

*Talent in every community: A glimpse into the world of parenting gifted children of color*

Across the globe, children and families from diverse communities are challenged by inequities in schooling that affect their present and their chances for future success. Education has often been touted as the great equalizer. Among the children who have limited access to equitable educational opportunities are those who have remarkable intellectual and academic gifts across multiple domains. Despite the needs that nations have to harness their intellectual potential, many gifted children from culturally diverse and poor backgrounds go underserved and thus, their talents undeveloped on a regular basis (Finn & Wright, 2015). These continued inequities in schools negatively affect achievement outcomes and life chances for millions of children & youth each day. Among those whose lives are affected by these tragic inequities are culturally diverse students who have demonstrated their ability to achieve and sustain success even in the midst of challenging circumstances. The under-representation of culturally diverse students in gifted programs is persistent and affects the future of an entire generation of highly capable children students, their families and communities (Ford, Grantham & Whiting, 2008; Morris, 2002).

Two myths underlie the systemic condition of underrepresentation of gifted children from diverse backgrounds. First there is the persistent and egregious myth that children of color and those who are poor are not equal in intelligence to the Anglo population and those whose wealth enables their access to high quality educational settings. Almost a century of research regarding giftedness in the Black communities and historical documents profiling gifted individuals throughout history across ethnic groups have borne out this simple truth (Davis, 2013).

The second myth is that parents and families of culturally diverse and low income communities are not as concerned about their children's education and future and do not have the same commitment to their children's future as those in the mainstream culture (i.e., whose children are usually more equitably identified and served) and thus, their children are not as successful in school. Research and first-hand accounts of familial norms and traditions of varied ethnic groups have documented intergenerational emphases on the value of education and how families engage with educational systems to ensure that their children have equitable opportunities even in the midst of poverty and other challenging life circumstances (Davis, 2010; Matthews & Castellano, 2014).

These are serious and detrimental stereotypes that need to be destroyed. The stories in this chapter will contribute to dispelling these myths by providing 'lively personal accounts' of the experiences of culturally diverse families from varied communities who are raising highly able/gifted children and youth or who have completed the task with outstanding facility and remarkable skill. In their own voice, these parents share how they experienced their children's unique behaviors in the context of the home and community from their infancy through young adulthood. Behaviors described in these vignettes align well with evidence-based descriptions of 'what it means to be gifted' (Clark, 2012).

Readers will discover parents' reactions to their childrens' unique capabilities demonstrated by their early and remarkable verbal skills, intense emotions, creativity, exceptional cognitive responses, focused attention on topics generally not of interest to their age peers, and how they gain expertise through practice, hard work, and their unusual resilience. The stories reflected here describe family attachment and cohesion, strong support systems, and social capital that have enabled them to do what others may see as nearly impossible, given the

often negative perceptions of families of color and those from limited income backgrounds. The families profiled here are among the groups who have suffered greatly in a society that remains unjust and inequitable in its treatment of ‘minority’ group persons.

The students featured have been identified as gifted by formal assessments by private psychologists or school personnel or, in some cases, by family members who have determined the child to be ‘gifted or exceptional’ based on their understanding of normal childhood behaviors. Families raising multiple gifted children have been able to verify a younger siblings’ potential giftedness based on comparisons with others within the family who have been formally identified.

### **Overview of the vignettes**

These vignettes were captured in a series of narratives written by family members in response to a national survey conducted in 2012-2014. The survey asked families of culturally diverse backgrounds (African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and low socio-economic groups) to share their experiences raising gifted learners. Responses were collected from families who completed the survey via social media and direct contact by the author.

The stories selected for inclusion in this chapter were from six families who consented to provide updated information of their children and those who reflected a sample representation of the initial respondents. Three families are African American, one Black family from the United Kingdom, one Hispanic American, and one Multiracial American. The first vignette is that of a Black family who lives in a rural community of Virginia. As an elementary student, the young Black male’s remarkable performance on a school spelling bee brought him to the attention of school district personnel who quickly invited the parent to complete paperwork for her son to be

evaluated for the gifted program. This same young man, however, soon experienced bullying by both his gifted program peers, who were Asian and White, and his social peers who were predominately Black. This young Black male excelled despite the challenges as he was constantly supported by a strong family circle who shared their own stories of struggle and success in varied discriminatory school settings over the generations.

