

EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESSFUL GIFTED AND TALENTED IMMIGRANT STUDENTS  
IN AN INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMME

by

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(Under the Direction of Bonnie Cramond)

ABSTRACT

This case study explores the background and experiences of gifted and talented immigrant students who were successful in an International Baccalaureate Programme. Immigrant students often have the potential for bilingualism and high achievement. They face barriers to advanced educational opportunities when educators view them from a deficit perspective based on language, poverty, or lack of cultural capital. If educators view immigrant students through a proficiency lens that illuminates their potential strengths and provide access to and support for advanced high school programs, immigrant students have increased opportunities for high achievement. The purpose of this study is to better understand the background and experiences of gifted and talented immigrant students within an International Baccalaureate Programme and to consider implications for educators so they can better address their strengths and needs. Research questions that pertain to this overall focus included: How do gifted and talented immigrant students who participated in the IB Programme describe their experiences? What were the cultural and contextual aspects of the students' experiences? What elements of the IB Programme addressed the strengths and needs of gifted and talented immigrant students?

Research methods included three semi-structured interviews of immigrant students, a teacher focus group discussion, and a document analysis. The data was analyzed and presented in a detailed description of the context of the IB Programme and in three immigrant student narratives. Cross-case analysis yielded intersecting themes about the immigrant students' experiences: the importance of native language development; the need to learn English and a sense of shame about not knowing English; the impact of parent sacrifice; the inability of immigrant parents to be involved in school; the significance of peer and teacher relationships, and the power of work ethic and motivation. Implications for educators include preparation, support, and access for immigrant students to advanced high school programs; creating opportunities for students to develop their native language; and structuring enrichment, teambuilding, and advisement experiences to involve parents and support immigrant students.

**INDEX WORDS:** Immigrant students, International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, native language, gifted and talented, English language learners

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## DEDICATION

To my husband, Skip –

*While one is yet only in love,*

*The real person lies covered with the rose leaves of a thousand sleepy-eyed dreams*

*And through them come to the dreamer but the barest hints of the real person.*

*A thousand fancies fly out, approach and cross, but never meet.*

*The man and the woman are pleased, not with each other, but each with the fancied other...*

*The real man, the real woman, is all the time asleep under the rose leaves.*

*Happy is the rare fate of the true . . .*

*To wake and come forth and meet in the majesty of the truth, in the image of God, in their very*

*being, in the power of that love which alone is being!*

*They love, not this and that about each other, but each the very other.*

*Where such love is, let the differences of taste, the unfitness of temperament, be what they may,*

*the two must by and by be thoroughly one.*

- George MacDonald

Thank you for believing in me. I love you.

To my mother and Scot,

Mom, you taught me to read when I was 3 years old, to love books and poetry and imagination. You were both mother and father to me in my childhood, until now as an adult, when I have a father in Scot. Both of you have encouraged me for the last 4 ½ years, listening to my ideas, and never doubting for a moment that I would accomplish this goal. Thank you.

My entire life you've been "dropping the dishes" and celebrating my shining moments.

You wrote:

Choose to care about others

Because you believe in yourself and in your ability to serve.

In the sharing of ourselves we create our happiness.

For what are we to do with this one life

If not to contribute the unique gift that is ours alone?

Thank you for living this poem all my life.

Thank you, Scot, for your wisdom, kindness, and love.

I love you both.

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Dr. Sally Krisel is my dear friend and mentor who shared her office, experiences, and heart for gifted children. Dr. Brad Brown stopped by almost every day, relentlessly holding me accountable to actually writing this dissertation. Dr. Anna Sargent alternately felt my pain or celebrated each milestone and was an endless source of encouragement. Dr. Kristy Kowalske helped me more than she knew. Dr. Buddy Fisch offered key insights that helped to shape my dissertation. I am grateful to many dear friends – Shawn, Helen, Kathy, Michele, Leigh, Sally, Anna, and Jennifer – who listened, encouraged, and understood when I was utterly consumed with this study.

My family loved me through this. My brothers and sister even spent a vacation letting me write (thank you, Glenn, Laura, Meg, and Bill!). It is from my mom that I learned to read, write, and seek to understand, and I somehow have the good fortune to have the most brilliant and



loving (albeit idiosyncratic) family in the world, even, after so many years, a real father. My husband always claims that my sister and I share a soul – if that is at all true, then I am the most blessed of all people. My children, their spouses, and my grandchildren hold my heart. I love you, Walter, Daniel, and Rachel; Emily, Luckie, and Mike; Henry, Parker, and Rhyse. My husband could write a book about how to support, love, and believe in your wife – I love you.

I was fortunate to have a mentor in Dr. Jackie Adams who had faith in our students, our teachers, and for some reason, in me. A. Bronson Alcott believed that children “entered this life imbued with inherent wisdom and insight, and that all that was necessary to summon these to consciousness was to appeal to each child with respect, trust, and affection” (Howell, 1991). This study would never have happened without the courage and commitment of a group of administrators, teachers, and students who lived this out and believed they could do almost anything. The most meaningful times in my teaching career occurred alongside them. My IB students shared and continue to share their wisdom, insight and beauty with me. I am grateful for their friendship.

Hey Rach – let’s go to New York.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2008, I wrote hastily on the board between classes as the quick moments ticked by before my gifted advisement class. Loud students bounced into the bright room, its ceiling plastered in bright tessellation art, a sort of friendly chaos in the bookshelves and pictures about. For what seemed like the hundredth time, Erick slipped discretely into my room, standing out from the other students with his black hair and brown skin, and asking again if he could get into this advisement and how he could be a part of the International Baccalaureate Programme we would start in the fall. I had a myriad of things to do and my own gifted advisement students to speak with, and my thoughts were doubtful. As one of my honors geometry students, he had demonstrated neither a determined work ethic nor particular mathematical insight. But Erick never wavered. From the very beginning he wanted to be a part of IB, unquestionably. I remembered his face, the hopeful look in his eyes, and how in the end, I did not have the heart to tell someone so sure of his decision that he could not be in the program. Seven years later, he stands before me as a college graduate of a major university. He, along with his thirty-two fellow-students, changed what I believed about student potential.

### **Rationale**

When I began my journey as a doctoral student, a colleague suggested I choose something to study that would never lose my interest, something I was passionate about, even something that I loved. My first thought turned to this audacious group of high school students who bravely set forth as the first IB students in our inaugural year of implementing the

International Baccalaureate Programme. These thirty-three students included those in my gifted advisement class, along with students having a low socio-economic status and/or from diverse backgrounds, among them many native speakers of Spanish and ten students who were children of immigrant parents. Fourteen students went on to earn the IB Diploma, but the equally compelling success stories were those who did not necessarily earn the diploma, but who grew into scholars and leaders. For two years, we laughed and cried and learned and grew. I was a part of their stories, and they were a part of mine.

Since 1970, the number of immigrant children in American schools has tripled, and now over 20% of students in United States schools are from immigrant families. More than five million students are considered English Language Learners (ELL), and almost 80% of them are native speakers of Spanish (Salomone, 2010). Thirty years ago, concern over Latin American immigration grew as the achievement gap between Hispanic and White students increased, and as the idea of bilingual education became a threat to the English Only movement. The 2002 No Child Left Behind Act required schools to demonstrate test score proficiency in English reading and writing, and the few bilingual educational opportunities became largely replaced by an emphasis on English support, with students mainstreamed into classes taught only in English (Salomone, 2010). Gifted and talented immigrant students were no doubt present in this group, but they, too, encountered a system that insisted they put aside their native language and devote time to learning English. Although it is necessary to learn English for American schooling, the ELL label can result in students being placed in low-level classes (Callahan, 2005).

Immigrant students encounter other barriers to pursuing higher levels of education. Currently, immigrant students represent a diverse population of families who have varied educational backgrounds. Although some immigrant parents may have high levels of education,

when they do not, they may be extremely uneducated, with 40% who have not graduated from high school and 24% who have completed eight years of education or less (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2009). This can result in parents who not only do not have the background knowledge to navigate higher education, but also do not know how to advocate for their children's K-12 education or to work with their teachers and schools (Gándara, 2005).

Poverty presents another challenge, as poverty rates for immigrant families from Mexico and other countries that have large immigrant populations are three to four times greater than for Whites. Students in poor families often lack appropriate housing, food, childcare, healthcare, or access to early education programs, which results in a negative influence on students' achievement in schools. A large number of immigrants have limited English skills (Hernandez et al., 2009; Holdaway, Crul, & Roberts, 2009). This not only slows academic achievement, but also exacerbates the cultural divide between school and home.

As immigrant students move through the educational system, most are hardly prepared for advanced high school programs, and they are largely absent from Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate opportunities. Garcia, Kleifgen, & Falchi (2008) described revealing statistics about ELL/Bilingual students' underrepresentation in advanced high school programs where 1.4 % of ELL students participated in gifted and talented programs, and only 0.8% of them went on to enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) math or science. Their notable absence from advanced college preparatory programs may be a natural result at least in part of their deficit status as ELL students and their resulting limited K-12 educational opportunities (Crul & Holdaway, 2009; Gibson, Carrasco, Pamies, Ponferrada, & Rios-Rojas, 2013).

Immigrant students, like children with economically disadvantaged and/or limited English proficiency status, demonstrate potential for giftedness in different ways that are difficult



for teachers to recognize without an understanding of their culture and background (Frasier et al., 1995). Bilingualism, in particular, can be an indicator of unique cognitive abilities (Matthews & Matthews, 2004; Priven, 2010). Areepattamannil and Freeman (2008) found that when compared to non-immigrant students, immigrant students had higher intrinsic motivation. Additionally, although parents may be uneducated or uninformed about educational options, their work ethic and support of education may inspire their children to improve their way of life (Holdaway et al., 2009; Hernandez et al., 2009). Gifted immigrant students have talents that need to be developed but require teachers who can recognize this potential and provide access to advanced learning opportunities.

The majority of immigrant students, instead, are tracked into English learning classes and mainstreamed into lower level academic classes taught only in English (Garcia et al., 2008). Kanno and Kangas (2014) found that students who were not native speakers of English moved from ELL courses to remedial courses. The students were tracked from one type of remediation based on language acquisition to another remedial level of learning because of the loss of years where their English-speaking peers were developing higher academic skills. Callahan (2005) examined the tracking of students who were learning English and similarly found that they were consistently left out of college-preparatory classes and were instead placed in low-level courses (p. 321). She contended that a deficiency view of students based on language caused them to be tracked into courses of study that aimed to teach English rather than to develop the critical thinking skills needed for higher education opportunities.

Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2011) called for “a research agenda that focuses on two central variables associated with the development of talent: opportunity and motivation” (p. 34). Noting that previous research focused on issues that interfere with

achievement, Subotnik et al. (2011) suggested that more research is needed that explores what works to enhance students' ability to achieve at high levels (p. 40). They outlined important research questions that included:

- How do students maintain commitment and motivation during the difficult times that inevitably arise during the talent-development process?
  - Are there identifiable common or typical critical experiences within various talent-development trajectories?
  - What is the nature of these experiences (e.g., opportunities to do significant, investigative work on a problem; mentoring by an adult professional)?
  - What are their common and/or essential features or elements (e.g., contact with a caring adult who pushes a student forward, deep intellectual engagement, experiences with content that are personally meaningful)?
- (p. 36-37)

Grantham (2012) cautioned against an emphasis on highly motivated students with high opportunity who achieve eminence as adults without a continued focus on equity and access. He cautioned that researchers guard against an eminence model becoming “a new way of segregating highly motivated, high opportunity students from low-opportunity, underrepresented students” (p. 219). A case study that explores the experiences of successful gifted and talented immigrant students in an International Baccalaureate Programme may address the questions proposed by Subotnik et al. while also focusing on a population often underrepresented in gifted and advanced programs. What were the critical experiences that shaped their educational journey as gifted and talented immigrant students, and what components of their educational experience provided opportunity and support for their success?

The purpose of my research was to better understand the background and experiences of successful gifted and talented immigrant students within an International Baccalaureate Programme and to consider implications for educators so they can better address their strengths and needs. Research questions that pertain to this overall focus included:

- How do gifted and talented immigrant students who were successful in the Lakeshore IB Programme describe their experiences?
- What were the cultural and contextual aspects of the students' experiences?
- What elements of the Lakeshore IB Programme addressed the strengths and needs of gifted and talented immigrant students?

I investigated the research questions in partnership with both the IB teachers and selected gifted and talented immigrant students who were successful in the Lakeshore IB Programme and who earned the IB Diploma. Together we conducted a case study of their experiences in the context of the IB Programme that offers new insights into what happens when high opportunity and high motivation coincide with equity and access.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

As the November 2016 presidential candidates campaign for votes, immigration reform has become a volatile topic. Some call for extreme measures such as renouncing birthright citizenship and deporting immigrant families (Braun, 2015), while others call immigration an “act of love” (O’Keefe, 2014). The controversy rages on, but public school districts are mandated to educate the children that enroll in their schools, regardless of their origins, and teachers work to prepare students for the future. Since 1970, the number of immigrant children in American schools has tripled, and currently over 20% of students in United States schools are from immigrant families. Children from immigrant families are the most rapidly growing group of children in the United States, increasing by 8.1 million from 1990 – 2007. Over 85% of these students are citizens, and more than half of these children are Hispanic (Fortuny, Capps, Simms, Chaudry, & Urban, 2009). More than five million students are considered English Language Learners (ELL), and the majority are native speakers of Spanish (Salomone, 2010). This review examines the current research about immigrant students in the United States: their challenges and potential strengths; what types of educational opportunities they typically encounter; and how those with potential giftedness, access, and support might succeed in advanced high school programs such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate in American schools.

#### **Who are Immigrant Students?**

To describe the children of immigrants, one must begin with a description of what it means to be an immigrant. Erisman and Looney (2007) defined an immigrant as someone who

comes to the United States with a plan to remain here, who may enter the country legally as a permanent resident or foreign national, or who may enter illegally (p. 9). Holdaway and Alba (2009) described children from immigrant families as those who are raised in a household where one or both parents are immigrants, and where the child may also be an immigrant (p. 600). Children of immigrants may include those who are brought with their immigrant parents as well as those who are born to immigrant families after their parents enter the United States.

According to U.S. Census figures from 2010, the foreign born population made up 13% of the total U.S. population and was more likely to have families and children under 18 than the rest of the population (Motel, 2013). Camarota (2012) reported that there are “10.4 million students from immigrant households in public schools, and...78% speak a language other than English at home” (p. 3). This group is growing so rapidly that based on current trends, researchers Garcia and Cuellar (2006) predicted that white students will become the minority while the population of immigrant students who do not speak fluent English will grow.

Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney (2009) called for increased attention to the education of immigrant students as they transform the demographics of America. Wells (2010) referred more specifically to “children of immigrants” in the title of a study about educational expectations of this special population, similarly finding a need for educators to focus on their unique needs (p. 1679). Kim and Diaz (2013) provided a description of this population that best serves the purpose of this study, explaining that immigrant students include those who move to the United States from another country as well as those who may be born in the U.S. with at least one parent who is an immigrant (p.4). Their parents may have entered the U.S. as either authorized (documented) or unauthorized (undocumented) immigrants. Immigrant students thus may or may not have been born in the U.S., and although they may have a language other than

English spoken at home, they themselves may or may not be fluent in this other language. Some come from educated families whereas others have profoundly under-educated parents (Sadowski, 2013). Many have only begun to learn English, while others may speak English fluently. Their commonality consists of their descending from one or more parents who immigrated to the U.S., bringing with them their culture, while giving their children to U.S. schools for education.

## **Generations**

Educators and researchers refer to immigrant students using a variety of labels. In terms of language, they are sometimes labeled according to their perceived weakness in English, Limited English Proficient (LEP) or English Language Learners (ELL), rather than considering their potential strength as emerging bilinguals. Garcia and Cuellar (2006) explained that they are described as language minority (LM), linguistically and culturally diverse (LCD), culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD), and also as bilingual (p. 2222). Researchers have made distinctions between the different generations as well.

**Second-generation.** The second-generation child is defined as growing up in the new country from a very young age, including one who is born in the country to which his or her parents immigrated. According to Alba and Holdaway (2013), by 2009 this generation made up almost one-quarter of all children in the U.S. These children hailed from a variety of backgrounds, including more than half from Latin America, with the majority of Mexican origin and others from Caribbean backgrounds such as Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Almost a fourth of the second generation children were of Asian background, with the largest groups from the Philippines, Laos, India, and mainland China (Alba & Holdaway, 2013). Additionally, second-generation immigrants vary among themselves in the potential for high achievement in school: children with more educated parents may out-perform native-born students academically,

whereas parents with little to no educational background may produce second generations less prepared to succeed in school (Alba & Holdaway, 2013, p. 6). Second generation immigrants may arrive at school speaking no English or fluent English. Although they grow up in their new country, their backgrounds and preparation for school vary widely.

**Generation 1.5.** Alba and Holdaway (2013) described the Generation 1.5 immigrant students as children who are not born in the U.S., but who come at a young age and receive their education here (p. 3). Stoffa (2007) termed them as children who were brought to the United States when they were in their adolescent years, students who were foreign-born immigrants and were partially foreign-educated as well as partially U.S.-educated (p. 191). This designation helped to focus on a specific group of immigrant children, many of whom may be undocumented, and who experienced a wide range of different educational experiences before immigrating to the U.S.

**First-generation.** Children who are not born in the U.S. but who immigrate at any age are often referred to as first-generation immigrant students. In their award-winning book, *Learning a New Land: Immigrant Students in American Society*, C. Suárez-Orozco, Todorova and M. Suárez-Orozco (2008) contended that “schooling is particularly important for immigrant youth. For them, it is the first sustained, meaningful, and enduring participation in an institution of the new society” (p. 2). Their longitudinal study began in 1995 and focused exclusively on first-generation of immigrants from over one hundred schools, including those who came from Chinese, Dominican, Haitian, Mexican, and Central American origins. Many of these first-generation immigrants had already developed a sense of identity and belonging to their country of origin, and as they assimilated into the United States, they often lived in poverty and with extended family members (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Their experiences in school had a lasting

impact not only on them, but also on their children, who will become a new group of second-generation immigrant students.

**Similarities and differences in generations.** First, 1.5, and second generation immigrant students face both similar and different challenges while also having the potential for giftedness and high achievement. Many factors influence the availability of opportunities for children of immigrants to develop gifts and talents at school. For example, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008) explained that although both first and second generation immigrants have parents that have emigrated from their homeland, second-generation children may not have to “learn from scratch the cultural nuances and social etiquette that make life predictable and easier to manage” (p. 4). Knowing the English language and having the advantage of U.S. citizenship gives distinct advantages to second-generation students in terms of higher achievement and job outlook. Yet first generation immigrants may have better health and overall well-being (p. 5). For first-generation children of immigrants, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008) observed that academic achievement was positively influenced by the extent of the mother’s education, father’s employment, English proficiency, and family structure (p. 51). When looking at predicted academic achievement and school factors, they found that achievement was impacted by proficiency levels of English-Language Arts, poverty, attendance and school segregation based on race (p. 53). The educational outcomes of both first and second generation children of immigrants are influenced by a variety of factors related to relationships, language, culture, and available school environments and programming.

### **Challenges and Barriers for Immigrant Students**

Immigrant students display characteristics that may also overlap with other special populations who are less likely to be identified as gifted: English language learners; children



living in poverty, and students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Immigrant students share many of the same challenges as these populations, while also facing barriers more unique to themselves. Hernandez et al. (2009) noted that immigrant students come from diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds, although many immigrant families are from Latin America or Asia, and three-fourths do not speak English at home. Almost one-fourth of at least one of their immigrant parents has been in the U.S. for ten years or less, and thus may have no experience with American schools or culture (p. 641-642). Erisman and Looney (2007) found that immigrant students encounter many barriers to higher education that include a lack of understanding about postsecondary options; work and family commitments that make demands on their time; financial issues that make college unaffordable; lack of English language development; and poor academic readiness (p. 6). As immigrant students oscillate between home and school, they grow up in two worlds.

### **Hispanic Immigrant Students**

The 2010 U.S. Census Bureau reported that Hispanics make up one-sixth of the U.S. population, with over one-third of them being immigrants (Latinos in America, 2012). By 2025, Hispanic students may comprise 25 percent of all students enrolled in US public schools. (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2000). Many of the 47 million Hispanics in the United States were born out of the country (By the numbers, 2011). Davila (2010) conducted a study of Puerto Rican students in Chicago schools and found that they encountered barriers to their education that included families who were not involved in educational decision making and a resistance to being different from their peers, as well as fewer early childhood educational opportunities, assessments that were not culturally sensitive, few bilingual teachers, and overcrowded schools, all of which may interfere with their

opportunity to participate in advanced high school options (p. 34). Crul and Holdaway (2009) described Dominican immigrant children in New York as children with strong ties to their native country and family which influenced their sense of identity, fostering a sense belonging to two cultures. Their parents, like many immigrant families, emphasized the importance of education even though the parents may not have been educated themselves (p. 1478). Despite parents' lack of education or financial support, they found that many parents had specific goals for their children to be the first in the family to go to college. Nevertheless, they lacked the information that might help their children to achieve this goal. The children may have gone home after school to a different language and culture, but they returned to parents who emphasized education as the key to a better life.

Three-fourths of the immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean have never attended high school, and half of them are not high school graduates (Erisman & Looney, 2007, p. 4). Hispanic students make up the largest group of immigrant students, and they have a history of lack of representation in gifted or talent development programs (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Furthermore, over half of Hispanic students educated in the U.S. drop out of high school (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Hispanic immigrant students are not only the largest group of immigrant students, but they also encounter the same challenges faced by Hispanic students who may not be children of immigrants.

### **English Language Learners**

Although immigrant students may have the opportunity for fluency in two languages, many of them are not completely fluent in either. A large number of immigrants have limited English skills (Hernandez et al., 2009; Holdaway et al., 2009). This not only affects the students at school; the parents' lack of English skills impacts their ability to be involved in their

children's homework, be informed about the school curriculum, or communicate effectively with teachers (Holdaway et al, 2009). As students learn English, they may lose their fluency in their native language, affecting their relationships with parents and their ability to share their educational experiences. Additionally, if the children's English is better than the parents', the children often become interpreters for both school and society, from paying bills to navigating a new world. This not only takes time away from students investing in their education; it can also invert the traditional parent-child relationship so that the parents are in the dependent roles (Holdaway et al., 2009). The challenge is multi-layered: At school, students are not able to engage in the regular school curriculum because they must learn English. This follows them home, where they must devote additional time as family interpreters while also living in two cultures, neither fully.

### **The Immigration Process**

Erismann and Looney (2007) explained that immigration can be very stressful for people who may be fleeing persecution or war; splitting up their families; being smuggled into the U.S. illegally, or simply coping with an entirely new culture (p. 19). In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that immigration status cannot interfere with a child's right to public education, but the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act of 1996 ruled that states could not offer in-state tuition at public colleges (p. 20). Schools, then, must educate these children, but educators know that immigrant students who are undocumented may not have affordable access to postsecondary options. Furthermore, when immigrant students are not documented as citizens or legal residents, they and their families often live in fear of being deported, adding to the stress of the immigrant and assimilation process and interfering with plans for the future. Whether children have immigrated legally or illegally, the transition to a new country can be traumatic.

## **Immigrant Students in Poverty**

Poverty presents another challenge, as poverty rates for immigrant families from Mexico and other countries that have large immigrant populations are three to four times greater than for Whites. In their study about talented minority students in AP and IB Programs, Kyburg, Hertberg-Davis, and Callahan (2007) described the commonly shared threat of poverty among minority students. Immigrant students are almost three-fourths more likely to live in poverty than native-born children (Hernandez et al., 2009; Borjas, 2011). Borjas (2011) studied poverty and immigrant children and found that almost half of immigrant students live in homes that receive public program assistance, and there is a strong correlation to their continuing to live in poverty as adults. Children in poverty face a myriad of issues that may interfere with their education, such as fewer resources that include housing and food; the unaffordability of childcare or early education that could support future high achievement; or a lack of adequate healthcare, all of which can result in a negative influence on student achievement (Hernandez et al., 2009, p. 623-4). Thus the challenges and barriers that stem from poverty are shared by many immigrant students. The high prevalence of poverty in immigrant students' families creates additional challenges for gifted and talented immigrant students to access or flourish in advanced learning environments.

## **Cultural Capital**

Kyburg et al. (2007) described the meaning of cultural capital as the knowledge a child needs outside his or her family relationships in order to grow academically and to access the path to postsecondary education. The absence or presence of cultural capital is directly related to the level of parent education, and the authors noted that students whose parents are recent immigrants or minority students in poverty are often the first in their family to consider college

(p. 185). This can translate into students and parents lacking the background necessary to find and access educational opportunities that could support long-term college goals in a new country. Immigrant students may be scheduled in high school classes that do not lead to graduation or college or they may not be properly credited for education courses taken in their native country, and their parents are not informed about the consequences or what they may do to intervene (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009). Hernandez et al. (2009) further explored the impact of a lack of cultural capital, noting that school communications may not be in the home language, exacerbating the problem of parents receiving information about advanced educational opportunities (p. 641). When analyzing the support for undocumented students and their transition to college, Nienhusser (2013) found that it was vital to share information with parents as well as students (p. 23). Increasing effective communication may help, but gifted and talented immigrant students and their parents may still struggle to understand the nuances of how to find and apply for post-secondary opportunities or how to know what preparation is needed.

