ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Study of the Family Environment and Nurture of Two Gifted Boys

by Shu-Chen Tsai

This is a qualitative study of the home life of two genius boys who have done unusual achievements. It uses the approach of grounded theory in order to learn what concepts or themes may emerge from the environmental circumstances of their family that might help explain the production of giftedness in the children. The study examines the explanations of all family members about the practices of this home. Using the grounded theory method, after collecting data about the family, the author attempts to identify themes and concepts in this family that may be connected to the production of gifted children generally. Numerous nurture related themes that may be connected to the production of giftedness in children were identified and suggestion for further study of these themes was made.
A Qualitative Study of the Family Environment and Nurture of Two Gifted Boys

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Chapter One

Introduction

In the past before the development of the industrial society families had many children but the major role of children was to work with the family to produce food and to carry on the family name and the family tradition. Since the industrial and post-industrial period, families have had fewer children and parents now desire to give to their children, not take from them. In the industrial and post-industrial society education became more important and influential in creating success than in earlier types of societies and success in education became the key to upward social mobility (Theo, 2001).

Many parents like to send their children to special schools that give their children skills in foreign language, art, piano, ballet, and math. Sometimes this training will start by age three. It is very common for parents to want to “show off” their children to their friends and relatives so that they can see their giftedness. Many times they will place stress on their children and many times the children will place stress on themselves so that they will become educated and thereby get good jobs as a way of bringing glory to their families.

Because this attitude is so common, giftedness has become very valued by both parents and children. Would it not be wonderful to easily bring glory to your parents? Would it not be wonderful to compete in the important game of education with other children and win very easily? And would it not be very fulfilling to be a parent of children who could always bring glory to you?

The topic of this thesis is “What is the source of giftedness in children”? To begin to answer this question I hypothesize that nurturing techniques and attitudes of “super parents” of children are a major contributing factor in giftedness. There is a long but not finished debate about the definition of giftedness and about its source. This debate involves the issue of “nature or nurture” and it has important experts on each side. However, most experts in the field of giftedness in the United States tend to take the side of nature and genetics in explaining the source of giftedness (Campbell, 1995).

This study will investigate parenting techniques using a focused qualitative analysis of one family that has produced gifted children. It is the hope that this qualitative
study can produce insight about the parenting techniques used by this family and that these insights can later be used by future researchers as the seeds of future hypotheses for quantitative analysis.

As I review the literature regarding the source of giftedness it is necessary to make some comment on what giftedness is and as I investigate the type of nurture that “super parents” provide, there is the same need for definition. As I review the literature regarding the source of giftedness we must keep in our mind the awareness that giftedness has been a hard term to define. It has been viewed as just the ability to do well on I.Q. tests (Jackson & Peterson, 2003) but it has also been viewed in much broader ways (Clark, 1992). As will be clear later, I will be using a definition of giftedness that combines two elements.

For “super parent” nurture I will use the definition of Campbell (1995) who describes it as the type of parents that:

Project their child into the future and come up with a plan for achieving this goal of having their child be an exemplary student. They then do what is needed to accomplish it: instilling the necessary work habits and high expectations; using the right mix of pressure, encouragement, praise and criticism; and training their child how to plan and use his time so he can do his school work and read book, watch educational television programs, and generally nurture his intellectual gifts. Most of all, these parents focus their child on a goal of high-level academic performance. They work with the child to adopt the goal as his own, and then help ensure he follows through on what is needed to meet that goal. (p. 3)

Research Problem

Strauss and Corbin (1990) said that by “qualitative research we mean any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p. 17) and that “it can be used to gain novel and fresh slants on things about which quite a bit is already known” (p. 19).

According to John W. Creswell (1994), another recognized expert and author on the topic of research techniques:

One of the chief reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory, not much has been written about the topic or population being
studied and the researcher seeks to listen to informants and to build a picture based on their ideas. (p. 21)

This study will focus on the family environment variables that have been applied in the case of two gifted children. The purpose of this investigation is to focus on a specific family environment as an attempt to contribute to what is known about how family nurturing may cause giftedness in children. Much more is known about what prevents effective learning than is known about producing giftedness in children (Winner, 2000). This investigation will hope to add more understanding about what produces giftedness in children. Again, as Creswell (1994) noted:

For qualitative studies the research problem needs to be explored because little information exists on the topic. The variables are largely unknown, and the researcher wants to focus on the context that may shape the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. (p. 10)

The variables of how families produce gifted children are largely unknown and I want to focus on one family environment that may help us to shape the understanding of the phenomenon.

There are many types of qualitative research. Some of them are: grounded theory, ethnography, the phenomenological approach, life histories, and conversational analysis (Straus and Corbin, 1990). In this thesis, I will use the approach called grounded theory. It is an approach where careful research tries to make a theory formulation of the reality that is investigated. According to Strauss and Corbin:

The purpose of grounded theory method is, of course, to build theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study. Researchers working in this tradition also hope that their theories will ultimately be related to others within their respective disciplines in a cumulative fashion, and that the theory’s implications will have useful application (1990, p. 24).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) say that the difference between the grounded theory approach and mere description is that theory uses concepts with similar data being grouped and given conceptual labels by placing interpretations on the data and that the concepts are related by statements of relationship. This is what I hope to do with my observations of the family that is the subject of this thesis.
Justification of the Question

Whether giftedness in children is the result of nurture or nature or nature through nurture seems to be a question that has not been answered clearly. As many experts are on one side of the argument as the other. It is not the purpose of this study to make any argument about the balance between genetics and learning environment that results in gifted children. Instead, this study will examine the environmental family circumstances behind two specific gifted children. It is hoped that by identifying these circumstances and the approaches and attitudes of these parents that future studies can examine the themes and concepts identified within these circumstances so that they may be copied and transferred to benefit other children. Morse (1991), another expert on research techniques, states that:

Characteristics of a qualitative research problem are: a) the concept is immature due to a conspicuous lack of theory and previous research; b) a notion that the available theory may be inaccurate, inappropriate, incorrect, or biased; c) a need exists to explore and describe the phenomena and to develop theory; or d) the nature of the phenomenon may not be suited to quantitative measures. (p. 120)

The last three reasons apply to this thesis and are good justification for researchers to go back to simple examinations of specific cases of family environments that may seem to be connected to giftedness in children.
Chapter Two  
Literature Review  

This investigation of the Jones family requires a review of the literature in two areas: 1. nature verses nurture and 2. the relationship of family environment to the production of giftedness in children. In examining the terms “nature” and “nurture” I shall define nature as “the inherited biological predispositions of the individual” and nurture as “the influence of the social and cultural environment on the individual” (Cole, & Cole, 2001, p. 13).

What Does It Mean To Be Gifted  

Since “giftedness” is so closely related to the idea of intelligence and both are so hard to identify precisely, it is necessary for me to address these concepts with more detail before I go any further. Golant (1991) says that intelligence, and by association giftedness, has “as many theories regarding what constitutes it as there are theorists” and that “there is no one way of looking at intelligence that encompasses them all” (p. 13).

According to Golant, Francis Galton, one of the earliest psychologists, saw intelligence, or “intellectual fitness” as he called it, as inherited. But Albert Binet disagreed and later, one of his disciples, Charles Spearman defined it as a general ability (g) and specific abilities (s) that were components of g. According to Golant, Spearman argued (as cited in Golant, 1991, p.14), “that people who fared well or poorly on tests of intelligence would perform similarly on all other tests such as those measuring math, vocabulary and spatial relations” and “this belief in a unified, general intelligence has been widely accepted and is the rationale for using a single criterion such as an IQ test to assess a child’s ability today”. After Spearman, scientists continued to debate whether the g factor is derived from genetics or nurture. However, regardless of the source of the g factor, today it is recognized that intelligence is related to the culture within which it exists. Golant (1991) has collected seventeen distinct viewpoints on giftedness, and intelligence, from seventeen experts that show, at the least, intelligence is dependent upon a culture that gives it recognition and allows it to develop.

Howard Gardner (1999) helped expand our understanding of human intelligence and gifts with his theory of seven multiple intelligences. According to him there are seven separate human intelligences: two that have been valued in school, linguistic
intelligence and logical-mathematical intelligence; three that are used in the arts, musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, and spatial intelligence; and two that are used in personal relations, interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence.

As definitions of intelligence have changed from narrow ones that only look at I.Q. to ones as broad as Gardner’s (1999) it has caused some people to wonder whether intelligence may not be so much in the characteristics of the children labeled as intelligent but more in the social group that labels them. According to Barbara Clark “calling certain children gifted may say as much about the parents and professionals as it does the children” (1998, p. 8).

Because the definitions of intelligence vary in a great way and because my subjects that are the focus of my investigation seem to be much more than just examples of high I.Q. test scorers and since it seems that culture attitudes are important in determining when people are gifted, I am going to combine the narrow and broad approaches by using the definition of giftedness given by Golant and connecting it to the I.Q. requirement for giftedness given by Jackson and Peterson. According to Golant (1991), children are gifted “when they show a love of learning, a burning curiosity about the world and how it works, a sense of excitement over a new discovery, and a remarkable ability to integrate information and create a new reality” (p. 28). According to Jackson and Peterson (2003):

Extraordinary ability is usually measured in psychometric terms, using scores on intelligence or aptitude tests. For instance, with the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, individuals scoring at or above 145 are labeled “highly gifted,” those scoring at or above 160 are “exceptionally gifted,” and those scoring at or above 180 are “profoundly gifted.” Individuals who show evidence of extremely high levels of creativity or unusual and profound talent are also usually included in this subcategory of gifted learners. (p. 176)

Therefore, in this study I am examining how family environment produces high I.Q. children, as well as how family environment produces high I.Q. children with a particular attitude about learning.