The second family has experienced gifted education in the Midwest and now more recently in a more affluent district in the Northern Virginia. In this vignette, the mother shares insight into the distinct characteristics of a son who is very successful early on and later, begins to struggle with high academic content and does not pass an admissions test to an exclusive high school for gifted students in his region. Next is a family who come to the United States from Germany. They are now living in Southern Alabama, raising a brilliant, multiracial daughter identified as highly gifted, yet whose district failed to provide appropriately for her high intellectual potential. Without the parents' research and advocacy, this budding young genius would have floundered in a community burdened with vestiges of systemic discrimination.

The fourth story is from a young mother of limited income raising two children in the United Kingdom while she battles her own health issues. One of her children, is a boy identified as highly gifted is touted in the local media as having IQ higher than that of Einstein. This mother and her son also become victims of discrimination while she makes every effort to acquire the appropriate educational services for him. Next, the family of two highly gifted females shares their remarkable experiences with acceleration and early college entry in two of the United States more distinguished universities. Both of these gifted young women suffered as a result of the rigor and highly competitive world of the Ivy League coupled with their constant need to prove themselves worthy of their intellect and access to the best education possible in the

United States. And finally, a Hispanic family in California raises and educates five gifted children with the brilliant and persistent advocacy of the mother who eventually moves from her role as advocate to running for a seat on the local school board. She tells of how her role as a community advocate has been beneficial not only to her own family, but to other Hispanic families as well. Table I provides a summary of family demographics.

Insert Table I about here

In these stories, the reader will come to know how some of the ingenious strategies families use to nurture independence while raising introverts and extroverts in the same household; how they teach race, the value of culture and family traditions to their children; and the sacrifices they make to ensure that their children have access to the most academically rigorous programs available. In a concluding ‘lessons learned’ section, an analysis of themes generated will be shared from the personal narratives written by the parents. Recommendations for further research and considerations for school practice are also provided.

### **A glimpse into the invisible but remarkable world of raising gifted children of color**

#### ***Vignette #1-Berry Fletcher family***

*During the third month of my pregnancy, I began reading at least an hour a day to my budding intellectual. We listened to Mozart and I explained everything from Noah Ark’s to Spanish verb conjugation. By eight months, it seemed this bundle of joy was anxious and excited as he’d swirl and kick most defiantly when I hesitated to turn the page. What a moment! I knew then he’d surpass the dreams I could ever imagine for him if I could manage to nurture his thirst for learning.*

*Devin attended a small, private Christian school during pre-kindergarten and by first*

*grade, he was writing in cursive and reading on a second grade level. While we were encouraged to accelerate him we feared that emotionally it would be difficult. He flourished in that environment. By fourth grade we moved and decided it was time for public school. Devin entered the county spelling bee as a first time participant and won first place, 4th grade level. The following day he was sent home with an envelope marked TAG (Talented and Gifted). While we applauded the administration's swift recognition of our son's potential, the challenges began as he was clustered with predominately White and Asian classmates who scoffed at the idea that he could be gifted. My family and church prayed with and for Devin as he remained ambitious and jovial. Aunts and uncles encouraged him and shared their stories of trial and triumphs from integrating school during segregation to discriminating experiences in the workplace. As a village, we were molding my youngster to overcome.*

*There were times when he struggled with fitting in. It began with disruptive classroom behavior in electives where he had friends, to acting out on the school bus to prove he was a "bad boy". He shared his feelings of being ostracized by other Black students for being in classes with mostly Whites and Asians. He also explained the contempt the non-Black students openly discussed about him sharing their "clique". Clearly there was an internal conflict. He wanted to fit in with those who were teasing him about "acting white" by being disrespectful to teachers. On the other hand he was adamant to stand his academic ground in core classes with the other ethnicities as his entitlement to rigorous opportunity.*

*Devin took the SAT twice, scoring over 1200 on his second attempt at perfection. He enjoys courses at the Math and Science Innovation Center and summers at the Governor's School studying Lego Robotics and engineering. I should mention his sense of humor is mildly eccentric as it seems gifted children always say the unexpected and unimaginable. Devin is also a member of the High School Varsity football team. He is a linebacker and running back who is just as committed to his getting his homework done as he is to attending practices. As a descendant of the Masai Tribe of the Cameroon, a central African nation on the Gulf of Guinea and also having ancestral ties to the Kru People of Liberia, a lush rain forested country, Devin is my gifted warrior with an inquisitive nature and boundless opportunities.*

**Update:** Recently, Devin worked with the Governor's Youth Development Academy as a

mentor. He will be graduating in June 2016 from the Chesapeake Bay Governor's School for Gifted Students. He has applied to North Carolina Central and Old Dominion University with anticipation of admission. He plans to study civil engineering.

