz myself	Social studies	The only subject to me that seems harder at Renzulli Academy is math.
Ana	3	What I usually do is make flash cards of the important info, then study wherever I go	SEM-R	Yes, I do have to work harder at Renzulli Academy than I did at my previous school
Alejandra	2	I would see the word and memorize then spell it, then find the meaning	Science, Physical Geography, Writing	Yes
Felix	4	A friend and I would question each other about the topic. I would also review my notes and textbook	U.S. and World History and Algebra	The assignments are harder because it is an advanced curriculum in every classroom
Anibal	3	I just read the whole chapter a couple time	I never really had a reading program like SEM-R. It's quite more in depth	Yes
Orlando	2	I memorize and picture in my mind of it or use flash cards	Social Studies and Science	Yes, I did

<b>Name</b>	<b>Years at Renzulli</b>	<b>What study strategies would you use if you were going to prepare for a challenging test?</b>	<b>What subjects are you studying at the Renzulli Academy that you did not study at your previous school?</b>	<b>Do you have to work harder at the Renzulli Academy than you did in your previous school?</b>
Charitin	2	I would make sure I take good enough notes and then study them on flashcards or white making my own little test/quiz	The subject I am studying is foreign language because we did not have that at my previous school	Yes, you have to work harder because the expectations are more advanced

Table 3c

Afterschool Routine, Being Identified as Gifted and Talented, Students' Self Expectations

<b>Name</b>	<b>Years at Renzulli</b>	<b>Please describe what you do when you get home from school most days.</b>	<b>What does being identified as gifted mean to you?</b>	<b>How has the Renzulli Academy changed your expectations for yourself?</b>
Diana	4	I change clothes, do homework, watch a little TV, go outside, then eat dinner, shower then to bed	It means that I can do anything I want if I put my mind to it. I'm getting the right education	I expect to learn something new each day
Rosa	2	I go to my room and do my homework that takes about 45 minutes to an hour to do, then I eat dinner, take a shower, read a little, watch some TV then go to bed	It means that I was born to be successful and I have potential	The Renzulli Academy has changed my expectations for myself by being a more controlled person and being a lot more responsible and challenging myself
Paloma	2	I drop everything, take a shower, and eat something before starting my homework. Then I mostly go and use the computer and watch some TV for a while.	For me being gifted means being above average in my talents, my uniqueness matters.	I have organized myself and actually have enjoyed my time with friends
Ivan	4	Eat, TV, computer and homework, sleep	That I accomplish things faster than others	It was really shown me my full potential
Javier	3	Take a bath, do my homework, eat dinner, play video games, go on Facebook, sleep	Nothing	They help me set goals for myself and they tell me to not give up
Damaris	2	I watch TV, eat, finish my homework then listen to music or some free time activity	Being able to go above and beyond on what you are asked to do	It showed me my more in depth passion for writing
Ana	3	As soon as I get home I shower then get my homework but I might eat before then	It shows that someone believes and I'm meant for greater things	It has really shown me all I can be

<b>Name</b>	<b>Years at Renzulli</b>	<b>Please describe what you do when you get home from school most days.</b>	<b>What does being identified as gifted mean to you?</b>	<b>How has the Renzulli Academy changed your expectations for yourself?</b>
Alejandra	2	First I change then I get a snack and then I do homework	It means to be noticed as highly educated	Now I have more challenges and opportunities
Felix	4	Clean room, do half of the homework assignments, have dinner, complete the other half (if any), shower, read, sleep	It is an honorable label to be given	The Renzulli Academy has me set goals for my future, to have a successful lifestyle
Anibal	3	I change clothes, eat dinner, do homework, watch TV and play video games	I don't see myself as 'gifted' but more of a person who chooses to make the right decisions and work hard thus, being able to comprehend material a lot better	I expect myself to do my best ALWAYS
Orlando	2	When I get home I take a shower, eat dinner, do my homework, wash the dishes, watch TV, eat a snack and go to sleep	It means that I'm a special kid that has skills	It hasn't changed my expectations
Charitin	2	When I get home from school I turn on the TV, than go shower so I can eat dinner then go to bed after I finish my homework	Having a talent of being really advanced at your studies	They make me want to better myself in my studies

Table 3d

Academy Support, School Routine & Motivation to Task Commitment and Creativity

<b>Name</b>	<b>Years at Renzulli</b>	<b>How has the Renzulli Academy staff supported you in developing your creativity and talent?</b>	<b>How does the school allow you to continue developing your potential?</b>	<b>How has the school supported you in your task commitment and motivation to learn?</b>
Diana	4	They challenge me to do my best and be creative and think out of the box	They challenge me with something new each day	I see my teacher making it, I want to learn more and be what I want to be
Rosa	2	They have supported me by pushing me to the point where I have to think beyond and go beyond my comfort zone	The school allows me to continue developing my potential by showing me not to quit so easily	The school supported me in my task commitment and motivation to learn by making school and learning fun and interesting
Paloma	2	They challenge me with the amount of help I need	Encourages me that there are new things in life for me to learn	They encourage me to keep reaching for me goals in school and their trips has showed me and taught me many useful things

<b>Name</b>	<b>Years at Renzulli</b>	<b>How has the Renzulli Academy staff supported you in developing your creativity and talent?</b>	<b>How does the school allow you to continue developing your potential?</b>	<b>How has the school supported you in your task commitment and motivation to learn?</b>
Ivan	4	They really push me to better myself and do what I want to do	It helps me because it keeps me alert and not bored to keep me focused on my potential	I had a motivation to learn but they were the ones who gave me the building blocks to set it into motion
Javier	3	They tell me I'm really good in drawing and math	I know that I'm moving forward each year into achieving my goal	They teach us about our future and how we can keep moving towards our goal
Damaris	2	They pushed me to my limits to achieve even more	If I exceed at something they give me hard work so I am always challenged with a new task	It gave me more commitment to lean because they showed me the rewards in life of achieving your goals
Ana	3	They have constantly found programs and activities that helped develop my writing among other things	This school allows me to continue developing my potential by supporting and helping me grow	This school has taught me to stay focused and patient with difficult tasks
Alejandra	2	They listen and encourage me	They give us things we all know are challenging for us	Yes it has because each day we get a new assignment
Felix	4	I am constantly pushed by my teachers to better myself	The teachers constantly say to 'go above and beyond' with everything we do	The teachers make class exciting and entertaining at times
Anibal	3	Well, I'm quite better with my grammar now since we do DGP in the morning	Enrichment clusters are good	Pep rallies
Orlando	2	By giving me lots of tests, improving and learning my mistakes	By having field trips that are educational	We go to libraries as a field trip like 3 times a year
Charitin	2	They have not supported me because they don't know about my talent or creativity	They don't because I have to act how they want me to	They motivate me to do better

### **Core Categories and Results**

This section of Chapter four is divided into four parts that address the core characteristics that emerged from the data collection and analysis, including responses of the twelve study participants. The participants expressed their beliefs about their gifts and talents and their perceptions relative to talented students from other cultures. Most of the students in the study began their educational careers in bilingual classes, either because they were born in Puerto Rico

or because their primary language at home was Spanish. Their school records indicate that during their early school years, they demonstrated exceptional abilities to learn concepts and skills in their native language. They acquired English at a faster pace and were able to transfer skills from their native language to English with ease. In their cumulative school records, most of their teachers commented that these students were motivated and intellectually curious, served as class leaders and role models for their peers, and were willing to help their classmates with their schoolwork.

This section also addresses the core categories that emerged from these PR-ELL students' responses regarding family characteristics (language spoken in the home, home environment and study habits) and their responses regarding educational factors that have contributed to their gifts and talents.

The major finding and core category about how these students describe their gifts and talents were "their work ethic and their strong motivation to succeed." The second category that supports the core category as contributing to the students' high academic achievement, was their need to seek challenge, and their belief that they possessed the ability to go above and beyond what one is asked to do, having aspirations to go to college, being committed to doing their best to complete all assigned work, and being able to comprehend materials with accuracy. The core category regarding their perceptions of the gifts and talents of students from other cultures was that they all shared similar above average intelligence. Supporting category included their beliefs that academically talented students from other cultures also shared similar study habits and strong effort and motivation.

The core category regarding students' families was clear: all the parents encouraged these academically talented students to work hard to get a good education. The supporting category

included parents who read to their children when they were young and encouraged them to read on their own on a daily basis, provided a quiet space to work and technology to support their school work, talked to them about attending college from an early age, and discussed choosing a career that will make them happy and that will also provide a good living.

The core category relating to educational factors involved having a rigorous curriculum. The supporting category included challenging classes in the core academic areas, exposure to advanced reading using the SEM-R, high expectations and encouragement to do their best from all of their teachers, and field trips, which provided exposure and enhanced their classroom experiences.