**Nature Verses Nurture**

Beginning with early studies like Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron, (Lane, 1976) and then to more recent studies like Genie (Cole, & Cole, 2001), it seems clear that environment (nurture) can prevent humans from becoming gifted. However, it is not so
clear whether giftedness might be the result of nurture and environmental learning. The developer of the first I.Q. tests, Binet (as cited in Campbell, 1995), believed that a person’s I.Q. could grow with age but his student, Louis Terman (1925), took the opposite view and said that I.Q. was fixed throughout a person’s lifetime. Some psychologists have said that giftedness is the result of children being taught to engage in “goal-directed” hard work (Howe, Davidson, & Sloboda, 1998). Other psychologists have said that unusual achievements by gifted children who were gifted in one area but slow in other areas were because they had practiced their skills with very great obsession (Miller, 1999). To support the nurture view there are also studies that show that most people who are very creative practiced and worked very hard before their giftedness appeared (Gardner, 1993). It was also shown in studies by Roe (as cited in Winner, 2000) that people who made achievements in the area of science correlated more with the characteristics of endurance, ability to concentrate, and ability to be committed than with intellectual ability. Bloom (1985) further found that when people achieve highly that they first had a long period of training and practice. In his book, Raising Your Child To Be Gifted, James Reed Campbell (1995) was critical of the genetic explanation for giftedness and used his study of gifted children in the United States, Greece, Japan and the Republic of China (Taiwan) to say that what psychologists and educators call giftedness is “frequently the product of exceptional, or what I call super parents” (p. 3). Campbell (1995) argued that giftedness in families is not because of genes but because of “richness of scholarly activities, an affinity for books, and openness to learning” (p. 5). Finally, he argued that it was clear that the family nurture environments of ethnic groups such as Jewish people and their openness to learning explained why they and various other groups were so dominating in mental achievements.

Against the nurture position, there are many researchers that point out that there are “simply too many reports of child prodigies to be unreliable” and that “if exceptional abilities emerge prior to intensive instruction and training, then these abilities are likely to reflect atypical, innate potential”. According to Winner (2000), this innate potential of gifted children may be due the fact that they have “unusual brains that enable rapid learning in a particular domain” (pp. 160-161). Miller (1998) argued the reverse of nurture arguments about obsessive practice causing high achievement and instead argued
that the high motivation of the gifted might be the result rather than the cause of high ability. There are also many researchers that have found that gifted children have different brain organization than normal children (Winner, 2000).

Finally, the best-known researchers of recent times that have argued on the nature side are Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray (1994). In The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life, they suggested that children’s’ genetic inheritance determined most of their potential to be gifted and that therefore nurture should possibly be reserved for children having this potential. However, Gould (1981) gave a caution about the kind of “scientific analysis” that Herrnstein and Murray tried to do. Gould showed that many times the idea of science has been used for social and political purposes. He called this practice “scientific racism” and argued that biological determinists (such as Herrnstein and Murray) needed to understand that the science that they think they are relying upon is really “a social phenomenon, a gutsy human enterprise, not the work of robots programmed to collect pure information” (p. 21). Instead, he said that “science, since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity”. To make his point Gould quoted Gunnar Myrdall saying that “cultural influences have set up the assumptions about the mind, the body, and the universe with which we begin; pose the questions we ask; inform the facts we seek; determine the interpretation we give these facts; and direct our reaction to these interpretations and conclusions” (p. 23).

**Family Environment and Giftedness in Children**

In the first major study of gifted children it was discovered that the family environment of some ethnic groups seemed to produce many more gifted children than others. In this early study Terman (1925) found that:

Data on racial origin indicate that, in comparison with the general population of the cities concerned, our gifted show a 100 per cent excess of Jewish blood; a 25 per cent excess of parents who are of native parentage; a probable excess of Scotch ancestry; and a very great deficiency of Latin and negro ancestry. (p. 82)

According to Campbell (1995), the reason for the high performance of Jewish children could be explained by the “value of learning that permeates Jewish culture” (p. 8). He also explains that the reason that Asian immigrants produced unusual amounts of gifted children was that “education is prized, and there is a deep respect for learning that goes back to Confucius. The evidence favors the home and cultural traditions that
provide the fertile soil for much of what we call giftedness.” Finally, he explained that the low number of gifted children that Terman found in Italian, Portuguese, Mexican, and Spanish immigrant families might well be because “most were totally illiterate in English”. Terman asked, “How such people could be expected to know what kinds of support and interest—much less resources—they must provide in order to produce scholars and professional people?” (pp. 8-9)

There are some things that the research literature does clearly show about the families of gifted children. They are very child centered and many times make all of family life to be centered on the needs of the gifted child (Freeman, 1979). They are likely to have much intellectual or artistic stimulation provided to the gifted child (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993). They are likely to have high expectations for the gifted child and the parents will be likely to model hard work and achievement themselves (Bloom, 1985 & Gardner, 1993). They are likely to give the gifted child more independence than usual families (Winner, 2000). They will be likely to combine a good balance of stimulation and nurturance so that giftedness potential is carefully developed at the proper rate and is not allowed to be wasted but is not destroyed by too much pressure, an approach which is called the “complex” family by Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993, p. 11). According to Matt Ridley (2003), super parent families will also be likely to be tuned to the view of how nature is shown through (via) nurture. In Nature via Nurture: Genes, Experience, and What Makes Us Human, Ridley states, “Genes are not static blueprints that dictate our destiny. How they are expressed—where and when they are turned on or off and for how long—is affected by changes in the womb, by the environment and by other factors” (p. 56). Haensly (2004), thinking in the way of Ridley, has argued that super parents can do “wise planning of specific resources and diverse possibilities” to give a greater chance of developing giftedness in a child (p. 31). According to Haensly (2004), parents must provide the right nurture stimulation at the right time according to the genetic trait of the child in order to give a greater chance for the child to achieve giftedness. She shows how this can be a very complicated task when she asks:

Will a child be most fulfilled or happiest hurriedly touring all of Europe, or thoroughly exploring just one corner of Holland? Perhaps potential and actual diversity of outcome—taking Frost’s less-traveled road—is what makes each of
us as individuals destined to fill a unique place in the grand scheme of human endeavor. (p. 31)

Another source of information about how home environment may produce giftedness came to us from a British study by Joan Freeman (1979). Her study of gifted children is called the Gulbenkian project on gifted children. Her study seemed similar in its conclusions to the American studies. For example, she said that parents of gifted children tended to have positive educational attitudes and placed strong pressure on children to achieve, and that gifted children were the recipients of early, continuous stimulation and encouragement at home. There was one negative thing in her study that I did not find in any American studies. She said that the parents of gifted children often appeared to be sensitive and emotional themselves (Freeman, 1979).

Although she was not writing specifically about gifted children but rather about children who are high-achievers, Barbara Clark (1992) argued that the difference between high-achieving children and underachieving children could be found in the personality of the child, in his home, and/or in the interaction between the child and the parents. In examining the home environments that produced children who were high-achievers she found that high-achiever homes and underachiever homes had the following differences. She reported these differences as follows:

In families of high-achieving students, often

- Parents are interested in their children
- The fathers are important life influences
- Mothers are responsible and independent
- Parents have high educational aspirations for their children
- Parents are well educated
- Families are small.
- The student is often the first born or only child

In families of underachieving students, often

- The student is dependent on the mother
- The father is rejecting and domineering and gives little warmth or affection
- The relationship between father and daughter or father and son is negative or nonexistent.
- Parents set unrealistic goals for their children, and the children imagine that they are only as valuable or “good” as their accomplishments
- Parents allow achievement to go unrewarded
- The children do not identify with their parents
• There are deep social and emotional problems in the family
• Parents are not active in schools. (p. 420)
Chapter Three
Methodology

This study will use the methodology called qualitative research. John W. Creswell (1994) stated, “few writers theories agree on a precise procedure for data collection, analysis, and reporting of qualitative research”. He further stated, “reading qualitative journal articles provides little assistance because authors truncate the steps in order to emphasize results or to meet editorial restrictions on length” (p. 143).

Charles C. Ragin (1994) in his book Constructing Social Research said that the organizing principle of qualitative research was “the idea that the kind of in-depth knowledge needed for a proper representation of the research subject must be based on the perspectives of the people being studied—that their lives and their worlds must be understood through their eyes” (p. 92). He said that the methodology of qualitative research could be understood when it was compared to quantitative methods. In quantitative research the researchers are “data condensers”. They condense data in order to see the big picture. On the other hand, qualitative researchers are “data enhancer”. They are like photograph enhancers. They are trying to see certain aspects of the picture (photograph) more clearly and when qualitative methods are used to enhance data, researchers may see something about their subjects that is being missed.

Ragin (1994) also said that one of the procedures that is common to most qualitative research is the process of “analytic induction”. Analytic induction is not a search to find properties or characteristics of something that are invariant. Instead, Ragin says that it is a research strategy that “directs investigators to pay close attention to evidence that challenges or disconfirms whatever images they are developing” (p. 93). After watching the evidence then the researcher has clues about how to change concepts or alter categories. Finally, in order to make sense of one case, Ragin says that the researcher may need to triangulate information about a number of cases in order to see how his case might fit.

Ragin (1994) said that there are many research methods that can be used in qualitative research but all of these methods are connected to the idea of in-depth investigation. For this study I have tried to do what Truzzi (as cited in Ragin, 1994, p. 92) called “immersion and empirical intimacy” with the family that I investigated by using a
case study method and the method of grounded theory that has been earlier explained. The goal has been to discover the themes or concepts that may be important in explaining the giftedness of the two male children of the Jones family.

With these research ideas as my guide I have made an examination of the family of Mr. Jones and Mrs. Jones and two boys, Robert and William (Their names are not true and for the rest of this thesis I will refer to them as Father, Mother, Oldest Son and Younger Son). I have made visits with both of these parents in their home and outside of their home, I have interviewed the parents and the two boys, I have watched videotapes of one of the boys on many television shows, I have researched the past history of the boys and of the parents, I have seen the boys perform mental activities and musical activities, I have met with peer friends of the boys, I have researched the academic and school activities of the boys, I have observed the social skills of the boys, I have observed communications of the family, and I have given survey questions to all members of the family. From this examination, I have tried to identify the approaches and attitudes that make this family environment unusual and have then tried to identify concepts or themes that may be connected to the “giftedness” of these two boys.

This researcher gathered the information in the case study during the period fall, 2003 to the present. The conversations that were used as part of the study were recorded and took place in the home of the Jones family in a Midwestern city. Other data was acquired by mailed interviews that were answered by the subjects and returned by mail. I have recorded approximately four hours of interview material with the subjects of the case study, I have approximately one hour of video of television programs that focused on this family, and I have collected and included four newspaper articles about them (see Appendix B).