Immigrant students live in two different worlds as they move between the American culture of school and their family culture at home. For U.S. schools, the diversity of immigrant backgrounds continues to grow, and the tension between the home and school cultures can lead to children searching for an identity. Kyburg et al. (2007) described how students may embrace their home culture and resist assimilating into the mainstream culture as a way of reinforcing their cultural identity, noting that the growing Hispanic population confronted more cultural challenges than other populations and that other immigrant populations demonstrated higher success rates (p. 184). Suárez-Orozco, et al. (2008) found that for first generation students, a particular challenge was finding support when they do not have extended family in their new country.

**Parental influence.** Immigrant students represent a diverse population of families who have varied educational backgrounds. Some of them are well-educated, although they may not qualify for professional jobs due to language or legal issues. For immigrant students, the parent education level may vary from uneducated laborers to highly educated professionals but it is on average generally weaker than their native-born peers (Hernandez et al., 2009; Alba & Holdaway, 2013). Immigrant students, however, may be almost as likely as their peers to have parents who are college educated: “Twenty-three percent of children of immigrants have a father with at least a bachelor’s degree, compared with 27% of native-born children...18% of children of immigrants and 23% of native-born children have mothers with a BA” (Hernandez et al., 2009, p. 620). Yet when parents are not highly educated, they may in fact be strikingly uneducated. Forty percent have not graduated from high school and 24% have only completed eight years of schooling (p. 620). Gándara (2005) found that Hispanic high-achieving students are more likely than other populations to have parents with less than a bachelor’s degree. This can translate into parents who not only do not have the background knowledge to traverse the intricacies of higher education, but also do not know how to advocate for their children’s K-12 education or to work with their teachers and schools (Gándara, 2005). Parents’ lack of education contributes to immigrant students’ lack of cultural capital and inhibits their ability to help their children navigate their education.

The challenge of learning a new language; the prevalence and impact of poverty; parents’ lower education levels and unfamiliarity with American schools; and the lack of cultural capital are barriers that complicate the ability of gifted and talented immigrant students to flourish in school. They encounter a variety of teachers and administrators in their school environments. Educators who are aware of these challenges may help immigrant students

develop their gifts and talents, but they may also exacerbate the issues when they judge immigrant students' abilities by the barriers they face.

### **Deficit Thinking and Access to Advanced Programs**

Diverse students face an additional barrier when they are viewed through the lens of the daunting challenges and perceived deficits they face, instead of their potential strengths (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Garcia, et al., 2008). In Pereira and Gentry's (2013) study of high potential Hispanic students, they found that teachers displayed deficit thinking, which involves teachers focusing on students' weaknesses rather than their strengths (p. 165).

Alba and Holdaway (2013) explained:

All too often immigrant students' home languages and ways of knowing are defined as deficits or problems, something to be remedied rather than rewarded or treated as the assets they are. Thus, when immigrant youth perform poorly in school, their difficulties are seen as intrinsic to them or their families or their neighborhoods, rather than recognized as related to shortcomings within school structures and policies. (p. 116)

Often, however, the perceived weaknesses have a flipside of a potential asset. For example, Hernandez et al. (2009) described the problem of children's anxiety about money, due to the irregular job opportunities of their fathers, which may undercut children's capacity to focus on school or may lead to changing schools often. They found, however, that immigrant students often live with both parents and possibly other adults who are hardworking, which may model the kind of strong work ethic that leads to school success (p. 628). Being the first in their family to hope for college while living in economic uncertainty may work to undermine their ability for high achievement in school whereas exposure to the importance of working hard may have motivated students to do their best.

## **Tracking Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students**

Kulik (2003) explained that tracking often refers to high school courses of study that prepare students for either college, technical school, or the work force. Researchers also use the term to mean sorting students into inflexible tracks early on in education (Callahan, 2005; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002).

**English language learners.** With widespread use of tests of English ability, schools may quickly discern which students, often immigrant students, may need support to learn English. Often this characteristic overrides all other considerations, and students become classified as English Language Learners or ELL. When teachers refer to students as ELL, instead of as potential bilingual students, they are labeling them in terms of their deficits, not their possible strengths. Unfortunately, this label becomes the determining factor in their educational choices, or the lack thereof, as these students go on to learn English while often being ignored for potential giftedness.

The emphasis on learning English may result in students being overlooked for advanced or gifted educational programs. Ford and Grantham (2003) found that some culturally and linguistically diverse groups are underrepresented in gifted programs because educators have a deficit perspective about these students and explained that “educators hold negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations of these students accordingly” (p. 217). In fact, this deficit perspective has led to students’ overrepresentation in special education programs, possibly due to poverty, ethnic or racial perceptions, biased testing instruments, and the need for varying levels of language support (Crul & Holdaway, 2009, p. 2239). Pereira and Gentry (2013) explained that English Language Learners are underrepresented in gifted and advanced programs while overrepresented in



programs that focus on their weaknesses, as evidenced by their numbers in special education (p. 165). The deficit perspective of teachers may place students on a lower track to address perceived deficits.

Callahan (2005) examined the tracking of students who were learning English and found that they were consistently left out of college-preparatory classes and were instead placed in low-level courses (p. 321). She contended that a deficiency view of students based on language caused them to be tracked into courses of study that aimed to teach English rather than to develop the critical thinking skills needed for higher education. Kanno and Kangas (2014) found that students who were not native speakers of English moved from ELL courses to remedial courses. The students were tracked from one type of remediation based on language acquisition to another remedial level of learning because of the loss of years where their English-speaking peers were developing higher academic skills. For immigrant students, being placed on a lower track begins early. In a study of immigrants in New York City, Crul and Holdaway (2009) claimed that segregation starts during elementary school (p. 1501). The need to learn English may supersede other possible considerations of students' potential strengths as immigrant students become placed on lower tracks that ignore their potential.

**Immigrant students in poverty.** The higher prevalence of children of immigrants living in poverty further works to hide potential, because children in poverty may also be tracked on lower levels. Wyner, Bridgeland, and DiIulio (2007) explained that fewer students from low-income backgrounds begin school as high achievers (p. 15). They may not have had the same learning opportunities before starting school. Pereira and Gentry (2013) contended that when these students do achieve at higher levels in elementary school, they struggle to continue to achieve and that when compared to their peers, they are not as likely to graduate from college (p.

169). Initial tracking depends largely on teachers' concepts of what giftedness looks like, and it may not apply to culturally different students or to children living in poverty.

**Longevity of lower track.** Once students are placed in an ELL or lower track, it may take more than a knowledgeable educator to notice their potential giftedness; it may require a paradigm shift, as these students often rise only to the lowered expectations. Davila (2010) described the lasting negative impact as tracked students fall behind their peers and become bored and disengaged. Jaffe-Walter and Lee (2011) contended that a student who begins in ELL may be locked out of higher academic opportunities (p. 283). Offering students the choice of open enrollment in other more advanced coursework is not an effective solution to tracking. Yonezawa et al. (2002) found that diverse students on a lower track do not take advantage of more advanced course opportunities because of "institutional barriers, feelings of inadequacy, and a determination not to leave the safe spaces they knew...for seats in majority-White honors courses where they felt unwelcome" (p. 59-60). Lopez (2010) asserted that a feeling of belonging was a critical factor for student success and that this sense of belonging was lower for ELL students in schools that focused on ELL tracks instead of bilingual opportunities. Once students are placed in ELL, they may develop an identity as an English language learner instead of someone capable of high achievement. Compared to their peers who are being challenged with advanced programs from elementary school forward, these students stand little chance for becoming prepared for advanced high school programs, even if they should be identified as gifted.

### **Limited Options**

When educators address perceived deficits and simultaneously ignore the potential strengths of immigrant students, they limit immigrant students' ability to access a higher level of

learning. The barriers of deficit thinking and tracking influence immigrant students' prospects in far-reaching ways that include their schools, teachers, resources, and access to advanced programs.

**Inequitable learning opportunities.** Immigrant students are not simply under-represented in gifted and advanced programs; they are over-represented in under-performing schools and programs. Gándara and Rumberger (2009) explained that when compared to white, monolingual, and middle class students, immigrant students enrolled in poorer and more segregated schools; had fewer resources and less effective teachers; and were evaluated by assessments that did not fully capture what they learned. Placed in schools and programs based on their deficits instead of their potential strengths and facing other challenges to learning, these students have little chance to demonstrate high potential or to access more advanced opportunities.

**Underrepresentation in advanced high school options.** As immigrant students move through the educational system, they are hardly prepared for advanced high school programs, and they are largely absent from Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate opportunities. Garcia et al. (2008) described revealing statistics about ELL/Bilingual students' underrepresentation in advanced high school programs where 1.4 % of ELL students participated in gifted and talented programs, and only 0.8% of them went on to enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) math or science. Their notable absence from advanced college preparatory programs may be a natural result, at least in part, of their deficit status as English Language Learners and their resulting K-12 educational opportunities.

Although both first and second generation immigrant students possess specific strengths from their family, cultural, or language backgrounds, they face many barriers to both accessing

and achieving success in programs for gifted and talented students. Similar to other special populations, they are more likely to be placed in educational programs to address their perceived deficits rather than their potential strengths.

### **Frasier's Four A's**

Almost twenty years ago, Dr. Mary Frasier outlined ways for teachers to view students from a proficiency, rather than deficiency perspective. She was a pioneer in gifted education who worked with other researchers to understand and overcome barriers to gifted and advanced programs for students from low socio-economic, culturally diverse, and limited English proficient backgrounds. Frasier (1997) outlined four A's that may influence teachers' perceptions of diverse students' abilities:

- Attitudes about their capabilities
- Access to gifted or advanced programs
- Assessments that may be biased
- Accommodations to address cultural or linguistic differences.

Grantham (2012) explored the relevance of Frasier's four A's to emphasize the importance of equitable access to advanced programs when considering the implications of the talent-development model proposed by Subotnik et al. (2011). Teachers are the primary source for recommending students for testing, and they may not be familiar with the characteristics of potentially gifted immigrant students.

### **Attitude and Access**

Frasier (1997) stated that the most persistent reason for lack of identification of gifted and talented minority students was the shortage of positive attitudes towards their gifted capabilities and interests (p. 501). Teachers' low academic expectations and inability to recognize gifted

behaviors in minority students limited students' access to advanced learning opportunities (p. 500). Grantham (2012) described how teachers' low expectations for these students resulted not only in less challenging but also in less culturally responsive learning environments. Specifically for immigrant students who speak another language at home, an emphasis on learning English may result in students being overlooked for advanced or gifted educational programs, as evidenced in the available programs discussed later in this paper. Crul and Holdaway (2009) found that this deficit perspective led to students' overrepresentation in special education programs. The emphasis on the possible weaknesses of immigrant students does more than lead them to be overlooked for gifted testing or advanced programs; it may actually place them on a lower track than may be appropriate and where they may remain.

### **Assessment and Accommodations**

Frasier et al. (1995) called for educators to consider how diverse cultural backgrounds, language issues, and cognitive styles, which may be influenced by culture, may influence traditional forms of assessment for giftedness and potential for advanced programs (p. 33). For finding potential, Frasier et al (1995) advocated using the "Panning for Gold Observation Sheet" that describes traits, aptitudes and behaviors (TABs) of potentially gifted and talented students. The TABs tool includes motivation, communication and problem-solving skills, inquiry, insights, reasoning, and creativity, all of which may be manifested in unique ways for potentially gifted immigrant students. Grantham (2012) stated: "Educational leaders must be mindful of potential biases and how they contribute to narrow assessment policies and practices and, thus, create or maintain barriers for underrepresented groups" (p. 217). For immigrant students to access appropriately challenging programs, they must be accurately assessed in the context of their strengths.

Frasier (1997) referred to accommodation as the type of strategies that are needed to help minority students develop the necessary skills to move between two cultures rather than remedial strategies to help students access the dominant culture (p. 501). High school programs such as Advanced Placement or the International Baccalaureate Programme do not require students to be identified as gifted in order to participate, so a wide variety of students could have access to this opportunity if educators saw their potential and found ways to support their diverse cultures. Teachers should consider students' cultural and linguistic variances and then address both their strengths and their needs with appropriately differentiated teaching strategies (Grantham, 2012). This is the antithesis of deficit thinking and relies on an attitude of seeing potential in immigrant students; assessment of this potential manifested in a variety of ways; access to appropriately challenging programs and curriculum; and accommodations to support students' cultural contexts and learning needs as they attempt to realize their potential.

### **Gifted Potential**

What may be overlooked is that children of immigrants have the potential for giftedness. Immigrant students' language capabilities and cultural perspectives are often viewed as problems to be addressed rather than assets to be developed (Gibson et al., 2013). Frasier et al. (1995) conducted a study to identify economically disadvantaged and limited English-speaking proficiency gifted students that built upon three tenets:

1. There are significant numbers of economically disadvantaged and limited English proficient students who do not meet traditional criteria for gifted programs but who are believed to possess significant cognitive, motivation, artistic, or creative potentials that would enable them to successfully participate in programs designed to develop and nurture gifted behaviors.

2. The demonstration of gifted behaviors by children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and by children who have limited proficiency in the English language would be affected by the sociocultural context in which they develop, but would not necessarily be limited by interpretations within that context.
3. The search for a paradigm to guide the identification of the gifts and talents of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and by children who have limited proficiency in the English language must be embedded within their sociocultural and economic context. (p. 7)

Frasier et al. (1995) defined gifted potential in terms of behaviors that could be found in a variety of sociocultural contexts and that thus would be impacted by those contexts, specifically cultural differences, language, and cognitive style (p. 38). Almost twenty years later, children of immigrants are still primarily provided learning opportunities that are based on a deficit perspective of language and that do not consider the potential giftedness that may reveal itself in a sociocultural context.

Garcia et al. (2008) suggested that immigrant students whose native language is not English are more accurately described as emergent bilinguals. Priven (2010) claimed that bilingualism is both a behavior and a contributor to a child's giftedness and that increased language awareness was a potential component of giftedness that results from learning more than one language. This link between bilingualism and giftedness speaks to the strengths and potential of children of immigrants. Ford and Trotman (2001) called for increased professional training for teachers to learn how to identify potential giftedness in children from diverse cultures. Research

to explore either potential giftedness or educational programs that will address immigrant students' strengths has been scarce.

### **Potential Strengths of Immigrant Students**

Immigrant students experience a myriad of influences that also build strengths in their potential for high achievement. For example, Areepattamannil and Freeman (2008) found that when compared to non-immigrant students, immigrant students had higher intrinsic motivation. Although parents may be uneducated or uninformed about educational options, their work ethic and support of education may inspire their children to improve their way of life (Holdaway et al., 2009; Hernandez et al., 2009). Their parents want them to do well in school, and immigrant students feel a sense of duty to family (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). The challenges and barriers that immigrant students face have a flipside that can offer strengths and create potential. Table I, *Immigrant Students: Common Challenges versus Potential Support and Giftedness*, compares the common challenges for immigrant students that may also provide potential support for giftedness.



Table 1

*Immigrant Students: Common Challenges versus Potential Support and Giftedness*

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Common Challenges</b>	<b>Potential Support and Giftedness</b>
<b>Parent Input</b>	May be uneducated and uninformed about options; May have uneducated parents who lack knowledge about how to advise students for further schooling; high percentage of parents who have less than a high school education (Holdaway et al., 2009; Hernandez et al., 2009)	Many two-parent families with inspiring work ethic; family is important (Hernandez et al. 2009, p. 628); Students may be motivated by immigrant parents to push themselves to improve way of life and who promote education (Fuligni & Fuligni, 2007; Sadowski & Suárez-Orozco, 2013)
<b>Culture</b>	Lack of cultural capital: May be impoverished; first in family to try to go to college (Kyburg et al., 2007)	Unique culture and pride about their language and culture (Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012, p. 43)
<b>Language Proficiency</b>	English Language Learners; most speak a different language at home (Holdaway et al., 2009); may not have full command of either native language or English (Hernandez et al., 2009; Crul & Holdaway, 2009)	Potential for giftedness and bilingualism; tie between giftedness and bilingualism; capacity for bilingualism (Priven, 2010); using two languages to connect with diverse peers for support (Sadowski, 2013)

Esquierdo and Arreguin-Anderson (2012) concluded that traditional concepts of potential giftedness ignore the linguistic and cultural traits of gifted bilingual students (p. 44). They called for a paradigm shift in the understanding of what constitutes giftedness and in what these traits look like in bilingual students. Building literacy skills in a student's first language positively impacts English literary skills, and bilingual students develop an increased aptitude for language acquisition in additional foreign languages. Bilingualism promotes other cognitive benefits such as an ability to organize data (Matthews & Matthews, 2004). Matthews and Matthews (2004) suggested that heritage language classes, those that employ the student's native language, fit with the model of talent development that focuses on individual student abilities. If schools provide access to programs designed to build on immigrant students' strengths and provide support for their challenges, then immigrant students might succeed in a variety of advanced programs while developing their unique talents.

### **Available Programs**

Programs available for children of immigrants vary greatly depending on the school, district, and state. The lack of consistency and scarcity of effective program options contribute to a lack of success. Many immigrant students, particularly those who grow up in poverty, do not graduate from high school (Hernandez et al., 2009). Garcia et al. (2008) described the disconnection between what is offered and what is needed. There is an increasing dichotomy between the policies that govern the educational options available for native speakers of other languages and what researchers have found to be most effective for educating bilingual students (p. 6). U. S. educational policy has become increasingly focused not only on acquiring English, but also on using an English only paradigm for student education, a perspective that evokes the deficit perspective previously discussed (Garcia et al., 2008).

Thirty years ago, concern over Latin American immigration began to grow, as the achievement gap between Hispanic and White students increased, and as the idea of bilingual education became a threat to the English Only movement. The 2002 No Child Left Behind Act required schools to demonstrate test proficiency in English reading and writing, and the few bilingual education opportunities became largely replaced by an emphasis on English with students mainstreamed into classes taught only in English (Salomone, 2010). Gifted immigrant students are no doubt present in this group, but they, too, encountered a system that insists they put aside their native language and devote time to learning English. Although learning English is vital, the ELL label can result in students being placed in low-level classes (Callahan, 2005).

The programs that are most prevalent for children of immigrants focus on English language acquisition and include submersion, where students are expected to acquire English proficiency by immersion in English classes without any English Speakers of other Language (ESL) instruction, and where no development of their native language is available (Garcia et al., 2008). The primary English learning program is the pull-out ESL class for 60-90 minutes per day, coupled with the submersion technique of mainstreaming students into the regular classroom taught in English. Neither option includes development of the native language or learning academics in the native language, which could provide the cognitive benefits of bilingualism while allowing students to continue to grow academically, rather than halting their learning in other subjects while they learn English. When available to immigrant students, language development programs such as heritage language classes and transitional bilingual education provide both English instruction and support for native language development (Matthews & Matthews, 2004; Garcia et al., 2008). Table 2, *Programs Related to Language Available for Immigrant Students*, offers specific details about language opportunities.

Table 2

*Programs Related to Language Available for Immigrant Students*

<b>Type of Program</b>	<b>ESL Instruction</b>	<b>Native Language Development in Native Language/Other Subjects</b>	<b>Opportunity for Gifted</b>
<u>Submersion:</u> Students are mainstreamed into English-only classes; no support (Garcia et al., 2008).	Learning English by immersion; no ESL	No / No	No: Emphasis on learning English
<u>ESL Pull-Out:</u> Students primarily mainstreamed with 30–60 minutes per day for support for ESL (Garcia et al 2008, p. 19).	Limited instruction in English	No / No	No: Emphasis on learning English
<u>Heritage Language:</u> Native language classes for those who demonstrate some oral proficiency (Matthews & Matthews, 2004, p. 51)	English may be through immersion or through ESL	Yes / No	Opportunity to learn at a faster pace than regular language classes
<u>Transitional Bilingual:</u> Some academic subjects in native language / some ESL (Garcia et al., 2008)	ESL to help learn English (Palmer 2011)	Yes, Limited to Academic Subjects / Yes: Support in core subjects in native language" (Palmer, 2011,)	No
<u>Two-Way Bilingual:</u> Instruction in two languages to promote bilingualism; both English monolingual and ELL GT students learn together in a cooperative setting (Garcia et al., 2008)	Primarily through immersion	Yes: Both bilingual and English-speaking students Yes: Students are able to display subject specific talent in native language (Garcia, Flores & Chu, 2011)	Students receive content instruction in both languages with GT teacher (Bernal, 2002)

Traditionally, students who are not native speakers of English or who are bilingual are taught English as a language while also learning their other subjects in English, and opportunities to build on the strength of bilingualism are rare. Access to advanced programs or post-secondary education may be limited for these students whose focus in school is on acquiring English.

Garcia et al. (2011) found that singleton students, who do not have peers that speak their native language, encounter even fewer chances to develop their native language and become truly bilingual. This is compounded by the additional barrier of being unable to access information about schooling in their own language (Hernandez et al., 2009). The majority of instruction is designed for students to learn English, sometimes for years, allowing their native language to lapse while simultaneously missing opportunities for advanced learning in core subjects.

### **Other Available Opportunities**

Some schools offer other non-language focused opportunities for diverse students, which may serve to address children of immigrants as well. Rodriguez and Cruz (2009) analyzed the current research about ELL students and their transition to college, and found evidence that this transition depends on concurrent support for both language and academics. Opportunities for this type of concurrent support are further influenced by teachers' expectations, diverse cultures being valued, and guidance for college. Jaffe-Walter and Lee (2011) focused on two international schools and how they supported ELL students' journey to college through a positive emphasis on student culture and potential, finding that a key component was teacher expectations, emphasizing that students would be going to college (p. 287). Additionally, teachers designed curricula that stressed a value for students' cultures, including asking students to share about their experience as immigrants through personal narratives (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2011, p. 289). Gonzalez, Stein, and Huq (2013) found that teachers can have a profound

influence, often more even than immigrant parents, on immigrant students' perceptions of themselves as college bound. Programs that build on teacher expectations and that value students' unique cultures demonstrate that gifted and talented immigrant students can succeed when given the appropriate support.

Calaff (2008) conducted a qualitative study about nine Latino students who were involved in a college preparatory program that partnered with a local college. Calaff (2008) found that this program succeeded because teachers' high expectations were pervasive, as they constantly communicated to students the goal of attending college. Additionally, teachers offered tutoring and alternative course sequencing so that students could access higher level curriculum while still being supported in learning English. Native language was not supported, but speaking in Spanish was an accepted part of the core subject environment, lending a type of language support (Calaff, 2008, p. 104). Although this was an International Baccalaureate School, the population was not represented fully in IB, and this college partnership existed autonomously from the IB Programme. This is one example of a variety of programs that are successfully serving the needs of gifted and talented immigrant students by offering key elements such as language support, tutoring, and high expectations for students; however, these programs are not common.

### **Advanced Placement Programs**

The two premier Advanced Placement options for American high school students are the Advanced Placement (AP) Program and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB or IBDP), both designed to provide high potential secondary students with a rigorous college-level curriculum. What are the elements of these programs that might provide an opportunity for gifted and talented immigrant students to demonstrate high achievement?

## **The Advanced Placement (AP) Program**

The Advanced Placement Program (AP) was developed by the Educational Testing Service to create college level courses and exams where students could remain in high school while potentially earning college credit. Initially targeting 5% of high achieving high school seniors, the program has grown to include courses for all grades of high school and intentionally sought to include more diverse populations (Hertberg-Davis, Callahan, & Kyburg, 2006). Teachers participate in training workshops and must submit an approved syllabus to the College Board, and the College Board offers optional training opportunities about increasing access to diverse populations, but these are not required. Over time, increasingly competitive college admissions criteria have included an emphasis on taking a certain number of AP (or IB) courses (Byrd, 2007). Administered through the College Board, college credits are issued at the discretion of the university, with a score of 3 or greater on the end of year exam designated as a passing score. AP courses are a collection of individual courses from which students may choose based on their own strengths and interests. Students reported that AP courses helped them to be accepted into college and to be prepared for college (Kyburg, et al., 2007).

Minority and low-income students' participation in AP has increased in the past fifteen years, but these students continue to be underrepresented in the group that demonstrates high achievement on AP exams. Kyburg et al. (2007) conducted a study about how schools supported AP and IB programs for students from multicultural backgrounds, finding that creating student support groups, nurturing relationships, tutoring, and implementing culturally sensitive teaching practices provided needed support that was enhanced by a dedicated team of administrators, counselors, teachers, and parents. As an individual menu of course options, the AP Program has

the potential to offer advanced learning opportunities for immigrant students when schools intentionally provide the appropriate scaffolding.