### ***Vignette #2 Coffman Family***

*My son Noah began talking and singing around the age of two. From a very young age he was able to communicate orally and we did not necessarily think he was gifted at that time, but thought it was unusual that he was so verbal and articulate at that young age. Folks typically expect girls to be more articulate, but we and our family and friends were also surprised and pleased to discover Noah's acumen for oral communication. Noah loves sports and music. He is at his happiest when playing basketball, skateboarding, singing, dancing or playing an instrument.*

*Noah was formally identified by the school district. He was tested for the first time in 1<sup>st</sup> grade (the earliest time available in our then school system Metropolitan School District of Pike Township, Indianapolis, Indiana) and his test results were high enough for him to be enrolled in a self-contained gifted program in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. In middle school, he participated in the self-contained program known as the Advanced Academic Program Level IV. The AAP Level IV program for students in grades 3 through 8 offers identified students a highly challenging instructional program that follows the district Program of Studies.*

*Noah is an only child. He is very comfortable around adults and has a great appreciation and enjoyment for joining in when adults are conversing about politics, music, pop culture, life, etc. He can be very precocious but also very age appropriate at the same time. I wish I had a dollar for every time a family member or friend said [I forget sometimes that he is only – fill in the blank]. He can be very mature in his thought process, world view and ability to reason and problem solve, but then he can be very much a kid.*

*Parenting a gifted child means that you always have to 'bring your A game'. A lot of who you are is related to what you know. I like that my kid knows both Tupac and Basquiat, Shakespeare and Salinger. I also like that smart is not a bad word, nor is it something to use against someone. The fact that my kid is smart is just one of the cool things about him, not the only thing.*

**Update:** Noah is now a sophomore. He is pursuing the International Baccalaureate diploma and is also taking honors English, math, history and chemistry. As an eighth grader, Noah took the admissions test for entry at Thomas Jefferson Science and Technology High School in Alexandria (a regional Governor's School for the gifted). He did not score high enough on the test to be considered. His high school career has brought his first academic challenges. In high school, he has experienced failing grades and is now having to learn more how to work harder and receive support to help him develop his potential. We are blessed to be in a school district (Fairfax County, Virginia) with incredible student support resources and teacher engagement.

### ***Vignette #3 Robinson Family***

*We are a multicultural family living in L.A. (Lower Alabama). We do not blend in easily. We know it, and we are more than ok with it. I am a German citizen who legally immigrated to the United States 15 years ago, and my husband is a U.S. citizen who is Black - which makes our precious daughters what some people call "mixed", "multi-racial", "bi-racial", or "multicultural". We call our daughters tender-hearted, caring, compassionate, sweet, sensitive, spirited, bright, and sometimes a pain in the rear end.*

*Both my husband and I also had made it a habit to read to Vanessa before bedtime and, after a while, she would read to us. By the time she entered Kindergarten, not only had she greatly improved her English, she was also able to write and read. This caught the attention of her teacher. She suggested having my daughter tested, so that she could participate in the pull-out program for gifted/talented students starting in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. At this point, I had no idea what "gifted" or "gifted program" meant since at that time, there was no such thing at German schools. After I received the results of her testing, I educated myself about what a score like hers really meant. I learned about the challenges and emotional needs of profoundly gifted children, the rights of gifted children, in general, educational recommendations and options for this group of children, and about Gifted Education Policies in Alabama and other states.*

*1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades were pretty uneventful. When I asked her 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher what could be done for her in terms of accelerated instruction and advanced materials, she told me that my*

*daughter could bring her own books to school to read and study, but other than, that she would have to give the majority of her time to the kids that were behind or struggling to keep up. Vanessa was often “put to work” by teachers helping and tutoring her classmates in the classroom. The pull-out program starting in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade was good, but did not have that much of an impact since it was only 1½ hrs. per week.*