The decision to use a case study was made for two reasons: access to a convenient sample of gifted children; and access to parents who have kept many records of the development of their children and their home environment because of the newspaper and television interest in their oldest son. They allowed me to study their family environment and their children even though they had not allowed their children to be studied or to appear on television or be written about in newspapers for more than ten years.
Sample

The sample for this study was one family that had four members: father, mother, and two male children. The age of the father is 39 and the age of the mother was not given. The family income is between $40,000.00 to $50,000.00 and the occupation that supports the family is the father’s position as teacher in a private high school. The father has a Master’s degree in mathematics and the mother reports that she had “some college.” The mother is very active in the family but she does not work outside of the home. Neither of the parents had any unusual academic or mental achievements when they were children. Both of the parents are Christian and the church plays a very large role in the life of the family. When they were asked to place their family socially, they said that they thought that they were lower middle class to middle class. The two sons are now 16 and 14 and their unusual academic characteristics will be described in chapter four. Most of the unusual characteristics are about the oldest child because the parents did not allow the younger son to be studied and written about but they did allow this to happen to the oldest child up to when he was about three. Even though the youngest child was protected from being studied both of the parents report that the youngest son is more gifted at his age than the older son was at that age.

Data Collection

To gather information about the environment of this family I used four hours of oral face-to-face interview that included all members of the Jones family. I made a visit to their home and to their private school and made notes of what I saw. I had the opportunity to visit with the two sons of this family and to also visit with two of the peers of these boys. I also made a written interview of each of the boys and of both of the parents. In all of the contact I had with these subjects they were always very open and friendly and willing to answer any question I could think to ask to them.

As I have made questions to my subjects I have tried to follow the ideas of Creswell (1994) about qualitative studies and use of grounded theory. I have also followed Ragin (1994) who says that “not all qualitative researchers develop analytic frames” and that this is why they are often accused of being “merely descriptive” and not “scientific” in their research. I have tried to have only a “tentative, vaguely formulated analytic framework” for my research so that it could emerge as I researched. (pp. 90-91)
The only limit to my approach of being very open ended in my questions was that I did structure some of my questions by using the age categories of Jean Piaget since my topic was so related to cognitive development (Cole & Cole, 2003).

**Data Analysis**

As stated earlier, I have tried to avoid having a clear analytic framework for my investigation because I hoped to develop it in course of my research as recommended to me by Ragin (1994). However, to interpret the findings of my investigation, I have used the grounded theory approach. According to Strauss and Corbin, “grounded theory is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon” (1990, p. 23). In other words, after I collected the data of my observations of the family I have tried to identify the themes or concepts that emerge from this data that may be connected to the production of the phenomenon of giftedness in children. As Ragin (1994) says:

> As more is learned about the cases and as categories and concepts are clarified, the researcher can address basic questions: What is this case a case of? What are its relevant features? What makes the chosen research subject or site valuable, interesting, or significant? (p. 90)

Because researchers can easily infect the validity of a qualitative investigation if they have any biases, I will follow Creswell’s (1994) recommendation that the researcher should state the researcher’s role in analysis of the data. I am a foreigner from another culture. I was not a gifted child when I was young and I do not think that anyone in my family has ever been gifted either. I did not know any of the members of my subject family personally before I started this study. However, I am a Christian and all of the members of this subject family were Christians. Also, Asian cultures have the reputation of highly valuing education and intelligence. I must admit that I do have great respect for these parents and I am proud for the two boys who were subjects of my investigation.

**Reliability and Validity**

Creswell (1994) says that early qualitative researchers felt compelled to relate traditional notions of validity and reliability to the procedures in qualitative research. However, he also says that more recent researchers substitute the idea of “authenticity” for validity and reliability. (p. 158) I want to follow the ideas of more recent researchers
and I will only attempt to mention validity and reliability and how they may apply to my study.

Because the design of this study is a case study it could be easily repeated and have a kind of reliability in similar circumstances. There are many gifted children who have parents with circumstances similar to my study. Questions similar to my questions could be used. However, I doubt that another study could have very similar findings to mine because, following the recommendation of Creswell (1994), I have used many “grand tour” questions that are very general and then followed them with additional questions that followed what the subjects gave as a response. Also, since my sample was so small we cannot have confidence that its validity will be high. In other words, we cannot be very certain that I am really measuring the variables that cause giftedness. It seems to me that these two built in problems of qualitative research must make validity of my study very low. In order to increase the validity of my findings I have tried to “triangulate” or find convergence (p. 158) between the literature and my research of the subject family but I have not used quantitative methods.

The intention of this study is not to generalize findings, but to make a unique interpretation of only one event. Also, as said by Creswell (1994) about qualitative study designs, “like the issue of generalizability, the uniqueness of a study within a specific context mitigates against replicating it exactly in another context” (p. 159).
Chapter Four

Discussion of Observations and Identification of Emergent Themes or Concepts

The observations, interviews and interview responses are discussed below. Finally, the proposed important concepts and their relationships are presented at the chapter’s conclusion.

Environmental Setting- The Home

The home of my subject family is pretty normal in appearance. It is a one-story house with a full basement that is in a new housing area close to a university. It is what most Americans call a suburban home. It is on wide streets and the neighborhood is attractive, neat and appears to be very safe and comfortable. Since the family income was reported at between $40,000 to $50,000, it seems to be a better house and neighborhood than I would expect for such a family. The yard was very neat and in the parking lot there was a van and a 1987 Yugo that seemed to be in a perfect condition. (I learned that the parents had seen it advertised on the internet and the father had driven to Iowa to buy it very cheaply and then brought it back to surprise the youngest son who had a very great interest in this type of automobile.) On the side of the driveway there was a basketball goal like the kind you can buy in Wal-Mart. In the front of the house there were many flowers that had been planted between rocks that had been arranged to give this house a special appearance. The inside of the house was very neat and everything seemed to be in its place including a little dog that was trained to only enter into the kitchen and hallway and that never came on to the rug in the living room. The walls and the fireplace were filled with pictures of the family members but most of the pictures were of the two sons. There were many notes from family members about their activities on the refrigerator and on a family bulletin board in the kitchen. The house had three bedrooms that I did not see. There were stairs that went down to a very nice basement with another fireplace that had carpet. The basement was divided into two large rooms. One room was like another living room with nice chairs and a divan. There was another fireplace and above it there were 29 special metal plates showing the academic achievements of the two sons. When I saw these achievements I thought of the early 1955 study by Pressey reported by Barbara Clark (1992) that said that one of the factors necessary for the development of talent is “provision for strong success experiences and recognition of these successes” (p. 72).
In the other room of the basement there was a very nice music room with a very big sound system with speakers. It was an electronic piano with an electronic guitar and a large set of drums. As part of my observation I asked the two sons to play for me and to play some of the compact disc that the group had produced. Their music was very modern but also very good. In the backyard there was a large cement porch that had sitting chairs and a place to cook outside. It also was very neat and it also had rocks that were carefully arranged to make it more beautiful. My impression of the house was that it was a very busy place that was neat and organized but also very warm and comfortable.

The School

The sons of my subject family both attend a private school located very close to their home. It is a school that opened in 1993. It has 32 teachers and nearly 70 percent of them have advanced degrees. The father of my subject family teaches mathematics in the school and this allows his sons to attend the school without paying any tuition. The school is in a city that has a population of 40,000 and it is the most important city in an area with a population of 135,000 yet this private school with only 85 graduated students since it was started has produced 79 percent of the National Merit Semifinalists in the city since 2000. The class of 2004 contained seven National Merit Semifinalists and two commended students. Since 2000, this private school has educated 79 percent of the city’s National Merit Scholars even though only four percent of the area’s high school students attend the school (Reuter, 2003). My opinion about the school was that it looked to be very new with many teacher offices and with much learning equipment.

The Church

I learned that their church plays a very big part in my subject family’s lives. It is a protestant church with a large membership (over 300 people) that has many activities and has a special pastor for the young people of the church. As I did understand, it is a conservative church and follows simple principles of the Bible similar to my church in my country. The physical appearance of the church makes me believe that it is a pretty rich church and that it is well supported by its members. My subject family is very active in the church. One of the activities of the children of my subject family is to play in “Idiosyncrasy”, a Christian musical group of one girl (vocal), two boys (guitar and bass), and the two children of my subject family (keyboard and drums). Both the parents and
the two sons agreed that the church members were much more important to them than friends at their school. In fact, the support system and friends of the two sons are almost completely connected to their church and only a little connected to their school. The father seemed to value the school a little more than the mother and this was one of the few things that I could find where they had any division of opinion. For the mother the school was just a place for formal learning. It had mostly wealthy children and she did not think it was very important as a social support for her sons. On this issue it seemed to me that the sons agreed more with their mother than with their father. However, they were not negative toward their school, they were just very positive toward their church.

The Family Members-The Father

The father of my subject family was unusual in many ways. First, he is very much devoted to his religious beliefs. When I listened to him it seemed that he is certain about what he is supposed to do in his life and he is going to try his best to do it. However, this does not mean that he will not listen to other ways or beliefs. Even when he seems to know the way for him and his family, he does not seem to think that he knows what is right for everybody else. In fact, he is unusual too in the way that he is willing to listen. He seems to listen very carefully when he talks to someone. Not only does he do this with his wife and sons, but he also does it with others. I met him at three different times and watched him communicate with his colleagues and this characteristic always showed itself. When he talks, one knows that he is also listening very carefully and it makes one feel important.

Another way that this man is unusual is his kind and gentle manner. Even though he appears to be a strong man and gives you a feeling of strength, his manner and voice is very gentle. He seems to almost smile at everyone he speaks to and then after he listens very carefully to what you say he speaks in a very quiet voice that almost sings to you. I noticed that when he talked to his sons he motivates them very well but he does not seem to push too hard on them.

This man is also unusual in his energy level. When he speaks he concentrates very much but he does not get tired quickly about any topic. The result is that when you do not understand something he just keeps explaining it in different ways so that he shows unending patience. It seems that his interest level is very high and with each point that
you say he finds a new reason to continue the discussion by asking you another question. Each time that I have asked him for information I have found that he was on his way to or was just returning from some school or church activity that involved his children or his family.

Other qualities that shine out of the personality of the father are humbleness and intelligence. He is very fast to say that he does not believe he or his wife or their children are blessed by genius. He believes that they are all normal people and that most other humans can do as his family and his children have done. After observing this man I wonder if it is not his humility that makes him unwilling to recognize the special abilities of himself and his family. It is very obvious that he is a very intelligent man and his view is very convincing to me but I must be careful because my research led me to many examples of gifted parents taking credit for making their children gifted and telling others that they need only “do what we did” to “have what we have” (Tolan, 1998, p. 168).