### **The International Baccalaureate Programme (IB)**

In contrast to AP, the International Baccalaureate Programme (IB) aims to provide a holistic program of study designed to require students to achieve in many academic areas. The International Baccalaureate Programme began in Switzerland almost 50 years ago, but now is in more than 130 countries, with the greatest rate of growth in the United States (Guttenplan, 2011). IB offers four programs: The IB Primary Years Programme for students aged 3 – 12; the IB Middle Years Programme for students aged 11 – 16; the IB Career-Related Certificate for students aged 16 – 19; and the IB Diploma Programme, for students aged 16 – 19 (Four Programmes at a Glance). For the purpose of this literature review, the IB Diploma Programme designed for high school students in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, is the advanced program discussed.

From 1977 – 1979, the number of IB schools in the U.S. increased to 24 (Mathews & Hill, 2005, p. 81). In the 1980's, concerns about lack of rigor and high schools losing middle class families helped to make IB a choice for more North American public schools. One of the strengths of the IB is its excellent training, which was better than the AP training available in the 70's and 80's (Mathews & Hill, 2005, p. 156). In May 2014, over 75,000 U.S. students took IB exams, more than in any other country in the world, while 830 American high schools offered the Diploma Programme (IBDP Statistical Bulletin, 2014). IB was developed to provide a common curriculum for international schools and was not specifically designed as a way of meeting the needs of gifted students. Yet the IB mission reveals a focus on a rigorous program of study that may be appropriate for many gifted learners.



**Mission and vision of IB.** The International Baccalaureate Mission Statement, revised in 2014, states:

- The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.
- To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.
- These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right. (IBO, 2014)

The revised IB mission statement reveals a focus on a rigorous program of study that may be appropriate for many gifted or high ability learners. In addition to a rigorous curriculum, the IB Mission Statement concentrates on students' social and emotional development; growth as lifelong learners; character and caring; and international perspectives (IBO, 2014). The far-reaching ideals of this course of study are particularly noticeable in the IB Learner Profile, which constitutes the vision of what IB Learners will become (IB Learner Profile, 2013). Table 3, The IB Learner Profile, portrays a detailed list of these characteristics.

Table 3

*The IB Learner Profile*

As IB Learners, we strive to be:

<b>Inquirers</b>	Who acquire the skills necessary to conduct purposeful, constructive research
<b>Thinkers</b>	Who exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to make sound decisions and to solve complex problems
<b>Communicators</b>	Who receive and express ideas and information confidently in more than one language, including the language of mathematical symbols
<b>Risk-takers</b>	Who approach unfamiliar situations without anxiety, have confidence and independence, are courageous and articulate in defending things in which they believe
<b>Knowledgeable</b>	Who have spent time in school exploring themes with global relevance and importance, and have acquired a critical mass of significant knowledge
<b>Principled</b>	Who have sound grasp of the principles of moral reasoning, integrity, honesty and a sense of fairness and justice
<b>Caring</b>	Who show sensitivity towards the needs and feelings of others and have a personal commitment to action and service
<b>Open-minded</b>	Who respect the views, values and traditions of other individuals and cultures and who are accustomed to seeking and considering a range of points of view
<b>Well-balanced</b>	Who understand the importance of physical and mental balance and personal well-being
<b>Reflective</b>	Who give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and who analyze their personal strengths and weaknesses in a constructive manner

(IB Learner Profile, 2013)

**The core of IBDP.** During the 1970's, Peterson and other leaders developed what would become the core of IB (Mathews & Hill, 2005, p. 51). The core of IB is considered fundamental to the overall purpose of IB, and consists of the Extended Essay; Theory of Knowledge (TOK); and Creativity, Action and Service (CAS). The Extended Essay requires that students submit a 4,000 word, independently researched essay on a topic of choice within an IB subject area, externally assessed by IB. Students research and write an independent essay on topics as varied as human rights or ancient math problems. For the TOK class, students address the philosophical underpinnings of knowledge as well as make connections between subjects. The most telling aim for TOK is that students will “develop a fascination with the richness of knowledge as a human endeavor and an understanding of the empowerment that follows from reflecting upon it” (IB Core Requirements, 2010). The third part of the core is the 150-hours requirement in Creativity, Action, and Service (CAS). CAS requires that students engage in creativity through the arts and other experiences that involve creative thinking, as well as action (physical exertion such as sports or exercise) and service to others. Among the goals are intentional emphases on student collaboration, perseverance, self-understanding, and commitment (IB Core Requirements, 2010). The Core of IB provides a variety of enrichment opportunities for gifted and high-achieving students.

**The IB Diploma curriculum.** The IB Diploma Programme (IBDP) refers specifically to the two-year IB option for high school juniors and seniors who sit for IB exams before going on to college. Every high school IBDP is unique in that each school makes decisions about any admissions requirements, scheduling, and IB course selections, but all follow the IB Diploma Programme model. This model reveals the fundamental focus on the IB Learner Profile,

expanding outwards from the core of IB and then finally to the six key subject areas for which students will sit for exams.

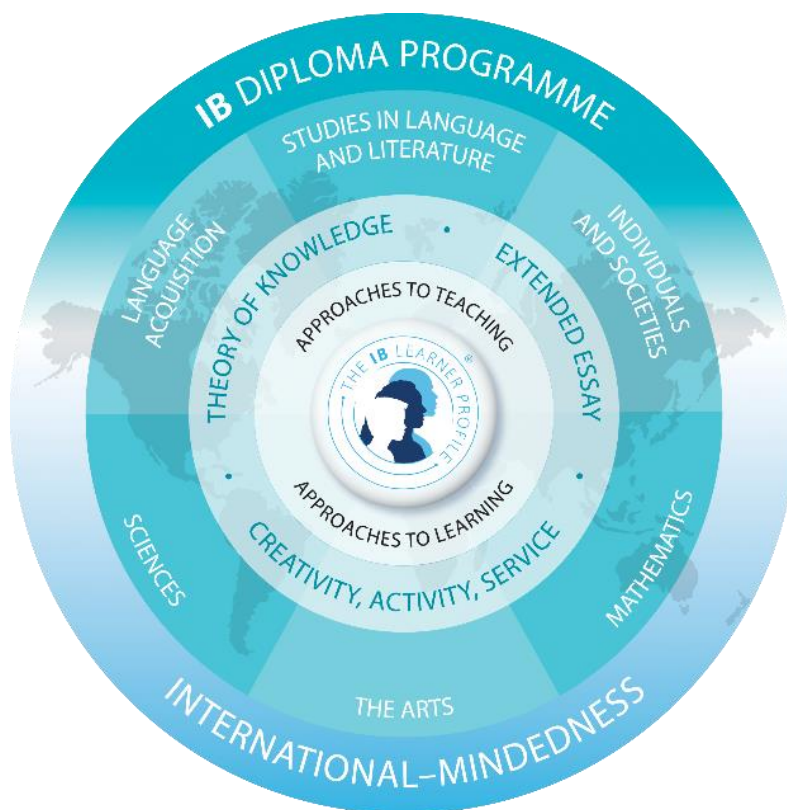


Figure 1. IB Programme model. This model illustrates the centrality of the IB Learner Profile and IB Core to the IB Diploma Programme (IB Logos and Programme Models, 2014).

In addition to the core requirements, full IB Diploma students take six subjects in their junior and senior years. These include classes from the following categories, outlined in the figure above: (a) studies in language and literature, (b) language acquisition, (c) individuals and societies, (d) sciences, (e) mathematics, (f) the arts or an IB class as an elective (IB Curriculum, 2014). Similar to AP exams, students sit for exams in all six subjects and may earn college credit for passing scores. The Diploma Program (DP) assessments measure students' basic academic skills as well as higher level skills in analysis, evaluation, constructing arguments, or creative problem solving (IB Assessment and Exams, 2014). Components of these exams are assessed

both externally by examiners around the world, and internally by their classroom teachers, moderated by IB. This allows students multiple opportunities and a variety of ways to demonstrate mastery of standards which may be particularly helpful for immigrant students. Students earn a score of 1 – 7 on each of the six IB exams. They must pass the three core requirements and earn a minimum of 24 points on their six IB exams to be eligible for the IB Diploma.

On its website, the International Baccalaureate Programme states that it helps to develop social and emotional abilities as well as intellectual and social skills for students to flourish in a global society (IB: Who we are, 2014). Specific key components include encouraging a love of learning and providing access to students in a wide range of schools. The mission statement supports the assertion that they both “encourage international-mindedness in IB students... [and] believe that students must first develop an understanding of their own cultural and national identity” (IB: Who we are, 2014). The emphasis on cultural identity, required second language development, and a global society may provide a natural fit for immigrant students.

**The IBDP as a gifted program option.** How do the components of the IB Programme relate to the needs or strengths of gifted children, of children from underserved or diverse populations, and more specifically of potentially gifted and talented immigrant students? Subotnik et al. (2011) suggested that neither ability nor achievement fully encapsulates an understanding of giftedness. They stated, “General and domain-specific abilities, task commitment, and opportunity in the form of access to teaching and appropriate resources contribute to outstanding performance...” (p. 21). In this sense, the International Baccalaureate Programme may be considered a program that could potentially address the needs of gifted children, demanding a commitment to rigorous curriculum and providing the opportunity for

high achievement for students who have access to the program. It provides acceleration by offering access to college-level curriculum, while offering what Subotnik et al. (2011) defined as enrichment through in-depth study and the IB core, which requires more than what is offered in the traditional course of study. The IB Programme's emphasis on the core of IB includes independent, in-depth research; the Theory of Knowledge course that would not normally be in a high school course of study; and the requirement for 150 hours of Creativity, Action, and Service. Students also engage in six college-level courses which provide an accelerated curriculum.

Conley, McGaughy, Davis-Molin, Farkas, and Fukuda (2014) conducted a study published by IB that found that students who took IB courses were more likely to be well-adjusted to college (p. 21). Students felt that they had learned time management through their IB involvement; would recommend the IB to others; and felt it was worthwhile to their success (Conley et al., 2014, p. 21). IB students are accelerated into college level courses while still in high school and are well-prepared for college. In this sense, the IB Programme is appropriate for gifted, high ability, or highly motivated secondary students in terms of both enrichment and acceleration.

In a case study of a new IB Programme, DiGiorgio (2010) found that students enrolled and stayed in the newly implemented program because of parental influence and the students' feeling that they were in a safe and challenging learning environment. According to Foust, Hertberg-Davis, and Callahan, (2009) the common positive themes in AP and IB classes included a better classroom atmosphere than regular classes; prepared and committed teachers who respected students; peers who had like interests and goals; self-confidence and feeling proud; and a "special bond among participants" (p. 11). The negative common themes included

feeling alienated or different from their non-participating peers; feeling stereotyped in a negative way; having a vast amount of work; and dealing with exhaustion and stress (p. 13).

Culross and Tarver (2011) conducted a 10-year study about the perspectives of an initial group of IB students at a beginning program in a public school. They found that during the first year of the program, students were concerned about the sometimes overwhelming amount of work, but that looking back years later, they felt that many positives resulted from their IB experiences (p. 234). These included college credits, preparedness for college success, and depth and breadth of learning.

Other gifted students may indeed be motivated and creative, but may have one or two areas of passion where they would flourish more than in the all-encompassing full diploma program. The IBDP may be a powerful option for gifted students, as well as other hard-working students with potential for high-achievement, but it is not necessarily the best option for all. Hertberg-Davis and Callahan (2014) asserted that neither AP nor IB are an instructional fit for all gifted learners and that high school gifted programs should have additional opportunities for gifted students. For example, schools could exercise the option of offering the IB Course Program for students who would like to take only one or two IB classes, much like the option for AP, which allows students with specific strengths and interests to focus on a more individualized program of study.

**The IBDP for gifted and talented immigrant students.** Is then, the IB Programme an appropriate challenge for gifted and talented immigrant students? The potential success of providing academic readiness for college depends on the immigrant students' access to and participation in IB and the support they may need to be successful (Perna et al., 2015). The IB Diploma Programme is not available to all, since it is not in every high school nor even in the

majority of schools. When it is offered, however, how accessible is the IBDP to students from diverse populations, to teenagers from low socio-economic backgrounds, or to children of immigrants, and, when available, what is their experience in IB?

*Access to IB.* Perna et al. (2015) found that although diverse and low-income schools may offer the IB Programme, these schools still struggle to enroll diverse and low-income students (p. 419). Thus, even if the program is offered at their schools, immigrant students may not have the same type of access or preparedness. For example, an application process that may require a certain GPA or tracking issues that lead to lack of preparation can exclude students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse and/or who are from low socio-economic status. Since immigrant students are often in one or both of these categories, this can mean they are less likely to have access to IB. Hertberg-Davis and Callahan (2014) called for schools not only to provide encouragement for minority students to take IB, but also to offer scaffolding to meet students' needs so that they can succeed (p. 58).

Mayer (2010) addressed the implementation of an IB Programme in an urban setting and found that it is possible to implement an authentic and rigorous IB Programme in a more diverse environment (p. 26). Mayer's study focused on the key factors that contributed to a successful start to the IB Programme from a teacher and administrator perspective, finding that a key element was the position of IB coordinator. IB requires schools to have a teacher serve as the IB coordinator to support students and teachers in the IB Programme. The peer-coaching model that an IB Coordinator provides was found to be an effective way to prompt teachers to implement new teaching strategies while also offering needed resources and support (Mayer, 2010). The support of an IB Coordinator, coupled with the required IB workshop professional development,



seemed to influence teachers to believe that they could create an environment where diverse students could succeed.

Unlike many of the programs available to immigrant students, the IB does provide support for students in their Native Language, both through self-taught A1 Literature and possibly through the Extended Essay, with options for students to test in either English, Spanish, or French, the three official languages of IB. Students have the opportunity to enroll in almost any native language literature course and sit for an IB exam in that class, thus supporting students' native languages. Little research, however, exists about the implementation and effectiveness of these opportunities for bilingual students in the United States. If International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme opportunities are made available for immigrant students, educators would need to address the challenges previously outlined in Table 1, which include an increased likelihood for uneducated parents; the possibility that the native language is not English; a lack of cultural capital; and a deficit perspective from teachers.

*Factors for success in AP and IB.* Kyburg (2006) conducted a study of students' experiences in AP and IB classes where schools were attempting to increase minority participation. She found that students in these programs felt that the teaching strategies and advanced curriculum engaged and motivated them (p. 112). Although this study did not focus on native language support, students described three important relational factors that contributed to their success: "Master Adults" who provided support; peers who helped minority students balance two worlds; and parents who either helped shape future plans or who enabled students to take responsibility for their futures (p. 113-114). Kyburg (2006) concluded that the students wanted to be recognized for their unique talents. Kyburg et al. (2007) found key factors to success that included open classroom environments that valued diverse cultures; scaffolding for

those with gaps in skills; and flexible support and teaching strategies, rather than a rigid “one size fits all” approach. When these types of support are available, then gifted and talented students from diverse populations can address the foundational skills, background knowledge, and language skills they need to succeed in AP and IB programs (Kyburg et al., 2007).

Immigrant students are more engaged and can better acquire needed skills through developing key relationships with peers, teachers, and mentors (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). For immigrant students, to be in an environment that values their unique culture and language; that provides support for their learning needs, and that fosters relationships with teachers who believe they can succeed is critical to their success.

*Past and future research.* Sadowski (2013) wrote *Portraits of Promise* to provide a qualitative look at what successful immigrant students’ experiences told about the elements of their background and education that influenced their high achievement. The student portraits provided insights from immigrant students in New York and California. These students were motivated by parent sacrifices and by special teachers. Their relationships helped them to acclimate to American culture as they both learned English and continued to use their native languages. Although this study was not specifically about advanced placement programs, it added to the literature about key factors that helped immigrant students succeed in school.

Several studies have focused on the effectiveness of and access to AP and IB for students from the underserved populations who share similar characteristics with immigrant students. Some Florida IB Diploma Programmes have made exceptions to admissions criteria, which are designed by each individual school, in order to admit recent immigrant students, international students, or students whose native language is not English (Perna et al., 2015). Yet this study also found that although IB is in more schools with higher populations of Hispanic and low-

income students, those students are not equally represented in the group that actually participates in IB. There is hope, however, due to increased awareness of the need to offer access to all students. A U. S. \$2.4 million dollar grant entitled *The International Baccalaureate (IB) Access Project* was funded by the Gates Foundation from 2009-2012 to promote access for underserved students (Perna et al., 2015). Another example is Chicago Public Schools, which conducts a week-long workshop for immigrant students involved in the IB Programme, where they explore their immigration stories and share in an archived library project (Leven, 2015). Perna et al. (2015) reminded readers that variations in the availability of and participation in IBDP and the key supports and characteristics of each program influence the effectiveness of IB in reaching underserved populations.

Kyburg et al. (2007) found that the most important factors for minority students' success in AP or IB were teachers' expectations and providing needed scaffolding to support students. On the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) research website, other findings are posted. Bland and Woodworth (2008) conducted case studies about two schools that had successfully included low-income and minority students in IBDP, finding that recruiting and preparing underrepresented students was critical. Siskin, Weinstein, and Sperling (2010) explored how schools have created support structures for implementing IB in Title I high schools. The IB itself has sponsored studies about the impact of the IB Learner Profile, integrating technology, curriculum alignment, international-mindedness, and post-secondary success. The research for AP and IB and diverse or low socio-economic status students has been primarily about access and what is needed for student success, while other research focuses on various types of program evaluation or program impact. A qualitative look at what diverse or immigrant students might specifically experience in AP or IB is notably absent.

### **The Need for Continued Research**

Although some research exists about what kinds of support are most effective for immigrant students, the researchers call for more specific studies. For example, it may not be enough to offer English language instruction or even support for bilingualism when a student's life outside of school or his/her feelings of difference from peers may further interfere with learning. Stevens (2011) described how students from immigrant families have unique backgrounds that may vary significantly from those of their American peers. An understanding of a student's documentation status, background, culture, and family responsibilities is critical to appreciating his or her real access to advanced educational opportunities (Stevens, 2011, p. 139). Garcia and Tierney (2011) contended that "those who are most politically, socially, and educationally disempowered, such as undocumented youth, have the potential for agency, but the conditions for empowerment need to be aided by social organizations such as educational institutions" (p. 2753). Stevens (2011) suggested further exploration of what impacts students from a non-dominant culture outside of school and what literacy practices can best prepare these students.

The literature reveals that immigrant students face many of the same challenges and barriers as other special populations and that their gifted potential may be overlooked without the kind of empowerment Stevens advocated. Studies suggest that a peer group of support for learning may be another critical piece in immigrant students' opportunities for educational achievement. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008) portrayed high achieving, first-generation immigrants that highlighted the positive influence of stable families, resilience, hard work, and supportive mentors. Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005) conducted a study about ethnic minority first-generation college students where they found that peer support was more critical to future

success than parental support. They suggested that successful high school programs provide study sessions, peer tutoring or mentoring, and other support for students to prepare them for college. Sadowski (2013) interviewed successful immigrant students and created portraits that revealed further themes for success. They explored students' experiences and recommended classroom practices that included supporting dual language acquisition; respecting diverse cultures; working with families; and emphasizing hard work, persistence, and high expectations (p. 125). Mayer (2008) found that developing a sense of family in the program; establishing an IB identity; providing enrichment opportunities and scaffolding; and implementing an open admissions policy were key factors for diverse students' access and success in IB. Exploring the experiences of specifically immigrant students who completed an International Baccalaureate Programme may further contribute to the understanding of the factors that support first-generation college students, speakers of other languages, or diverse populations, and that also lead to immigrant students' academic and social success. Educators need to adjust their view of immigrant students, seeing them through a proficiency lens that illuminates their potential strengths, gifts, and talents; offering support to address the challenges they encounter; and providing access to and scaffolding for advanced programs such as AP and IB.

For years, gifted education advocates have sought ways to provide access to underserved populations, and IB Programmes have been researched for effectiveness. Hertberg-Davis and Callahan (2014) suggested that research has primarily concerned student satisfaction and later student success in college (p. 50). Although they point out that more recent studies have focused on access for minority students, they stated:

More research is needed on the question of whether the curriculum and instruction in AP and IB courses is appropriate for a broad range of advanced learners, or if course

organization and/or delivery present barriers to the successful participation of groups underrepresented in these courses. (p. 58)

Suárez-Orozco (2013) explained that although research exists about the barriers that low-achieving students encounter, there is very little research about immigrant students' experiences or how schools and teachers can best respond to their needs. There are studies about IB and linguistic minority students, students from low socio-economic status backgrounds, diverse students, and students in a Title I school, but little to no research about immigrant students and their experience in an AP or IB Program. Additional research is needed to fill this gap, not only to gather insights about what immigrant students experience in advanced programs, but also to offer increased understanding about the key elements and potential effectiveness of the Advanced Placement Program and International Baccalaureate Programme for gifted and talented immigrant students.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

From a constructivist perspective, I conducted an intrinsic, embedded, single-case study using document analysis, interviews, and a focus group (Yin, 2014). My case is the experience of successful gifted immigrant students in the International Baccalaureate Programme (IB); I studied individual students to gain a more complete understanding of the case (Simons, 2009). The context is the IB Programme at Lakeshore High School (pseudonym). The purpose of my research was to better understand the background and experiences of successful gifted and talented immigrant students within an International Baccalaureate Programme and to consider implications for educators so they can better address their strengths and needs. Research questions that pertain to this overall focus included:

- How do gifted and talented immigrant students who were successful in the Lakeshore IB Programme describe their experiences?
- What were the cultural and contextual aspects of the students' experiences?
- What elements of the Lakeshore IB Programme addressed the strengths and needs of gifted and talented immigrant students?

Before exploring these questions, I first explore the philosophical foundations that form the lens from which I view the world, what I believe about the nature of knowledge and knowing (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004).

### **Theoretical framework**

“Our theories are really disguised autobiographies, often rooted in childhood” (Newkirk, 2014, p. 3). In my early years, I grew up in Pennsylvania, in a family where my dad made up songs for us to perform and my mother taught me to read at age three. My father’s sudden death transported our family – my mother, a young and beautiful widow with four children aged four months to eight years old – to Atlanta to be close to her twin sister’s family. Even tragedy was transformed into affirmation as my mother continued to create the kind of childhood that celebrated us as individuals while turning us loose to explore the wild world. I was raised on words, my mother’s poetry lived out in our family life:

I am a Child

And I am like the Springtime

Full of hope, innocence and sense of Expectancy!

I am Potential

Yet to be molded by the handiwork of Time

Please stop folding the clothes

and look at me!

(Roehm, 2003)

Any moment of triumph or beauty was celebrated, and we grew up empowered by a strong sense of self coupled with a tangible sense of the connection we shared, the reality we created as a family. Perhaps that is why constructivism resonates with me as a researcher, where knowledge is created rather than found. Since childhood, I have been aware of my own perspective about what is real and how families and groups share a common understanding rather than an exactly similar reality, a collective creating of reality (Stake, 1995). I hope to describe the collective



reality of the IB students in a way that may help others better understand the experiences of immigrant students and the transformative experience of implementing a new and rigorous program.

*The Dance*

Come, frolic with me in this delicious world.

Feel the silk of dialogue

Revel in the majesty of communion

Forget the Saints, for we are our own wonder!

(Roehm, 2003)

My strongest memories involved communion – my mother’s soft hand stroking my forehead, my sister’s arm flung over my back as we slept, even the feel of the wind in my face. My experience was enriched by the power of language, surrounded by poetry, stories, books, and an environment where words completed our thoughts and connected us to each other. As Newkirk (2014) suggested, the autobiography of my childhood laid the foundation for my theory: a constructivist theoretical framework influenced by the philosophies of John Dewey and Paulo Freire that stems from an interpretivist’s view of reality.

### **Interpretive Research Paradigm**

Schwandt (2007) described the interpretivist paradigm as a philosophy of idealists who do not understand reality directly but instead interpret the world through the mind. For interpretive researchers, describing what happened is a social exercise where people interpret meaning, and the meaning changes through their interactions (Bassey, 2010). This means that by the very act of conducting this study, I affected the meaning of the experience. An interpretivist approach lent definition to my role as a researcher embracing personal connections and

empathetic insights (Glesne, 2011). The act of researching involved me as a variable in the study (Bassey, 2010). The reality I sought to understand was not a thing to grasp and dissect; rather, it continued to be a living, changing entity that my students and I constructed together.

### **Constructivism**

Constructivism embraces the idea that we construct knowledge rather than discover it (Stake, 1995) and emphasizes how we create meaning in our minds (Crotty, 1998). To understand the experience of my students who were immigrant students in an IB Programme, I asked them to join me in remembering and thus constructing the individual reality that each creates as meaningful and that we create together. Guba and Lincoln (1994) described the epistemology of constructivism: “The investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the ‘findings’ are *literally created* as the investigation proceeds” (p. 111). From this perspective, the participants were my co-researchers, and our interaction was necessary as I joined them in creating. Freire (1993) suggested that the researcher and people who are being researched should work as co-investigators. My former students and I explored the individual experiences and themes together. My purpose was to create a study that gave readers a sense of the students’ experiences so that students, readers, and I can better understand, rather than to draw conclusions for readers.