*By mid-3<sup>rd</sup> grade, I noticed that Vanessa was getting more and more depressed. She also complained a lot about being bored at school. I shared my concerns with the Gifted Coordinator who suggested administering the WIAT (Wechsler Individual Achievement Test) to assist in developing her Gifted Education Plan for the upcoming school year. Contrary to his and other teacher’s predictions that all kids’ abilities will even out by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, Vanessa scored even slightly higher on the WIAT than on the Stanford-Binet, scoring overall in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile. The examiner who administered the WIAT concluded that our daughter was academically read to handle material beyond her present grade level. Armed with the recommendation of the examiners, I requested a meeting with the principal, my daughter’s homeroom teacher and the Gifted Coordinator, hoping to hear suggestions about how to implement the recommendations.*

*I was worried about her and became more and more frustrated by all the resistance I encountered from school officials. I honestly, to this date, don’t know why it was so impossible for our local school to accommodate her. People and friends who had successfully advocated for their children in other matters advised me to bring my husband or any man, basically, to the meetings, preferably a man in uniform. Others speculated if the school’s reluctance had something to do with the fact that my daughter was of mixed race. I simply refused to believe that any of this had something to do with it, after all, this was the 21<sup>st</sup> century, right?*

*Throughout the whole process, I felt that I should not have to ASK the school for a favor. Instead, I felt that it was my daughter’s right to receive an adequate education that would challenge her and enable her to progress. I short, I didn’t ask, I REQUESTED. I fought back and acted on my firm belief that EVERY child has a right to an education that is commensurate with his or her abilities.*

**Update:** So where is she now? As far away from the South as possible. No, seriously. Right now, she is in Kyoto, at Doshisha University, Amherst’s sister institution in Japan. Vanessa is a

sophomore at Amherst College, Massachusetts, and she is currently participating in a semester study abroad program. Her final college choices came down to Duke University or Amherst College, and with North Carolina still being considered a southern state, Amherst College won. Well, this was one important reason why Amherst College won. The other reasons were an extremely generous financial aid package and the prospect of breathing liberal air. Vanessa loves, loves living in New England. And I love hopping on a plane and visiting her as many times as I can. As for my daughter, along with being a full-time student at Amherst College majoring in Music and Linguistics, she is working part-time at a local tea house and was just being promoted to supervisor. For the past two years, she has been successfully juggling a full course load and her part-time job, even finding enough energy to also squeeze in some extracurricular activities like playing Ultimate and dancing (DASAC; Dancing & Stepping at Amherst College). And since she refuses to return to the South even for just a visit, I'll be happy to catch up with her and explore new exciting corners of the US wherever it takes her.

#### ***Vignette #4 – Wilfred Family***

*My son Ramarni has been recognized across the UK as having a measured IQ higher than that of Einstein. Because of this status, news media wrote a number of stories about him, this is how his story begins:*

*Age 2-4 years - Ramarni's nursery school teachers recognized his remarkable speaking, reading, writing and communication skills. He was added to the school and education department's Gifted and Talented register. Age 4 - On entry to infants school, school staff suggested Ramarni be put into the class one year ahead as he's academic ability was well beyond that of his peers but I felt it better for his social development to remain with pupils his own age as he had a tendency to be quite introvert. He continued to receive extra activities to enrich his learning and his social skills also excelled.*

*Age 9 – Ramarni was selected by his teachers to take part in The Brilliant Club (TBC) for gifted children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Age 10 – Ramarni was graded a 2:1 on an essay set by TBC and which led to a very encouraging mock graduation ceremony at Oxford University. He left elementary/primary school 2yrs ahead on the curriculum. Age 11 –*

*Secondary school so far has been very disappointing. His current school is very unsupportive and uninterested in his ability and do not have any provision for more able/gifted students. Their main focus is on sporting ability. Because of this, in April 2014, in an attempt by me to expand his "personal enrichment programme," Ramarni completed the official supervised MENSA IQ test at Birkbeck University in London (booked and paid for by myself) scoring the highest possible IQ of 162 placing him in the top 1% of the UK population of those tested. He was ultimately invited to join Mensa and now enjoys attending interest groups and events exclusive to Mensa members and has full access to their website.*