### **Characteristics of PR-ELL Participants Categories**

The researcher attained valuable perspectives regarding the characteristics of the gifted and talented PR-ELL students who participated in the study. Working hard was a dominant core category, which was indicated by the vast majority of the students who stated that their desire to work hard and achieve success in school were important traits of being gifted. In a thorough review of their school records, the researcher corroborated the students' perceptions of themselves because most were described as high achieving hard workers.

### **Working Hard and Being Highly Motivated to Succeed**

The participants in this study indicated their firm belief that working hard would enable them to succeed both in school and in life. The surveys they completed and the interviews in which they took part demonstrated that most of the students held the belief that hard work was the most important characteristic they displayed in being identified as gifted and talented. For example, when asked what it means to be gifted, Damaris replied, "Go over and beyond what we are expected to do and work hard if you want to succeed." Ivan stated, "One of the

characteristics of academically talented students is that they work hard.” Paloma explained, “They are the types of students that like to try harder in what they do and like know that they will never give up and go for their goals. They keep on trying and want harder levels of work.” When discussing the characteristics of being gifted, Ana stated, “I don’t feel that it makes me better than anybody else. It just means that I have been recognized for how hard I work.” Although Ana has made good progress in her academic endeavors and excels on state tests, her teachers are concerned because she has difficulty completing her assignments and staying focused. These seeming contradictions in what Ana says and how she performs are in many instances experienced by children identified as gifted. Reviewing her survey responses and listening to a transcript of Ana’s interview, the researcher perceived that in another setting, this young lady may well have fallen through the cracks in school; however, at the academy where expectations are high and personalization a critical component of a child’s education, Ana’s chance for success is very good.

Most of the students in the study also cited being highly motivated as a core characteristic of being identified as gifted. Anibal described a gifted student as, “Willing to work hard and achieve your goals, especially if you want to go to a good school, you want to keep those grades up. You want to take time from playing video games or watching TV and make the right choices, and do your school work, and take any opportunity you can get.” In Diana’s case, in her school records her teachers indicated that she made excellent progress in all areas and was a conscientious worker. As she progressed to her next grades, her teachers continued to commend her motivation and work ethic. For Diana, being a gifted student means, “having the potential to be whatever I want as long as I push myself to achieve my goals and become what I want to be.” She further described a gifted student as, “someone that has determination and motivation.”

Diana is an exemplary student. In her findings, the researcher concluded that Diana's perceptions of the characteristics of a gifted student align with her performance and grades, and her teachers consistently report that she is highly motivated and self-directed. Diana possesses many of the characteristics reported in the research of Frasier and Passow (1994) and Lara-Alecio (1996), among them motivation for learning, communication skills, high academic achievement, a desire for learning, and the ability to generalize learning. Charitin, an eighth grader at the academy, stated that she has to work harder than she ever did because the expectations are, "more advanced." However, her records indicate that her teachers are concerned with Charitin's lack of motivation and effort, and, at times, her uncooperative and disrespectful behavior. In her previous school in Florida, Charitin's grades were very poor, and her behavior negatively impacted her grades. Yet, on Florida's state tests, she consistently scored at above grade level, suggesting a serious disconnect between her native ability and her academic performance. At the academy, Charitin continues to fail to work at her full potential; however, the environment and the curricular challenges have resulted in increased effort, and her grades have improved. She surpassed school, district and state goals on the state mastery tests, and her grades are more closely aligned with these results than they were at her previous school.

### **Strong Academic Achievement and Work Ethic**

A key criterion for acceptance to the Gifted and Talented Academy was that students had to earn a score of 4 and 5 in all areas of the state Mastery Tests. The twelve students who participated in the study met this criterion and are high academic achievers. One of the characteristics of giftedness that has been identified by researchers Irby and Lara-Alecio (1996) is high academic achievement and the ability to generalize learning, which is assessed on the state Mastery Tests. In this study, the researcher found that ten of the twelve students

demonstrated high academic achievement and met and/or surpassed school, district and state goals on the state's Mastery Tests. The data from the Mastery Tests for the last three years indicated that all of these students demonstrated strong scores since they enrolled at the academy. It is evident that their high potential combined with their well-established study habits have enabled these students to advance in their studies. When asked, "How much homework do you do most nights?" all students responded that they spend one to two hours completing their homework; nine of the twelve students also indicated that they read at home every day. Rosa, an eighth grade student, impressed her bilingual teachers in her primary grades with her intelligence, effort and high potential. She learned English at a quicker pace. By fourth grade, Rosa was performing above grade level in all academic areas. Even though her primary language was Spanish, Rosa was able to transfer her concepts and knowledge from her native language to her second language. Since her mother speaks Spanish only, Rosa had to interpret and translate for her, and her ability to code-switch is extremely impressive. Rosa demonstrated most of the characteristics identified by Brulles et al. (2011) in their research.

Paloma, a seventh grader at the academy, was described by her bilingual kindergarten teacher as a "Stand out." Like Rosa, she acquired English proficiency by the second grade and was exited from the bilingual program after meeting all the exiting criteria. She continues pushing herself to do better, spending over an hour every evening completing her homework and reading. Rosa and Paloma possess above average intelligence, task commitment, and intrinsic motivation, characteristics that are similar to those defined by Renzulli (1978).

Two students in this study are not working to full potential due to behavior, work ethic, and lack of consistency in meeting deadlines, yet they scored well on the state Mastery Tests. These two students' grades, however, do not align with their scores on the state tests. There is a

belief on the part of their teachers and themselves that they are making progress, and when interviewed, both students expressed a sincere desire to work harder to reach their potential. The researcher observed that the high expectations and the school culture of excellence promoted these students' willingness to work at improving their comportment and their learning.

### **Future Aspirations: College and Career**

When the question, "Do you want to go to college?" was posed to each of the study's participants, all replied with a resounding yes. Of the twelve, ten had a specific college or two in mind. The two who did not name a specific college were, nevertheless, very sure that they would attend college. Orlando, for example, at this early age has a clear vision of his potential and what he must do in order to realize his dreams and goals. He understands that he has to work hard to be successful in high school and college to achieve his dream to become a doctor. Alejandra is described by her teachers as the "ideal student." She loves to read and write and wants to publish a book of poetry; but, at the same time, she is also pragmatic. She stated that she aspires to be a lawyer so she can be "in a good place."

Felix wants to pursue a career in criminal justice and hopes to matriculate at Harvard. It is Anibal's dream to attend MIT or UConn to study for a career in engineering. His first choice is MIT, but he worries about expenses and having too many loans. Anibal's insights and reasoning relative to the cost of college speak to his attributes of giftedness as found in the research of Frasier and Passow (1994). It is apparent that all the students are motivated to do well, so that they can attend a good college and realize their career aspirations.

### **Seeking Challenge and Going Above and Beyond What Is Expected**

When the researcher asked the students to describe their typical day at the academy, their responses varied, but all stated that their days were full and long with interesting, educational,

and surprising activities, which kept them focused and engaged. They also stated that they had to work much harder, and more was expected of them than in their previous schools. They were very appreciative of the variety of subjects in which they had classes, such as social studies and science and SEM-R, new subjects that the academy provided, which was not the case in their previous schools. Alejandra loves the academy because she is challenged and has more opportunities than in her previous school. For Rosa, attending the academy has changed her life. “Basically, it’s changed my view of things, to challenge myself more because things aren’t always easy, and you have to see that there is always that one challenge that you have to work hard at.” When interviewed, Charitin explained that she looks forward to the challenges that lie ahead. She added, “In the future, I would hope to achieve bettering myself and being able to still have the knowledge as I had as a kid and reinforce it with the knowledge as an adult...Being able to absorb more and more information to help me through my life.”

Students also stated that they used different strategies and a variety of approaches when confronted with challenging tasks. Six of the twelve students prepared flashcards to review key information before taking a challenging test. This strategy helped them to memorize key information and concepts to do well on the test. Frasier and Passow (1994) identify a well-developed memory as one of the common attributes of giftedness. Anibal stated, “I prepare flashcards to prepare for a challenging test, and then I memorize and picture the information.” Damaris said that when preparing for a spelling test, she would look at the word and memorize its spelling and the meaning of the word. These students’ test preparations speak to their willingness to go above and beyond the norm in order to achieve at high levels. Orlando takes his studying to the next level, “First, I take good notes, then I organize and prepare the information to put on flashcards, and then I make up my own little test or quiz.” Orlando’s meticulous

preparation has paid off, since his teacher stated that she was “blown away by his growth and progress during the academic year.” A further and important benefit has been that Orlando’s behavior and focus have improved dramatically, which demonstrates his commitment to his studies.

### **Students’ Perception of the Gifts and Talents of Students from Other Cultures**

The Gifted & Talented Academy has an enrollment of approximately 120 students. Although they all live in the same city, they come from different cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds. A good number are Hispanic, others are African-American; and others are Caucasian. As stated in Frasier’s (1989) research, there are cultural and social differences within each group. These differences include socio-economic status, cultural backgrounds, and levels of poverty, first language, and English proficiency. The researcher notes that in this study all the participants were Hispanic ELLs, bounded by the fact that all were from Puerto Rico.