### **Experience**

Dewey (1997) instructed educators to “view teaching and learning as a continuous process of reconstruction of experience” (p. 87). As my students reconstructed their experiences, I believe they created and found meaning beyond the subjects they studied or the IB exams they passed. The act of reflection on past experience may have helped them to further understand themselves as well as the experience. Because each person’s experience was both unique and

collective, I understood that their recollections were different. Autobiographical recollections require an individual to be conscious of the self in the past, as well as to be aware of others who shared the past and who may remember it differently (Fivush and Nelson, 2004). Although I was interested in any common or disparate themes that emerged from the study, the themes were not the point of the study. Each participant had his or her own perspective, and describing their memories and stories was the focus. Dewey (1997) explained: “Wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in further experiences” (p. 27-28). By sharing memories and stories, we could understand the nature of their experience then, the experience of telling in the present, and their future selves changed both by these experiences and the telling of them.

### **Dialogue**

“If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings” (Freire, 1993, p. 69). As I’ve experienced since my childhood, words have the power to connect people, but they help to express what we find meaningful and in so doing, to shape meaning itself. “Naming the world” is the way we remember, understand, and thus shape reality. A teacher, a classroom, an educational program, or a school can create an environment of transformational learning when students and teachers enter into true dialogue: living, creating, reflecting, and then telling their story. Asking my former students to enter into the dialogue of telling their story was a way of naming the world, giving a narrative identity to their experience. Greene (2014) described dialogue as an opening to each other, involving imagination, empathy, and connection. I entered into this kind of dialogue with my participants, where our conversation sprang from a desire to understand, to imagine, and to connect. This dialogue may continue as it connects their experiences to the reader through the empathy and connection he or she finds.

D.H. Lawrence (1982) wrote, “Water is H<sub>2</sub>O, hydrogen two parts, oxygen one, But there is also a third thing, that makes it water. And nobody knows what that is... The atom locks up two energies but it is the third thing present that makes it an atom.” My study involved participants and artifacts and even the reader interacting to create a third thing, a unique understanding of the reality of their experience. By inviting my students to join me in this study, I asked them to create what D. H. Lawrence called the third thing, which continues to be dynamic even as we create it. Freire (1993) explained that we are “beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted human beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (p. 65). This was significant for my theoretical framework and belief that dialogue and experience will not create a static reality. As a researcher, I committed to resist closure. I regarded my former students not as how I remembered them, but instead where they were at this moment of becoming; looking back at previous moments of becoming; reflecting, and sharing their experiences; which changed continually as they experienced that reflection.

To get a sense of an educational experience (or any experience) requires something beyond a quantitative summation of outcomes. This study’s focus was on the individual and collective experience of successful gifted and talented immigrant students in an IB Programme, conducted in the context of my theoretical framework. Asking the students to look back was not to record a dim reflection of a past experience, but was instead an extension of that experience through dialogue, using the art of narrative to share their stories.

### **Research Design: Case Study**

Case study is a type of approach within qualitative research. Stake (1995) described the audacious goal of qualitative research as seeking understanding for “the complex interrelationships among all that exists” (p. 37). I accept the impossibility of ever finishing with

the limitlessness of “all that exists” but simultaneously embrace the infinite movement towards deeper understanding. A case study may achieve its purpose of deeper insight by offering a type of generalization (Hays, 2004). Most applicable to the purpose of this case study is what Bassey (2010) called a fuzzy generalization, a more open-ended conclusion that suggests the possibility that something found in one place may occur in another. There is no certainty, but there is potential. This case study of successful gifted and talented immigrant students’ experiences in an IB Programme in the Southeast is unique but it may offer a possibility for elsewhere and insight for readers.

For this case study, an embedded single-case study design was most appropriate. My study was both revelatory and longitudinal, two rationales that support the design of a single-case study (Yin, 2014). Because of the shared experience of the IB Programme, I had a unique perspective from which to observe (and participate in) the IB experience of the children of immigrants. The IB experience began with applications in the spring of 2008 and culminated with graduation and IB Diplomas or Certificates in the summer of 2010. As I conducted research in 2015, asking students to look back on their experience and reflect on its impact on their now twenty-something year old selves, the case was somewhat longitudinal, with two points in time – looking back at the high school experience and considering the lingering impact of this experience five years later. The design of an embedded case study helped me to focus on both the individual experience of each student while also considering the larger unit of analysis, the case itself: the experience of successful gifted and talented immigrant students in an IB Programme.

## **Bounding the Case**

What is the case? The case, then, is the unique person, group, or program to be studied, explicitly bounded by its particular nature and by time, yet infinitely complex. The definition of the case relates to the research questions (Yin, 2014). The purpose of my research was to better understand the background and experiences of successful gifted and talented immigrant students within an International Baccalaureate Programme and to identify implications for educators that may help to address immigrant students' strengths and needs. The case is the experience of these immigrant students in the IB Programme, and the context is the program itself.

**Context.** My research questions delineated the context of the place and time of the IB Programme in which my participants enrolled. I used the pseudonym Lakeshore High School for the school to protect the privacy of my participants. This study focused on the 2008 – 2010 time period, the first two years of an IB Diploma Programme at a suburban high school in the Southeastern United States. In 2008, Lakeshore High School was one of six public high schools in a district that served approximately 25,000 total students.

The context included the inaugural years of this IB Programme, with thirty-three total students from a wide variety of cultures, languages, and socio-economic backgrounds. Lakeshore High School was a public high school with 1,040 students, located in the southeast in a suburban setting. During the 2008 – 2010 time period, a diverse population of students included 55% on free/reduced lunch, 36% Hispanic, 53% White, and 11% other ethnicities (Enrollment by Ethnicity/Race, Gender and Grade Level, 2010). This paper provides a more comprehensive description of the context of the Lakeshore IB Programme in Chapter IV.

## **Participants**

The larger unit of analysis or single-case is the experience of successful gifted and talented immigrant students in the Lakeshore IB Programme. I chose this case when I first considered this study and discovered that ten of the thirty-three students who completed the IB Programme happened to be children of immigrants from a variety of backgrounds. There is little research about the experience of successful gifted and talented immigrant students participating in advanced high school educational programs such as IB. In order to gain a more comprehensive perspective of the context of their experience, I included a teacher focus group of their IB teachers.

### **Students**

After examining the ten students' immigration and language backgrounds, parent education status, native country, gifted qualifying status, success in IB, and college destinations, I discovered that the immigrant students were quite diverse. Their families had emigrated from the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Ethiopia, South Korea, Mexico (3), El Salvador, and India. Four of them had spoken English at home, and five of them had parents involved in professional careers that relied on a college education. Only one had immigrated to the U.S. illegally and had undocumented status until he was 16 years old. Three of the students had been identified as gifted and although all of these students completed the full IB Programme, five of them earned the IB Diploma; the others passed various IB exams and earned college credit. It is important to note that students may be considered successful in an IB Programme even if they do not earn the IB Diploma. All of the thirty-three students were successful at passing some or all of their exams. In a larger sense, they were successful in navigating the challenge of six IB classes a year for two years while also completing the IB core of Creativity, Action, and Service (CAS);

Theory of Knowledge (TOK); and the 4,000 word Extended Essay. I could have chosen any three immigrant students if I based it only on being successful.

I intentionally chose three specific immigrant students as participants, based on both their similarities and differences. I chose three whose parents had not completed college and did not work in professional careers while the students were in high school. All were native speakers of other languages and successfully earned the IB Diploma. The three students varied, however, in their gifted qualification status and immigration backgrounds: one had come over illegally from Mexico when he was seven; another came over legally from Mexico when he was five, and the third was born in the U.S. after her parents emigrated from Laos. Two of them were in the gifted program and one had never been nominated or tested for gifted. After graduating from high school, they took three different postsecondary paths, but all went to college and had graduated by the time of this study. One went to an Ivy League school; another to a prestigious private university, and the third to a public state university.

Table 4

*Characteristics of Selected Participants*

Name	Gender	Gifted	ESOL	Legal Status	When Immigrate to U.S.	Free/Red. Lunch	College	Parent occupation	Language at Home	Parent's Home Country
<b>Santiago</b>	M	NA	Y	Undocumented	Immigrated illegally at age 7	Y	Full Scholarship to state university	Mom: General Poultry Plant Worker Dad: Shipping and Receiving at Poultry Plant	Spanish	Mexico
<b>Alejandro</b>	M	G	N**	Legal Resident	Immigrated legally at age 5	Y	Full Scholarship to Ivy League University	Mom: Customer Service Specialist Dad: salesman	Spanish	Mexico
<b>Maly</b>	F	G*	Y	Citizen	Born in U.S.	Y	Scholarships to private university	Both were machine operators / assembly line workers	Lao	Laos

\*Maly was identified as gifted but the gifted records were not transferred to high school when the family moved.

\*\*Alejandro did not have to be in ESOL in exchange for repeating kindergarten.



I chose these three because they had in common that they had spoken a language other than English at home, had working parents, qualified at some point for free/reduced lunch, and had earned the IB Diploma. I also chose them for their differing immigrant statuses, how they arrived in the U.S., and their varied gifted designations. Despite their commonalities, their immigration stories, legal status in the U.S., and backgrounds were vastly different, which I felt would contribute to a richer understanding of the gifted and talented immigrant student experience.

### **Teachers**

To select teacher participants I looked back at the original IB application for authorization at the list of the inaugural group of educators. Each of them had been to a 3-day IB training workshop and written a 15-page syllabus outlining their specific approaches to the IB curriculum (Lakeshore High School Diploma Programme Application Form, 2007). They had met together many times in the year before the program started, and in the first two years, they collaborated and met over the summer and monthly. These teachers knew their students; they had taught them as freshmen and sophomores and were deeply involved in the student application process.

I chose six teachers who had taught IB at Lakeshore High School from 2008 – 2013 and who were still living or teaching nearby. They taught the following subjects to the participants in this study: IB Spanish Literature; IB English B (English support); IB English Literature; Theory of Knowledge (TOK); IB Math; and IB Advisement (School Librarian). This group included the teachers who had taught the immigrant students in language and literature, as well as in TOK, one of the core courses of IB. The IB math teacher had been an instrumental part of starting the program. The school librarian had built strong relationships with the IB students as one of their advisors who met with them every day for two years. I believed that this group of teachers could

provide a rich description of the context of the Lakeshore IB Programme as well as insights into the immigrant students' experiences. Table 5, *Teacher Focus Group Participants' Subjects, Certifications, and Experience* shows the specific backgrounds of each of the six teacher participants.

Table 5

*Teacher Focus Group Participants' Subjects, Certifications, and Experience*

<b>Subject(s) taught</b>	<b>Certification – Endorsements - Training</b>	<b>Began teaching in:</b>	<b>Years of Experience in IB</b>
English A Literature	English IB English Literature Training 10-hour Gifted Characteristics Course	1993	2008 – 2015 (currently teaching IB)
English B Language	English; ESOL; Speech IB English B Training Gifted Endorsement	1984	2008 – 2014
Spanish A Literature	Spanish IB Spanish A Literature Training 10-hour Gifted Characteristics Course	1985	2008 – 2015
Theory of Knowledge	English; ESOL; History; IB TOK Training Gifted Endorsement	2006	2008 – 2015 (currently IB Coordinator)
IB Math	Math IB Math Training Gifted Endorsement	1996	2008 – 2015
Librarian	English; Media Specialist IB Librarian Training	1988	2008 – 2015

### **Researcher's Role**

From Stake's (1995) list of possible case researcher roles, I was a teacher, participant observer, advocate, and interviewer (p. 91). Additionally, I am a storyteller (Simons, 2009). My role as a case researcher was similar to the role for which I strove as teacher: the role of facilitator and collaborator. I as the researcher and the students as participants were collaborators

who created meaning from the memories of the shared experience of the IB and their unique experiences of being a child of immigrants. As a collaborator, I must respect the dynamic persons of my former students. Walt Whitman (2001) wrote in “Song of Myself:”

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

My students (and I) contain multitudes: their remembrances of their former selves, their present perceptions, and the growing and changing people they are becoming. My role was to draw them into a shared experience in this study. Freire (1993) supported this point of view: “...the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflection of the students. The students – no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (p. 61-62). My role as a researcher was to be the collaborative facilitator who created a space for memories, stories, and meaning-making.

What, then, was the relationship with my former IB students? I was their IB coordinator. As IB coordinator I supported teachers by providing training workshops, resources, or just a listening ear, but my primary job was to serve students as an advocate, tutor, and advisor. I came to know all three of my participants when they were in 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I taught them in my geometry classes, knew them through our daily homeroom advisement meetings, or met them as they first began to inquire about the new IB Programme we were starting. My first relationship with them was one of a teacher or IB coordinator, an adult advisor, and certainly someone with some kind of authority and thus power. I believe, however, that they knew even from the beginning that I supported them in their dreams and embraced them as unique and varied individuals. As we moved through the IB Programme together, I would describe our relationship

as one of devotion to each other. I spent long nights, weekends, and early mornings working to help them be successful, not just in IB, but in their growth as young adults. They shared their lives with me and I was constantly aware of the privilege of being a part of their growing and becoming. As they struggled with stress, grades, family issues, illegal immigrant threats, college choices, and identity crises, they often turned to me, for occasional guidance or just as a listening ear. By the time they graduated, I loved them, and they loved me.

Some might wonder if such closeness influenced the outcome of this study, to which I can only reply – of course. It influenced the study because it was part of the study. The First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul’s famous chapter on love, included, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face, now I know in part, but then I shall know fully” (I Cor 13:12 New American Standard Version). This has been translated as seeing through a glass darkly. Rather than obscuring the understanding, I wondered if the unique lens through which I saw them instead offered a new dimension of understanding, seeing more clearly. If indeed we do see through a mirror dimly, I asked them to look at a mirror of self, reflect back to me, and hoped for a moment of understanding, face to face. The subjectivity of love provided a significant aspect of deep, insightful perception, something to be valued rather than avoided (Stake, 1995). As we constructed the meaning of their stories, my role was to reflect back to them what I heard and understood. The love we share may not have obscured an immaculate truth, but may instead have illuminated a deeper understanding.

Freire (1993) explained that love, humility, faith, and trust are necessary: “Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence...which leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world” (p. 72). A key part of this trust was humility,

where I as the researcher did not regard myself as the one with the knowledge, but rather as one who was trying to learn more (Freire, 1993). This resonated with my constructivist point of view that we created meaning together as co-investigators. As a researcher, I strove for humility about my role and faith in my participants to share the experience of gifted and talented immigrant students in an IB Programme.

### **Subjectivity**

I have confessed already that I viewed my participants through the lens of love. Additionally, I came to this process with both conscious and unconscious values, beliefs, and biases. My subjectivity was an unavoidable but significant factor in a deep understanding of the case (Simons, 2009). The task was to design a plan to monitor and discipline my subjectivity. I kept a reflective journal to reflect on a continual basis about my subjectivity. It was the intentionality and honesty of my reflections which helped me to more fully enter into the shared meaning-making with my participants, as my attempt to be as transparent as possible to myself may have helped us to see more clearly, face to face. White (1954) wrote, “Whoever sets pen to paper writes of himself, whether knowingly or not...” (XI). Although I sought to hear my students’ stories, I was a part of their stories, and I was inextricably intertwined with the process itself. Because I wanted to offer my participants’ personal views, being aware of my subjectivity helped me to monitor it and to ensure quality in my study.

### **Data Collection**

I used interviewing as my primary method of collecting data, but I also used document analysis, a teacher focus group discussion, and reflective journaling to triangulate data. Triangulation refers to using several methods to gather data to support and strengthen the significance of findings (Simons, 2009). By using the methods of interviewing, focus group,

document analysis, and reflective journaling I looked for where the varying perspectives of students, teachers, and documents intersected (Simons, 2009). My goal was to amplify understanding of successful gifted and talented immigrant students' experiences in the IB Programme and to identify program elements that impacted their experience.

### **Document Analysis**

Prior (2011) described searching for documents as creating the parts of a map, with identifiable patterns. My document analysis, then, was an attempt to make an initial map, a tool for organizing the chaos into a beginning of describing the landscape of this new program, and even what it may have felt like to breathe the air. The documents I sought and found included not only formal writings, but also informal documents such as photographs, electronic postings, and videos, remaining "open for unexpected clues" (Stake, 1995). I cast a wide net, looking through files, electronic folders, letters, student assignments and presentations, parent meeting documents, applications, schedules, and the students' documentation on Facebook and other social media. The process of collecting relevant documents began as a divergent process, wide open, and then I sifted and found insights that enhanced my understanding of students' experiences and the IB Programme. Prior (2011) emphasized the importance of understanding documents as socially situated and suggested that researchers find the original purpose of documents and seek to understand their cultural context. Careful and patient analysis helped me to avoid using the written text or images of the documents apart from their context.

The document collection and analysis occurred first, as a way of setting up a context for the IB Programme and for understanding student experiences, but the overall data collection process was iterative, as interviews, the focus group, and my own reflections brought fresh insights to that context. Appendix A: Screenshots of Parts of Document Analysis, shows

examples of some of the documents and includes the original purpose of the document, date of the document, and the textual support of themes.

## **Interviews**

My theoretical framework involved my perspective that reality is interpreted through the mind in a social context and through dialogue, while the meaning of experiences is constructed rather than discovered. To understand the experience of gifted and talented immigrant students, the interview process included dialogue, embracing the idea that we are making meaning through the interview as a reflective process. I used a semi-structured interview protocol to promote authentic dialogue. I borrowed from the philosophy of phenomenological interviewing by using sensitive questioning, listening intently, allowing the story to flow, and using follow-up questions to elicit rich responses (Roulston, 2010). I wanted to uncover vivid layers of narrative about their experiences (deMarrais & Lappan, 2004). In light of our shared experience and any perceived power or influence I may have had, it was important to exercise a certain restraint. I did not refrain from contributing to the meaning-making, but I did intentionally take on a role reversal of the student of the meaning-making rather than their former teacher and IB coordinator.

**Interview guide.** For the student interview guide, I created lists of open-ended questions and planned for a flexible approach that might open up opportunities to gather unanticipated responses and stories (Stake, 1995). Phenomenological interviewing emphasizes flexible questions that ask the participants to share about experiences in order to generate detailed descriptions (Roulston, 2010). I developed the interview guide as a foundation for dialogue and followed up with probing questions to elicit description and stories (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Roulston, 2010). Appendix B contains the student interview guide.

**Contacting participants.** My first contact to my students was an email request, but I followed up with Facebook messages to the participants, because they do not always check their email. All responded via Facebook and then by email, returning the signed participation agreements. I interviewed two of the students electronically, as one was in Pennsylvania and one in Peru. The third student I interviewed face to face. I recorded and transcribed the interviews and then sent each transcript back to the respective participant for approval and suggestions.

### **Teacher Focus Group**

I used a focus group approach to obtain the perspectives of the original IB teachers from 2008-2010. I recruited participants who were still in teaching and who had been a part of the IB faculty who first implemented the program, taught the immigrant students, and had been involved with their experiences until they graduated. I contacted the teachers by email and set up a time to meet in the school library, the scene of so many of our IB experiences. I used a semi-structured question format (Appendix C) and also emailed discussion ideas to the teachers ahead of time. All of the teachers were able to attend, and I recorded the 90-minute focus group discussion, transcribed it, and then sent it back to the participants for any additional feedback or suggestions.

### **Data Analysis**

When the data was collected, it consisted of 55 pages of interview transcripts, 25 pages from the transcript of the focus group, 22 pages of my personal reflections, and over 100 pages of documents. The data had to be analyzed to provide a rich description of the context of the Lakeshore IB Programme and to be transformed into student narratives of their experiences. I used the data analysis strategy of poring through the data to look for patterns and insights through an inductive process (Yin, 2014). This was not a linear approach but rather an iterative



process of listening, reading, organizing, and analyzing in a cyclical and often circuitous manner, transforming the data by condensing it into meaningful chunks (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis included combing through all data for the IB Programme description; analyzing the interview transcripts, teacher focus group transcript, documents, and personal reflections; chunking the analyzed data into a narrative form based roughly on time and theme; and seeking the individual narrative themes that emerged in each student's story.

The document analysis was first. As I found, selected and combed through the documents, I began to uncover themes. I analyzed each document for its original date and purpose. Then I put the information in a spreadsheet and listed the themes as titles across the top with the supporting text of each document pasted in the appropriate cell. The themes included challenge; teambuilding; building community; creativity; learning; diversity; humor; challenge; stress, etc. The themes served as a background to the context of the IB Programme at Lakeshore High School and also served to offer individual student insights through student applications, surveys, and past writings.

I analyzed the data from the student interviews using what Roulston (2010) referred to "narrative cognition," a form of analysis that generates stories. Polkinghorne (1995) used the term "narrative analysis" to describe how writers use collected data to construct stories, moving from the specific details in the collected data to narratives. In order to begin this narrative analysis, I organized each individual student's data (from interviews, teacher focus group, personal reflections, and document analysis) in a spreadsheet based upon time and topic. I analyzed each student's data individually to determine how best to tell their stories. One technique included pasting all of the interview text into a Wordle program to show which words were used most often by each student (Feinberg, 2014). I looked at the numerous topics for each

student and began to see where some were connected and could merge into one, or where another topic was weaker in textual support. With the spreadsheet in front of me and my reflections continuing, I wrote their individual stories, organizing them according to time whenever I could do so without losing the thread of each theme.

The case concerns the experiences of successful gifted and talented immigrant students in an IB Programme, and the three student narratives served as subunits in an embedded case study design (Yin, 2014). The “analysis of narrative” refers to analyzing the constructed student narratives to find individual or common themes (Polkinghorne, 1995). This amplifies the understanding of the students’ experiences by recognizing the themes that resonate with human experience in general. I majored in English Literature as an undergraduate because I loved the process of analyzing narratives for themes and found deep meaning in how themes resonated with life experiences. After writing the distinct narratives, I read them again and again, using an inductive approach to finding insights into their meaning. I recorded the thematic topics from each story in a spreadsheet that included the various places in the individual student text that alluded to a theme; the notes from my reflections that pertained to those themes; the text from the teacher focus group that mentioned anything that related to the topics; and insights from the document analysis that pertained to the ideas. I repeated the process across the same spreadsheet for every student to find patterns and themes shared by more than one of the students. I pored again through the constructed narratives to allow intersections among the stories to emerge.

The spreadsheet supported the analytic technique of cross-case analysis applied to the subunits to discover places where the themes overlapped among the student narratives (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). In cross-case analysis the researcher compares the cases, or in this study, the embedded cases or subunits, to uncover themes common to two or more cases. This was an

iterative process as my notes or documents gave new insights into the themes and served to add a new layer of meaning to recurring themes and to return my perspective to the larger unit of analysis.

Finally, I listed the individual and intersecting themes and decided to portray them in a 3-circle Venn diagram to illustrate the overlapping areas that amplified the overall understanding of the immigrant student experience. I liked the idea of using circles, which can represent infinity. As one attempts to find the area of polygon, for example, one can increase the number of sides to infinity and never quite reach the curve of the circle. In the same way, the Venn diagram of three intersection circles represented the places where I found unique themes or intersecting themes, but they are only a part of the unlimited depth of the actual students' experiences. This model (on the following page) served to guide the discussion of my findings.

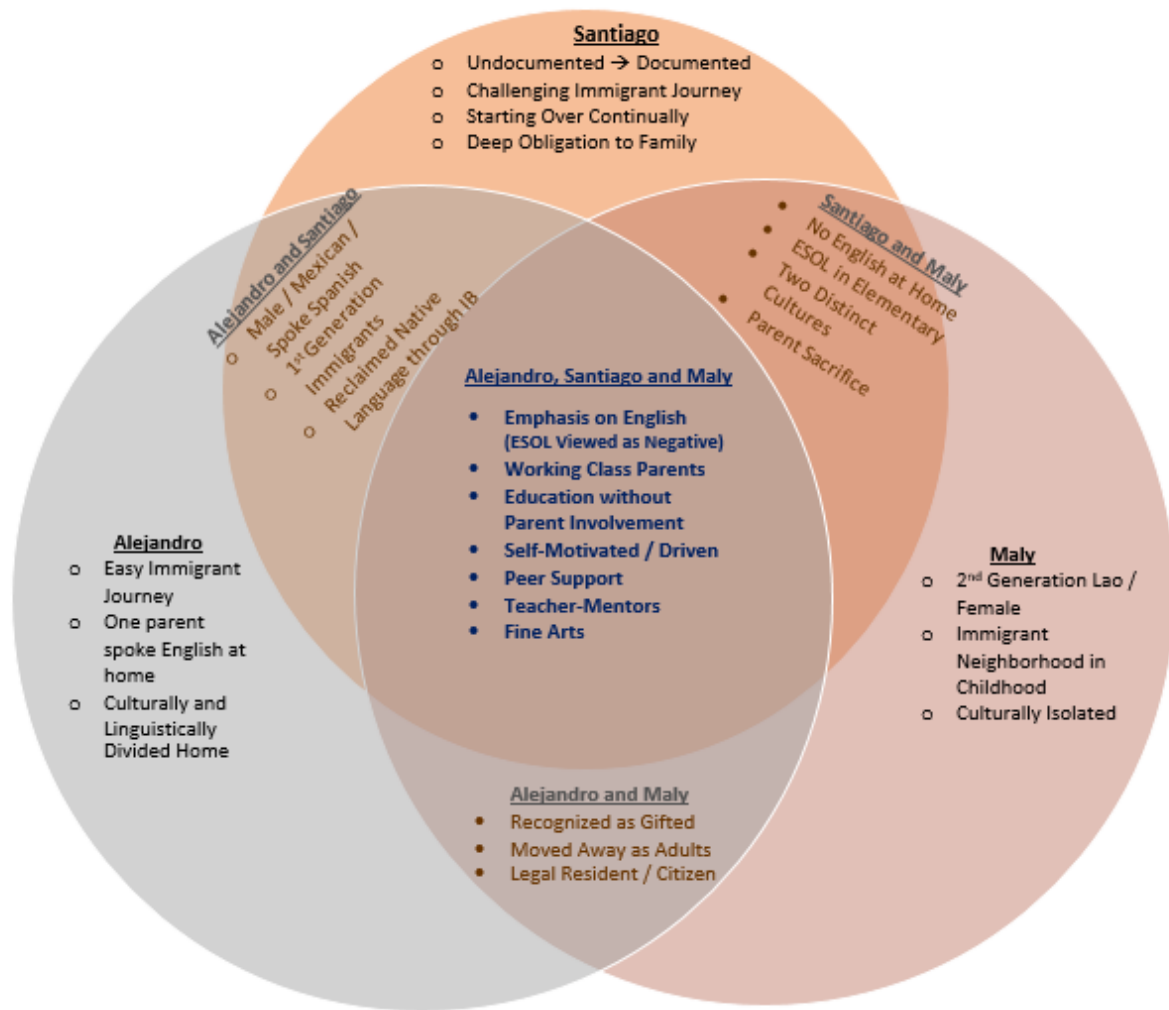


Figure 2: Thematic Intersections. This figure illustrates the singular and overlapping themes from the student narratives.