Maybe the most unusual quality of the father is how he relates to the other members of his family. In his relations with his wife he seems to let her have as much authority as she wants but it seems that they both know that she will return authority to him at the last moment on everything that is important. Sometimes he will interrupt her and correct her on a memory or point but she will then just interrupt him back. There does not appear to be any pain or memory of these contests for authority but, finally, any listener knows that the father is the highest authority even if they cannot identify how it is known. This approach is also applied to the children. The father seems to give them much authority and power but then the power seems to be given (or taken) back so that the children’s last look is toward their father’s position.

Karnes and Schwedel (as cited in Gelbrich, 1998) found that fathers of the gifted reported longer and more frequent instances of reading to their children and showed an overall pattern of greater involvement with their children. I cannot imagine a father who could be more involved with his children then my subject father. He reported that he read to the children for hours at a time even before they were born. He also reported many learning practices that he used with his children; from learning the Greek alphabet when swinging to games on a globe of the world, to using big plastic letters so that they could feel each letter and arrange them in a physical way.
It is not clear to me where this father has learned his parenting techniques. He reported that he was raised as one of six children in an alcoholic father family and that he remembered many nights when he hid under a bed from his father because he feared that he might be beaten. He also reported that he had become independent from his own family by the time he was 16. He did not report any techniques that he learned from his siblings or other friends. He admits that his wife has had a great effect on him and he reports because of her influence that he had a strong religious experience that changed his life before they married. It seems to me that his wife has given him many of his ideas about being a father and he has then made them work. He is very intelligent but he seemed always very fast to recognize that if he acts with wisdom it is usually because of the influence of his wife.

When I asked the father what goals he wanted his children to have, he quickly said he hoped their goals would be in the following order: 1. Love God (not learning); 2. Love neighbor more than self (not learning); and 3. Do your best to add a little “extra” to ordinary in everything you do (including learning) He said that he really did not care what his children did if they followed these rules and did their best. He told me that the most important advice he could give about raising gifted children is that the capacity for learning is fixed by six and that if parents wait to teach to teach their children until their children can verbally communicate it may be too late. He also said that the greatest obstacle to generalizing his family’s approach to producing gifted children is that most parents do not have or will not take the time to parent. He said that the idea of spending “quality” time with children is a myth, that it is not just “quality” time it is also “quantity” time and most parents do not have any concept of spending time with their children in the amounts that was done in his family.

When I asked him about his ideas for discipline of his children he surprised me by answering that his standard for discipline had always been “immediate, instant, and complete obedience.” However, he and his wife then explained together that after their children give obedience to their command it is fully acceptable for the children to question the parents about any issue and that they never discourage their children from questioning the reasoning of the parents about their orders. According to the father, the children must recognize that their parents are “on their side” that their parents know more
about their welfare than they do, and that they must learn to trust their parents if they are ever going to be able to trust God. When I asked the father about the use of physical punishment he immediately gave me the quote of “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” (Ephesians 6:1) and said that physical punishment was used by the parents when the children were young but that when they reached the teen years that it was no longer used.

My last point about the father is his belief that any family can raise children that will have the characteristics of giftedness. He is very strong and certain on this point. He makes the point that most parents do not invest time and energy in their children at the same level as his family. (This investment will be described under the section on the children.) He argues that when two loving parents make excellence in parenting their single goal, almost any normal children will become excellent and outstanding in some areas. He said that after they complete raising their children that he and his wife are thinking about adopting children and he is very confident that they will also have the characteristics of gifted children.

The Family Members-The Mother

The mother in my subject family is also a very unique person. She had a very stable home life when she was a child. Her father was a teacher and her mother was able to stay in the home with the children and she told me that her parents never did “raise a hand” to her. She said that she got her parent training from her mother and sisters and from friends and from helping to raise two nephews before she had her own children. She said that these experiences made her to look forward to having a family of her own. Even though she has an interest in English and Art, the thing that she has always wanted to do was to be a mother. Even now it seems very obvious to me that her most important self-definition is of “mother.” She seems to agree with her spouse in her devotion to religion ideas and in her attitudes about child discipline. She does seem to be a very confident person but I do not think that she fits Clark’s (1992) description of the typical mother of gifted children as being independent and well educated. Her whole life seems involved with her children and family. Cockerham (1995) writes about how important Japanese mothers are in the education of children. She seems to be a type of Japanese mother but her efforts involve everything about the family. She is very active in every
activity of her children. When I visited their home she had just had prepared food for about 30 young people from their church to eat. When I asked the two sons who was their greatest source of support both of them chose her over their father. One of her greatest ways of helping the family is to shop on the Internet for cheap things for her family and to go to yard sales and buy things very cheaply. She was the one who found the Yugo automobile that was bought for the youngest son. In the hours of taping that I did with her there were only two times that she seemed to have any disagreement with her husband. One was that she did not seem to value the children’s school as much as he did and the other was about whether her husband should accept so many extra duties at the school. I think that anything that disconnects her children or her husband from the family and the church is seen in a negative way for her. The father is very important in decision actions in this family but the mother is like a magnet force that keeps all members of the family connected.

The mother seems to have been very important in the early education of the children. After each child was born she carried it constantly with her in a backpack. She did all of her housework with them on her back because she felt it increased their trust in her. She said that she hardly ever allowed them to cry before she would hold them and she nursed them until twenty-two months. Ruddy and Bornstein (as cited in Gelbrich, 1998) found that mothers who offered more frequent reinforcement to their babies attention to stimuli at four months had babies who could speak more words at age one. Both of the children of my subject family were called by their names months before their births and both parents read to both of the children for hours at a time before they were born. Both parents believed that reading is a way to open up the world to children and they wanted to open up their children’s world very early. The mother home schooled the children from 6 a.m. until 9 a.m. for three days per week and then after six years they were put in a small religious school where they could work at their own speed until they started in their present school seven years ago. The mother said that she has always loved to play with her children and that one of their biggest games was memorizing verses from the Bible. She said that in all of their games the purpose was to give them information but to also give them confidence that they could do well.
During the four hours that I was present with the children I noticed that the mother constantly gave the children encouragement. Even when I asked the parents to tell me their children’s greatest weakness, after they identified the weaknesses, the mother immediately said that they were getting better. While the reinforcement of the father seemed to come by giving attention to the points that the children made, the reinforcement of the mother seemed to be more direct but it did not seem to be artificial or given just to control. When I asked the mother what she would change if she could, she said that she would have more children and have them closer together.

The most obvious characteristic of the mother was her confidence and her love for her family members. She seemed to be very certain that she is doing what she was made for and that she knows how to do it very well. She is confident in her children and in her husband and this makes her confident in her mother role. She smiled when she told me that she only had “some college” and she smiled again when she told me that she did not want to give her age. I do not believe this shows any weakness of confidence, I think it is just a type of joke that she has with her family. I think that the children have much respect for her intelligence. She is a clear speaker, and she is very intelligent but her intelligence is expressed in understanding herself and the other members of her family and the relationships between them.

When I asked about whether this family might be giving too much attention and protection to children, both parents, but especially the mother, said that it is job of the family to give protection and shelter to children and that they will always do this as much as possible as long as they can allow their children to be free individuals. Neither of the parents felt that giving too much help to the children would make them weak and unable to function without family support.

Finally, I asked the mother whether she thought her children were geniuses and she agreed with her husband that they were really only ordinary humans whose parents had invested extraordinary energy in their development. I then asked her whether she thought that if they adopted ordinary children that they would also appear to be gifted. She immediately answered, yes. I then asked her about the confidence of her response. She replied to me, definitely yes!
To complete my description of the parents in my subject family I would like to include their own responses to a survey that I sent to them. I have deleted family names but everything else is the same as their answers.

**Questionnaire**

* Response of Parents to Questionnaire

1. **Do you think that your children are gifted? If so explain why you think they are gifted.**

   **Father:** Well, they both read at over 1500 words per minute. They both have very good memories and vocabularies and they both have tested at above 155 on I.Q. tests although I do not think that the test measured how much above 155 they were. Anyway, 155 would put them in the top half of one percent of tested subjects. We first noticed that they were not normal children when they had learned the letters of the alphabet at 13 months. We have attached a recent application submitted by our oldest son. It shows some of the characteristics that make him at least very “special”.

2. **Would you please describe your feelings about the social development of your children?**

   **Father:** We do not see any problems with their social development. Both of the boys are much younger than their grade peers but in both cases we would say that they are more socially mature than the children in their grades. One of the boys chooses to have fewer close friends but this is a matter of choice, not a matter of his feeling insecure or isolated.

3. **What are the traits related to “giftedness” in your children?**

   **Father:** In addition to the traits regarding I.Q., vocabulary, reading speed, etc. we see another positive trait of “social awareness” and empathy that exceeds that expected from children their age. There may be just a trace of “perfectionism” in the boys but it is not so pressing as to cause them undue frustration nor does it seem to produce any unusual tendency to procrastinate as a defense mechanism.

4. **Describe your approach to giving nurture for you children's intellectual development. (Was there some type of teaching style that gave them creativity, helped them avoid frustration, made them use play to learn, etc?)**
**Father:** There are two things. First, we have spent much more time than is probably the norm with our boys. For example, while my wife was pregnant, I read the newspaper to the boys, not to make them intellectually unique, but because we had read that it might increase the strength of their bond to me as their father. The second thing about our approach is that we have tried never to set limits stage like limits as to when learning could take place. The only requisite was whether the boys were interested in a topic. We feel that most of society places unconscious limits on learning and children think that learning must wait upon some appropriate developmental stage.

5. **How would you describe the importance of genetics and family learning environment in explaining the giftedness of your children?**

**Father:** On the question of nature verses nurture, we think nature or genetics is very, very, minimal in importance. We truly believe that if most families spent as much time with their children as we do then most children would have the gifted traits that our have. We have given some thought to adoption and we have no doubt that any normal adopted child would turn out similar to our genetic children.