*On May 9th 2014, following media interest in my son's Mensa achievement, I emailed the headmaster of his current school to inform him of Ramarni's Mensa IQ score and the subsequent media interest believing the school would be proud of him. I never received a reply. There have been a lot of problems with this school.*

*As a lone parent on low income and battling with a long term illness, my current circumstances mean that I am not able to acquire the high caliber education of which my son is in desperate need. I feel I am doing Ramarni a terrible injustice by leaving him in his current school and am planning to withdraw him in 2015 on condition that a private school offers him a scholarship. Ramarni is 1 of only 2 black children in his school year group. I have been informed by a former staff member that this is likely to have contributed to Ramarni being ignored. I am continually developing Ramarni's personal enrichment programme.*

**Update:** In February 2015, Ramarni accepted a life-changing academic scholarship to continue the next 5 years of his education at Wellington College in Berkshire, known as one of the UK's, if not the world's, finest co-educational private boarding schools. Since September 2015, he has been enjoying experiencing many new activities for the very first time. Activities that I have not been in the financial position to be able to offer him previously. He has welcomed the rigorous and challenging curriculum offered by the college including 'mindfulness' and 'well-being' and the vast array of extra-curricular activities, from creative writing society to learning to fly an aero plane in Air Cadets. He settled well and very quickly into his boarding house and new surroundings. Well aware of the exceptional opportunity that has been afforded to him at WC and the splendid and privileged surroundings in which he now lives and learns, he is making the

most of every moment there. He now studies in class sizes of 8-14 (rather than the previous 30-40 at his old school) with pupils of similar ability to himself and has daily 1-2-1 coaching from his tutor to develop his 'whole self'. He is finally getting the attention he deserves and the academic stretch he needs to reach his true and full potential. I am incredibly happy with the pastoral care and the outstanding teaching he now receives and words cannot begin to express how extraordinarily proud I am of the man my baby boy, Ramarni, is becoming.

### ***Vignette # 5- Fears Family***

*My oldest daughter, Iman, is a senior at Columbia. She is a creative writing major. She has been recognized as one of the best creative writing majors in her class. She is encouraged and supported by the professors in her Creative Writing Department. She has also been molded by the Kluge Scholars which is an exclusive program at Columbia. Only 10% of the students are invited to participate. The Kluge Scholars programs gives students like Iman the extra money, support, mentoring, and other supports necessary to be a successful fine arts major.*

*Iman wants to be a college professor and teach creative writing. She is applying to MFA programs. She also had a successful internship this summer with an international advertising company as a media buyer. She has been promised fulltime employment as a media buyer when she graduates.*

*She has matured nicely. She just turned 21 years and everything is falling in place. She has learned to manage her anxiety. She still has low self-esteem sometimes from being bullied in elementary and middle school however her sense of self improves as she sees how literary and advertising professionals value her work and point of view.*

*Delmar is my youngest. She left high school at the end of her junior year. She was a few credits shy. If the school had chosen to work with her she could have graduated. However they dismissed the high school courses she completed in middle school, such as algebra I and geometry, and 3 credit hours she earned from the University of Maryland during the summer between her sophomore and junior year. The school wanted Delly to do it their way and stay for senior year. After attending University of Maryland for the summer, she fell in love with college. She loved the freedom. So she decided with our*

*support to apply for college admission.*

*Delly set her mind on Cornell because she wanted to study agriculture, agribusiness, and food equity. Cornell is the only college that has this unique combination of fields. She applied early decision and got it. We were surprised by her schools' reaction. Instead of being pleased for her it was more like- how dare you jump out of your place? was their response.*

*We moved on. We had our own graduation ceremony for her and pictures. During the summer, she buried herself in the Alliance Theater as an actor in social justice plays. She also worked in a community garden. Delly started Cornell in August. She is so happy there. She was just accepted to being a representative to the student government this year. She is taking Arabic and reveling in her African studies classes. She does not miss high school at all.*

*Delly is well adjusted. She has anxiety like her sister. We caught it early and helped her learn how to manage it. She is using the extensive supports Cornell has to maintain a balance. So far she is doing a great job. She has a peer group of her equals. She has many extracurricular options. She is finding her place at Cornell. Because Cornell is my alma mater it has given me a chance to reconnect with it.*