### Ensuring Quality

Glesne (2011) discussed the importance of trustworthiness in qualitative research. To ensure quality in my case study, I used the techniques of member checking, triangulation, and reflexivity.

**Member checking.** Member checking is a way of contributing to the quality in the process of interviewing, transcribing, and interpreting participants' voices. It addresses the

quality of interviews by checking back with participants and asking for their responses to transcriptions and interpretations (Roulston, 2010; Simons, 2009). After transcribing each interview, I sent the transcript to the participants for any feedback, suggestions, or changes. As the researcher, I was inextricably involved in the construction of narrative and meaning, but I wanted to give them the opportunity to hear their voices. One of my student participants followed up with an additional paragraph she wanted to add, and one of the IB teachers also responded with something she had been uncomfortable articulating with the group.

After constructing the individual student narratives, I again contacted each student and shared what I had written. I asked for their suggestions, concerns, or changes, explaining that I did not want them to feel Eliot's (1964) poetic refrain from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." "That is not what I meant, that is not what I meant at all." I wanted to be sure that their stories resonated with them, and that I had not taken their words and made them something into something different from what they perceived as reality. I sent each participant his or her portrait on the same day. They responded immediately. Maly wrote to me while she was reading her narrative, dialoguing about how it moved her and her immediate reaction. All of my participants responded: they asked for a different pseudonym; or to clarify something they had said; or to take something out that seemed to convey a significance they did not feel.

This process certainly strengthened the quality of my study, but it also made real my constructivist approach as together we created a shared reality. The electronic dialogue back and forth with my students as we constructed their final narratives together was, for me, the most meaningful part of the study, truly a moment of sharing, face to face.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation refers to utilizing several methods to gather data and is a way of determining the significance of an idea that emerges from the data, providing a different

perspective that can strengthen the findings (Simons, 2009). I used the methods of document analysis, interviews, reflections, and a teacher focus group to generate data from several sources. This process was not to arrive at an infallible truth, but rather to provide layers of support for key themes. Triangulation was able to both support and more fully round out my sense of the immigrant students' experiences in IB.

**Reflexivity.** Reflexivity involves being aware of how I as the researcher may impact the research process and thus affect the data and findings (Simons, 2009). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that researchers might “fall in love” with participants and yet move from a closeness to an objectivity throughout the process. As I conducted my interviews and research, I reflected in a research notebook or document and moved back and forth from objectivity to a feeling of shared intimacy. This provided a way for me to recognize my own subjectivity, not necessarily to avoid it, but to be aware of its influence on the study. The notes also served as something like field notes taken out of time. Reflecting back on the closeness I had with my participants in the past or that I experienced while conducting research helped me to construct a certain picture of what was experienced, a way to “freeze specific moments in narrative inquiry space” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 83). My researcher's journal helped me to explore my own involvement and influence (Simons, 2009). To ensure quality in my case study, I used the journal to write an observation or idea and then set it aside to see what my participants revealed rather than allowing it to guide the results. Although I conducted the interviews and focus group, I was still a participant-observer, both in my past role as IB coordinator and my current role as listener, researcher, and writer.

Appendix D describes the timeline and process of data collection for and data analysis of the student portraits. Member checking, triangulation, and reflexivity served not only to ensure

quality but also to enhance the richness of the findings. I was most aware of living within my theoretical framework of constructivism, interpretivism, dialogue, and experience when sharing the stories with my participants and hearing their responses. One wrote via Facebook message: “I am tearing up while reading this.” Another thanked me for sharing his stories. The qualitative research techniques designed to ensure quality actually enriched the quality of the research experience itself, for both my participants, who were also co-researchers, and for me as the researcher, who was also a participant.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Given our previous relationship where I was a teacher, coordinator, and potential authority figure and given the bond we share, I felt a compelling need to explore potential ethical issues. A case study can empower participants by giving them control of the interview (Simons, 2009). I wanted to enable my participants to share their stories without pressuring them or betraying their privacy, and in particular to avoid using any deception, consciously or unconsciously (Yin, 2014). I took careful measures to obtain informed consent, but there was more to this than simply addressing it with the Internal Review Board and accurately informing participants. I wanted to protect their identities and ensure that they felt valued by me as their friend rather than used by me as a researcher. Altork (1998) described a particular concern about a participant she called Goldie, who felt abandoned after the study concluded. My participants are my co-investigators, my former students, and my friends. I wanted them to feel as if they told a story that they wanted to tell. Several of my participants, including the teachers, have contacted me via Facebook or email to thank me for the experience, and I have responded back to them electronically as well as with handwritten notes. I have always planned to stay in close touch with my former students for the rest of my life, but the fact that they have entered into this

adventure with me makes me want to be sure that they understand that I value their friendship far more than their involvement in my research.

My final concern was protecting their confidentiality. I have changed their names and shared their stories with them so that they gave their final approval to the published document. My student participants were not particularly concerned about confidentiality and seemed to have a sense of fulfillment about their stories. One suggested using his real name and another asked me to include a piece of artwork he had previously published. My students and the focus group of teachers shared their stories freely. My ethical moment of crisis occurred when I realized that all that my former students had shared with me in this study had been inside them all along. I had lived through two years of IB with them, loved them, and supported them, but I had missed so many opportunities to know them. I knew they were beautiful in their brilliance, imperfections, resilience, and depth, but there was so much I did not understand. More than the fact that I may complete this dissertation is a deep sense of gratefulness that the research process served to open my eyes to beauty that I had not imagined, the magical merging of each of them as a child, a part of a family, and a stranger in a strange land. Their kindness in allowing me to see them more clearly overwhelms me.



## CHAPTER 4

### CONTEXT: THE LAKESHORE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMME

The teacher focus group and document analysis provided a rich description of the context of the Lakeshore IB Programme. In order to become authorized to offer the IB Programme, a school must complete a comprehensive application. The Lakeshore High School IB application for authorization contained the following description of the school and the reasons for applying to become an IB school:

Lakeshore High School is located in a rural community that is rapidly changing and growing to become more of a suburb of a large southern capital city. On a small scale, our students are a part of a quickly diversifying population who speak a variety of languages, primarily English and Spanish. On a larger scale, our students are growing up in a truly global society unlike the southern small-town community of their parents and grandparents. The history of the Deep South in the United States includes a lack of acceptance and understanding of people from different backgrounds; now, the south is a hub for immigrants and for people of all cultures. Because of the setting of our school, the southern part of the United States in a time period of immense growth and change, we believe that our students need the IB Programme for the following reasons: To increase rigor and curiosity; to build a global perspective; to deepen principles and character; and to benefit our local and global community. (Lakeshore High School Diploma Programme Application Form, 2007)

In the fall of 2006, Lakeshore High School in the southeastern United States applied to offer the International Baccalaureate Programme (IB). The inaugural group of students included students from diverse populations, including native speakers of Spanish, children with low socio-economic status, and immigrant students. Thirty-three students completed the program as the first group of International Baccalaureate Diploma students in this suburban high school. Along the way students who were afraid to speak aloud in class gave speeches to the entire student body; children who had never fully read a novel for an English class become experts at reading analysis and literary criticism, and students who literally did not speak the same language became bilingual best friends. Students did not simply stay in school; they thrived. Additionally, students forged friendships that transcended ethnicity, language, and background.

This IB Programme became the first public school in the United States to offer the IB Bilingual Programme with support for non-native English speakers, and first and second-generation immigrants, undocumented students, and native speakers of other languages joined their American-born peers in earning scholarships and attending prestigious universities. Fourteen of these students would go on to earn the IB Diploma, but the real success stories were those who did not earn the diploma, but who grew into scholars and leaders. The school was named a Georgia School of Excellence and nominated for a Blue Ribbon School award because of their test scores. This school, district, and state provide the context for this study.

### **School District**

Lakeshore High School was in a progressive school district that had begun exploring creative programs for high achieving students under the guidance of a new superintendent and innovative gifted coordinator. The district philosophy was built upon Renzulli's (1998) idea that "a rising tide lifts all ships," which proposes that the teaching strategies previously used only for

gifted students could help to develop abilities in all students. The district supported the implementation of IB by funding the exploration, application, and training processes. Bland and Woodworth (2009) conducted a study on two IB schools that had recruited and supported low income and diverse students in their IB Programmes and found that adequate district support was an important part of the success of the program, whether it be supporting the program design or providing necessary funding. District staff advised the Lakeshore High School IB leaders and facilitated district support for the application and implementation of IB. The district fully funded training and travel expenses for teachers, all needed resources, a full-time teacher allotment for coordination, and the expense of students' registration and IB exams. The fact that students did not have to consider cost enabled the Lakeshore IB Programme to reach out to a diverse group of students who may not have otherwise been able to afford the cost of IB exams or materials.

### **School Demographics**

Three elementary schools and one middle school fed into Lakeshore High School, which had a population of 1,075 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> graders during the time of this study. Historically, the school population had been primarily White and affluent. When the school opened in the early 90's, 11% of the student population was eligible for free/reduced lunch and 93% of the students were White. Beginning in the early 2000s, the Hispanic population began to increase while the White population decreased, and the overall enrollment continued to fluctuate between 1,000 and 1,050. The student demographics changed from 2008 – 2010, the time period of this study, as the number of white students continued to decrease and the number of Hispanic students increased. Currently, Lakeshore High School is a majority-minority school, with the largest group identified as Hispanic. Table 6, *Principal Nationalities/Ethnicities of Lakeshore High School, 2008-2015*, outlines the changes in demographics from 2008, 2010, and 2015.

Table 6

*Principal Nationalities/Ethnicities of Lakeshore High School, 2008-2015*

<b>Principal nationalities/ethnicities</b>	<b>Number of students (2008)</b>	<b>Number of students (2010)</b>	<b>Number of students (2015)</b>
White/Non-Hispanic	569	546	481
Hispanic	322	374	498
Black/Non-Hispanic	52	61	56
Asian/Pacific Islander	20	33	26
Interracial	14	18	17

Although currently the majority of the school population is Hispanic, the trend towards increased diversity continued during the time period of this study. Additionally, the number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch grew, a trend which has continued to the present day.

Table 7

*Socio-Economic Status of Lakeshore High School, 2008-2015*

<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	<b>Number of students (2008)</b>	<b>Number of students (2010)</b>	<b>Number of students (2015)</b>
Eligible for Free Lunch	467	520	533
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	70	73	97
Total Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	537	593	630
Total Enrollment	1083	1076	1102
% Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	50%	55%	57%

With more than half of their students eligible for free or reduced lunch, teachers were challenged to discover how best to serve their changing student population.

## **School Environment**

In 2005, the school had begun an extensive Teachers as Advisors Program where every teacher had an advisement group of 15 – 20 students. Teachers began as advisors with 9<sup>th</sup> graders and then stayed with the same students every year until they graduated, meeting with them for 30 minutes twice a month for four years to advise them about choosing their classes and meeting state graduation requirements. In 2008, the advisement increased to daily sessions of 20-25 minutes each, and teachers were encouraged to spend time building relationships with their students.

From 2008 – 2010, the school operated on a block schedule where students took four 90-minute classes per semester, from 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Seventy teachers, one librarian, two counselors, three assistant principals, one principal, and approximately twenty other staff people were employed at Lakeshore High School. The administration had a history of nurturing a positive environment focused on student learning, and the principal was particularly supportive of the IB Programme. Teachers described the school climate as friendly and family-like.

Despite the overall positive atmosphere, the Advanced Placement (AP) Program was struggling in 2006. Six AP classes were offered in the 2006-07 school year, when the school first applied for IB, with only 12% of the entire student population enrolling in at least one AP course, and the scores were below the state and national average. Teachers described a lack of effort in class and on the AP exams, and a familiar refrain was that students just didn't care. In January, 2006, teachers began to visit IB schools to determine whether or not to apply to become an IB school. They were alternately inspired and overwhelmed by the IB classes they observed. One English teacher who greatly admired what the students were achieving at the IB schools turned to me to say, "Our kids can't do that."

## Exploring the IB Programme

From January 2006 to April 2007, district staff, school administrators, and teachers spent over a year visiting a total of eight IB schools in the southeast, discussing the implications of IB, and voting on whether or not to move ahead with the application at Lakeshore High School. When looking back at the original documents, I was surprised to recall how extensive this process actually was. In the notes of the actual Lakeshore IB application for authorization we had written:

Our principal felt strongly that we should only move forward with IB if the entire faculty understood and supported the endeavor. We did an online survey of the faculty to see what they thought about pursuing IB further. Several teachers initially had questions and reservations about IB, so we continued to dialogue. The potential IB coordinator met with teachers individually and in small groups to hear their concerns. More teachers visited IB schools, and in the spring of 2006, we conducted another online survey and kept a poster of a thermometer to record the results. Within a week, everyone had voted, and we had 99% voting YES for IB, with only one teacher saying he still had unanswered questions. (This teacher has since had IB training and is a fervent supporter of IB.) We reported our faculty consensus about IB to our superintendent, and he gave us the go ahead to move forward with our IB application. (Lakeshore High School IB Application for Authorization, 2007)

In fact, the discussions had been long and hard, with several groups of teachers who were at first opposed to the idea of the IB Programme. They were concerned that this would focus on only high-achieving students and that the students' lack of commitment to AP classes would simply

continue into the IB Programme. When 100% of the teachers finally voted yes, the district approved the school beginning the application process to offer the IB Diploma Programme.

### **Implementation of the IB Programme**

The IB required a yearlong process for applying to become an IB school, eventually culminating in a site visit where an IB team would evaluate the school's plans. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students were required to work together to write the application.

**Teacher responsibilities.** The application year involved presentations and workshops during faculty meetings twice a month for five months. Almost every teacher was asked to be a part of an IB Faculty Group who addressed different questions from the IB application. At the same time, fourteen selected IB teachers were attending IB training sessions and writing their syllabi for approval from IB. The IB Creativity, Action, and Service (CAS) coordinator formed her own CAS committee of 20+ teachers who met on their own to create a unique CAS program, designed to involve students who did not enroll in IB as a way of including more students in the program.

**Parent involvement.** In a case study on a new IB Programme, DiGiorgio (2010) found that parents were influential on students enrolling and staying in the newly implemented program. The IB application for authorization had to include evidence of family and community outreach and support. That spring, both the middle school and high school sent home information to parents about international education and the possibility of pursuing the IB program, translating the documents into Spanish as well. There was parental support, as parents emailed, called, and visited to ask questions and to voice their interest. Parent surveys demonstrated interest in volunteering. The 2006-2007 Parent Newsletters were sent home regularly with progress reports and included articles about the IB Application process and international

education. At the IB Parent Information meeting, a small group of parents volunteered to form an IB Parent group to support the program. Several parent meetings followed through the spring of 2007 (Lakeshore High School Diploma Programme Application Form, 2007).

The parent group continued to support the IB Programme in its implementation years, and sending updates through IB parent emails became a regular part of the IB coordinator's scheduled communications. It is important to note, however, that parent emails continued to be written in English, and several IB students' parents did not have email addresses at that time or were not fluent in English. Parents were contacted and included more than before the IB Programme, and many documents were translated into Spanish; however, few non-English speaking parents attended meetings or became involved.

**IB site visit.** The visitation team spent two days poring over the notebooks of plans and interviewing district staff, school administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and students. One particular element stood out to the visiting team. We proposed offering not only IB English A Literature and IB Spanish B (Spanish as a second language), but also Spanish A Literature and IB English B (English as a second language) for the school's growing population of native speakers of Spanish. In American, students would traditionally enroll in the IB English A Literature and IB Spanish B Language. We proposed offering the reverse for our students who were native speakers of Spanish. Table 8: *Explanation of IB Literature and Language Courses*, offers an explanation of the difference between the Group 1 Literature and Group 2 Language Acquisition courses offered in the IBDP.



Table 8:

*Explanation of IB Literature and Language Courses*

<b>IB Group 1: Studies in Literature</b>	
<b>English A Literature</b>	This course is equivalent to a college literature course taught in English at an American or English university
<b>Spanish A Literature</b>	This course is equivalent to a Spanish literature course taught in Spanish at a university in a Spanish-speaking country – it is the same course as English A Literature in terms of rigor, but it is taught in Spanish
<b>IB Group 2: Studies in Language Acquisition</b>	
<b>English B (Second Language)</b>	This course is designed for students in non-English speaking countries who are learning English as a second language and strive to become fluent in English. It is the same course as Spanish B (Second Language) but it is taught in English.
<b>Spanish B (Second Language)</b>	This course is designed for students in non-Spanish speaking countries who are learning Spanish as a second language and strive to become fluent in Spanish. It is equivalent to the AP Spanish Language course taught in many American high schools.

Students could choose between both English and Spanish Literature and Language; this program offering would allow students to study in their strength areas and open up the full IB Diploma Programme to students for whom English was a second language. The IB granted students who sit for an exam in a language other than the language of the school to earn the IB Bilingual Diploma, and IB also promoted the importance of allowing students to continue study in their native language.

The site visiting team, however, had never seen this idea proposed as a reality in a suburban public school with a diverse and often poor student population. They challenged me either to take out that option or to demonstrate how the students could actually succeed. I

explained that a nearby private IB international school offered these choices to their students. One of the members responded, “But the parents at that school were not plucking chickens.”

That evening, I met with the principal, feeling rather devastated by their response and concerned that we may not be granted authorization. The principal asked, “Do you believe that our native speakers of Spanish can do this? Do you believe in the IB Bilingual Programme?” When I answered that I did, the principal offered her full support, encouraging me to go back to the team in the morning insistent upon pressing forward with the idea. The support from my principal galvanized me into action, and I defended our belief that all students could rise to high expectations. At the end of the site visit, the team applauded the school’s vision and approved of the bilingual option, cautioning us, however, to provide support for these students.

### **IB Student Recruitment**

Bland and Woodworth (2009) suggested that schools that wanted to encourage underrepresented students to participate in IB should implement recruitment strategies that reached out specifically to high potential students. The Lakeshore IB Diploma Programme recruited a variety of students for enrollment. Students were specifically asked to attend information meetings if they were qualified for the gifted program, had taken at least one honors course, or if they were native speakers of Spanish nominated by their teachers. All students, however, could apply. Native speakers of Spanish were invited to attend meetings given in Spanish during school, and the IB Spanish teacher led the way in encouraging these students to consider the program. The IB English B course was designed both to offer further development of the English language and also to support students as they experienced a schedule of six IB classes, one of them being IB Spanish A Literature.

The student application involved teacher recommendations that focused on evaluating a student's desire to learn; creative and divergent thinking; leadership and maturity; problem solving skills; and independent thinking. The Faculty Application Group wanted student records and transcripts, but they were more interested in motivation than past achievement. The IB student application read:

We want students who believe they can succeed in the IB Programme to be allowed that option, so we do not intend to make prohibitive requirements based on previous grades or test scores. We believe that the most successful IB students are those students who are committed to taking a risk and striving for their very best; therefore, these will be the primary criteria for entering our IB Programme.

The teacher focus group cited the significance of looking for character traits rather than traditional achievement benchmarks:

I remember when the IB program first started; you emphasized we're not looking for the very top, top, top students. I mean, that would be great, but we're looking for kids who are curious and hard workers and who have the desire. That's really what we opened it up to. And I think that was important, because we didn't just look at grade point averages.

We looked at the individual student and interviewed the students.

Frasier's (1997) four A's that influenced teachers' perceptions of diverse students' abilities included the teachers' attitudes towards student capabilities and access to rigorous programs. Grantham (2012) advocated for equitable access to advanced programs when considering the implications of the talent-development model proposed by Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2011). The recruitment process of the Lakeshore IB Programme reflected a commitment to finding diverse students with the potential to succeed.

## **Elements of the Lakeshore IB Programme**

The International Baccalaureate Programme requires schools to teach the IB curriculum and IB core. The IB curriculum for full diploma students consists of six IB subject areas: Literature; Language; Individuals and Societies; Science; Math; and the Arts (or a different sixth subject elective). Students must also complete the core of IB: the Extended Essay – a 4,000 word, independently researched essay on a topic of choice; Theory of Knowledge (TOK) – where students experience a philosophical approach to the connectedness between subject areas; and 150 hours of Creativity, Action and Service (CAS) (IB Core Requirements, 2010). Schools must plan for students to enroll in the classes and be involved in the core over a 2-year period, which IB terms as “concurrency of learning,” where subjects are studied continually over an extended period of time (IB Programme Standards and Practices, 2014). Students must satisfactorily complete all requirements and earn enough points from passing most or all IB exams in order to be eligible to earn the IB Diploma. The Lakeshore IB Programme incorporated a variety of elements to build success for the students and program.

**High expectations and scaffolding.** A key tenet of the Lakeshore IB Programme was the philosophy that a wide variety of students could be successful if approached with both high expectations and support for areas of need. Kyburg et al. (2007) found that believing students could succeed and providing scaffolding experiences were the necessary factors that would foster academic growth for diverse populations, mentioning examples such as extracurricular activities, tutoring help, visiting colleges, and providing opportunities for students to collaborate and study at school. Castellano and Robertson (2014) described key strategies that support students in a culturally responsive classroom. These included celebrating student achievement, providing necessary scaffolding; giving feedback; and fostering creative problem solving opportunities (pp.

27-28). Although Lakeshore IB teachers were not convinced that it would work, they were open to providing access to more students and to providing support. In the teacher focus group, several teachers vocalized that not everyone at the school was “on board,” which was disheartening. The IB teachers were fresh out of IB training workshops where they had begun to grasp the daunting task before them. They understood that they could not compromise the rigor because of the looming IB exams, especially since earning the IB Diploma depended on students succeeding in every class. They kept expectations and requirements very high, but students’ grades suffered. It was time for a paradigm shift concerning grades. To acknowledge student growth instead of achievement level at an arbitrary moment in time, teachers implemented “wipe-out” grades where students could demonstrate mastery at a later date. The new grade could replace a previous grade after the student showed increased mastery of the standards. This helped all students, not just with their grades but also with a stronger sense of hope. The IB English B classroom became both an English class and a support class for native speakers of Spanish, and IB students could also enroll in IB Communications, an IB support class.

**Support for native language.** Unlike many of the programs available to immigrant students, the IB provides support for students in their Native Language, both through self-taught A1 Literature in almost any native language; IB Literature A in French, English or Spanish; and opportunities for students to take IB exams in the same three primary languages mentioned. Students were also supported in IB English B, as a teacher from the focus group described:

I mean, I think I’ve noticed that some of the bilingual students that we’ve had that are not as fluent in English, it’s a lot tougher for them. And it takes a while for them. And that’s why English B has been so supportive of helping them in other aspects like TOK [Theory of Knowledge class], and that was one of our recommendations that IB made when we

got our authorization was that we needed to support these Spanish A, English B kids as much as we can... And I think we've done that.

Native speakers of Spanish had been encouraged to exempt the Spanish language requirement through testing and take AP Spanish as 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> graders. The IB Programme then provided an opportunity to study literature in Spanish at the college level. In the student interviews, they discussed how important this class was to them, an opportunity for them both to reclaim their native language and to embrace their cultural heritage. Additionally, the native speakers of Spanish were valued as experts in language. Several of the documents from my research included the plan and pictures from a Spanish language field trip to a Cuban restaurant. The experience involved all of the IB students, and they could speak only Spanish. At each table, a Native Speaker of Spanish was the facilitator, leading the Spanish language learners in a discussion. Native language was not only developed; it was valued by both teachers and peers.