**The Family Members-The Oldest Son**

When I visited in the home of my subject family I met the two boys of the family. I met them in one other situation but it was just for a short time. The oldest son had just become 16 years old. He was tall (about 6 feet, 1 inch) and very polite but he also seemed to be very confident and comfortable to have research done on his family. I spent about four hours in his home and he stayed with the family in our discussions and never seemed to be tired or bored. To talk with him reminded me of the description written by Tolan (1998) where he described the characteristics of gifted learners by saying they have: “extreme levels of curiosity and highly connective mental processing” where “every answer to one question brings a flurry of further, elaborative questions, a process that often goes on until the answerer, rather than the questioner, tires” (p. 167). His manner was a little like his father because he had a little softness and gentleness but still he appeared to be strong and confident like a man. He also had his father’s way of listening very closely when one spoke with him. In discussing with him I first felt very uncomfortable because I could tell that he had much more knowledge than I, but soon he
made me to feel comfortable because I could see that, like his father, he was not a proud person.

As I talked with the family, I learned that the oldest son could identify the letters of the alphabet at 14-months, was reading magazine headlines in the checkout line by 22 months, knew the Greek alphabet forward and backward, could count and speak in three languages, could identify the countries on a globe and recite the books of the Bible, could graph polynomials on a computer screen, and had read over 1000 books all by the age of three. I also learned that at the age of 3 he had appeared on “Late Night with David Letterman,” “Saturday Night Live,” “CBS: This Morning with Harry Smith,” “Baby Talk,” “Sally Jesse Raphael,” “Inside Edition,” and other programs in England (Biles, 1990).

As I continued to talk to him I learned his view of how his parents had raised him and his young brother. According to his report, his learning had always taken place because it was fun to learn. He remembered that he had learned the Greek alphabet as part of the fun of swinging with his father pushing him and each push being a letter. He remembered how he thought it was fun to explore how tape recorders and a stereo worked and how his parents never limited his curiosity even though when he explored at age three and he ruined three tape recorders and a stereo. He also remembered that he was never exposed to television but had really good programs (like Sesme Street or Barney or medical surgeries) given to him by tapes that his grandparents made. He said that he valued the freedom that his parents gave him to question and study whatever he chose and he was very thankful that they were willing to make sacrifice to provide him with maps, books, special magazines, sound recording equipment, and computers. He agreed with his parents’ rule of no television and no computers used for just games without learning. Most of all, he thought his mother’s games of memorizing Bible verses helped him to learn. He said it made the boys to have confidence and made them to also have discipline. When I asked him if he felt he had been hurt or had lost anything by the way his parents raised him, his answer was that he agreed with their parenting style and felt that he owed his parents very much for the gift of his giftedness. He seemed to enjoy showing me a picture of himself at three that was taken while when he was trying to continue reading under the covers of his bed with a flashlight as well as the many videos
where he appeared on television with important people. It was as though when he did these things he felt he was bringing honor to his parents and to their approach of raising him.

When I asked the oldest son about his present activities he explained to me that he has is very interested in a computer business that he has started. He explained his interest in computers and told me that he had recently competed in international computer academic competition between 70 countries and had won first place. He also let me to know that it was his policy in his business to do computer work for free for those people that he knew to be poor and to not charge anything unless he could solve the problem of the customer.

When I asked the oldest son about his plans for the future he said that he intended to combine his skill in computer science with a study in medicine and become a medical doctor doing very small types of operations. He also said that even though he had been offered full scholarships at very famous universities on the east coast and the west coast that he wanted to attend a university that was close to his home. He said that his father had taken him to have a tour of the University of Oklahoma and its medical school program and that he thought it would be a nice choice and that they were also willing to give him a full scholarship. I asked him if he thought he might be homesick when he went to the university and he said that he thought he would but that it was something that he was confident he could handle.

From my discussion I could see that the oldest son agreed with almost all of the philosophies of his parents. He believed that it was his duty to give the kind of obedience demanded by his parents. I did not ask him whether he thought he was a genius from his biology because I thought that it might cause embarrassment to him but I am confident that he would agree with his parent’s position on this also. According to his parents, his greatest weakness is in the area of physical skills and in the fact that he does not want to try things that are not easy for him. This fits Clark’s (1998) statement that gifted children often have an “unusual discrepancy between physical and intellectual development” (p. 11). He said that sports do not have much interest for him. He seems to have good social skills to meet strangers like me. While I was visiting in his home two of his peer friends stayed with the family for about an hour and he seemed to have good social skills.
with them also. His relations with his parents seem to be very good and comfortable. His relations with his younger brother seem to be good and comfortable also but it seems to be a relationship of equals, not older and younger sibling relationships like those that are found in Asian cultures. Their relationship seems to be like the relationship of their parents, it is almost equal with just a little more power and authority going to the father and for the oldest son.

I gave questions to both of the sons about the sources of pressure that they felt and about their sources of support (see appendix A). For the older son the mother was a greater source of pressure than the father but the greatest source of pressure for him was himself. It is interesting that he rated peers as his lowest source of pressure. For the sources of support both children rated their parents as their biggest sources of support but it is interesting that they both rated their teachers and their peers very low but rated themselves pretty high.

I could see no serious weaknesses in the older son. While I visited in the home he did some outstanding things. One of my interests is music and one thing that he did display was very great musical skills on the keyboard. Another of my interests is the Bible and so he did quote much of the book of James for me from memory.

In order to describe the oldest son more fully I would like to include the following description of himself that he gave to me that he has used in scholarship applications. I have also included descriptions of him that were given by his teachers in my appendix. Together, they show that he is not only very gifted in his cognitive development but that he is also socially very mature and comfortable.

**Self-Description of Oldest Son**

1. **SPECIAL TALENTS**

   One special talent that I possess is my ability to work with computers and other technology. After getting my first computer when I was three years old, I have constantly pushed myself to understand the latest technologies. In 2000, as a thirteen-year-old, I started my own computer-repair business called I Do Windows. My customer base has now expanded to include a trucking company, a florist and gift shop, and an area youth center. I have also designed websites for two national educational publishing companies, Chalk Dust Press and MIREH Publishers. I recently migrated a nationally published
newsletter called FAITHGRAM from outdated printing and distribution methods to new computer-driven publishing and subscription services. I now publish this newsletter, and am currently designing its accompanying website. For the last three years in a row, I received first place in the CyberSurfari international computer contest. This competition tests computer and Internet proficiency. I also am currently part of the official technical support team for InvisionFree Hosting, a national forum hosting company. Last year at the Southwest Missouri State computer competition, I achieved the highest score out of over thirty entries on my two computer programs, a numeric conversion applet and a color algorithm differentiation utility. (I program in seven different languages, including ActionScript, Basic.NET, and C++.) Had I been a senior, I would have received a university scholarship for my scores. Another of my talents is in the area of music. I have played piano for over ten years, and have been awarded several honors locally and at regional levels. I received the "Best of Show" award for my performances, which included a piano solo, a piano duet, and two accompaniments, at the Southeast Kansas Art & Music Competition. My highest award was a gold medal in the talent competition of the National Bible Quiz Championship in Chicago, IL. Another area in which I consider my talents to lie is in academics. During my freshman and sophomore years, I entered a total of fifteen regional and state math competitions, such as the Pittsburg State math relays (30+ schools) and the Pummill math competition (50+ schools). Out of these fifteen events, I earned thirteen firsts, a second, and a third. My more notable accomplishments among these fifteen competitions include a first-place finish as a sophomore in a twelfth-grade regional calculus competition and a perfect algebra paper in a Missouri state competition in which I competed against all four high school grade levels as a freshman. My prowess in mathematics extends to my participation on my school's academic bowl team. There, I carry the majority of the mathematics questions, in addition to those in French, science, and general knowledge. As a sophomore, I was named to the six-person all-district team and the eight-person Missouri all-state team. Our team won first place at the state competition, which was our school's first-ever state championship victory in its ten-year existence. My scientific achievements have been some of my most recognized. I have researched several areas of interest to me, including the effects of sonic and tonal stimuli on higher-order
left-brain functions, vision enhancement for those with myopic and astigmatic disorders, and recognition reaction time difference between genders. My project dealing with vision disorders earned first place and the "Best of Show" award at my school. I also received awards from the Army and the Air Force, as well as an award for the best biology-related research project from the college's biology department. I received first place and "Best of Show" at the Missouri Southern Regional Science Fair. Finally, I was honored with semifinalist status in the Discovery Young Scientists' Challenge, a national science competition. Last year, I received a superior rating at the district level of the Junior Science Academy and second place in my division at state for my research in recognition reaction times. I also received second place at the Missouri Southern Regional Science Fair for the same project. My foreign language recognitions include three first- and two second-place awards at the Missouri Southern State College French competitions during my freshman and sophomore years. I currently edit and publish my school's official French newsletter, Le Petit Monde. I have attended the Missouri Southern English Field Day for three years and in that time have entered seven events. I received first place in every one of those seven. In addition to competitions, my academic abilities enable me to score highly on standardized tests. I earned perfect scores on the math sections of the ACT and the PSAT my sophomore year, and on the SAT and the PSAT again my junior year. I also earned one point short of perfect on the verbal sections of the ACT and the SAT, and a perfect score on the verbal section of the PSAT. The advanced math class I am in sat for the AP Calculus AB exam last year; I took the class and exam as a fourteen-year-old sophomore and earned a 5, which is the highest score possible. I am currently enrolled in AP Calculus BC, AP American English Language and Composition (American Literature survey), and AP United States History. Last summer, I was selected to attend the Missouri Scholars' Academy, an elite summer honors program that accepts only the top half of one percent of rising juniors in the state.

2. LEADERSHIP

I currently serve in several leadership positions. I am the captain of my high school academic team, which requires me to not only set a high academic standard, but also to discern which of my teammates are the most suited to answer questions. For
example, during the bonus rounds of matches, the team is allowed to confer. As the captain, if different members of my team give conflicting answers, I must choose which answer is most likely to be correct. This leadership responsibility is one of the most demanding, for my actions affect not only me, but also my teammates. In my community, I am the leader of a youth band. As such, I am required to choose song lists for performances, arrange bookings, and generally keep the band in order. My leadership abilities have grown from this experience, as well as my understanding of what makes a good leader. I have gained understanding of a seemingly empty truism—the best leaders do not work alone but instead listen to those that they lead. In my particular case, this means taking suggestions for what songs to play and how to play them. I attempt to ask each band member for his or her opinion so that the most vocal are not the only ones to get their way. I also try to maintain an equitable balance among the band members, giving each person a chance to be "in the spotlight," to lead on a song vocally or musically. I have found that to work effectively, I must not so much lead the band as channel and direct its energy. Rather than pulling it forward, I must work among its members as a member myself. Another venue in which I am able to use my leadership skills is at my church. There, I hold the position of technology coordinator for the high school and college-age ministries; I have the responsibility of organizing the technical side of events such as Wednesday-night church services and special events. In this area, my leadership entails supervising six to eight people during setup, operation, and teardown. Recently I led a team for three days in preparing for our annual youth group New Year's Eve party. We worked around the clock to set up twenty-five networked computers, half a dozen wireless and two dozen wired video feeds, and backstage technical gear. It was a challenge to plan intermediate jobs for each individual, keep them on task, and also motivate them to complete their projects. My experiences in leadership roles have taught me that the most effective leadership is also the most subtle. A true leader is one who cares for and guides those whom he leads without drawing attention to himself.