The participants in the study were asked various questions regarding their peers from different backgrounds; it became evident that the majority of their responses had to do with their interactions at the academy. When asked questions about their peers’ home life and experiences outside of school, they seemed to know very little or nothing at all. Outside of school most interacted via Facebook or other means of electronic communication; however, they did not visit each others’ homes. When asked to compare their work with the work completed by other students in their class who were African-American, Caucasian, or Hispanics from countries other than Puerto Rico, four of the participants stated that their work was better than that of their classmates who were not part of the study. Four believed that the work of all the students was similar because all had their strengths and weaknesses, and four participants said that they did not compare their work with the work of their classmates.

When the question, “How do their experiences at the Academy differ from yours,” was posed to the participants, Diana, for example, replied, “I just feel that I work harder at times, and they just chill.” Ivan added, “We have similar academic abilities; however, I stress out over homework and tests and they don’t.” Javier believes that he puts more effort into his work and that his work is often neater than the work of his peers from other cultures. Damaris believes that she and her classmates have many similarities, even though they are from different backgrounds. Felix enjoys the company and friendship of students from different backgrounds and feels that they are very similar to him. Ivan believes that they have similar academic skills, but their background was difficult. In his own words, “We share the happiness, and we share the pain.” Alejandra acknowledges the high potential in many of her friends from other cultures; however, regarding their behavior, she feels that “Most get offended and fool around a lot.” Damaris sees them as very focused and hardworking like she is. Orlando feels that he has a lot in common with his peers, but he feels that they are doing better than he is due to the fact that they have been attending the gifted and talented academy for a longer period of time.

### **Family Characteristics**

As stated in Chapter 2, Blazer (2005) stressed that family involvement is a consistent predictor of a student’s academic success. When interviewing the participants, the researcher found that all had parents or guardians who provided them with the support, encouragement, home structure and stability that combined with the students’ potential and high abilities resulted in their high academic achievement.

### **Family Demographics**

The researcher designed a survey with thirty questions that provided demographic information. From the participants’ responses, seven of the twelve students live in single parent

homes, and in these single parent residences, the mother is the head of the household. In the homes with two parents, both parents share the household responsibilities. Eleven of the twelve students indicated that their mothers were high school graduates, and five stated that their mothers had completed at least two years of college. One of the twelve said that her mother had attended high school but did not graduate. Six of the students said that their mothers worked full time; four indicated that their mothers did not work, and two stated that their mothers worked part time. When asked about their fathers' schooling, four stated that their fathers completed high school; three indicated that their fathers had attended high school but did not graduate, and two said that their fathers completed two years of community college. The remaining three students did not have this information and were not able to answer this question. When asked about their fathers' work status, seven stated that their fathers had full time jobs; while three said that their fathers were unemployed, and two could not provide the answer.

When the participants were asked about what language(s) was (were) spoken in the home, four students indicated that their mother communicated with them in Spanish only; seven said that they communicated in Spanish and English, and one stated that she communicated with her mother in English only. With their fathers, two students indicated that they speak Spanish only with their fathers; four spoke English only; three stated that they spoke mainly English, and three said they could not provide the information.

Regarding older siblings in the home, eight of the participants reported that they had older siblings living at home; six said that their older siblings had graduated from high school, and five stated that they had older siblings enrolled in college. When asked if their parents wanted them to read, all the participants stated that their parents encouraged them to read. Nine of the twelve stated that when they were growing up, their parents read to them. When asked if

their parents helped the participants with their homework, five stated that their parents helped them to complete their homework. Ten stated that their parents made sure they had a quiet space to do homework, and all the students indicated that their parents encouraged them to work hard, so that they could go to college. During the interviews, it became evident to the researcher that the students had a great deal of respect for and felt very close to their parents. Anibal stated that his mother always stressed the importance of doing well in school. Alejandra reads every day, a habit she acquired from her mother who read to her on a daily basis. She stated that both of her parents instilled in her the idea that she was going to attend and graduate from college. Her parents always encouraged her to study hard, so she could attend a good college. They instilled the belief that she could be anything she wanted to be, whether it was to become a lawyer or the President of the United States. At a very young age, her parents took Alejandra to the local library and had her sign up for a library card. At an early age, Ana's mother talked to her about attending college and started a college fund for her when Ana was born. Ana's parents wanted her to have a successful career, but, at the same time, it was important that she choose a career that she would enjoy. Her two older siblings graduated from high school but did not attend college. Ana is determined and excited by the prospect of being the first in her family to attend and graduate from college. Diana's parents encourage her to read independently. They believe that reading will increase her IQ. Her parents support Diana with her homework, encourage her to work hard in school; they want her to go to college, graduate, and choose a career that interests her. Her parents expect Damaris to attend college to pursue a career in journalism, and they believe that this is a great career choice for her. As a young child, her parents read to Damaris; now, she reads on her own because she reads faster than her parents. Ivan's parents spoke to him about college since his pre-school days and told him that everything he does will

affect whether or not he goes to college. They provided him with a computer and internet to support his work in school. Rosa's mother talks to her about attending college, and even though her mother is concerned with the high cost of higher education, she tells Rosa that she will pay any amount to ensure that she will attend and graduate from college. Paloma credits her mother with inspiring her to pursue a career as a pediatrician because she often tells her that it is better to help others than to help yourself.

All of the participants report that their parents nurture their children's academic gifts by providing them with a quiet space to work, a computer with internet access, and conversations regarding what they must do to attain academic success, so that they can attend a good college, graduate, and have a career that will enable them to achieve financial security and work that they will enjoy. In an examination of student demographics, the researcher found that none of these twelve participants' parents graduated from a four-year college. Although their parents do not have high levels of education, they have high educational goals for their children and have successfully instilled in them the belief that they will attend and graduate from a four-year college. The parents also have encouraged their children to pursue a successful and fulfilling career. The participants' active parental involvement in their education is a driving force according to the research of Arellano and Padilla (1996); Gandara (1995); and Lockwood (2005) in their having high educational goals.

### **Educational Factors**

The teachers at the Gifted & Talented Academy have played a pivotal role in nurturing, advancing, and sustaining the participants' academic gifts. Ladson-Billings (1992) discussed the need for relevant pedagogy that is directed toward empowering students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impact knowledge, skills and

attitudes” (p. 382). Ladson-Billings asserted that teachers must also be culturally sensitive. Brulles et al. (2011) strongly believe that teachers should participate in professional development in gifted education that will enable them to identify ability and develop the talents of ELL gifted students. Based on the participants’ responses, the researcher found that the teachers have expertise in working with minority gifted and talented students and continue to participate in meaningful and relevant professional development, are sensitive to and understanding of their students’ culture, and have high expectations for all of their students.

During the interviews, all of the participants said that the work at the academy is much more challenging and rigorous than at their previous schools. Students have to work hard; the school days are long, and they have to spend many hours to complete their work. They also have extra-curricular activities and field trips that often complement the curriculum, and which enhance their learning. All of the participants are impressed with the SEM-R Program and appreciate the challenges associated with the more challenging reading. Anibal stated that it is more in-depth than any other reading program he experienced. Alejandra did not study social studies or science in her previous school. Once enrolled at the academy, she struggled with social studies, but with hard work and perseverance, she earned an A during her last marking period. As a result, she loves history because, “it explains people’s lives and the sacrifices they made for our freedom.” Alejandra added that she was not challenged at her previous school; it only took her a few minutes to complete her work. At the academy, although the work is challenging and takes much longer to complete, Alejandra enjoys it. As with Alejandra, Ivan understood and mastered the lessons at his previous school within half an hour. The rest of the day, he helped his peers with their work. At the academy, Ivan finds that the lessons are more rigorous and challenging. He attributes his academic success to the rigor of the curriculum. He always had the

desire to learn, but gives credit to the teachers at the academy for giving him the building blocks to set his learning in motion.

### **Self-Regulation**

At the Gifted & Talented Academy, the teachers have implemented self-regulation strategies into their instruction in an attempt to modify student behaviors as appropriate. When Diana entered the academy, her interactions and behavior impeded her academic progress, and the teachers at the academy immediately assessed her needs and then implemented self-regulation strategies for her. This process enabled Diana to become engaged and focus on her schoolwork, and they also positively modified her interactions with her peers. Now, Diana reflects on her days at her previous school and realizes that nothing much was accomplished because of the high level of destructive behaviors with which their teachers had to deal daily. At the academy the implementation of self-regulation strategies appears to contribute to high academic achievement, maximizes use of instructional time, and creates an environment that is conducive to learning with minimal behavior issues. The two participants whose performance is inconsistent and who struggle with behavior issues have made good progress due to their teachers' tenacity in holding them accountable and having high expectations for fulfilling their potential. It is obvious that the self-regulation strategies are working for these two students.