*Iman, Delly, and I all left high school at 16 years of age. Delly and I left high school because we wanted the bigger pond. Iman left because she skipped 2nd grade. As gifted teens, both of the girls suffered from anxiety and depression as many of their peers did. Iman was also bullied and that contributed to her anxiety. The difference for my girls is that I recognized the symptoms, worked with them, gave them freedom to make some of their own choices and ensured that the universities provided the supports they need to be balanced, challenged and have numerous creative outlets.*

### ***Vignette #6- Medina family***

*{At the time of the interview in the fall of 2012, the five Medina children had all been identified as gifted, one as Twice Exceptional/2E}*

*When they were all young, people would literally come and pray for my kids...others thought they were 'little aliens'. They did not sleep much. My grandparents thought that*

*something was wrong with my oldest daughter. She is very emotional, cried easily, they suggested that she should take something for anxiety. Before K they were always physically astute, with muscular bodies, would do arm push-ups, pull-ups, road bikes at 4 yrs. old. I didn't know how to really develop their academic skills, so I didn't do it consistently, but I did read to them all.*

*I found out about testing for the gifted program when the school district sent forms home for my children to be tested along with others in grades 2, 4, and 9. The girls passed the test the first time around. I received a response in the mail. I didn't understand what the 99<sup>th</sup>ile meant. I asked the principal, who told me about options for high performing gifted students. However, the school did not encourage me to send my children to the magnet school and take advantage of the other options.*

*My oldest son had the ability to write but did not pass it the first time. He's twice-exceptional, has a 504 plan. His grades, performance was inconsistent. Teachers mentioned that he was 'all over the place' in the classrooms. Psychologist told me that he had a high IQ, with my advocacy work—he was identified in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. It would not have happened if I left it with the school personnel...actually they would have retained him. My middle son in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, curious and wanting to touch things...did not pass the test (here the percentile has to be 98 or 99%). Later, I made a decision to switch my children to the magnet school. There, they were more engaged and focused on their work.*

*I began reading materials about gifted education and became a strong advocate. Financially, however it was difficult to provide for our children all of the enrichment experiences they needed. We see many opportunities but it's expensive!! Even SAT preparation, for those of us who are trying to get our kids to the next level, the expense is too much. Where are the Summer Enrichment programs for poverty kids?*

*I would advise parents to trying to look for what's available for them and become an advocate. Get involved in the schools. Don't be afraid to transfer your children to another school especially if they believe their child is bright. I would educate the principal and teachers who don't know what gifted is (I sent them articles about gifted education). Ask the principal if the teacher is GATE certified. Don't be afraid to approach the schools and let them know what you think is best for your children.*

**Update:** Monique Stephany, my oldest, is in her second year at California State in San Bernardino, majoring in Mathematics. She almost didn't make it due to her low GPA, but was given the opportunity and is now doing great, much better than in high school. She has always been highly emotional, but that has been a great benefit for others. She tends to be quiet, but when others are treated unjustly, she defends them ruthlessly, standing tall. In high school, she played volleyball.

Jesus Alex, who just turned 18 is in his first year at California State majoring in Computer Science Engineering. He received a full ride to college entering with a 3.5 GPA. During his spare time, he worked on a Congressional race in our community. Jesus struggled in elementary and middle school and was almost kicked out of the magnet school. He is twice exceptional and at one point was placed in Special Education support class for one period a day, but I advocated for him to take Honors and College prep courses. With extra support from his teachers, he was successful. Jesus did not participate in sports because he did not want to lose focus. At home, he continues to build and create all kinds of functional devices (cell phone stand, skateboard boxes and racks). He is developing into a very successful entrepreneur.

My next son is 16 year old Samuel MichaelAngelo, currently in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. He is actually very articulate and speaks better than all of us. Samuel is the thinker who analyzes everything. In middle school, he suffered from bullying by other students (for being a thinker), as a result he became very isolated. He joined a Tutors club and is now president. He is a writer and artist. He is also an active Triathlon athlete (swimmer; bicyclist and runner). He is interested in majoring in Bio Medical Engineering.

Abigail Yarlette is 14 in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. If you tell her she can't do it, she will meet your challenge and beat it! She is the type of person who will do it all if she could. In middle school, she was in the Honors Chorus, Jazz band, track and field, cross country, Advanced County Orchestra (she plays the cello), Black History bee, Soccer and Triathlons. She kept us super busy. Her goal is to go to Stanford University and become a pediatrician, although she would make a great attorney (try to beat her at debate, it is tough).