3. COMMUNITY SERVICE

As one of the eight members of the local chapter of the National Honor Society at my school, I played an integral role in a canned food drive in which we collected
over 3,000 cans for the Salvation Army food bank. We also collected over 200 backpacks, which we filled with personal items such as toothbrushes, combs, and other toiletries. These backpacks were distributed to needy children who were removed from their families and placed in shelters or in foster care. For many children, these backpacks were the only thing they could call their own. I have also served as an accompanist on the piano for my high school's vocal ensemble and accompanied the elementary school grades in their winter musicals. Besides playing piano, I am present at every school function that requires operation of sound or video equipment. In ninth grade, I designed and created a picture CD with over six hundred pictures of Anything Goes, a musical our high school presented to the community. This CD included pictures from early practices and continued through the final performance; they were sold to raise money for music and equipment for the music department. In tenth grade, I once again donated my time to the school musical as the head sound technician. This job required over fifty hours of work in practices, dress rehearsals, and performances. I also set up and run the sound and video equipment for elementary and high school concerts, pep assemblies, and other special programs. In addition to my service at my school, I regularly play piano and keyboard at my church for services and specials. I am a member of three local bands, all of which perform free of charge. I have played with these bands for youth camps and rallies, church services, at a state college, at area schools, in theatres, and on television, all without compensation. Last summer, I spent a week working at a youth camp, and the summer before that, I spent two weeks working at the same camp. Not only did I operate the sound and video equipment, but I also was in charge of a group of fifteen to twenty campers each week. I was responsible for taking care of them as well as taking care of my technical duties, which was definitely a full-time job. At my church, I maintain the equipment and create the necessary PowerPoint files for the week's services. In addition, I designed and currently administer the web site for the youth group there. I recently added a forum and bulletin boards to this website, allowing visitors to interact and have discussions with one another. Including time spent in design, creation, and maintenance, I have donated well over eight hundred hours in this service.
4. GOALS PARAGRAPH

From the time I was very young, I have always wanted to enter the field of medicine. Having never vacillated from that desire, I still plan to attend college and continue on to medical school. After recently spending time shadowing doctors in a local hospital, I developed a special interest in surgery. My other love is computers; I have worked with them since I was three. I hope to merge these two interests by pursuing a course of study in biotechnology or a related field. I have followed with fascination recent developments such as robot-assisted surgery, remote surgery (telemedicine), and MIRCAS (Medical robotics and Computer Assisted Surgery). I am very interested in helping to advance these new technologies in minimal surgery.

The Family Members- The Youngest Son

As I have already said, my subject family decided to not allow study of their oldest son’s learning achievements after he was three. They told me that they did this because they thought it was the best interest of their son. When their next son was born they continued to do this. For that reason the youngest son has not received so much attention. However, his parents told me that his teachers report that he is just as good in academics as his brother and that he is even better than his brother in the area of creative writing. The youngest son is also different from his brother in the area of physical activities. He looks stronger than his brother and his body has a shorter and more solid look. His father said that he is good in both basketball and soccer and his appearance of strength also says this.

As I observed the youngest son he seemed to be very confident for his age and he interacted very with me very well. He seemed very intelligent for his age of thirteen and he had the same mental energy as his brother and father. As I said, he does not take a position of younger brother in his relations with the family but acts almost as an equal with his brother. Except for the difference in attitude toward physical activities he seems very similar with his brother in his philosophies and manners. He did not seem to be jealous of the many pictures, videos, and newspaper articles about his brother. He seemed to be as interested in them as I was. Someway in this very talented family, he seems to have found a way to find a comfortable place to fit in and he seemed to be as secure and comfortable as all of the other members of the family.
My survey questions on sources of pressure and sources of support showed similar results for the younger brother as compared to the older brother (see appendix A). However, the younger brother made a strong point that his church peers were much more important to him than his school peers. When he said this all of the other family members agreed.

On other points the attitudes of the two sons were similar except for two points. First, when I asked the family about the weak points of the two sons the parents agreed that for the older son it was a tendency to avoid trying to do things that were not easy, such as physical activities, but for the younger son they agreed that is was a tendency to be disorganized. Second, when I asked the younger brother about his plans for the future I discovered that he wanted to either become a musician or a lawyer.

When I learned that he was interested to be a musician I asked him to do a sample of his music for me. He was very eager to show me his skills so we went into the music half of the basement and he gave me some earplugs. After equipping me with earplugs he began to play very loudly and quickly upon the drums. He was very, very good.

Because there was so much more information on the older son than for the younger son, after I met with the subject family in their home, I wrote to the parents and asked them for additional information about the younger son. I asked them to give me more information that would compare the younger son to his brother. I would like to complete my description of the younger son by including the father’s response for my request: (This response of the father has not been changed from the way it was written except that the names of Robert-older son and William-younger son have been substituted for the real names of the children.)

**Father’s Additional Information**

*William is quite a bit different than Robert. William has a lot more energy than Robert. He rides his bike around 10-15 miles per day (weather permitting), plays basketball, soccer, and racquetball. While Robert focuses on the keyboard, William plays drums, lead guitar, bass guitar, keyboard, and harmonica.*

*William is probably more sociable than Robert. Not that Robert has a problem with meeting people, but William attracts people with his compassion and his wit. I wouldn’t say there is much competition. Rather, they operate in slightly different realms.*
On the computer, Robert is a wiz at programming, troubleshooting, and repair. William excels at graphic design. In school, they are far enough apart that there is not much head-to-head competition. They both earned 1230 on the SAT as 7th graders; Robert 620 verbal, 610 math and William 670 math, 560 verbal. William is a better writer with respect to content and original thought while Robert is a superior technical writer. They both have right at 98% GPA.

Robert has wanted to go into medicine ever since he was young. William can’t stand blood or the thought of operating on someone. Instead, he is presently looking at full-time Christian music for a career. Robert likes classical music and contemporary Christian music. William likes Christian rock music.

William would like to be on the go every day...to spend the night, go camping, etc. Robert would just as soon stay home and cuddle up with a great book. Robert is fairly organized; William lacks any organization whatsoever – as far as keeping a neat room, picking up after himself, etc. However, when it comes to schoolwork, William plans ahead and is always prepared. Robert does things fairly quickly and is content to give it the once-over whereas William will work on something until he is convinced it is the best he can produce.

It may be that William has steered clear of things in which his brother is exceptional. However, I don’t see the evidence of this. Instead, I think they are just made differently with different likes and dislikes.

**Analysis of the Data and Identification of Important Themes**

Using the ideas of grounded theory, I now will examine the data from my observation of my subject family and try to identify themes and their relationship to production of giftedness in children. In his book, Constructing Social Research, Charles C. Ragin (1994) says that in the social sciences that “Even studies of a single individual are driven by an interest in what one case can teach us about ourselves and others something larger than that one person” (p. 159). As Ragin has recommended, I have tried to understand my subject family and its children’s giftedness “through their eyes” (p. 92) and now having made a systematic data collection, I want to make an “analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon” (p. 23).
As I consider the data that I have collected on my subject family it seems to me that there are some themes that emerge from the data that should be identified so that they can be studied further in the future.

Theme one: It seems to me that the clearness and unity about family norms in this family is very unusual. I could not find very much in the ideas of this family that was not very clear and I could not discover very much that was debated. Everybody seems to be on the same track and everybody agrees on the track. Whether the topic was discipline in the family, priorities in life, or duties to other people, this family seems to speak with the mouth of one person on the topic of important values. Part of the reason for this is that family members have spent much time with each other and it must bring them together in their values. (They all agree that family time must be “quantity” not just “quality” time.) However, I think that the most important reason for this clearness and unity is the ideology and philosophy that has been the foundation for building this family. All of the data of my investigation of this subject family seems to lead back to and be connected to a whole set of ideas about what humans are and what is important about human life. This set of ideas is called Christianity. Everything that I could discover in the data of my investigation reflects that each of the members of my subject family connect to each other and to their society through this set of ideas. This theme makes me to question if family norm clarity and unity might be connected to giftedness in children. I cannot say from my data whether it is just agreement over any set of clear family norms or whether it is agreement over the specific set of norm values that spring up from Christianity. Maybe families are like teams. If they all follow some clear plan of the team and if they feel really connected to other members of the team then each of the individuals of the team let their production abilities to be let loosed more freely. The Japanese seem to produce children with higher I.Q.s than other countries (Tasker, 1987). They are also very well known for having very uniform and clear learning standards by which they test their students and for thinking of themselves as one, united special people. In some ways the giftedness that seems to be more common in the Japanese population may be the result of their being like a large family with clear goals and a sense of unity.

Theme two: A second theme that emerges from the data of my investigation relates to the very strong assumption that this family has about the source of giftedness.
In my investigation of this family they seemed to use every other breath to repeat their belief that giftedness is taught and learned and that all ordinary people can be both teachers and learners of giftedness. I have not met Americans that have such confidence that giftedness comes from nurture rather than from genetics and nature. I have met this attitude in Asian cultures. Using Japan for my example again, it is said “unlike people in the United States, who believe that different individuals have different abilities, the Japanese believe that all students have much the same innate ability and that differences in academic performance must be due to differences in effort” (Curry, Jiobu & Schirra, 1997, p.285). I question if giftedness is more common in families that have the attitude about it that is reflected by the Japanese and by my subject family. W.I. Thomas says that reality is not just something that is “out there”. He says that people create reality in their everyday encounters and that in these encounters “situations that are defined as real are real in their consequences.” His idea is called the “Thomas Theorem” (Macionis, 2003, pp.145-146).