### **Extracurricular Experiences**

The teachers at the Gifted & Talented Academy collaborate with several community and state organizations to provide meaningful opportunities for enhancement of the curriculum and to complement their academic work. All of the participants concur that the field trips and many other opportunities to participate in activities such as the Connecticut Invention Convention, Talcott Mountain Science Center, and History Day have provided the hands on experiences

necessary to enrich learning and make their school experiences more relevant. Anibal loves the field trips because he finds that they are related to what he is learning in class. The visit to the State Capitol allowed him to learn a great deal about Connecticut and its history. For Alejandra the extracurricular activities give her life skills and enhance her educational experiences.

To summarize, all twelve participants demonstrated characteristics of giftedness, especially task commitment and motivation. The involvement of their parents in their education was a critical factor in their success. When they entered the academy, the rigor of the curriculum, the high expectations, an environment that fostered collaboration and creative problem solving all contributed greatly to the success of these twelve remarkable young people.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The objective of this study was to examine the self-perceptions of twelve high ability Puerto Rican English Language Learner (PR-ELL) students who have attended a Gifted & Talented Academy for at least two years. Equally important, this dissertation explored the social and cultural characteristics of these gifted and talented students and their personal perceptions about characteristics of students from other cultures that are also identified as gifted and talented. This research also examined the perceptions, beliefs, and home and educational experiences of these students by using data from surveys completed by the participants, and interviews conducted by the . These data were collected and analyzed to probe perceptions about characteristics of giftedness, as well as which services would most effectively benefit Gifted PR-ELL students. In this chapter the findings relevant to the research questions that framed this study are discussed. The implications of these findings as well as areas for future research are also addressed.

#### Discussion of the Research Questions

##### Research Question I, Part A

- A. Which characteristics do PR-ELL students believe best describe their gifts and talents?

Zappia (1989) concluded that to identify specific behaviors in students of different backgrounds, a variety of data should be collected. Based on the data from the participants' surveys as well as the data collected during the interviews, the researcher found that these students shared a commitment to continuous growth and a consistent desire to excel in everything they do. It is evident that they all possess high levels of motivation, effort, and

personal expectations. The students manifested keen insights and assumed responsibility for their education, achievements, and their success in life. They appeared eager to accept the challenges and responsibilities that accompany the educational opportunities offered at the academy they attend. It is evident that their academic work is their most important priority; however, this research also found that they balance their academic responsibilities with leisure activities and hobbies. These young people thrive on various types of challenges and welcome them with both anticipation and single mindedness. Their unique hobbies, their love of music and sports, and their devotion to their studies and seriousness of purpose in fulfilling their educational responsibilities suggest that they have gained a sense of well-being, as well as a good handle on how to achieve their goals. There is a balance in their lives, which speaks well for their future.

In analyzing the data, another common pattern emerged. All students in this study spend between one and two hours every evening completing their homework. All have learned to excel in school, reading above grade level, and meeting and even exceeding the expectations of their teachers. On their school records, their teachers described all of these youngsters as motivated, conscientious, focused on improving their learning, and well mannered. Although some initially lacked organizational skills and displayed an inconsistent work ethic, the fact that their teachers had high expectations and taught these students self-regulation strategies in a nurturing and caring environment enabled them to improve in these areas. The students' performance based on their teachers' high expectations reflect Miller's (2005) findings that if these young students are not encouraged, the result is often a lack of interest in school. The participants also expressed self-confidence in their abilities, and are self-directed, bright, mature, and hardworking. They are eager to tackle learning opportunities, which empower them to seek challenging curricula with enthusiasm. These students are focused, and they persevere and are committed to their studies

and to learning as part of their daily routine. They use technology and other innovative resources efficiently. All but one read regularly, and the majority read at home on a daily basis.

Self-awareness was evident in these students regarding their strengths, weaknesses and learning styles. The participants display strong abilities to self-reflect, as they examine their errors and do everything they can to learn from their mistakes and improve their performance. They exhibit good study skills and habits, using checklists, flash cards, note cards and review strategies to prepare for tests and quizzes. For the few who struggle academically, certain positive characteristics enable them to confront and overcome the obstacles that impede their learning. Further evidence that these participants possess many of the attributes of giftedness is their well-rounded lifestyle, as all are focused on doing well and excelling academically, but all are also involved with a hobby or activity outside of school, and more than half play sports. Brulles, Castellano, Liang (2011) confirmed the importance of enrichment experiences, noting that extracurricular activities give students opportunities to enhance their abilities.

The results of this study found that gifted & talented PR ELL students possess similar characteristics as those identified by Irby and Lara-Alecio (1996), Frasier & Passow (1994) and others. The participants in this study describe the following characteristics that identify them as gifted and talented: high potential, motivation, commitment, perseverance, self-confidence, maturity, and hard work. However, the researcher also found that these characteristics are manifested in different ways by different participants. This supports Leung's (1981) research, which suggests that certain gifted characteristics exist in students of all cultural backgrounds and thus can be labeled as absolute attributes of giftedness, but he also believed that each individual does not have to possess all the characteristics in order to be considered gifted and talented.

### *Implications*

Analyzing the results of these studies, the researcher found relevant information to help identify the characteristics and attributes of gifted PR ELL students. These findings can be used as a solid and valuable screening tool and as a frame of reference in designing and implementing effective curriculum and instruction for gifted PR ELL students. When working with PR ELL students, educators must be vigilant to appropriately identify students who have the potential and attributes of gifted and talented young people. Educators should assume the responsibility for examining student records and monitoring their academic progress in their native language to identify whether characteristics of giftedness are evident. Further research is needed to determine the percentage of children in bilingual programs who are identified as gifted and talented and how to design rigorous curriculum that will meet their academic needs.

A possible follow-up is for the researcher to continue to monitor these young participants as they progress in their education, in particular their motivation and academic achievement. Design a tool to monitor whether they are participating in Advanced Placement (AP) classes and taking the AP exam at the end of the academic year. When they take tests such as SAT and ACT, scores should be reviewed and analyzed to determine whether they are scoring at levels that are commensurate with their academic promise. As they make decisions regarding college applications, how many apply and are accepted to competitive colleges or the colleges they indicated that they would like to attend when they responded to the initial survey? How has the educational foundation and background that the Gifted & Talented Academy provided these students supported their continued progress in their junior and senior years of high school? The data that are gathered as a result of this on-going monitoring will yield very useful information

for future PR ELL gifted students in particular and all culturally diverse gifted students in general.

### **Research Question I. Part B**

A. How do these PR-ELL students characterize students from other cultures (White or African American) who are identified as academically gifted and talented?

Most of the students identify similarities between them and fellow students from other cultures who are also identified as gifted and talented. While they believe that they have similar abilities and share similar interests, the participants in the study also believed that they work harder, expend more effort in their academic studies, take school more seriously, and have more enthusiasm for learning than students from other cultures who are identified as gifted and talented. Most also explain that they are different relative to their culture, their traditions, their language, and their academic preparedness and organization. Participants note that their peers from other cultures do not always behave appropriately, but many attribute this to the fact that they have been at the academy longer and seem more accustomed to the setting and perhaps are not as focused. The students in the study further state that they are similar in ability, but there is limited contact between the participants and students identified as gifted from other cultures outside of the academy. Two participants said that they see their friends outside of school but have limited knowledge of their home environment and family life.

Little research exists regarding PR ELL gifted and talented students and their perceptions of peers from other cultures. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct in-depth research of the perceptions that PR ELL students have regarding gifted and talented students from other cultures. One notable exception, which is insightful, is the research of Baumrind (1989) and others (e.g., Steinberg, 1996) which suggests that relative to parenting styles, Latino, African –

American and immigrant groups in general tend to parent from an authoritarian perspective, and that parents more often appear to be distant, controlling and offer few opportunities for independent thinking and behaviors.

### *Implications*

Although the participants get along well with their culturally different classmates, and express the belief that they are equally talented with similar intelligence and talents, the researcher found that there is little understanding about their classmates' culture, heritage, traditions, and home life. Consequently, certain assumptions regarding their classmates' behaviors and study habits are based on casual observations and generalizations that have little basis in fact. Accordingly, the researcher recommends that the academy promote activities and programs to showcase the culture, values and traditions of the different groups that comprise the school community. For example, the academy could establish an annual festival where students, families and the community can come together and share information about their native country: history, language, unique traditions, culture, and the universal unifier - food.

A possible future research is recommended with the following research question as a frame: how do students from other cultures characterize PR ELL gifted and talented students? The same questions could be posed to the twelve participants regarding their perceptions of their culturally different counterparts and the results could be analyzed in a comparison of the responses of non-PR ELL gifted students with those of PR ELL regarding their perceptions.

### **Research Question II**

- A. What are the family characteristics (home language spoken, home environment, study habits) that characterize these PR-ELL students who have been identified as academically gifted and talented?