**Unexplored cultural backgrounds.** The teacher focus group discussed their lack of knowledge about which students were immigrant students or what might have been their experiences.

As for \_\_\_\_\_, I could tell that she was immigrant Vietnamese. But [the others], I never really thought of them as immigrants. I thought of them as sort of acculturated or assimilated into the American society, very much so, in the way they dressed, in the way they talked, their mannerisms. Unless you had \_\_\_\_\_ on the soccer field and he got upset, then you could see his Latino side. But other than that...

After the teacher focus group, one of the teachers contacted me to explain that she realized that they had failed to realize that in addition to language abilities, immigrant students had unique cultural backgrounds that should have been considered and shared.

If we tell ourselves that helping them become just like everyone else is our task, I think we do our immigrant students and our other students a real disservice. “Assimilation” suggests that the USA has it all figured out and that now it’s just up to others around the world to get with the program. I was struck by how few stories we all (I include myself here) told about the contributions that our immigrant students made in class by bringing up comparisons between one culture and another. They have that knowledge. How did we all fail to draw that out of them?

Although the Lakeshore IB teachers valued immigrant students’ language abilities; welcomed them into the IB Programme; offered support on an as-needed basis; and had high expectations for their success, they did not intentionally seek to create an environment that sought to understand and celebrate their diverse backgrounds.

**Teacher perspectives.** According to Foust et al. (2009) the common positive themes in AP and IB classes included a better classroom environment and more prepared and committed teachers who demonstrated respect for students. The teachers in the Lakeshore IB Programme were teaching IB classes that they had never taught before. The students called themselves guinea pigs, but the teachers felt equally challenged by the newness of the program. They turned to each other for support, meeting over the summer and in monthly IB Teacher meetings. The TOK class provided an area of interdisciplinary application of their subject areas. Teachers turned to each other for problem-solving and support, acting as a team because they shared the same students and the same enormous task.

Both IB students and teachers described their interaction as different from previous classroom relationships. Kyburg et al., (2007) described how students valued being treated as adults in the IB Programme. Students were able to access teachers by email; share candidly when

they were overwhelmed; and build strong relationships with their teachers after two intense years together. Teachers felt that the IB students could achieve, and that they could be the teachers the students needed. “I believe in the program with all my heart. Because the preparation that we have provided for them to be successful in college is just, it’s unparalleled.” One teacher described feeling inspired by the new classroom environment and the curriculum itself:

When the IB program first came around. I thought it was just revolutionary and amazing. Like it was probably what kept me in teaching. Because I mean I love teaching American Lit and everything, but being able to take it to that next level, on the college level...I always used to tell everybody, in kind of a bragging sort of way, I was like, yeah, I get to teach college level to high school students, it’s really cool. And then having a class like Theory of Knowledge, it reinvigorated my teaching. It reinvigorated my morale and really energized me, and it was exciting. And every year was different. And it was such a cool crew of kids.

The inaugural years of the Lakeshore IB Programme provided motivation for teachers as professionals, transforming the way they approached students and enabling them to teach a curriculum that both challenged and inspired them.

**The library.** The IB places great emphasis on the importance of the school library to support student learning. In order to become authorized by IB, teachers must outline the specific resources available in the school library, and the librarian must also attend a specialized training workshop. The IB teachers used the library for research, IB internal assessments, and student presentations. The IB coordinator office was housed there as well, and very quickly the library became a hub for IB students. The school librarian and I as the IB Coordinator were the advisors for IB students, and the group met every day for two years in the library for the 20-25 minute



advisement period. We built strong relationships with the students, who turned to the librarian often for social and emotional support. They also came early to school and stayed late, counting on the flexible hours of the library to provide an environment for studying, tutoring, and just hanging out. This turned out to be another area of support for immigrant students and other IB students who may not have had access to the Internet or a computer at home.

**Teambuilding and enrichment.** Peer support can be a significant factor for diverse students' success in advanced programs (Foust et al., 2009; Mayer, 2008). In an effort to support students, the IB teachers and coordinator developed teambuilding field trips and experiences for students. These included a ropes course challenge at the start of each year; professional teambuilding activities; monthly pizza or potluck IB lunches; ice cream socials; and before and after-school tutoring and game sessions. The students traveled in packs as they relied on each other to survive the challenge of six IB classes. Culross and Tarver (2011) noted that "perhaps the most important feature of the IB is concern for and development of each individual in relation to others. This, thereby, facilitates the core belief of one, collective, inter-connected human-kind" (p. 233). During the teacher focus group, one teacher described how the IB lunches "gave the students hope" and how being the first to be in the IB Programme "gave them a community, because everyone was going through the same thing." Another enrichment and teambuilding example was a study session that turned into a late night pizza party and spoons tournament in the library. It was almost as if in order to survive, the students had to turn to each other for support.

Despite the workload, teachers facilitated opportunities for creativity in their classrooms, encouraging students to create videos or musical adaptations for academic presentations. Additionally, the Lakeshore IB students experienced a myriad of field trips and guest speakers.

These included going to hear Khaled Hosseini speak, since he was the author of *The Kite Runner*, which they were reading in IB English. We found scholarships for students to attend a college science exploration weekend, and students visited colleges; listened to service-oriented and internationally-focused guest speakers; and had cook-outs at parks. Enrichment became a key element of the IB student experience.

The Theory of Knowledge (TOK) class was a particularly enriching class. The teachers recalled a TOK Day experience where students were exempt from their classes and explored ways of knowing through hands-on activities and situations designed to provide a paradigm shift in thinking. One example was known as the crying baby scenario. Students went outside for a learning activity, only to see a parked car with what appeared to be a crying baby locked in the back seat. In actuality, it was a motorized baby from the Healthcare Science class, but students were told by their teachers to ignore the situation and do their assignment. Some refused, while others acquiesced. After a few minutes, the TOK teacher held a discussion about the moral dilemma posed when someone in power refuses to allow someone to make a moral choice.

The teachers felt that the students did meld into a team:

It seemed like all the cultures sort of came together. There was less, I felt less diversity, even though they were all very diverse....they fit in that group because they all are different, whether they're immigrants or not, every one of them is unique in their own way. And so each is less weird. And so it seems to me that in the non-IB classes the immigrants seem to stand out a lot more than they do in IB.

The constant refrain from IB teachers was for students to work hard and play hard. They intentionally created teambuilding and enrichment opportunities to give students both a break and support.

## **The Imperfect Storm**

The context of the 2008 – 2010 Lakeshore High School IB Programme provided an almost perfect storm of what Subotnik et al. (2011) called high opportunity coupled with high motivation. A district that encouraged and funded innovation; an administrative and teaching staff that were ready to try something new and believed it could be done; and a program that supported native language, creativity, and rigor provided the structural foundation for high opportunity. The open application process and seeking of student potential made the opportunity available to diverse populations that included immigrant students. The students themselves were either intrinsically motivated or were encouraged by teachers to believe they could be successful. The environment was almost a perfect storm of high opportunity and high motivation, except for the human elements: teachers who did not have the training or prior experience to understand the importance of their students' diverse backgrounds; a faculty that did not quite fully support the IB Programme; and students who had family lives and challenges that remained hidden at school. It was an imperfect storm, but a situation more ideal than most for providing the context of the immigrant students' experiences in an IB Programme.

## STUDENT PORTRAITS

*It goes back to the whole immigrant experience. My parents never experienced education*

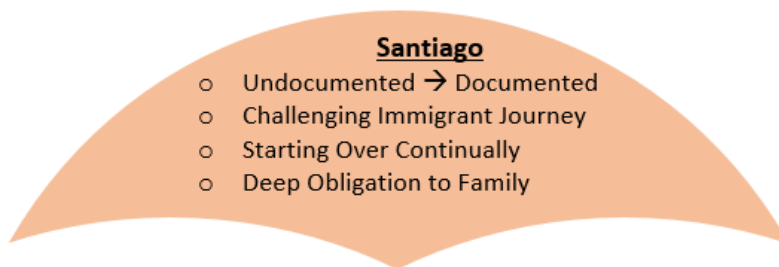
*It was chaos on me to fully figure out what was next or what I should be doing*

*I think I told my parents about IP but then we always have the mindset that if I'm aware*

*It doesn't like Vm, ... you're in the IR universe at the high level*

*it was not anything like that at all*

knowing are important to Santiago. Interestingly, “going” and “go” are used often, and “journey” also shows up, meaning that it was used several times. The words “family” and “parents” are larger than words like “art,” “education,” and “college,” while “English” and “immigrant” are used more often than “Spanish” or “Mexico.” The picture provides a quick snapshot of a young man who was indeed on a journey, both a physical journey from one country to another, as well as a journey of education, culture, and identity.



We sat outside on a picnic table in the garden, the summer sun shining through the trees above, and perhaps it was the flickering brightness all around, but it seemed to me that there was only one person in the universe at the moment. I stared at the dark-haired, smiling young man across from me, searching for a sign of that mischievous boy I knew eight years ago. I held the image of that skinny soccer kid in my mind, remembering that infectious grin.

My most vivid memory of Santiago had two parts, separated by months but connected so clearly in my mind. He had always wanted to go to the state research university, but even as an IB student, he knew it was a long shot because of grades and SAT scores. When a smaller state college offered him a full scholarship, he made the pragmatic choice to give up his college dream. He did not even apply, but he did keep talking to me about it, saying over and over that it was the right decision. The final deadline to apply to his dream college came on a school day, and after school, he found me in the library. “Mrs. Ecke, I think I want to apply to State Research University.”

It was a critical moment. Santiago did not have anyone in his family who could help him, and he had not yet written his essays. But I could tell it seemed like life or death to him. We camped for the next four or five hours in the library, while I chased down the transcripts he needed and wrote a recommendation. Santiago wrote his essays, sharing his dreams. It was one of those surreal experiences, where we tried the impossible just for its own sake. And somehow, we found a way to hit “submit” before the final deadline.

Three months later, I awoke to a text on my phone: “Mrs. Ecke, I was accepted to State Research University.” I kept that text for the next two years, even though ultimately, he decided to take the full scholarship to the smaller school. What mattered was that he did it. He took the risk, he earned the prize, and it was enough. Now it was five years later, and I asked the confident man he had become to tell me his story. His voice was mesmerizing as he shared what feels like a family legend, one he had lived and heard and remembered many times.

### **The Immigrant Journey**

When Santiago was a young boy, his father came to California from Mexico and picked avocados to help support Santiago and his mother, who remained in Mexico. His father would visit, but it was hard, and finally his dad decided he would do whatever it cost to bring them over to America. He moved to the southeast, where the poultry business was booming, and he saved enough money, \$10,000, to bring Santiago and his mother to the U.S. illegally.

*One day my mom told me that it was time for me, for us, to take the trip to go see my father. I didn't have a choice, and I just remember leaving. I remember the day leaving, which was also the last time that I saw my Grandma. I would never see her again because she would eventually pass away. So that's something that really stuck in my mind. I was seven at the time. I was in first or kindergarten, I think I had just finished*

*kindergarten. And, it was a time where, I briefly remember ever being part, ever truly feeling Mexican because I don't, I don't know what that means any more, but my whole vision of what it meant to be there at seven is really blurry right now.*

*So this whole journey was unreal for a 7 year old. We took a bus up to a border city and from there we - there were several destinations where we would have to be in order for the guide who would smuggle us or what they call a Coyote, or Coyotes. These are the titles or the nicknames given to these people who devote their lives to smuggling people into the United States. So they develop routes in order to accomplish this. It was just like I said, unreal. What I do remember is that there was a lot of walking. There's a lot of walking that takes place, and we were in a resting place that this guide set up for us, several spots that are set up by him, for us to rest.*

*And my mom had been warned that the following day there would be people who would try to steal anything that was valuable from us. So I remember my mom grabbing my sneaker, pulling out the sole, and putting in all of our money under the sole of my shoe. And we went to sleep. The next day we got going because it was a lot to walk. And just how it was, just how we were warned, we were all lined up by I guess these other smugglers by gunpoint, asking us for any valuables that we had. Eventually they didn't find anything on us, because my mom had been smart enough to take care of that money by using my shoe.*

I imagined for a moment that 7 year old boy, standing so still, and men with guns, and how he must have tried not to look at his shoe, not to show on his face that they had the money. And miraculously it worked.

*All of this journey is really blurry to me, but the next thing that I remember is that it was really late in the evening. And we were still walking the desert. And immigration was really close to us, so they were securing the area with flashlights. So pretty much the whole group that I was with, we had to lie down, and fortunately there was tall grass. So they wouldn't be able to see us from a distance. And I remember telling my mom that I needed to pee. And she's like, son, I'm really sorry, but you're going to have to... you know, pee your pants.*

He looked away as he told me; a shadow flickered across his face as he remembered the young boy ashamed of wetting his pants. His next memory was about the two black SUVs that drove over the border. One truck made it, his truck, but the other was stopped. Another miracle. And they were in America.

The physical journey to his new country was complete, but the walking continued. As they moved to the suburban city that would become their home, his mother could not drive. She did not have time to take English classes but had to find work. He walked with her, from factory to factory, until she found a job in the poultry factory.

### **Welcome to America**

Santiago remembered his first meal, his first step into American culture:

*So my first meal was KFC. So that stuck in my mind, (laughter), so I guess that's how my addiction to fried chicken started. And I just remember eating that and just thinking wow, there's nothing better than this. This is amazing; it may have been the hunger because of the journey, but that's something that also is stuck in my mind.*

Santiago's home life was unsettled at first, staying in homes with other families.



*We got here at a time when everyone was working, so we didn't really have anywhere to go, so the Coyote allowed us to stay in his house up until my father was able to take us in. For a while, we lived in one bedroom in my uncle's house, so we all slept there, that's where we had dinner; that was our home. And that's all that I knew. I remember it being a whole different world. I didn't speak English, I had to relearn everything. But I lost a sense of privacy I had had in my own home in Mexico, and now I had to share it with another family. And I couldn't be myself. It was conflicting at the time because you know you just, you literally start over, from scratch, you know there's no more seeing Grandma, there's no more those friends that you made, the school, those faces that you're so familiar seeing every day. Everything, it was a new world we were in.*

Like most immigrant students who come to the U.S. as children, Santiago spoke only his native language, Spanish. He recalled the pressure to learn English, not just at school, but at home.

*It took me a while to pick up on English. There were times where I'd call women "he," and vice-versa, and eventually my dad would get frustrated with me because I wasn't picking it up as fast as he would like me to do. So he'd tease me to the point that it would hurt, but then I'd be motivated. That's sort of always been the way that I experience growth. When I'm challenged, or I'm told that I can't do something, or I'm not doing it at the pace that someone else is. So that's when I'm really like, okay, then I really need to try, so. I picked it up pretty fast. Eventually I went from being in ESOL classes to eventually going into normal classes with just regular students, people who had always spoken English. And, ironically enough, literature and English was my strongest subjects in school. So, yeah, it was like starting over.*

Fairly quickly, Santiago became the best English speaker in his home, a situation that has continued to this day. He was an only child for many years, until a sister was born who had Down Syndrome. He stared at the table for a moment and said, “I’m the only one that really speaks the most fluent English.” He explained that his mother did not have time to learn English:

*We get here and it’s a whole new learning process for each and every single one of us. Mom eventually has to work. She ends up working in a poultry factory. There’s not really a lot of time for her to take English classes or even driving course classes. She has to join in sort of getting the household going and we eventually get our own home. We really start to live like a family and moving house was an amazing thing.*

The endless walking through the desert and city, and even the money hidden in his shoe, seemed like the figurative language of a writer who communicated the deeper meaning of struggle, chance, and journey.

### **The Greatest Gift**

His father had begun the process for his mother and Santiago to become legal residents before they crossed the border illegally. Since U.S. authorities were not aware of their presence, they continued the process as though he and his mother lived in Mexico. It took almost ten years to complete the process. As a teenager, he was at first unaware of the significance of being a legal resident.

*We have to make these drives to Atlanta for the offices, so I was interviewed. I was asked are these your parents, how long have you been here...eventually they approve our residency. And when we go out for a lunch, we end up going to Burger King and my dad looks at me and he says, “Son, this is literally the greatest gift that I could give you, your U.S. residency.” And at that time I have no idea what that meant. I mean I was*

*annoyed that we were in Atlanta. I was happy we were at Burger King, but I just didn't understand that gravity of what just happened or what was just given to me up until later on in life where I realized that there were peers of mine who weren't as privileged as I was, and their future was so uncertain.*

*I briefly remember what it means to be undocumented. My mom would literally walk through our city, anywhere that we needed to go, because she couldn't drive. That was just the thing. We walked everywhere. If you've ever been in Mexico, one of the main ways of transportation, you walk. Everything is walking distance. So we continue that over here but literally in the United States without a vehicle, you almost can't do anything. Whether be a bus or a car, you can't do anything. It's just the way life works here, so fast. So that's something that I remember that -- because we were undocumented we couldn't drive anywhere so we'd walk and I remember early on walking to poultry factories with my mom for her to pick up an application and -- those were the normal things.*

Santiago and his mom were undocumented residents before he fully understood the implications. By the time he was a teenager who might have encountered obstacles such as not being allowed to get a driver's license or in-state tuition, he was a legal resident of the U.S. It was only later, when several of his peers faced the uncertainty of their future in America due to their documentation status that he began to fully appreciate his father's efforts to get him legal status.

### **An Immigrant Family with a Special Needs Child**

Santiago was an only child until he was 12 years old. When his mother told him she was pregnant, he was very excited. He had always been lonely and felt like now he would have the kind of relationship he had seen with other families.

*It was a really exciting time, but one day I walk into the kitchen and my mom was crying. I really don't understand why she's crying and eventually she tells me that the baby that she's expecting is going to have Down Syndrome. I didn't know how to take that at all, because I'm not proud to say this, but I was one of those kids who would make fun of children with special needs, that was me, and then suddenly my own sibling is going to have special needs. It changed my world 360 the second time from arriving here to having to sort of -- I'm still learning how to cope with the fact that I have a sibling with special needs. But it's the biggest blessing that could have ever happened to me. When she came it was like one of the strangest feelings. I didn't feel love. I felt anger because she came so late. I felt angry at myself for not understanding what was happening. I felt confused.*

*So there are certain responsibilities that come with special needs child. My sister was able to communicate with us through full sentences. She's able to run. She, to a lot of people's surprise, is bilingual in her own way. She can speak -- she can't speak as much English but she fully understands English and fully understands Spanish. So, she is just, she really shapes my world and she's the life of the house.*

Santiago's Facebook page had many pictures of his sister, usually laughing with him, his face relaxed into a joyous expression. As his sister grew up, however, addressing her special needs was complicated by his parents' lack of English skills.

*I can tell you how it feels for me to come from an immigrant family but at the same time having a sister with special needs. You have to add to that, for example, appointments -- like what does this mean. We have these meetings where we sort of discuss our progress. So my parents will be told, "Oh, this is what we think is best." And a lot of times there*

*will be translators [saying], “Okay, yeah, we agree.” But there is always that frustration in my mom [that] they’re not allowed to vocally express what they want...My frustration comes in that my parents are unable to vocally express or even devote enough time to really research what is best for my sister. That has been one of my biggest frustrations and our struggles. Sometimes I have to pick up the parent role in my household. That’s a part of my life that I don’t really like to talk about, because I don’t understand it myself. I don’t understand whether I should give myself that parenting role or I should just let it go and just let things be. But it’s also like how can I be there for my sister the most that I can, because there is only so much that I can do before I just fully drain myself. It’s definitely another struggle that I face in my day to day life, but that’s part of my experience.*

Many immigrant students take on more adult roles as the one who speaks the most fluent English, but for Santiago, his sister’s life seemed to be at stake. His involvement and ability to communicate were necessary for his family to have any real involvement in what types of special education she needed.

### **A Deep Sense of Obligation to Family**

*It goes throughout the whole day. You’ll get home and your mom will be like, “What did she’d say again?” That’s definitely the immigrant experience and I’m sure anybody whether they come from Europe, Africa...I’m sure that they share similar experiences as far as parents who don’t speak the language, who don’t have the same opportunity as young immigrants to sort of develop an education.*

Santiago’s family was important to him. His Facebook page from high school onwards was just as likely to show pictures of him with his sister as with his friends. He shared how being

in an immigrant family has become an inextricable part of his very nature, a necessarily lifelong commitment, and one with which he had struggled.

*But as I got older and currently at the state that I'm in, it's been quite difficult accepting the fact that I come from an immigrant family, because in the back of my mind, I'm always having to bring up my parents with me as far as language goes, as far as the technology goes, as far as basic everyday things, I'm the one who takes care of them because I'm the one who speaks English. I'm the one who is young. To some extent, that's a responsibility that comes with an immigrant family that doesn't get spoken [about] enough because I think that we're sort of made to believe that that's part of our responsibility - that it's something we should do simply because they're our families. But at the same time, it's conflicting because I'm thinking in the back of my mind. Well, I want to progress in this way, or I'd like to develop a career in this way.*

As he shared he looked away, as though looking from far off at imagined futures, where he pursued his art career, but when he spoke it was clear that this was not a real conflict for him; it was something that was an ongoing challenge. He had a strong sense of his identity and commitment to his family.

*But at the same time, my focus is to bring up my family with me and to not solely focus on myself, but at the same time make sure that they're experiencing growth just as fast as I am. So, that's has been something that's been really troublesome in my mind lately, because how do I balance that? How do I continue to grow professionally but at the same time, how do I make sure that my parents are okay, that they get a credit card, that they sign up for automatic bill payment, so that they no longer have to stress about that. My mom doesn't drive, so all of those simple day-to-day things that just really do weigh on*

*me sometimes or because I'm just working them in. I have to worry about those things before I can even start to work on material whatever. That's something that's been difficult but of course it's just like it's always a test, it's always like you have this going on, so how can you make that work and even despite those circumstances how can you continue to grow.*

Santiago's challenge is exacerbated by the career he chose for himself: art. He longed to have the time and space to express himself and push towards his potential. Just as he faced the other hurdles in his life, however, he pressed ahead, believing he can find a way.

*Also, the field that I chose for myself is incredibly ego driven and I find that idea to be – I don't want...I refuse to think that in order for me to be successful in a creative field that I should solely devote myself to creating 24/7, because there's so much more to life than just simply chasing something that's simply just for you a lot of the times. I'm sure people make art for others but at the same time, a lot of times it's just for yourself. It's just for you to sort of receive that recognition, to sort of feel like, we all like to feel what we're doing is something good, we all want to get recognized for it.*

It did not seem to be guilt that dictated his current decision to stay close to his family, but instead it was part of his very nature. He saw, too, that reaching a pinnacle of some kind in his profession may not be as satisfying as he imagined.

*...Seeing professional artists who just literally devote their whole life to it. They just neglect so many other aspects of the life that I just can't see myself. I can't afford to do that. And I refuse to believe that that's the only way to be successful, because there's so much more to life than just you devoting to your field because -- I'll wake up five years from now and if I just solely devoted myself to my profession, I had missed five years of*

*my sister growing up, five years at going to this Special Olympics with her or even just teaching my mom a basic skill. I'm in the stage right now where I'm trying to figure out what does it mean to come from an immigrant family but at the same time, how do I give myself enough space for growth, how will I keep helping them evolve and adapt to this ever changing world? Just like it's not going to stop for anyone.*

Santiago was clear that this was his choice, to remain close to his family, to help, and he felt it was part of his immigration experience, something others may not have understood.

*You know no one likes to speak on that because like I said, people like to think that simply because it's their family, it's something that you have to do but at the same time, it's like as human beings, we need our own space for growth. But you know I also will feel like I have that responsibility to sort of help, and I want to. It's my personal choice to still be here and help them because I could very easily be you know what, I'm going to follow the best art scene and I'm going to move to San Francisco... and give it a shot over there. But that sort of what comes with being from an immigrant family, and it's hard to speak with, to anyone...*

From our conversation, it was clear that Santiago had been confronting the conflict between his personal dreams of his career and his deep love for his family for many years. He seemed at peace with where he was at the moment, aware that chasing his dreams would not grant him happiness if it were at the expense of his family.

### **Applying for the International Baccalaureate Programme**

Santiago heard about the IB Programme in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and he applied and ultimately earned the IB Bilingual Diploma. He described how he did not initially feel as though he was encouraged to be a part of the program.



*I think I remember feeling that I wasn't the one being spoken to for this upcoming opportunity, but I saw that application around the room that I was just, "This is really interesting. I'm going to look into it. Perhaps, it's an opportunity for me to push myself." At some point, I must have spoken to Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ [art teacher] about it and I think she encouraged me to go for it. I would later on learn that she would fight for me to have an opportunity and be in the program but, yeah, it was more of, "Santiago, you're not really doing enough and you haven't done enough to prove that you're part of it but you're ready to give it your all."*

Santiago's IB application seemed more like the boy I knew – a B student, with the occasional A, in mostly regular classes, a hodgepodge of a schedule that included computer applications, early childhood education, and music appreciation before his years of IB. He was not in the gifted program and was never nominated for testing. His 2007 transcript gave little indication of his eventual passion for art and learning. But he had written a carefully worded and lengthy essay where he discussed goals of becoming a better person, increasing knowledge, and maybe going to college. I smiled when I read that he hoped the program may help him manage his time better, but the recurring theme was clear: he asked to be in the IB Programme, believing that the hard work and challenge would help him to realize his goals.