Finally, there is Christian Hector, who is 11, but we think he's 12. He's in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Christian is very artistic, he has always been admired for his work in three-dimensional paper

projects. Once he created a basketball court with a basketball player that could make a shot into the hoop with a small paper ball. He currently struggles with kids who make fun of him, but he is starting to be creative and pretend to be a superman and not care what others say. He was in the GATE magnet school for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He's always been the youngest in his class. He wants to major in engineering and create robots and machines that will benefit our community. Like his siblings, he is also a triathlete, but doesn't care about winning. He sets goals to accomplish and has fun doing it.

### **Lessons Learned**

A review of the vignettes reveals a few common lessons that other families, educators, researchers and policymakers can learn from. While these ideas are important, some have already been revealed and explicated as important to the education of gifted children, in general. What is unique is that these lessons originate from the daily life experiences of families of color whose stories are too often ignored. The lessons noted here are listed in no particular order of importance, all are of equal importance and value:

- *Gifted children of color are bullied frequently for being different, for being designated as not fitting in, for not belonging. This bullying leads to isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety, and in some cases, to underachievement. Schools must recognize these conditions and actively seek solutions by engaging the students, their families, counselors and other stakeholders in development of safe haven environments for gifted children of color*
- *Overt and deliberate discrimination against gifted children of color continues to be a barrier to accessing services and to be ignored by school administration responsible for ensuring equity in public education*
- *Gifted children of color, like most gifted children demonstrate the same high intensity, high sensitivity, high energy traits at an early age that sets them apart from their age peers*

- *Pullout programs and other part-time methods of service delivery are inefficient and do not adequately provide for the intense, academic focused instruction needed by gifted children from ALL backgrounds*
- *Parents of color recognize remarkable behaviors in their children and like other parents, know their children best. They will become engaged and advocate for optimal services when they are fully informed of school procedures and available services OR they will seek information on their own*
- *Gifted children of color have the capacity to excel in multiple domains simultaneously*
- *No-cost or low cost alternatives to part-time gifted programs must be made accessible to all gifted children to maximize their potential (full day residential and non-residential schools, acceleration, early college, test preparation, enrichment programs)*
- *Parents of culturally diverse backgrounds can be positive and effective allies with gifted education personnel if their experiences and viewpoints are valued and they become directly involved in creating comprehensive programs for gifted children of color.*

## Summary

This chapter is but a brief treatise of the lives and experiences of families of color raising gifted children in today's society. The six families represented have shared unique and quite remarkable day to day experiences facing a world that all too often disregards the capabilities of their children. As people of color they have not been judiciously included in the conversations about what is best for gifted children. Their voices have not been heard, their experience

therefore has been invisible. The aim of this chapter was to reveal how their children fit and deserve access to a monopolized world that has created a false construct that equates affluence and privilege with high intelligence.

The high IQs, uniquely creativity, high energy, renaissance-like behaviors of the students in these stories demonstrate that they too have a right to what our global society has constructed as efforts to educate our brightest minds. Leaving this group of children out is a massive and unethical waste of human intelligence and innovation. Globally, there is no dearth of high intelligence, creativity and talent. Giftedness knows no boundaries of neighborhood, income, ethnic or cultural group. In every community, there is potential for bright minds to exist, for innovative solutions to every problem that plagues the human condition. It is the responsibility of educators, advocates, politicians, and communities to work together to draw attention to the capacity for universal talent and excise every barrier, eliminate all systemic discriminations to begin the long and arduous, but not impossible task of talent development for the benefit of all.

## References

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*Table I. Summary of Family Demographics*

<i>Vignette #</i>	<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Family Type</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Geographic Location</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Single Parent</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Rural Virginia</i>
<i>2</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Two Parent</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Indiana and Northern VA</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Two parent</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Lower Alabama</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>Single Parent</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Two parent</i>	<i>Two females</i>	<i>Indiana and Atlanta, GA</i>
<i>6</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Two parent</i>	<i>5 children (2 females, 3 males)</i>	<i>California</i>

*Ethnic group codes: A-African American; B-Hispanic; C-Black/United Kingdom; D-Multiracial*