### *Family Characteristics*

Blazer (2005) discusses several research sources that confirm the importance of active parental involvement as an effective predictor of successful student achievement. The twelve students who participated in the study discussed the high value their parents placed on their early, current and future education. The students are consistently encouraged to work hard, to read, and set goals for college and career. Most students' parents read to them when they were younger, a habit that instilled in them their love of reading. Their parents also discussed college early in their children's lives and encouraged them to choose a career, which interested them. While they wanted their children to choose a career that would make them financially secure, they also stressed the importance of having them do something they loved. According to Soto (as cited in Hine, 1994) some families of Puerto Rican descent provide a nurturing environment for their children and have established an interesting way to interact with them by supporting their independence. The students stated that their parents always told them that attending college and graduating was the key to future success, and these parents encouraged their children to engage in future/goal oriented thinking.

The researcher noted a consistent message that was repeatedly issued to these young people by their parents: work hard, and excel in school. Hine (1994) noted that a strong family unit and a family centered culture significantly support high achievement. The students also indicated that their parents referred to their potential when they discussed their school performance, college choices, career plans, and their overall future plans. One student stated that his parents encouraged him to attend a technical school, but his own aspiration was to go to college. Although the parents of the participants had limited schooling, all emphasized the importance of school and working hard to excel academically. Most of the students said that they

did not get help from their parents with their homework; however, their parents provided them with a quiet space, a computer, internet access and continually encouraged their children in a way that is related to the motivation and work ethic these students appear to possess. Hebert (1993) indicated that the level of parental involvement, parental education and educational environment in the home were significant factors in students' motivation to achieve at high levels.

### *Implications*

This research found that parents do not have to have a high level of education themselves in order to motivate their children to do well in school. Castellano (2003) states that families of gifted children who are diverse in culture and language make a concerted effort to assimilate to the mainstream culture while maintaining their own cultural roots. Many parents recognize giftedness in their children at an early age and support their children and their school. On many occasions, they are the first to recognize signs of giftedness and their children's talents (Castellano & Diaz, 2002). Parents who nurture, encourage, and motivate their children to have high expectations for themselves and for whom they have high expectations are more likely to have their children work to develop their full potential. Brulles et al. (2011) discussed actions that parents can take to support their children, including finding opportunities related to their children's areas of interest, and obtaining information about what it means to be identified as gifted. It is evident that parents greatly influence their children's desire to do well and to display behavior, which is appropriate in public spaces. At home they provide the structure and framework for committing themselves to their studies, and they bring these attitudes to the classroom, which enables them to be academically successful. Continuing communication with parents is critical as parents of students with high potential should be provided with information

on characteristics of gifted children and the ways they can support their children to realize their full potential. Educators must establish effective forms of communication with parents, in particular those who teach gifted ELL students. Information to families should be purposeful, specific and clear, free of educational jargon and written in parents' native language (Brulles et al., 2011). Workshops for parents should be offered on a regular basis to learn about factors that promote academic success for their high potential students. Additional research is needed to investigate the family characteristics of Hispanic ELL students with high potential not participating in a Gifted and Talented program.

### **Research Question III**

- A. What educational factors (teachers, subject, and enrichment activities) do these students believe have contributed to their gifts and talents?

#### *Educational Factors*

An examination of school records demonstrates that most of the twelve participants were identified early on by their teachers as 'standing out from their peers.' They were described as bright, motivated, hard-working, eager to learn and self-directed. All of the students performed at above or advanced levels on the state tests. Although some of the students underperformed in areas such as reading early on, factors such as motivation, perseverance, a desire to learn, and effort enabled them to make progress to overcome their difficulties and excel. Their early reading difficulties are often due to their deficiency of academic language. A case in point is the experience of Jo Ann Robisheaux, (1997) an elementary school teacher who shared her perceptions of children whose first language was not English. Her perceptions of these students' abilities were colored by their limited English proficiency. She noted that an experience with a fourth grader changed her views dramatically. On a particular assignment, this student wrote

about her life in Honduras, in which she used imaginative and evocative language. This proved to be a transformational experience for Robisheaux, who became more actively involved to broaden identification procedures in her school so that LEP students would no longer be viewed as slow or be consigned to low level knowledge, with very limited opportunities to realize their full potential. She also began the process of investigating teaching strategies recommended for gifted students and adapted them for LEP students (Robisheaux, 1997).

When they talked about their previous schools, the participants of the study uniformly explained that they were not challenged when they attended these schools. At times, teachers question the need for gifted education for students who possess average academic aptitude and achieve at high levels, however, lowered achievement levels could well be a consequence of students' lack of instruction appropriate to their learning, academic potential, or instruction that complements their learning abilities and style (Brulles et al., 2011). A great deal of time was spent on classroom management issues and/or providing help to struggling learners. Students repeatedly stated that they completed their work quickly and then helped their peers or just did nothing for the rest of the day. The students would have preferred maximizing their learning time, but too often this did not occur, and they were all disappointed about not having access to an enriched curriculum that included social studies and science. Sometimes, they believed that they were overlooked because they mastered unchallenging content quickly and did not need help that others needed. These student frustrations regarding the quality of their learning are supported by Beasley's (2011a) contention that schools in areas of high poverty concentrations lack the rigor of high level skills, questions and concepts because they are more likely to be taught by teachers, who may be certified but are not highly qualified.

Regarding their participation at the Gifted & Talented Academy, all twelve students agreed that they receive a rigorous, enriched curriculum that included social studies, science, foreign languages and SEM-R. They explained that they are being challenged and appreciate the difficulty of their courses, but that they are motivated and eager to tackle the challenge and be continually challenged. They express that they love being exposed to new curriculum, and their learning time is maximized.

All of the participants in this study believe that the programs at the academy are future and goal oriented, and they enjoyed “the push to excel”. They believe that they are able to meet the rigorous demands placed on them because they receive the necessary support to work to their full potential. In both the survey responses and the interviews, the researcher repeatedly heard students saying that teacher support, a rigorous curriculum, and high-quality instruction were consistently provided at the academy and contributed to their motivation to work hard. Students also believe that they are in an environment in which they are continuously acquiring and developing their skills, and that they have the support they need to grow personally and academically. They receive support and encouragement to pursue college and are exposed to learning and school activities, which align with their ability and interests. It is evident that the faculty and staff at the Gifted Academy capitalize on students’ eagerness to learn, their motivation, dedication, and tap into different learning styles (visual, etc.) through hands-on activities, educational trips, and competitions that support and enhance their academic experiences. Most of the participants believe that the academy provides them with the tools, support, and environment to maximize their potential. Their perceptions are accurate; however, equally important to their level of achievement is their self-perceived motivation, effort, hard work, and commitment, which are a recipe for success. Esquierdo et al. (2008) state that it is

essential that teachers receive professional development in gifted education and have knowledge of the characteristics of bilingual gifted and talented students. Also, teachers who work with bilingual students need professional development in gifted education, philosophy, instructional approaches and best practices (Esquierdo et al., 2008). Based on the twelve participants' responses and perceptions and their academic achievement, it is evident that the teachers and staff at the Gifted & Talented Academy have received appropriate professional development and have the skills to maximize their students' academic growth and learning.

### *Implications*

It is essential for school district leadership to design effective, pedagogically sound, research based programs for students identified as gifted and talented. This is especially true in urban districts in which language issues, socio-economic status, and cultural differences often make potentially gifted students feel displaced and discouraged. These students deserve the opportunity to be challenged, nurtured, and provided with a rigorous curriculum to realize their full potential. It is imperative for teachers to receive meaningful and appropriate training in gifted education and ELL methodology. Teachers should be culturally sensitive to their student population. The goal is to create a learning environment for all children, which enables student learning to thrive. Therefore, creating an educational environment that fosters respect, appropriate behavior, and collaboration and provides strategies to resolve conflicts with dignity, is of utmost importance.

Further research should investigate what educational factors influence the academic achievement of PR- ELL students with high potential, who are not participating in Gifted and Talented Programs with those of PR- ELL students participating in Gifted and Talented

Programs. How are they progressing academically? Is rigor and relevance evident in their curriculum? Do teachers have high expectation for their students?

Before this study was conducted, the researcher had first-hand knowledge of the academy, the staff, the students and their families. Exploring the research questions in this dissertation revealed some surprising and enlightening results. The motivation and enthusiasm of the students and their appreciation for this learning opportunity, the rigor and breadth of the curriculum, their parents' desire for their children to succeed, the commitment and professionalism of the staff, and the nurturing environment that pervades the academy: these attest to the Gifted and Talented Academy's enormous success. This realization led the researcher to conclude that this model should be replicated across the country, so that all students with high potential, regardless of ethnic background, socio-economic status and cultural uniqueness can attain their full potential.