His father's permission was written in Spanish, but I could pick out certain words, like "estudio," "responsabilidad," and "futuro bueno." Santiago had forgotten about that application, and when I showed him his father's words, he exclaimed, "My God, he wrote that?" I liked best his teacher recommendations. Although he was not an outstanding student, his teachers gave him high marks for motivation and creativity, admitting that he occasionally "gets lazy," but that he has lofty goals. One teacher wrote quite simply, "Let him in. He will be able to get it done."

Santiago was intrigued by the idea of the IB Bilingual Diploma, available only to students who study at the highest level in two languages. Because he took IB Spanish A Literature, he was eligible for this, and the IB Bilingual Programme was considered even more challenging than the IB Diploma.

*It was also a very particular group that stood out; I think there are kids doing the IB program but then there are kids doing the Bilingual Program so that sort of like -- it felt really good to know that I was part of a few going through that. I'm sure at that time it was just the idea that made me really cool or something like that.*

I remembered how the IB Spanish teacher and I emphasized that the bilingual course of study was not simply a way for native speakers of Spanish to be involved, but was also a more challenging course of study than the regular IB Diploma.

### **Reclaiming Native Language in IB**

As a Native Speaker of Spanish, Santiago was eligible to earn the IB Bilingual Diploma, by taking IB Spanish A (literature) instead of IB English A. Santiago enrolled in the bilingual option of IB Spanish A (literature) and IB English B (language acquisition). Although he spoke only Spanish until he was seven years old and still spoke Spanish at home, he did not have any preparation for college-level literature in Spanish. Attempting this challenge was not just about earning the IB Diploma, but was also a way of developing his cultural identity through his native language.

*But the fact that I was able to study literature in Spanish just the way I would in Mexico seemed really intriguing to me. And it felt like I was sort of regaining something that I had lost by being here, so that was something special definitely. I remember struggling a lot to pick up on that Spanish, because I think it was sort of understood that I already had*

*that, but I had to relearn Spanish when I had just learned English. The whole idea of me studying Spanish at the level as any other individual in Latin America would be doing was fascinating to me. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ was a very strict teacher, but she had us read from José Martí, which is Cuban writer, to Garcia Marquez who was a Columbian writer to the author of “Pedro Paramo” who is a Mexican author, just exploring the whole cultures. Looking back at it, it really sort of forced us to rediscover that culture, like we were privileged to have that exposure at that time. Because if I would’ve had it now, it probably wouldn’t been just as rewarding, but now I have actually something to talk about. Now I can go from there to the next stop. Okay, what other authors do I explore? What are some similarities that as Latin-Americans share, and that’s a beautiful thing. I’m so happy that I went to that.*

Despite the initial challenge of learning academic Spanish, by the end of his senior year, Santiago distinguished himself by earning the IB Spanish A Literature Award, meaning that he was the most outstanding IB Spanish student in the school.

### **Parent Involvement at School**

When I asked Santiago about how his parents were involved in enrolling in IB, he explained that they knew almost nothing about his school life. Perhaps that was why he was surprised to see that his father wrote that required recommendation so long ago.

*It goes back to the whole immigrant experience. My parents never experienced education in the United States so there was never an idea of how things go. For example, I would always see my fellow peers’ parents showing up to events, like bringing in cookies, and meeting with teachers and I was just -- that was never something that my parents were able to do or they weren’t informed enough to know that they could do those things. It*

*was always on me to fully figure out what was next or what I should be doing. I think I told my parents about IB but they've always have the mindset that if I'm aware of what's best for me that that's what I should do and they trust that I do that for myself...It wasn't like Yay-- my son's in the IB Programme at the high school, it was not anything like that at all.*

Santiago's family was from a lower socio-economic status, and the IB Programme required substantial homework that included typed research essays. By 2010, most of his IB peers had laptops, the Internet, and printers at home, but Santiago had to find another way – the public library. He experienced a range of conflicting emotions.

*I didn't have access to a laptop or computer at home and neither did I have a printer so in order for me to get a lot of my homework done, I have to get home, my dad will take me to a local library, and then I have to call him to pick me up. I remember it created frustration to me because I'm like - I should have a laptop. Why aren't you giving me this? But then no, we can't afford that. If you really want this, you should be able to get it accomplished by just going to the library. Those ideas at that time just seem really frustrating to me because look, everyone else has one, why can't I have that? But now sometimes I wish they really understood the magnitude of what I was going through sometimes. But despite the circumstances, it wasn't really -- I guess, they didn't really comprehend what was happening. I don't blame them.*

I remembered that Santiago sometimes had to print his papers in the school library in the mornings, but I did not think about the natural conflict he experienced. He could see what his fellow IB students were able to do, but he did not have the same kind of resources at home. At

the same time, he could not explain to his parents about what he was feeling or even what he felt now.

### **Assimilation**

When Santiago began his junior year, his schedule included seven IB classes. Most of his new IB classmates were already friends with each other, and Santiago described this new challenge.

*Yeah, of course, they didn't really know me. You know, I wasn't really part of that gifted or honors class group. I didn't take AP classes with them because that's something that like they travel together through high school. They literally shared classrooms all throughout high school. It seemed like they had really strong friendships, and they all sort of had a niche together. So me trying to be part of that was definitely -- it was hard at times, but there's something that helped me become more open to the idea. I'm allowed to be Mexican and I have my Mexican friends in school, but then I can also be part of this group and that's okay, I can do that. I think that was growth for me because unfortunately you just stick to what you know a lot of the times.*

The Facebook albums of pictures showed the difference between the first and second year of IB for Santiago. In the earlier pictures, he was in the background, or in several instances, not pictured in a group photo. In the second year pictures, Santiago was in the middle of things, laughing or just being a part of what was happening, sometimes in the forefront. The IB students were from a myriad of backgrounds: Vietnam, Laos, Ethiopia, Korea, Mexico, El Salvador, and India, but the majority (2/3) were White.

*So a part of being an immigrant always brings up the issue of race whether you want it to be or not. I was always made aware that I was Latino, that I was Mexicano by my peers.*

*You just stood out. I found myself in group of just white kids....so I always felt out of place a lot times, because if you looked even statistically at AP classes or honors classes they were pretty dominantly white kids. That was always in my back of my mind. I mean, it's like I said, if I'm going to be honest, I didn't know how to relate to having these kids. I didn't know, there was this wall that I sort of developed because of what I was taught. They do things differently, like it's a whole different conversation that we could have but I just felt like I couldn't relate to how they deal with things that they went through. So I wasn't really with my friends and my classes anymore - I was with a very limited....It was really one of the first times that I was exposed to privilege and status. It was just, it was really aware to me what I could not do or what I could do based on what my peers were going through. Like their life was just, it seemed really different and that stood out, but I was fortunate to run with a group of kids who were really diverse and who were also really good people. It helped me open up my world to be like you know, these aren't just White kids. They have their own worlds.*

Santiago was able to look beyond the cultural differences and begin to understand the experiences of others who had different backgrounds and experiences.

### **A Passion for Art**

Before starting the IB Programme as a junior, Santiago had only taken two honors classes, while most of the other applicants had completed six or more, and many of them had taken some AP classes as well. Additionally, he was a year behind in math. He started his junior year with six IB classes, Art II, and an extra math class to make up his credits. Up to that time, he had completed one class of introductory art. Despite his lack of background in art classes and the jump from only two honors classes to now six IB classes (and an extra academic class),

Santiago poured time and energy into creative expression through art, developing a passion for photography and drawing.

*I had never experienced art at that level. I think that the IB programs set it up to where if you wanted it to be, it could be the closest thing to you being a young professional. The whole idea of a sketchbook, of producing work at such a rapid pace, that's literally what professionals go through in day to day life. I was being introduced to that because to me, art was rendering an image really nice and clean, but it was never beyond that. So then I started doing IB and Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ really encouraged me to explore conceptual ideas, to explore like an artist, to write down my thoughts on my sketchbook, and I just really grab that opportunity. I think I experienced a lot of growth and that's where my passion, that's where I was able to really develop a passion, eventually get even a degree in art at the college level. I don't regret that at all because it's been such a rewarding experience for me, because I'm constantly exploring myself. And it began there. It began in high school at the IB program. I'm really thankful for those two elements of the program.*

Santiago would go on to major in art in college and is working with a design company today.

### **Purpose of IB**

Santiago expressed his idea of the purpose of IB:

*I think the purpose is for you to, from a student point, to really experience growth in every sense of the word. From [Theory of Knowledge class] - Yeah, that's not part of any normal curriculum before the IB, you're exposed to ideas like that, that's dangerous stuff. That's really dangerous stuff.*

*American education spends a lot of time sort of trying to filter that out, but being as close to these philosophers and these ideas, that's pretty bold. I think that was*

*amazing. I don't know what the purpose was in general for everyone. I can just think of what it was for me; there was never a slacking course. It's just like you are consciously being forced to really explore and really grow. That was really good for me and I think maybe I experienced it like that because I was never pushed at that level. I had gone to just normal classes where really the least is expected from you and then you pass. Just having this Spanish class, having this TOK class, to even art, just growing as an artist, I had no idea what that meant at that time. I still don't know, but just really being encouraged to sort of explore and create but at the same time learn - that was a beautiful thing.*

*The purpose for me is to become a well-rounded individual who is ready for the next thing. Whether it be a college education or just in life in general, we're really prepared to be well-rounded and educated and to always ask questions, always ask. It was intended to bring that curiosity out again that we sort of lose in our curriculums for whatever reasons.*

*IB, it was one of the hardest things I've ever done but it shaped me. It shaped me just like you have to be strong with your right hand, you have to be strong with your left hand. That's the beauty of the program that it encourages full balance, not just one thing, which I think we need in this ever-changing world. It's not so much about you can do this. You have to really be diverse in your skills to really survive today's world. Being introduced to that idea was very much beneficial.*

Santiago seemed to have an appreciation for the IB experience. Art and Spanish in particular helped him to foster a love of learning.



### **Transition to College:**

Santiago chose to accept a full scholarship to a state school, where he had been recruited by an admissions counselor who became a mentor to him. He moved to college on his own but had no idea what college was about.

*But I was undecided [in my major] in my first year. I didn't know what college meant. I was never told what college meant, I didn't know what you went to college for. I think unfortunately you were sold the idea that if you went to college you'd have a career. I didn't know what college was - fortunately I had \_\_\_\_\_ to answer to a lot of questions because my parents had no idea what was happening. I moved in by myself, everything was all me again, all over again. Even until I graduated I didn't really understand what I had to have done in college to be out of college. Really, it's a strange time. What did happen though is, I learned a lot about myself. \_\_\_\_\_ always told me this is going to be the best four years of your life - really enjoy them, learn about yourself, and just really explore your passion.*

There are brochures with Santiago's picture on them, representing the diversity at the college as well as the opportunity for Hispanic students. He became a student representative of his college.

### **Leadership and Recognition**

Santiago never mentioned leadership in his interview, but he emerged as a leader in both high school and college. When Santiago applied for the Goizueta Foundation Scholarship, his high school principal wrote a recommendation letter that included:

*He has emerged as a leader over the past two years. After a while, students began to look at him as a role model. He is in our Youth Leadership Program, one of only six students representing our school. In September 2009, our school won the CASIE Award for*

*Excellence in International Education, and I immediately thought of asking Santiago to represent our IB students by making a presentation at the Jimmy Carter Center. Santiago spoke to a group of legislators and educators about his journey as a bilingual IB student, and his quiet confidence and heartfelt statements about his future goals moved his listeners. This year he was also elected as President of the National Art Honor Society and was one of two students selected for the Optimist Club Award as well. At our school, Santiago is a leader for all students whether they are native speakers of Spanish, African-American, Vietnamese, or southern American. His charismatic leadership is the natural outcome of living a life bent on personal excellence and caring for others.*

He earned the IB Art award his junior year, and the IB Spanish A Literature Award his senior year. Santiago was one of a very few students who was offered a full scholarship to college, while also getting accepted into the school of his dreams – which he sacrificed for financial reasons. Ultimately, Santiago was one of only two students who earned the IB Bilingual Diploma from one of the first public schools in the U.S. to offer this opportunity.

### **Career – Art**

Santiago's description of art demonstrated his passion for the subject. When he started IB Art his junior year of high school, he had only earned one introductory art credit. At the end of his senior year, his IB art portfolio included a large piece entitled "Aztec Heritage Novelo."

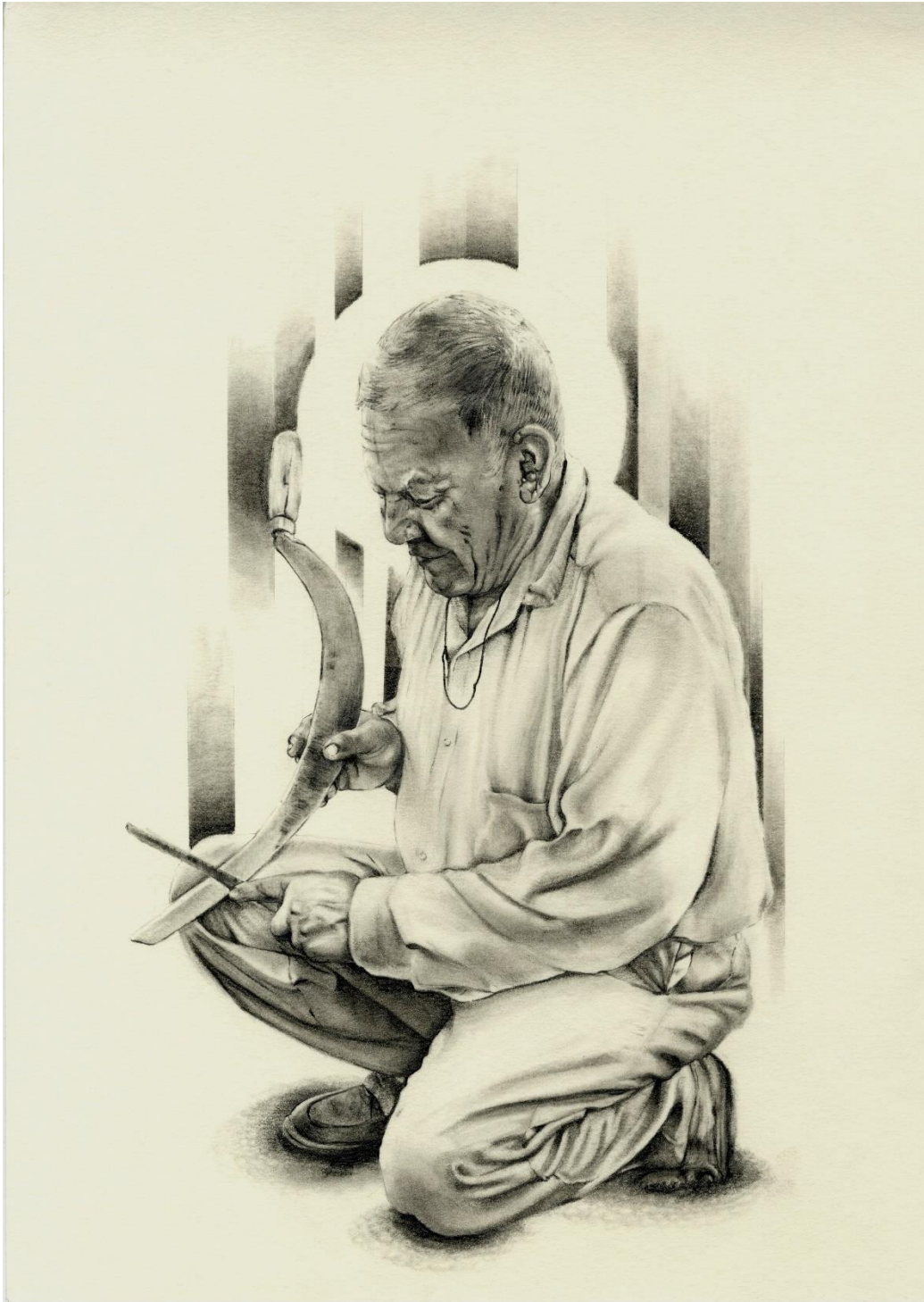


*So you really have to have an understanding of yourself and understanding what you want to accomplish with it [art]. And it just seemed like creating something is just one of the most -- I can't even describe it. It's like the closest thing to God. It's just, your world gets so open like you're not just stuck on something. You really have an opportunity to explore something, move on, explore that and just really appreciate what's around you. It just seemed, I mean, I just loved it, I just had to do it. I don't regret any of it at all.*

*Sometimes, like right now, I wish [I was] better financially off but it's just so exciting. It's just like keep creating, it's just one of the most rewarding things that anyone can do. We should all be creating something because that's our nature. From early on our nature is to write on walls, our imagination is like everywhere as kids. Then it's like society just takes that away from us as we get older. So we lose that desire to create or explore.*

Art, too, was a language that Santiago could access to explore his own identity. He shared with me a more recent drawing that was especially meaningful to him.

*It is of my grandfather who is a representation of where I come from and where I am today. His hard work has shaped my life in so many ways and I included it in my thesis show for college. It is titled "El Que Perdona El Viento" which translates to "He Who Forgives the Wind" inspired by a song my dad likes to play occasionally. The song is about a son reflecting on his father and how aging has taken a toll on his spirit and his body. The song goes on to say that now his father now walks slow, like forgiving the wind.*



So much of what Santiago shared is in the drawing – his unusually strong work ethic, the strong feelings of family heritage, the sense that he has been able to combine his Mexican identity with the American life he now leads, and the joy of creative communication through his art.

## **Reflection**

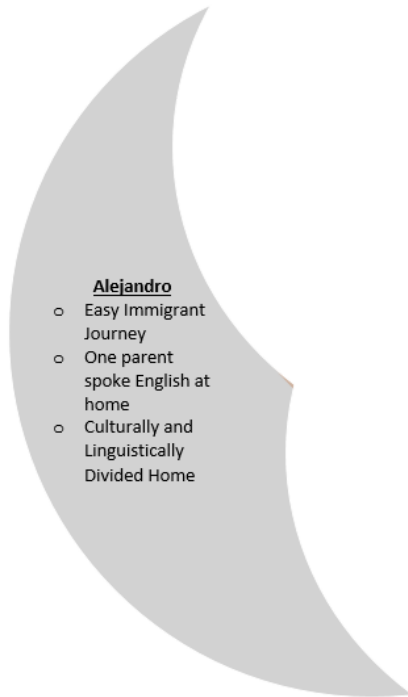
My memories of Santiago were shaped by the many pictures from his class and his own notes to me, expressing his appreciation for opportunity, encouragement, and his teachers' belief in him. I remembered him as quick to laugh or smile, but there was a seriousness about him at all times. In the teacher focus group his TOK teacher described him as “the gold standard of hard work.” My own recommendation letter hinted at the same idea:

*Students often ask me to write recommendation letters for colleges and scholarships, but this is a letter that I have been writing in my head for the past three years, as this fine young man's story unfolded before my eyes. He has inspired his fellow students and his teachers with his ability, his fortitude, his achievements, and his compassion for others. I can assure you that anyone who invests in [Santiago] will be rewarded by his fierce commitment to reaching his potential.*

His academic and artistic ability emerged while he was still in high school, propelled by this work ethic and fortitude. Yet his compassionate nature and commitment to his family constrained him. It was as though he had placed himself physically in a circle that included proximity to the family that needed him, because he was acclimated to the U.S. culture, while they could not fully enter it. The circle also symbolized a willing dedication of time to his family, not just because they needed him, but because he understood that his own happiness was tied up inextricably with theirs. Yet within this metaphorical confined and limited space, Santiago worked continually to discover and realize the infinite possibilities therein, whether it be art, compassion, understanding, or happiness. He is truly a man of two cultures, one who explores and expresses what he finds through his art.



This departure from the norm is somewhat evident in the Wordle above, created from the words most used in his interview. His multi levels of thinking are evident in the words “know,” “think,” “felt,” “read,” “science,” and “different.” As a highly gifted person, Alejandro’s challenge was to find an outlet for his creativity and mind. His early life provided some insight about his bilingualism and search for challenge.



Alejandro was born in Mexico, but his father was an American citizen. They moved to the United States as legal residents when Alejandro was five years old. He recalled that although the process wasn’t seamless because of confusion over his father’s birth certificate, the impact of the move itself was relatively small for him.

*My father was an American citizen, so they do tell me that there was a lot of paperwork, because my father had an incorrectly filed birth certificate in Chicago where he was originally born. Then they just created a new one for him in Mexico, so then there was the trouble of finding my father’s American birth certificate. So they did find it, but they*



*weren't able to grant me a citizenship, but I did have a legal green card and everything.*

*It's like getting on a plane and oh, now you are here and now this is where you live.*

The move to the U.S. was not much different for Alejandro than moving around Mexico as they had done many times before.

*We were just moving, we were seeing different things, and I do remember it was kind of sad, because I wouldn't be able to see the rest of my family as much, but we had already moved a lot in Mexico trying to find work for my parents. So moving was not a big issue.*

For Alejandro, moving to the U.S. was clearly not a traumatic experience. He was used to moving, and he was moving legally into a country where his father was a citizen and to a culture and language his mother embraced.

### **An Immigrant Family with Two Languages**

His family, however, continued to be in cultural and linguistic conflict throughout his childhood. His mother was from Mexico, while his father was born in America but had moved to Mexico at an early age. His mother spoke English well, and from the moment he was born, Alejandro learned English at home, speaking it with his mother. His father, however, spoke limited English and mostly Spanish.

*Because my mom had learned English growing up in school, she really wanted me to have those advantages. So from when I was very little I can remember her teaching me English, even while we still lived in Mexico. And then when we came to the States she pushed it even more. I don't really know why she just didn't feel like being in ESL would really benefit me in any way so, she really wanted to make sure that my English was on point. So I had actually already completed Kindergarten in Mexico when I moved to the States. And I think the situation was that my parents had to choose whether to put me in*

*first grade using ESL or to repeat kindergarten and not have to do ESL. And my parents chose to have me repeat kindergarten.*

His mother did not promote bilingualism, but instead insisted that Alejandro and his sister speak English. Although he had spent the first five years in Mexico, Alejandro spoke both English and Spanish.

*She [my mother] really pushed for us to speak English at home. And she didn't want us to speak Spanish. The only one that we had to speak Spanish with was my father because my father had never learned English despite being an American citizen. He had moved to Mexico very early on. So it's hard for him. We tried to speak English with him because actually my English had already been much better than his, but by the point that we moved to the U.S., because my mom had been teaching me for so many years, already. I mean I was like 5. So she had been teaching me as long as I had been able to speak. So really there wasn't too much about our having grown up speaking Spanish and making us switch to English. In kindergarten I really don't remember much of a big thing about switching languages either, because I had already been able to speak English, decently well, to merit being in kindergarten.*

The language confusion Alejandro did experience dealt more with the nuances of spelling, which he remembered because it was unusual for him to encounter something in language that he did not already understand.

*Except I still vividly remember at first grade actually, when we started learning how to spell different things and sentences and narratives, my teacher refused to tell me how to spell "the," because it never dawned on me that T and H make the, "th" sound in English...I think someone, one of the fellow students told me the answer eventually,*

*because I did it with like the DA , DE and I just could not figure how to spell “the.”*

*Eventually I got it and I learned.*

Even early on, Alejandro was an independent learner who found a way to survive and thrive in whatever environment he encountered.

### **Culturally Divided Family**

Alejandro’s Mexican born mother supported English and living in the U.S., while his American born father preferred Mexico and the Spanish language. Alejandro found that he knew more English than his father, which seemed to exacerbate the growing divide in his family.

*For me it was basically a product of a cultural clash. Because when we moved I knew more English than [my father] did, and he was 30 years my senior. It was hard for him to learn English, whereas for me I was still in that age when it was so easy and it already had been such a big part of my upbringing, because of my mom, and also my father just never really cared for American-like capitalism and government, because he had a very kind of Latin American mindset that America was full of imperialists. So even though he was an American citizen and he was white, he had kind of like that colonial mindset about the whole experience. Until finally he couldn’t take it anymore, and after my parents got divorced, a few years later, he just decided to move back to Mexico to be with his family, and also because he just could not find a job in the States that would really support him, because he could barely speak English. Even after we had been there for about a decade, or had been in the States for a decade.*

Alejandro described the divorce in terms of culture and language.

*When I turned twelve is when they got a divorce, and by then I just resigned emotionally for the next three years, because I didn’t know what side to be on, it wasn’t even just side*

*or like – between parents. My parents also made it a lot about choosing between sides of the border. My father really disliked living in America and preferred living in Mexico, while my mother preferred living in America and disliked the idea of ever going back Mexico to live. And so my mom, she'd be happy to speak in English, it's only in like the past six or so years that we've tried to speak more Spanish with each other. With my dad it's always been Spanish and Mexican pride. So when he left for Mexico it was shocking, but at the same time it didn't really change much of our relationship, because our relationship was already so distant, and actually I haven't seen my dad in like five years.*

For Alejandro, the immigrant journey was tied to a parallel personal journey. The trip from Mexico to the United States was a physical passage, but it was also a transformation of his family life. He attributed the dichotomy between the life, culture, and language of the two countries to the ultimate demise of his parent's marriage. Both of his parents had some college education, and eventually his mother became a teacher. As a first-generation immigrant parent, she was able to access opportunity for herself in the U.S.