It seems to me that if families define having giftedness as being a question of genetic luck then they create a different social reality than if they define giftedness as being the result of the nurture that is provided to a child. If they have a different definition then, according to the Thomas Theorem, they will get different consequences. If my guess is correct, then not only does it make sense that Japan would produce more gifted children than in societies where giftedness is viewed differently, but it also makes sense that families like my subject family would be more likely to produce gifted children.

Theme three: A third theme that emerges from the data of my research is also related to the idea of the Thomas Theorem. It is the idea that researchers should not define the process of human mental development too closely. For example, many Psychology texts recommend to students the ideas of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. These researchers produced paradigms that have stages that are said to be “discontinuous”. According to Robert A. Baron (1998) “Piaget proposed that cognitive development passes through discrete stages and that these are discontinuous—children must complete one stage before entering another. Most research findings, however, indicate that cognitive changes occur in a more gradual manner.” Baron also said Piaget’s
theory “underestimates the abilities of young children” because research indicates that children can do cognitive processes requiring abstract use of symbols prior to the time that his theory indicates that they can begin to use symbols. (p. 312)

My emergent concept or theme concerns the issue of whether we might accidentally retard some gifted children by having limited expectations of their development if we allow models like Piaget and Kohlberg to define our interpretation of the situation of giftedness too precisely. This theme would mostly apply to professional advisors or counselors because I do not think most parents would follow these models so closely. I question whether my subject family would have had their expectations set so high for their children if they had been very impressed with models such as Piaget.

Theme four: The last theme that emerges from the data of my investigation is the concept of how my subject family has emphasized the idea of security and support in raising their children. The parents of my subject family did not allow their children to cry without holding them when they were young, they emphasized the idea of “quantity” time so that they were with the children much more than normal parents, I observed the parents, especially the mother, to give many encouragements to the children, and they strongly emphasized the idea that they thought that the family could never give too much support and refuge for their children no matter what their age. Even when the children leave the home these parents expect the home to continue to be a place of support and protection to these children.

There does not seem to be much research on family support and security in children and its relationship to “giftedness”. Winner (1996) says that researchers “have shown that families of gifted children have lower-than-average divorce rates”, and that “perhaps because their families are more harmonious, gifted children have more positive relationships with their parents than do children in control groups. Winner continues, “when familial warmth and nurturance are combined with stimulation and high expectations, the optimal setting for the development of talent is created” (Winner, p. 198). Also, Csikszentimihalyi (as cited in Winner, 1996, pp. 198-199) did consider the idea of support and security of children when he divided families into “Differentiated”, where there was stimulation but little support, “Integrated”, where there was support but little stimulation, “Complex”, where there was both support and stimulation, and
“Simple”, where there was neither support or stimulation. However, my observation causes me to think that support and security may be a separate thing to consider in connection to the producing of giftedness. When humans do not have support and security it means that they usually have fear. I know from my own experience when I have fear it is very difficult for me to think or to learn. Maybe my subject family has caused their children to be such good learners primarily because they have been able to give so much support and security that they drove away the learning inhibitor of fear.
Chapter Five
Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to use the approach of grounded theory in a qualitative study of one family that has produced two gifted children. The purpose was to see what concepts or themes might emerge from the data observed in this family about the family nurture environment characteristics that might produce giftedness. After identifying these themes it was hoped that future research might allow the benefit of this family’s techniques to help other families. From the experience of study in this thesis I have made the following conclusions.

First, we can never determine for sure the exact influence that comes from nurture and from nature in producing giftedness. However, we can know that both nurture and nature are involved. Even if we accept that nature is the more important of the two, we know from animal studies that when rats from the same gene background are placed in different nurture environments that the stimulating nurture environment affects the brain cortexes of the animals and causes them to perform problem solving activities differently. (Clark, 1992)

Second, when it comes to the influence of nurture, we can conclude that there are unnumbered variables that may increase or decrease the chances of producing giftedness in children but I think that Csikszentimihalyi’s idea regarding the right balance between support and stimulation comes the closest to making a good summary of the recipe for giftedness.

Third, we know that it is difficult to become parents who can produce gifted children. It is very complicated and it requires much work and investment and sacrifice for the children. When I consider the dedication of my subject family’s parents, I am a little glad that I am not a parent and I have a new respect for those who are.

My last conclusion is that if different family nurture environments can cause different levels of giftedness in the children of a group, then it becomes clear why some societies appear to be more blessed by good genetics than others. However, if it is really nurture that explains these differences then the answer for members in the inferior group is clear: they must change their cultural nurture practices. Although this may be a big job, at least the solution is in their hands. On the other hand, if giftedness is caused by
genetics then there is no good answer for members of the inferior group. All that is left is the wrong side of Herrnstein & Murry’s Bell Curve and all that goes with racism.

**Implications of the Study**

There are at least four concepts or themes that emerge from the data of this study that need to become the focus of further study. Family norm clarity and unity should be studied using quantitative approaches to see whether this is key to production of giftedness in children. There are probably many systems of thought other than Christianity that can make family norms clear and unify members of the family but the effectiveness of the various systems in causing this variable could be compared.

The effect of family attitude toward the source of giftedness and whether giftedness is viewed as just good genetic luck or whether it can be expected to occur in ordinary children also needs to be studied quantitatively. Maybe this will give light on how social definitions may be responsible for production of gifted children under the Thomas Theorem. I would hypothesize that the families with strong nurture orientated explanations of giftedness are statistically more probable to produce gifted children than families with strong nature orientated explanations of giftedness. Paradigms of discontinuous stages such as Piaget and Kohlberg also need to be studied from the viewpoint of how the use of these ideas by counselors may accidentally have the effect of discouraging parents’ expectations of their children. If my subject family had been aware of the stages of Piaget, would they have had the expectations of rapid cognitive progress from their very young children that they had?

The last implication of my study is that more study needs to be done about the topic of family support and security. Is holding and touching the best way to give support and security to children? What is the right balance between challenge and support? And finally, are there any negative effects that may be the result of too much protection and support given for too long?

**Limitations of the Study**

The qualitative nature of this study and the use of the grounded theory approach (where development of themes to be studied further in the future was the major goal) make the reliability and validity of the study very low. The reliability is also made very low by the use of the grand tour questions that are encouraged in qualitative studies.
However, the ability to replicate the findings about themes discovered in this study by using quantitative methods might be increased by the following recommendations:

- Development of clear standardized definitions of giftedness and super parents.
- Development of survey instruments to measure the presence of the themes discovered in this study (E.g., parent attitude about the source of giftedness and about whether all ordinary children should be able to become gifted; amount of support offered by parents to children; and degree of family clarity of norms and unity).
- Development of methods to identify and divide cultural attitudes of societies from the particular values and approaches used in a specific family.
References


Appendix A: Interview Questions

The purpose of this interview is to find out how the family environment of your children may have been different than most families and how these differences might help to explain why your children have been so gifted. Some of my questions are included just to see if the ideas of some researchers are useful in the case of your family but for each question you should feel free to expand on your answer any way that you want.

1. Did you discuss having children before your children were conceived?
   Gender?
   Number?
   Adoption?
   How spouse was raised as a child?
   Philosophy of raising children?
   Expectations or goals for children?
   Other issues?

2. Who or what was an important influence on your attitudes about how to raise children?
   Persons?
   Books?
   College courses?
   Personal experiences?
   Other influences?

3. What were the earliest kinds of parenting things that you did? What made you first begin to think that each of your children might be gifted?

4. In the early years of your children’s lives (birth to around two) did you do anything unusual (or did anything unusual happen) to give your children opportunities for sensorimotor development? For development of trust of others? For moral development?
5. When your children were between two and seven did you do anything unusual (or did anything unusual happen) to give your children opportunities for learning to control their bodily functions? For learning basic ideas like cause and effect, speed, weight, reversibility, physical constancy, time, etc.? For learning to see things from other’s viewpoints?

6. When your children were between seven and twelve did you do anything unusual (or did anything unusual happen) to give your children opportunities for learning to get along with others? For learning to be successful in schoolwork? For learning when it is right to follow group’s (society’s) rules and when it is right to follow some other set of rules? For learning to think in an abstract way rather than a concrete way? For learning to have a distinct personality and not just always try to please other people?

7. When your children were between 12-17 did you do anything unusual (or has anything unusual happened) to give your children opportunities for learning to develop intimacy and interdependence with others?

8. What do you believe are the greatest areas of relative weakness for each of your children? What do your think has caused these relative weaknesses?

9. Do you believe that if you had adopted two genetically normal boys instead of having your own children that they would have also been “gifted”? Explain the strength of your feelings.

10. What are the three most important values (goals) that you have had regarding your children as you raised them?

11. Most parents would love to have children like yours. Assuming that a family was a two-parent family like yours, what advice would you give them so that they could also know how to raise such gifted children? What so you think would be the greatest obstacle to generalizing your family’s parenting style in order to get similar results for children?

12. Describe your parenting discipline style? Is this style the same for each of you? Has this style stayed pretty much the same throughout the lives of your children? Do both children seem to have the same strength of attachment to each of you?
13. Have your basic life values remained pretty much the same throughout the lives of your children? Explain any major changes.

14. How important has technology been in raising your children? What is your attitude toward technology, including television?

15. What is the single most important thing that explains how you have raised your children?

16. If you could raise your children a second time, what is the most important thing that you would change?

17. Please individually rate the importance of the following areas of development of your children in terms of which is most important (5) and which is least important (1): cognitive, affective, social, spiritual, physical.

18. What other family members may have had unusual influences in explaining the giftedness of your children. Explain.

19. Please rate the strength for the following sources of pressure for each of your children. (0=no pressure, 1=very little pressure, 2=some pressure, 3=moderate pressure, 4=a lot of pressure) ___mother, ___father, ___sibling, ___extended family members, ___teachers, ___peers, ___self.

20. Please rate the strength for the following sources of support for each of your children. (0=no support, 1=very little support, 2=some support, 3=moderate support, 4=a lot of support) ___mother, ___father, ___sibling, ___extended family members, ___teachers, ___peers, ___self.

Remember that all of these questions are just intended to be starting points, if you think of any other things or if you want to change anything it is wonderful to do. Also, if it is acceptable to you I would like to ask some follow-up questions to your children on questions 10, 15, 17, 19, and 20 by sending them a written questionnaire. If this is permitted by you please sign your names.
Demographic Questions

The purpose of getting this information is to discover what variables may have been important in explaining the “giftedness” of your two children. You can add other variables that you think might be important as you like. If any information is too sensitive you can just leave it blank.