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## APPENDIX A

### Renzulli Academy Student Questionnaire

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gender:  Male  Female    Age: \_\_\_\_\_    Years at Renzulli Academy: \_\_\_\_\_

1. If you were born in Puerto Rico, how old were you when you first came to the United States?
  
2. Who do you live with?
  - Both mother and father
  - Mother only
  - Father only
  - Mother and Stepfather or another male
  - Father and Stepmother or another female
  - Grandmother or Aunt or other female relative
  - Other
  
3. Who is the adult FEMALE HEAD in your home?
  - The child's mother
  - The child's stepmother
  - Other (e.g. father's girlfriend, child's grandmother) specify relation: \_\_\_\_\_
  - There is currently no female head in the home
  
4. Who is the adult MALE HEAD in your home?
  - The child's father
  - The child's stepfather
  - Other (e.g. mother's boyfriend, child's grandfather) specify relation: \_\_\_\_\_
  - There is currently no male head in the home
  
5. How many people (counting all children and adults) live in your home?
  
6. Do other adults besides your parents live in your home?
  - No
  - Yes
  - If yes, check the person who lives with you below:
    - Grandmother
    - Grandfather
    - Uncle/Aunt
    - Other
  
7. How many children under 18 live in your home?

8. How many siblings do you have?
- None
  - One
  - Two
  - Three
  - Four
  - Five
  - Six
  - Other
9. Do you have older siblings?
- Yes      How many? \_\_\_\_\_
  - No – *Please continue to Item 6*
10. How many of your older siblings graduated from high school?
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - 6
11. How many of your older siblings attended college?
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - 6
12. In what country or U.S. territory was your mother born?
13. If your MOTHER was born outside the United States (or in Puerto Rico), how old was she when she first came to the United States?

14. What is the highest grade or year of school that your MOTHER has completed?

- None
- Some elementary school (primaria) (Grades 1-6)
- Completed elementary school (primaria) (to Grade 6)
- Some high school (secundaria/preparatoria) (Grades 7-12)
- Completed high school (secundaria/preparatoria) (to Grade 12)
- GED Certificate
- Vocational/trade school (formación profesional, NO universitaria)
- Some community college
- Completed 2 years of community college
- Some college or university, NOT vocational school or trade school (universidad)
- Completed 4-year college or university (universidad or licenciatura)
- Some graduate level education after college (maestría)
- Completed graduate level education after college (maestría)
- Completed graduate level education after college (doctorado)

15. Overall, how many years of formal education has your MOTHER completed?

16. Does the MOTHER have a job or jobs?

- YES, she works full time
- YES, she works part time
- NO, she does not currently have a job

17. In what country or U.S. territory was your FATHER born?

18. If the FATHER was born outside the United States (or in Puerto Rico), how old was he when he first came to the United States?

- Less than 5 years old
- 5-11 years old
- 12-14 years old
- 15-18 year old
- More than 18 years old

19. What is the highest grade or year of school the FATHER has completed?
- None
  - Some elementary school (primaria) (Grades 1-6)
  - Completed elementary school (primaria) (to Grade 6)
  - Some high school (secundaria/preparatoria) (Grades 7-12)
  - Completed high school (secundaria/preparatoria) (to Grade 12)
  - GED Certificate
  - Vocational/trade school (formación profesional, NO universitaria)
  - Some community college
  - Completed 2 years of community college
  - Some college or university, NOT vocational school or trade school (universidad)
  - Completed 4-year college or university (universidad or licenciatura)
  - Some graduate level education after college (maestría)
  - Completed graduate level education after college (maestría)
  - Completed graduate level education after college (doctorado)
20. Overall, how many years of formal education has the FATHER completed?
21. Does your FATHER have a job or jobs?
- YES, he works full time
  - YES, he works part time
  - NO, he does not currently have a job
22. Which of the following ranges best describes the current annual income in your home?
- under \$10,000
  - \$10,000-\$19,999
  - \$20,000-\$29,999
  - \$30,000-\$39,999
  - \$40,000-\$49,999
  - \$50,000-\$59,999
  - \$60,000-\$69,999
  - \$70,000-\$79,999
  - over \$80,000
23. What language does your MOTHER use when she speaks to you ? (“Mother” refers to the mother or woman who acts as child’s mother.)
- Only Spanish
  - Mostly Spanish
  - English and Spanish about equally
  - Mostly English
  - Only English

24. What language does your FATHER use when he speaks to you? (“Father” refers to the father or man who acts as child’s father.)
- Only Spanish
  - Mostly Spanish
  - English and Spanish about equally
  - Mostly English
  - Only English
25. What language do other adults in your home (aside from your mother and father) use when they speak to you?
- Only Spanish
  - Mostly Spanish
  - English and Spanish about equally
  - Mostly English
  - Only English
26. What language do children in this household use when they speak to you?
- Only Spanish
  - Mostly Spanish
  - English and Spanish about equally
  - Mostly English
  - Only English
27. What language do you use when you speak to your MOTHER at home?
- Only Spanish
  - Mostly Spanish
  - English and Spanish about equally
  - Mostly English
  - Only English
28. What language do you use when you speak to your FATHER at home?
- Only Spanish
  - Mostly Spanish
  - English and Spanish about equally
  - Mostly English
  - Only English
29. What language do you use when you speak to other adults (not the mother or father) in your home?
- Only Spanish
  - Mostly Spanish
  - English and Spanish about equally
  - Mostly English
  - Only English

30. What language do you use when you speak to other children in your home?
- Only Spanish
  - Mostly Spanish
  - English and Spanish about equally
  - Mostly English
  - Only English
31. What language do you use when you speak to your friends outside of your home?
- Only Spanish
  - Mostly Spanish
  - English and Spanish about equally
  - Mostly English
  - Only English
32. Do your parents want you to read?
- Yes
  - No
  - Please Explain:
33. Do you read at home?
- No
  - Yes
  - If yes, how often?
    - every day
    - a few times each week
    - once a week
    - once in a while
34. Do your parents read to you when you were growing up?
- No
  - Yes
  - If yes, how often?
    - every day
    - a few times each week
    - once a week
    - once in a while
35. How much homework do you do most nights?
- None
  - 30 minutes
  - one hour
  - more than an hour
36. Do your parents help you with your homework?
- Yes
  - No

37. Do you have a quiet space to do your homework?

- Yes
- No

38. Do your parents encourage you to go to college?

- No
- Yes
- If yes, when did they start talking to you about going to college and what do they say to you?

39. Do your parents encourage you to have a career or job in the future? If so, what type of job or career do they discuss with you? Explain:

40. How often does an adult or older sibling in your home reads with you in English, including helping you with your homework?

- Daily
- 1-2 times per week
- 2-3 times per week
- Once a month
- Almost never

41. How often does an adult or older sibling in your home reads with you in Spanish, including helping you with your homework?

- Daily
- 1-2 times per week
- 2-3 times per week
- Once a month
- Almost never

42. Did you attend preschool/pre-Kindergarten?

43. If yes, at what age did you child start attending preschool/pre-Kindergarten?

44. Do you have a computer at home?

- Yes
- No

45. Do you have the internet at home?

- Yes
- No

46. Do you use a computer to help you do homework at home?

- Yes
- No

47. Do you plan to go to college?

- No
- Yes
  - If yes, what college do you want to attend?

48. What school did you attend before you came to the Renzulli Academy?

49. Describe your school day at Renzulli Academy.

50. What study strategies would you use if you were going to prepare for a challenging test?

51. Do you ever have trouble concentrating when you do homework or schoolwork?

- No
- Yes
  - If yes, please explain what happens when you can't concentrate and what you do to help you focus?

52. Have you ever done poor work on a school assignment?

No

Yes

If yes, did you think about what you did wrong and consider how you could have improved your work? Please explain:

53. What subjects are you studying at the Renzulli Academy that you did not study at your previous school?

54. Do you have to work harder at the Renzulli Academy than you did in your previous school?

55. Please describe what you do when you get home from school most days.

56. What does being identified as gifted mean to you?

57. At Renzulli Academy, you have peers who are Caucasian and African-American.

How do you compare their work with your work?

How do their experiences at the Renzulli Academy differ from yours?

- How do they prepare for school?
  
- Do you interact with these students in school?
  
- Do you interact with these students outside of school?
  
- What do you know about their home environment?
  
- How are their behaviors in school?
  
- How are they similar to you?
  
- Describe the differences between you and your non-Latino peers.

58. Do you access Renzulli Learning at home or the library?

59. Do the field trips you take help with your learning? How do they do that?

60. Do you have a library card?

- No
- Yes
- If yes, how often do you go to the library to get books?
  - A few times each week
  - Once a week
  - Once each month
  - Once in a while

61. Do you play sports?

- No
- Yes
  - If yes, where and when do you play?

62. Do you play a musical instrument?

- No
- Yes
  - If yes, where and when do you play?

63. Do you have a hobby?

- No
- Yes
  - If yes, what do you do for your hobby?

64. Do you attend any after school programs in your neighborhood?

- No
- Yes
  - If yes, what programs?