1. Parent’s names
2. Father’s age
3. Mother’s age
4. Family Income: $20,000 to $30,000; $30,000 to $40,000; $40,000 to $50,000; $50,000 to $60,000; over $60,000
5. Education of Father
6. Education of Mother
7. Unusual academic or mental achievements of father
8. Unusual academic or mental achievements of mother
9. Religion of Father
10. Religion of Mother
11. Social/Economic class of family: upper lower class (blue collar); lower middle class; upper middle class; lower upper class; upper class.
12. Elder son’s name:
   Unusual academic or mental achievements of elder son
13. Younger son’s name:
   Unusual academic or mental achievements of younger son
Appendix B: Various Newspaper Reports about Subject Family

* All personal references have been removed for the protection of the members of the family.
Seth

Continued from Page 1
directions on how to operate the keyboard, screen and printer. The following day, said he had trouble remembering which key to press to turn on the printer. suddenly piped up, "Push F5."

said that wasn't the first time he and his family were startled by his son's memory and reading ability. The initial shock came when was 22 months old.

said he was holding as he waited in a grocery line and heard the youngster say a long, unfamiliar phrase. After a few seconds, he realized that the toddler was reading the headlines of magazines displayed in a rack by the check-out counter.

Recently, and his grandmother were getting ready to play "Sorry!" when his grandmother realized she didn't have her eyeglasses to read the directions to the board game. picked up the top of the game box and began reading the rules to her.

The said they have already decided not to enroll in the public school system and to teach him at home. In addition to academics, the family is prepared to teach him piano and organ lessons and will use the nearby YMCA as a classroom to encourage physical fitness.

, a math instructor at , said he and his wife aren't overdrilling and forcing him to learn things.

"It's like a game," he said. "He learned the ABC song, and then we learned the letters backward by putting them to the song, ... When we doodle, we doodle shapes, letters and designs. When we play hide and seek, we count in German."

and said they are not intimidated by their son's advanced abilities.

"We look forward to learning things with him. ... We know it's a sacrifice to do a home school, but we feel like it's in our hands how far he can go," his father said. "Who better to be his teacher than his best friend. ... I think he'll do anything as long as Mom and Dad are doing it with him."

The lack of social contact with peers is a drawback often associated with home schools, but the feel that strong ties with their church community will provide their son with adequate socialization.

"Sometimes, it's frustrating for him to talk with kids his own age," admitted.

"And sometimes we have to remember he's still a baby even though we have adult conversations with him," added.

The said they've tried to figure out the cause of giftedness: Was it genetics or the prenatal reading? The absence of a television in the house? The time was able to spend with him because she didn't work outside of the home?

said the answer may lie with their 8-month-old son, who waves bye-bye and says "hi" to himself in the mirror.

"We're curious to see how turns out, to see if it's a chance genetic thing or environment," she said.

Then again, the answer may be as simple as a parent's devotion to his child. As talked, her husband held in his arms and comforted the teething baby by softly whispering "1-2-3-4-5."
MEET AMERICA'S SUPERTOT WHO'S READ 1,000 BOOKS BY AGE 3

"His daddy's computer is his favorite toy!"

He knows his ABCs backwards and forwards.
Furthermore, he can read books in different languages:
- Greek alphabet
- Finnish, German, Spanish
- He can also read computer manuals.

At 16 months, he was reading magazine headlines at supermarket checkout counters.

"We think of him as a genius," says dad. "He learned to read while he was still in the womb."

The couple read to their unborn baby because they heard that such exposure would lead to later word recognition.

After was born, they read and sang to him frequently.

While her husband, a math instructor at State University, works, stays at home and teaches.

We never have any kind of structured studying," she explains. "We made him a game, so it's just all-day fun and games.

The learned to read in a couple of hours. Now he's learning about body parts. He told me one time, "Mommy, this is fascinating.

"He loves puzzles and has a really good eye for detail. He enjoys it. We wouldn't do it if he didn't.

"His parents credit a good part of this to the lack of a television set in their home.

"We got rid of it over a year ago," explains. "We used to let him watch Sesame Street, but given a chance, he'd sit in front of the TV for hours. After that, his reading just blossomed. I say he probably reads a good four hours a day.

"He's gone through at least 1,000 books," adds. "Some over and over again. He reads everything from Little Golden Books to Sesame Street and Dr. Seuss books.

"I think he's reading even more now than he was," explains. "I think that, even more so, he's reading even more now because he reads so much to me while I was pregnant.

"Incredible talents have gained him national attention and a spot on a segment of the "ABC News Baby Talk."

"He learned his times right off, and he had everyone else's memorized too," says.

"I don't think he's going to like this. But, boy, he loves it!"
Seth charms Letterman

By Jan Biles
The Hutchinson News

Three-year-old Seth proved Friday night that he could keep up with late night television host David Letterman. Dressed in a navy and white nautical-style suit, the Hutchinson boy charmed both the host and audience by identifying shapes, reciting the Greek alphabet and saying the ABCs backwards.

Seth, the son of and , came from behind the curtains and onto the set at about 12:20 a.m. He hopped into an overstuffed chair and climbed over its arms into another chair next to Letterman’s desk.

He followed appearances by film critics Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel and actor Aidan Quinn.

Letterman described the youngster as “a 3-year-old genius who could do things”.

See SETH, Page 2

Seth

Continued from Page 1

typical of children three times his age. When the host asked him to recite the alphabet, said, “Which alphabet should I do?” Letterman responded by asking if he wanted to try the Greek alphabet.

The audience cheered after named the Greek letters in their proper sequence. The youngster motioned with his hands for the audience to stop applauding.

“You’re a very good-looking fellow,” Letterman told . The youngster nodded his head in agreement.

The show ended with sitting on Letterman’s lap as they played with a robotic arm, a popular prop used during the show’s viewer mail segment.

Interview on NBC’s “Late Night with David Letterman” was

his second television appearance since an article about his accelerated abilities was published Sept. 29 in The Hutchinson News.

He was a guest Tuesday on “CBS This Morning” and is scheduled to appear on the Sally Jesse Raphael show later this month.
Young Seth heads for Hollywood

By Jan Biles
The Hutchinson News

is hot property.

In the past month, the 8-year-old Hutchinson boy has appeared on "Late Night with David Letterman," "CBS: This Morning" and "Saturday Night Live." Next week, he'll make his acting debut.

mother, said the casting director of "Baby Talk" called a few days ago and offered a speaking part on one of the weekly segments. The sitcom will begin airing on ABC in November.

"She said she saw him on David Letterman," Mrs. said.

The sitcom is a spin-off of "Look Who's Talking," a movie released last year that starred Bruce Willis, John Travolta and Kirstie Alley. The cast of the television show includes Tony Danza and Julia Duffy.

who'll play a pupil at a school for young geniuses, will read and possibly identify countries on a globe or name state capitals.

"He'll rehearse on Friday, and they'll tape in front of a live audience Monday and Tuesday," his father, said.

The television network will pay for being on the show and cover all expenses associated with the family's weekend trip to California, Mrs. said.

The sitcom isn't all that's new in his life. Wednesday, he received an offer to appear on "The Time, The Place," a Donahue-like talk show televised in England.

They wanted us to come to England next week ... but we think we'll maybe go over Thanksgiving," Mrs. said.

Friday, a three-member crew from "Inside Edition," a daytime news-feature program in the mode of "20-20," will come to Hutchinson to film in his home. The crew is based in New York City.

Mrs. said was scheduled to appear on "Sally Jesse Raphael" a couple of weeks ago, but the show was canceled when another guest family couldn't come. The show has been rescheduled for mid-November.

In addition to his television appearances, has also been interviewed by a radio station in Sydney, Australia, The London Times and magazines in Germany and England.
Appendix C: Information Letter

Dear Potential Participants:

My name is Shu-Chen Tsai and I am a graduate student at Miami University of Ohio. I am presently working on a project for my Master’s Thesis in the Family and Child Studies program. I would like to conduct research on the members of your family that explores the question of whether advanced mental abilities in children are because of some special parenting styles and other types of nurturing.

In this research you will be asked to meet with me not more than two times and to complete interview questions about how you have raised your sons in your home, about what your children have done, about the background of your children’s ancestors, about your ideas about why your children have developed so far, and how other families might be able to learn from your approaches. If you approve, your children will also answer interview questions about these topics.

There is no significant risk involved with you or your children in the research study and also no penalty for not participating. While the benefits of the study will not directly influence you there may be information that could be help other parents understand how to raise gifted children. I have attached to this letter a Consent Slip for your children to also show their assent, which is stated in language appropriate for their age and maturity. If you do consent to be in my research it will last during the period of this date until I complete my research but not any longer than May 31, 2004. The research will mostly be by mail from my address and, with your consent, there will be one or two face-to-face interviews. If you agree to participation in this research, please show your consent by signing the attached Consent Slip and by having your children also sign and then returning it to me.

If you have any questions about the study you may contact me, Shu-Chen Tsai 513-664-8689 or shuchen6688@yahoo.com, or my faculty advisor Dr. Cheryl Burgan Evans 513-529-4125 or evanscb@muohio.edu. If there are any questions regarding your rights as subjects please contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship: 513-529-3734 or humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shu-Chen Tsai
Primary Investigator

Dr. Cheryl Burgan Evans
Primary Faculty Advisor
Appendix D: Consent Form

We have read the attached letter about the research project of Shu-Chen Tsai and say that our two children and we are voluntarily participating in the research project. Any one or all of us may terminate their participation in this research project at any time without penalty. Each of us understands that all of our information will be kept confidential, locked in a secure file cabinet and used only for the purpose of writing a Master’s thesis and future professional presentations and/or professional publications. We also understand that once the research study is completed the data for our children will be destroyed. If there are any questions regarding this research project, Shu-Chen Tsai (513-664-8689) or Dr. Cheryl Burgan Evans (513-529-4125) may be contacted. If there are any questions regarding the rights of subjects we understand that we may contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship: 513-529-3734 or humansubjects@muohio.edu.

X________________________________________________
Parents’ Signatures

We understand this research project and consent to participate in it.

X________________________________________________
Children’s Signatures