65. What activities do you do in the summer?

66. Have you ever been to summer camp? If so, what kind of camp?

67. How often do you go to the public library when you're not in school?

- Daily
- 1-2 times per week
- 2-3 times per week
- Once a month
- Almost never

68. How often do you read or look at books, magazines, or newspapers at home on your own?

- Daily
- 1-2 times per week
- 2-3 times per week
- Once a month
- Almost never

69. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your Renzulli academy experience?

- How has the Renzulli Academy helped you increase your knowledge?

- How has the Renzulli Academy staff supported you in developing your creativity and talent?
  
- How does the school allow you to continue developing your potential?
  
- How has the school supported you in your task commitment?

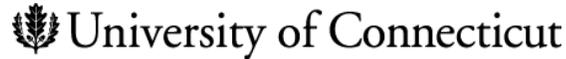
**Thank you for taking the time to answer our questions. Your input is very important to this project.**

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Miriam Morales-Taylor at (860) 803-8064 or send an email to [miriamtaylor3016@yahoo.com](mailto:miriamtaylor3016@yahoo.com).

Miriam Morales-Taylor is the Principal Investigator of this project and would be more than happy to answer your questions and/or address your concerns.

## APPENDIX B

### Parental Permission Form for Participation in a Research Study



**Principal Investigator:** Sally Reis

**Student Researcher:** Miriam Morales-Taylor

**Study Title:** Puerto Rican Students' Perspectives of Socio-cultural Characteristics of Giftedness and Talent Development

#### **Introduction**

Your child has been nominated to participate in a research project about high ability students being conducted by Miriam Morales-Taylor, a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Connecticut.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

The objective of the proposed study is to identify the social and cultural characteristics of gifted and talented students as well as their personal definitions of their identification as gifted and talented. This study will investigate students' perceptions of the common characteristics of all gifted and talented students (including those from their own as well as other cultures as well as their self-reflections regarding definitions and perceptions of their identification as gifted and talented).

#### **What are the study procedures? What will my child be asked to do?**

Miriam Morales- Taylor will meet with each one of the students individually during their recess time to provide them with context and information regarding the researchers objectives and intent. This will also allow students to ask any questions they may have regarding their participation.

The Renzulli Academy Student Questionnaire will then be administered to the students whose parents/guardians provided authorization to participate in the study. This questionnaire will be administered in a group setting by a designated teacher during school hours and will take approximately one hour to complete.

The researcher will bring the questionnaires to The Renzulli Academy main office directly to the Administrative Assistant who will secure them in a locked file cabinet. A designated teacher will be instructed by the researcher to pick up the questionnaires, administer them in the above described group setting, with a designated time frame and classroom, and return them in a sealed envelope to the Administrative Assistant who will again lock the completed questionnaires in a locked file cabinet. As soon as the questionnaires are completed, the designated teacher will notify the researcher who will then pick up the completed questionnaires.

Once the questionnaire is completed by the students and reviewed by the researcher, an informal interview will be conducted to seek elaboration from students based on their answers from the questionnaire. Audio-tape will be used to minimize error of interpretation of student's content of responses and comments. The recordings will be transcribed and translated. Since students are bilingual they tend to utilize both languages (English and Spanish) interchangeably. To allow them to use either language, or both, at their own pace will help student participants feel at ease. Students' permanent records will be accessed by the Director of the Renzulli Academy and copied so that the researcher may look at grade trends as well as school attendance, previous schools attended, any comments on class behavior, and teachers comments. Student artifacts will also be examined including papers written, portfolios of interests, learning styles, Renzulli Learning, expression styles, and products finished in the school, all of which will also be accessed and provided by the Director of the Renzulli Academy. Review and copying of this information is not only included in the authorization letter sent to parents, but will provide a richer and more wholesome investigation of the student profiles with regard to their background, academic and extracurricular achievements.

The Student Investigator will also be visiting the home of the students at the family's convenience (per authorization by parents on the consent form) to meet the family and introduce herself.

The academic records of the students will also be examined to obtain achievement test scores and/or grades. Your child's identity and responses will be considered strictly confidential.

### **What are the risks or inconveniences of the study?**

Students will be asked to complete the informational session, questionnaire and informal interview during their recess or enrichment time. The total time needed is approximately four hours in total.

Please be aware that as a mandated reporter, Ms. Morales-Taylor must report any situations that may be placing students at-risk.

The student's or parent's decision to participate will not affect the student's attendance to the Academy, grades or any other opportunities provided to the students.

### **What are the benefits of the study?**

Although the participating individuals may not benefit directly, the goal of the research is to explore how educators may better address the unique needs of this group. Will my child receive payment for participation? Are there costs to participate?

### **Will my child receive payment for participation? Are there costs to participate?**

Participants will not receive payment for participation nor will be required to pay a fee to participate in this study.

### **How will my child's information be protected?**

This study will pose minimal risks to participants. All information collected during this project will remain confidential. Collected data will be kept confidential by the Principal Investigator

who will store the records in a safe place at her office for three years after which records will be destroyed by erasing taped records and shredding paper records. The researchers will maintain student privacy by assigning an ID and code. Student data collected cannot be identified or traced back to the student since their student ID # in addition to an added on code will be used to track students questionnaires. A master list with the students names and personal information as well as the student ID #s and codes will be kept in separate and secure locations. Student names will not be used at any given time as we will be identifying them by ID # and code.

You should also know that the UConn Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of Research Compliance may inspect study records as part of its auditing program, but these reviews will only focus on the researchers and not on your child's responses or involvement. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

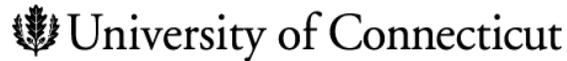
**Can my child stop being in the study and what are my and my child's rights?**

Your child does not have to be in this study if you do not want him/her to participate. If you give permission for your child to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may withdraw your child at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want your child to participate.

**Whom do I contact if I have questions about the study?**

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this study or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, Sally Reis at 860-486-4037 or the student investigator Miriam Morales-Taylor at 860-803-8064. If you have any questions concerning your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 860-486-8802.

## Parental Permission Form for Participation in a Research Study



### Return Slip

**Principal Investigator:** Sally Reis

**Student Researcher:** Miriam Morales-Taylor

**Study Title:** Puerto Rican Students' Perspectives of Socio-cultural Characteristics of Giftedness and Talent Development

**Documentation of Permission:**

I have read this form and decided that I will give permission for my child to participate in the study described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of my child's involvement and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw my child at any time. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this parental permission form. Please return this form to Ms. Ruth Lyons, Interim Director of the Academy or Ms. Maria Torres, Executive Assistant of the Academy.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

Relationship to Child (e.g. mother, father, guardian): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person  
Obtaining Consent

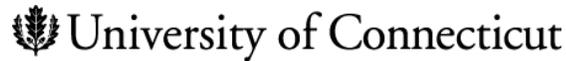
\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

Please use the included envelope to return consent form to The Renzulli Academy.

## APPENDIX C

### Parental Permission Form for Participation in a Research Study



**Investigador Principal:** Dr. Sally Reis

**Estudiante Investigador:** Miriam Morales-Taylor

**Título del Estudio:** Puerto Rican Students' Perspectives of Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Giftedness and Talent Development/Las Perspectivas de estudiantes Puertorriqueños sobre las características socio- culturales del desarrollo de Dotados y Talentosos

#### **Introducción**

Su hijo ha sido nominado para participar en un proyecto de investigación acerca de estudiantes con gran habilidad para aprender, conducido por Miriam Morales-Taylor, candidata a Doctorado de la Universidad de Connecticut.

#### **¿Por qué se está conduciendo este estudio?**

El objetivo de este estudio es identificar las características sociales y culturales de estudiantes puertorriqueños identificados como dotados y talentosos. Además, estudiara las percepciones de estos estudiantes acerca de las características de estudiantes de otras culturas que han sido identificados como dotados y talentosos.

Para cualificar para este estudio, los estudiantes deben de haber asistido a la Academia Renzulli por lo menos por dos años y ser de descendencia de hogares de Puerto Rico, donde el inglés es el segundo idioma de la familia o que los estudiantes sean identificados como parte de la primera o segunda generación en los Estados Unidos.

#### **¿Cuáles son los procedimientos del estudio?**

Después de obtener el permiso de los padres u encargados Miriam Morales-Taylor, estudiante de la Universidad De Connecticut, se reunirá con los estudiantes para explicarle el propósito del estudio. Los estudiantes tendrán la oportunidad de hacer preguntas para clarificar el propósito del estudio.

El Cuestionario de La Academia Renzulli será completado por el grupo de estudiantes autorizados por sus padres. Una maestra de la Academia de Renzulli, le dará el cuestionario a los estudiantes durante el tiempo de recreo o durante el periodo de actividades de enriquecimiento.

Completar el cuestionario tomara aproximadamente una hora. Una vez los estudiantes completen el cuestionario, este será entregado a la asistente ejecutiva quien los pondrá en un sobre sellado el cual será mantenido en un gabinete bajo llave. Esta persona le dejara saber a Sra. Taylor cundo este proceso sea completado, para ella recoger los cuestionarios.

Una vez el cuestionario es completado por los estudiantes y revisado por Sra. Taylor, esta se reunirá con los estudiantes, para hacerles preguntas a los estudiantes para elaborar sus contestaciones en el cuestionario. Sra. Taylor utilizara una grabadora para grabar las respuestas de los estudiantes. Usar la grabadora reducirá los errores de interpretación del contenido de las contestaciones de los estudiantes. Estas grabaciones se transcribirán y traducirán si el estudiante hable en español. Los estudiantes pueden contestar en español si esto los ayudada a expresarse mejor. Los records de los estudiantes también serán examinados por Sra. Morales-Taylor; resultados de exámenes del estado, notas, asistencia, conducta, numero de escuelas que el estudiante a asistido, comentarios de los maestros. Tambien se revisaran trabajos comletado por los estudiantes, porfolios y Renzulli Learning. Estos records serán obtenidos por medio de la directora de la academia.

La recopilación y estudio de esta información le ofrecerá a Sra. Morales-Taylor una información detallada sobre .....

This information will provide a richer and more comprehensive investigation of the student profiles relative to their background, academic and extracurricular achievements. Your child's identity and responses will be considered strictly confidential.

Los récords académicos de los estudiantes serán examinados para obtener información sobre el progreso académico de los estudiantes, sus notas y los resultados de los exámenes. La identidad de su hijo/hija y las contestaciones a las preguntas, se mantendrá completamente confidencial.

### **¿Cuáles son los riesgos o inconveniencias de este estudio?**

Los estudiantes se reunirán con Sra. Morales Taylor para aclarar los objetivos del estudio, completaran el cuestionario y participaran en la entrevista para aclarar sus contestaciones durante el recreo o durante el tiempo de actividades de enriquecimiento. Estas actividades tomara n aproximadamente tres horas.

La Sra. Morales-Taylor tiene obligatoriamente que reportar cualquier situacion que pueda exponer al estudiante en riesgo.

### **¿Cuáles son los beneficios de este estudio?**

Although the participating individuals may not benefit directly, the goal of the research is to explore how educators may better address the unique needs of this group.

Aunque los estudiantes participando en este estudio no se beneficiaran directamente, el objetivo de este estudio es explorar como los educadores pueden mejorar la manera en la cual—las necesidades de este grupo.

### **¿Recibirá mi hijo pago por participar en este estudio? ¿Hay algún costo por participar?**

Los participantes no recibirán pago por participar en el estudio y no habrá costo alguno para participar en el estudio.

### **¿Cómo estará protegida la información de mi hijo/a?**

Este estudio posee muy poco riesgo para los participantes.

Toda la información recibida es confidencial y se mantendrá en la oficina del investigador principal bajo llave por tres años. Al final de los tres años, esta información será destruida.

La información del estudiante se mantendrá confidencial ya que los nombres de los estudiantes no aparecerán en el estudio. A cada estudiante se le asignará un número de identificación en adición al número de identificación de la escuela. La lista la cual contiene los nombres de los estudiantes y el número de identificación asignado será mantenido en un gabinete bajo llave.

Usted debe saber además, que la Junta Institucional de Revisión de la Universidad de Connecticut (IRB) y la Oficina de Investigación y Cumplimiento, inspeccionará los récords como parte de un programa de auditoría. Estas revisiones se enfocan en el investigador y no en las respuestas provistas o en el involucramiento del estudiante. El IRB es un grupo de personas que revisan los trabajos de investigación para proteger los derechos y el bienestar de los participantes.

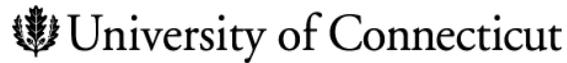
### **¿Puede mi hijo/a dejar de participar en el estudio y cuáles son mis derechos y los derechos de mi hijo/a?**

Su hijo/a no tiene que participar en este estudio si usted no quiere que él/ella participe. Si usted da permiso para que su hijo participe en este estudio y luego cambia de idea, usted puede sacar al niño/a en cualquier momento. No hay penalidades o consecuencias de alguna clase, si usted decide que no quiere que su hijo/a participe.

### **¿A quién puedo contactar si tengo preguntas sobre este estudio?**

Tome el tiempo que necesite para hacer su decisión. Gustosamente le contestaremos alguna pregunta que tenga acerca de este estudio. Si tiene alguna otra pregunta o si tiene algún problema referente a este estudio, se puede comunicar con la principal investigadora, Dra. Sally Reis al 860-486-4032 o con la estudiante investigadora, Miriam Morales-Taylor al 860-803-8064. Si tiene alguna pregunta referente a los derechos de su hijo/a como participante en este estudio, puede llamar a la Universidad De Connecticut, Junta Institucional de Revisión (IRB) al 860-486-8802.

Permiso del Padre o Encargado para participar en el Estudio de Investigación



Página para firmar y devolver

**Investigador Principal:** Dr. Sally Reis

**Estudiante Investigador:** Miriam Morales-Taylor

**Título del estudio:** Puerto Rican Students' Perspectives of Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Giftedness and Talent Development/Las Perspectivas de estudiantes Puertorriqueños sobre las características socio- culturales del desarrollo de Dotados y Talentosos

Documentación del Permiso:

He leído esta información y he decidido darle permiso a mi hijo/a para participar en el estudio descrito arriba. Para propósito general, la información relacionada al involucramiento de mi hijo/a en este estudio y los posibles riesgos e inconveniencias han sido explicados a mi satisfacción. Entiendo que puedo retirar a mi hijo/a en cualquier momento. Mi firma indica que he recibido una copia de esta forma de permiso del padre o guardián. Favor de devolver esta forma a Ms. Ruth Lyons, Directora de la Academia Renzulli o a Maria Torres, Asistente Ejecutiva de la academia.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma Del estudiante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre en letra de molde

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Padre o Guardián

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre en letra de molde

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

Relación con el estudiante (e.g., madre, padre, guardián): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de la Persona  
Obteniendo el Permiso

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre en letra de molde

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

## APPENDIX D

### Student Interview Protocol

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

I'm pleased that you were willing to meet with me \_\_\_\_\_. The purpose of this study is to investigate the school experiences of Puerto Rican English Language Learner (PR-ELL) students who reside in a large urban city, have been identified as gifted, and attend a full-time academy for gifted and talented students. The objective of this dissertation is to identify the social and cultural characteristics of gifted and talented students as well as their personal definitions and perceptions about being identified as gifted and talented.

I would like to meet with you and your friends to understand what are the factors that contribute to your identification and participation in the Renzulli Academy. I am going to ask you a series of questions and I'm going to record your responses so that I can go back later on and analyze the information that you will provide me.

1. How many years have you been at the Renzulli Academy?
2. What does being identified as gifted mean to you?
3. Who do you live with?
4. How many siblings do you have?
5. Do you read at home? If yes, how often?
6. Did your parents read to you when you were growing up? If yes, how often?
7. Do your parents want you to read? Explain.
8. Do you have older siblings? If yes, how many?
9. How many of your older siblings graduated from high school or college?
10. Did your mother graduate from high school/college?
11. Did your father graduate from high school/college?
12. What language is spoken in your home?
13. How much homework do you do most nights?
14. Do your parents help you with your homework?
15. Do you have a quiet space to do your homework?
16. Do you have a computer at home?
17. Do you have the internet at home?
18. Do you use a computer to help you do homework at home?
19. Do your parents encourage you to go to college? If yes, when did they start talking to you about going to college and what do they say to you?

20. Do you access Renzulli Learning at home or the library?
21. Do your parents encourage you to have a career or job in the future? If so, what type of job or career do they discuss with you? Explain.
22. Do you plan to go to college? If yes, what college do you want to attend?
23. What school did you attend before you came to the Renzulli Academy?
24. What is your favorite subject? Why?
25. What is your least favorite subject? Why?
26. Describe your school day at Renzulli Academy.
27. Before you attended the Renzulli Academy, what was your school experience like?
28. What subjects are you studying at the Renzulli Academy that you did not study at your previous school?
29. Do you have to work harder at the Renzulli Academy than you did in your previous school?
30. Do the field trips you take help with your learning? How do they do that?
31. Do you have a library card? If yes, how often do you go to the library to get books?
32. Do you play sports? If yes, where and when do you play?
33. Do you play a musical instrument? If yes, where and when do you play?
34. Do you have a hobby? If yes, what do you do for your hobby?
35. Do you attend any after school programs in your neighborhood? If yes, what programs?
36. What activities do you do in the summer?
37. Have you ever been to summer camp? If so, what kind of camp?
38. Please describe what you do when you get home from school most days.
39. Please describe your dream job and what you hope to achieve in your life?

Thank you for meeting with me and answering my questions.