### **Academic Journey**

Alejandro was a self-motivated, gifted student. His parents were not involved in his education in elementary, middle or high school, but he was nominated and tested for gifted eligibility after automatic referral from 99<sup>th</sup> percentile ITBS scores. He qualified for gifted services in elementary school and enrolled in advanced and honors classes throughout middle and high school.

*My parents never really had to push me when it came to academics, I would just do it. They never you know said, oh, you need to go do your homework or you know, stop watching TV, like they never limited me and forced me to do my school work, because I*

*had already had a history of becoming enraptured in it. I remember 6th grade, we had the project of writing a book on some physics topic and mine was on sound, and I went above and beyond, wrote 20 pages or something like that, of research, and explaining all of it. I got it very well printed, with laminated paper at Kinko's. So my parents never really felt the need to push me academically; they felt if I wanted to do it, that's fine, they would leave my education up to me.*

When the time came to apply for the IB Programme, Alejandro pursued it largely on his own. His parents did not come to any of the IB Parent meetings, but his mother did bring him to those meetings and drop him off. He recalled seeing his friends' parents but never really thought there was a need to involve his own. Similarly, when it came time to apply to college, he knew there was no available funding from his family. He applied for scholarships to several Ivy League universities.

*I had promised my mom at that point that I was going to pay for college somehow or somehow and she didn't have to worry about me, because I was just going to do it myself. I felt like why don't I just try it? If it doesn't work out, I still have time to apply to other schools and if it works out and it is totally legit, like it's a free ride and that will pay for college. Again typical me, so I do remember getting the [scholarship application] and just thinking there are 2 more weeks to turn in this application, we have got to do this now. So I just stopped going to school, stopped going to class, I just worked on it and worked on it. And then it just all came together surprisingly enough.*

From my own reflections and those of his teachers and librarian, we remembered that scholarship application process. For about 8-10 days, Alejandro was either away from school or in the school library, working on the many required essays. His teachers gave extensions on his

IB assignments and several of his teachers helped him by proofreading, listening to his many ideas, encouraging him, or just providing a snack when he needed it. He did not need any real help with his writing, however, and he created compelling essays that made me realize he had eclipsed the writing ability of the rest of us already.

*And I still think a major thing that helped me was the fact that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ had studied with the one of the professors at \_\_\_\_\_, and he gave me his book, and it was a book on multiculturalism, and I loved it. And I really wanted to come to school to \_\_\_\_\_, to work with that professor on multiculturalism.*

Looking back, Alejandro felt that this connection between a professor and one of his IB teachers turned out to be what motivated him to go to the Ivy League school he attended for college. The book and the professor behind it had captured his imagination, and he put that university on his scholarship application because of the idea of studying with that professor. Although he did attend the university, he did not study with the professor or take a class from him, because the professor had moved on from the topic of multiculturalism. He attributed his going to that university, however, to the idea of it being placed in his mind. He had won the scholarship and was able to have a full ride to the University of Ivy League even though he did not fully understand where he was going.

*I didn't know the difference between the University of Ivy League and City State University until after I was accepted. And I had already signed a contract that I would go.*

He was a child who had learned how to navigate his own educational path from a young age, but there were natural gaps in his understanding. His teachers and librarian were heavily involved in

support, but we did not comprehend those gaps, such as him applying to and being accepted into a prestigious university that he had really never heard of.

### **Cultural Assimilation**

Alejandro's home life after school revolved around television and books. He learned English, American culture, and other cultures from watching TV with his sister.

*When I would come home, it would just be me and my little sister and my parents would always be at work when I came home from school. So I ate a lot of Ramen and sandwiches, and easy things, and my sister and I just watched a lot of TV and read a lot, and for the longest time I felt like people were wrong about TV, that you couldn't learn anything from TV, and that watching a lot of TV would spoil you. I learned so much from just watching TV, and watching cartoons after school. I still think that it was a major part of my childhood and upbringing to watch these. A lot of what I watched was Anime from Japan that had been dubbed over with English voices. And the thing is that they directly target young boys and speak a lot about issues of loyalty and bravery and courage and persistence, and to me those were the most influential stories of my childhood.*

This was a student who was unusually independent and committed to pursuing his educational goals. In a unique twist on multiculturalism, Alejandro was born in Mexico to an American father, who felt that Spanish was his language and Mexico his home, and to a Mexican mother, who felt that English was important and wanted the U.S. to be their home. He moved to the United States and learned the legends that influenced his childhood from Japanese Anime shown on American TV (while eating Ramen).

## **Identity**

The cultural conflict between his parents was reflected in his own struggle to define who he was. He thought of himself as an American, but one who also had a Mexican heritage.

*So, I really have felt – if I have felt more American than Mexican in my life... I attribute it mainly to the difference between my father and I, because my father to me represents what a traditional Mexican man is supposed to be like, and my inability to be like him has made me feel also unable to be Mexican. But I really have a Mexican identity.*

After acclimating to American schools and speaking English, Alejandro's identity as a Mexican and as a bilingual speaker of both English and Spanish would grow when he became involved in the IB Bilingual Programme.

## **Reclaiming Native Language**

For Alejandro, reading and writing in both English and Spanish was natural. When the IB Programme began at his school, it included the opportunity for students to take IB Spanish A Literature, primarily with the idea that those students would take IB English B as an English support or second language through IB. For Alejandro, however, it was an opportunity to take both IB Spanish A Literature and IB English A Literature, effectively doubling up on college-level literature courses, one in English and one in Spanish. It provided an opportunity for him to learn both languages at an extremely high academic level.

*Ever since I was very little and as long as I can remember, I have been taught both languages. The IB Programme seemed fun...because I was especially interested in how I could take Spanish A1 and English A1, simultaneously.*



The opportunity to read the same book in two languages provided Alejandro with a new dimension of reading, writing, and analysis. This would eventually culminate in his desire to major in Comparative Literature in college.

*Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ wanted to start us off with the translated one of the international texts [in IB English.] We were first going to read a 100 Years of Solitude and I remember and I know, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ was also going to have us start with 100 Years of Solitude as well [in IB Spanish.] And I remember feeling very excited because for the first time I was really trying to understand the text in as many ways as possible. I loved the idea that I was reading it in Spanish and I was also reading it in English, and although I had enjoyed a class with Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ in Spanish previously my sophomore year, something about just reading 100 Years of Solitude, felt so much richer.*

I recalled from my reflections and conversations with teachers how Alejandro was able to amplify discussions in both classes with his perspectives on the novel. There was a small group of parents who at the time objected to the novel's appropriateness for teenagers. Alejandro was one of the more vocal supporters of the book.

*I remember the huge kerfuffle about reading 100 Years of Solitude. And that's kind of like when I was feeling that literature was a very exciting field to get into because it would have so much controversy, so many polarizing aspects. And I was so excited to get into that book and it's actually one of the few times that I finished the book in time.*

Alejandro had been reading, writing, and speaking two languages since he was born, but the opportunity to analyze college-level literature in two languages and from two different cultural perspectives provided a new dimension of bilingualism. A document from his senior year in high school described how he felt at that time.

"It kind of reawakened a part of me that had been dormant for a long time," he said of the IB Spanish literature course. "It's really helped me a lot. It's like my English literature class but different. The novels are different." He said he enjoys reading Spanish poems by Pablo Neruda and Antonio Machado while studying Geoffrey Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" in English because it mirrors his own bilingual experiences. "I'm really grateful for being in this school because of all the programs it offers me," \_\_\_\_\_ said. "I think it helps my identity because I have this unique perspective that's different from even other Spanish speakers. ... Yes, identify yourself by where you are from, but don't let that be who you are."

For Alejandro, his identity was multicultural, defined by two languages, two parents, two cultures, and two countries. Reclaiming his native language through the IB Programme seemed to help him forge his own one identity from both backgrounds.

### **Unique Approach to Education**

Alejandro built good relationships with his teachers, although he remained an unusual student. As mentioned before, for example, in most of his classes he could not sit still for very long. He did not disturb the other students, who were rather familiar with his oddities, but it often took new teachers a few weeks to get used to. Once they did, however, his love for learning helped them excuse his idiosyncrasies. He liked his teachers and seemed able to appreciate each one.

*I mean, all of them meant a lot to me in the end. And still do to this day because I learnt so much from each of them. So of course you know Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ and Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ [IB Spanish and IB English teachers] were amazing and really pushed me, and I was able to experiment a lot with different types of literary analysis. They really guided me to do that.*

*But also, you know, Government and IB Econ – those were good too, because just the way that it was taught, I was able to tie it in with the literature that I cared about.*

Once he became passionate about a subject, book, or idea, he devoted himself to it with an intensity that often took his focus off of necessary school tasks.

*A lot of me not doing well in school or IB, I feel was my own fault, because I was so passionate about what I wanted to know and the way I wanted to learn it that I didn't...it was almost to the point that it was disrespectful to the teachers, because I skipped so much class. I didn't care for deadlines, and I just wanted to do the assignments my way, and I mean I would talk to the teachers about these different things that I wanted to do and a lot of times they were okay with it. I don't think there was ever a time when they just flat out rejected what I wanted to do. Like they were always impressed that I wanted to do something on my own accord. And so a lot of times if I didn't do well in something it was because I chose to ignore the way that people were already doing things, or how we were supposed to do them, in order to do it my way. And that was just because I tend to be a very passionate person when I get into it, and I just threw myself into things and I would pull needless all-nighters worrying about minor details about the assignment that I had just blown up. Because to me those details were the crucial aspect I could make or break whatever theory I was trying to put together at that time.*

I remembered many times when Alejandro's obsession with a certain book or theory would dominate his life for days at a time. He was not cavalier, however, and would try his best to do what was asked even during those intense periods. His teachers respected him, not only for his intellect, but for his efforts to try when it was clear it was a struggle to focus on what seemed to be the mundane necessities of education when his mind was engrossed elsewhere.

## Purpose of IB

As a highly gifted student, Alejandro found succeeding at school to be relatively easy. For him, the IB Programme offered an opportunity for a different kind of challenge.

*I think the purpose [of IB] is to have a program that challenges kids at a global scale, because it's kind of crazy how this one organization evaluates students across the world. It has curriculums in all different countries. I think what I love most about the IB Programme is how small it made you feel, because you felt like it's not even just students in this country, it's students across the world that are being compared, not even compared to, but evaluated against. The main thing I dislike is the feeling of superiority sometimes that comes with being in a program that has prestige to it...But I do think – what I love most about the IB Programme is how small it made me feel, because up until then I think I did start to feel tired of feeling like a big fish in a small pond.*

Because the IB Programme was in its first year, every aspect of it was new. Not only was Alejandro challenged by its scope, he was also in a group of peers who had to lean on each other for support.

*We were all trying to figure out what to do, and how to do it. So it just felt like I don't know, everybody was in same boat, you know trying to figure out how to do these things that we were supposed to be doing.*

An early Facebook post from his first year of IB revealed a TOK video where Alejandro and several other IB students created a comedic take on the idea of breaking out of a metaphorical cave into a world of knowledge, symbolized by learning to read and discovering rap music. He posted about a variety of things, but included comments about creating a powerful oral presentation for IB and excerpts from essays. Looking back at the many pictures from this first

group of IB students and from Alejandro's Facebook, it seems that despite his unique gifts, Alejandro found a place in various groups of IB students as well as with other groups such as Band. He had a wide variety of friends, and the IB group was only a part of that. He was both solitary and social, figuring things out for himself and sharing the journey with a wide range of others.

### **Continued Growth and Exploration**

Alejandro felt that there was a connection between managing his own education from a young age and how he approached college and career.

*It's become a big part of how I perceive myself and how I do things myself. Now, I am very used to being in situations where the way to do things and what exactly to be doing is not very clearly defined. You just have these goals that you are trying to accomplish and then you just work with people in trying to figure out how do I accomplish these things. It's helped me a lot with my job because that's 90% of what my job is – not knowing what I am doing and then Googling it. It's something I correlated heavily that because of my upbringing I had to really just grow up from a very young age, and just take care of my sister and manage my own stuff, and learn my own stuff, and my parents weren't really there to guide me and just, I guess a natural desire to learn things. I just kept pushing myself to do different things, and try different things and learn different things even when I found myself completely, you know, out of my field, which is now natural to me.*

His current job involves computer science, something he had never studied, but his audacity and confidence helped him get this job over computer science majors. He found his job interesting, in great part, because it was about things he did not already know.

*So in my experience nothing I have ever done, I have the proper accreditation to do. And me getting this job was another, you know, example of that - that I with no computer science background, no clinical background was getting this job. I am sure there are students having a tough time finding a job that had actually done computer science. But at that point I had already you know developed a relationship with my boss, and had had the gumption to ask for a raise and that was approved, and my boss depends on me, for almost everything, he is almost, if not more eclectic than I am...I have been teaching myself a lot of things, and that's really natural for me because again since my parents weren't really there to help me with my homework, I had to teach myself everything that I wanted to know.*

Alejandro's career goals are somewhat stream-of-consciousness versus structured. He discussed how he felt he had experienced what he called horizontal learning by focusing on literary studies, and how now he was exploring vertical learning, making incremental progress deeper into computer science.

*Yeah, so I really enjoyed the idea that I could focus on my literary studies and then make everything else oriented towards my literary studies. Because I really wanted to pursue that. I think my career goal is just to keep making things and to not be bored...like Icarus, pushing myself, pushing myself beyond my limits, something greater out there that I could attain if I just kept trying.*

The myth of Icarus, of course, ended in disaster, as Icarus flew too close to the sun. Alejandro understood this metaphor, as I can recall many times when he might forget to eat or court disaster by forgetting important assignments or deadlines. For him, it seems necessary to both

learn continually and push himself to the brink. The IB Programme seemed to provide his first brush with this kind of challenge, problem-solving, and exhilaration.

### **Reflection**

By some chance, a public school offered the IB Bilingual Diploma Programme to native speakers of Spanish just as Alejandro entered the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. There could not have been a more appropriate student for the challenge. In a reflective essay from his senior year, Alejandro wrote:

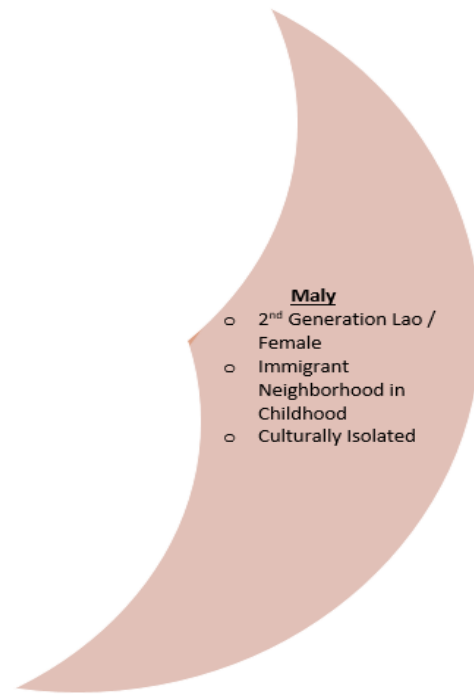
*Since I spent most of my after school time taking care of my little sister, my greatest companions and mentors were those I found in narratives. As I entered high school, I began to pursue literature as not only my source of inspiration but also as the medium through which to realize my artistic identity. Then I began to reclaim my Spanish from simply a connection with my Hispanic past to a pathway to a broader understanding of the world. Thus, the reaches of my consciousness expanded beyond America, and I loved it. I loved feeling like a global explorer as I traveled the world through literature. This love then metamorphosed into a passion and a calling. Through the IB Bilingual program I began developing myself around this calling. Everything I studied in IB provided pressure on my passions, effectively crystallizing my heart into that of an artist.*

I remember Alejandro's emotional and intellectual intensity. He loved music and was dedicated to band, while also appreciating art, theatre, poetry, and literature. The IB curriculum provided enough challenge for him, but it was the teachers who accepted him as an unusual genius that grew to be mentors of a sort, but who were really his intellectual peers for a time, until he moved beyond our scope. Somehow he was able to love learning and others, fully aware of his giftedness, but not elitist. It seemed like he thought everyone loved to learn as much as he did.





insisting on the pursuit of art, music, and community service. How did this wisp of a girl from a Laotian immigrant family ultimately channel her diverse interests into anthropology, diseases, and studying primates in Peru?



Our interview occurred through FaceTime, since Maly had just moved to a camp in the Peruvian rainforest to study primates. For a few minutes, her smiling face was on my screen, her long black hair cut short for this year of study, a beautiful smile on her face, and the cries of some kind of animals in the background. All too soon interference made it impossible to continue, so we proceeded with an audio call.

### **Family Immigration Background**

Maly's family emigrated from Laos to the United States before she was born, so her stories were from what her family and parents shared, but she had a clear sense of what they experienced overall. Like her parents themselves, she seemed reluctant to share too many details about their struggle.

*It was very difficult for them. My parents came to the states at different stages of their life. My dad he was a lot younger, he went through a lot of difficult ordeals in order to get to here, and my mother came when she was 20 and ended up staying just for a bit longer. So their situations were pretty different in ourselves. My dad came because of the war; they came as refugees. They ended up in a concentration or internment camp while they were in Thailand and they eventually got out...my dad was in the camp for a brief period of time, so it was pretty difficult, and my mom grew up like a foster kid, so their lives were very difficult, and they came to the Unites States and their lives were still very difficult. They didn't get any better in that regard.*

As her family struggled to acclimate and survive in a new country, her parents asked her to focus on education, attempting to shield her from the hardships they experienced.

*So it was very tough watching them, growing up. Because like every immigrant parent, they want the best for their kid, and they do the best they can for their kid, and as kids you pick things up really fast. You know when something is not quite right and you want to help out as much as you can. So while the parents want you to not worry, you end up worrying a lot more because you know the situation.*

Her parents did not willingly share their past experiences.

*Only when prompted. They don't talk about it on their own accord. You have to sit them down and ask about it, or ask someone who was also there about it, Otherwise they really don't talk about it much.*

Maly's family had moved into an immigrant neighborhood.

*Growing up in an immigrant community only reinforced it [the knowledge of the sacrifices]. We were all keenly aware of the sacrifices and hardship. Lots of the people I*

*knew were children of refugees or refugees themselves – so you were never naïve to the situation. You were always aware of the hardships everyone went through, what people continue to do just to get through, even if they end up in a situation that wasn't necessarily better than where they started off.*

Maly eventually moved away from this immigrant community, but it had a large impact on her understanding of the world.

### **Learning English**

Maly was born in the United States, but her family spoke no English at home, and she heard little English in the immigrant community where she grew up. Her voice dropped as she explained how she had to learn English in school.

*No, I actually had to take ESOL when I was in grade school. It was a little bit frustrating because growing up in an immigrant area, everyone didn't really speak English or some of them did but it was broken. And when you go to school, you are kind of told, "Oh, you don't know English very well," and some teachers try their best to pound it out of you, giving you stern looks with each mispronunciation. Even though I lived in a neighborhood of people who could speak multiple languages, they all felt inferior because they could barely speak English and did their hardest to learn. It created this strange atmosphere of shame within the immigrant community as we all strove to embody this wonderful idea of what it means to be "American" even though society, schools, institutions, continued to see us as outsiders. That kind of atmosphere, along with some of my teachers...I remember I was actually ashamed to speak a different language other than English growing up.*

She picked up English pretty quickly, and watching television helped. But her 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher felt that she may have had some speech issues besides her Lao accent.

*I learned English pretty fast, I watched a lot of Friends, actually, and PBS, you know, definitely age appropriate. But um, I think I was still in ESOL classes up until 3rd grade. And I remember in the 5th grade a teacher approached me about taking a speech class. But I never did that, because I was actually ashamed about that. I thought it meant that I didn't know English or didn't know how to speak. So I pretended like I didn't understand and walked away. He actually called my house one day and asked if he could talk to my parents about it, and I just said that the parents weren't here and I could leave them a message, and I just never told them.*

The teachers in the focus group recalled Maly's accent as well. They remarked on how she had what they thought was a Cambodian accent that improved remarkably during high school.

Another teacher described how at first she interacted with teachers better than the other students.

*I just remember talking to her about The Prince, the book, and I was like what is this little girl ninth grader saying to me? And by the time she graduated, it was just like...(gestures), and I think it was talking so much and talking with other children who had such good English, well, that's not the right way to say it, but that was amazing to me. Because it was a vast change.*

Throughout her IB experience, Maly grew in her confidence with both her peers and teachers. At the end of the two years, she was one of the most decorated seniors, earning multiple awards.

### **Early Identification as Gifted**

Despite her challenges with learning English and being in ESOL, Maly's teachers recognized her gifted potential, and she was placed in a higher track in her elementary school.

*In middle school, they placed students in clusters depending on whether they think you're an A-track or B-track student. Now that I'm older and think about it, it's pretty bad.*

*Essentially, they are prematurely assigning children on a path based on standards that may not that challenged the child to show their full potential. If you're placed in A-track, they consider you smart and they pool their resources to ensure you succeed. But if you're in B-track, it basically means they are not going to try as hard and [they] assigned an average course-load. This is really important since you are grouped with the same people for your entire time in middle school. I was in the A-track and had all the better teachers who pushed me. I think it was because I was in the gifted program since the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. But honestly, I think there were many students, if not all of them, who should be given an A-track level education.*

When Maly moved to high school, her family moved to a new school system. There were still many immigrant students, but they were mostly Hispanic.

*When we moved to \_\_\_\_ before we could apply/enroll, the school actually made us go to [a nearby] school (my brother and I) to take an English proficiency test first. We thought it was strange. Even the administrator for the test thought it was curious, considering we were both American citizens and went to American schools our whole lives. But we needed to go to school and \_\_\_\_ wouldn't let us enroll without it, apparently.*

Normally when a student transfers, either the parent asked for the gifted eligibility records to be transferred or the receiving school inquires. Although Maly was placed in honors classes, her gifted records were never transferred to her new school. That may have been because her parents did not know to ask, but it may also have been the result of her teachers not considering that she may be gifted. She struggled in math and earned her first and only C as a freshman, but she

earned A's in the remainder of her classes that year. Her sophomore year, she continued with honors and AP classes, band, and art, making mostly A's and even a B in math. Once she enrolled in the IB Programme for her junior and senior years, she made straight A's.

### **Transition to High School**

Maly's elementary and middle schools were largely populated with immigrant students. Before moving to high school, she went to school with others from a low socio-economic status, in contrast to the high school she attended after they moved before her freshman year. She compared the new school environment to her previous experience.

*It was a different kind of culture, a different kind of life than what I was used to. The people at the high school were mostly white or Latino – not much of anyone else. The exact opposite of what I grew up in. Growing up, the only white people, besides the teachers, were Bosnian refugees, which in terms of American standards, the Bosnian refugees weren't really white. So it was a big change – the racial dynamics and socio-economic classes. With that, you're able to see how it really influenced your perception of the world. To this day, I still feel that everyone at my high school is extremely naïve to the way the world, and their own country, worked. But I suppose if you grew up in a very protected, privileged environment, one of the privileges should be that naivety to the world outside one's bubble. But I think it's nicer to continuously question your environment and the world. It's more fun and not only do you get a better understanding of the world, but also your role in it.*

Moving into a suburban area, away from the immigrant community where she had lived for over ten years was a shock. Although she was interested in her peers' lives and how they differed

from hers, she was also surprised at their lack of experience with things she had thought commonplace, like being a refugee family who had fled its home country.

### **Different from Peers**

Maly had moved from a neighborhood of immigrants to a community where families had lived for generations. For the first two years of high school she tried to assimilate into the high school environment, but even though she made many friends, beginning the IB Programme her junior year in high school accentuated the challenge.

*I remember meeting a bunch of people I never knew. I remember being a little bit weirded out because everyone knew each other since they were little and their parents knew each other and so did their grandparents and great-grandparents. I thought it was interesting and weird because that's probably what my parents had before they came here. That's what the entire immigrant community had, before coming here and trying to assimilate. And coming from such a different background to a tight-knit environment, I felt there was no way I could join in. Even though two years had passed] and I already had a couple of friends, I was daunted with the prospect that I might not be able to join into a tight knit community. Everyone had different opinions, different mindsets, different beliefs, different backgrounds – it was a lot. It was a huge gap to close.*

The other bit of culture shock occurred when Maly saw how many families from her new school had been in the community for years. As a member of a refugee family, she did not have long term experiences in one country, much less in one small community.

### **Being a part of an Immigrant Family**

Maly lived in two worlds: her family life at home, dictated by her parents, and her school life where she longed to fit in. She explained that she always felt like an immigrant.

*I feel like you're always reminded that you're an immigrant or a child of immigrants. It is a contributing factor to your socio-economic status, yes, but it gets down to your sense of self, your identity, and the expectations of your family. You become acutely aware of the sacrifices made and everything you do is made with that knowledge tucked in the back of your mind. It really impacts on whether you can go out and have fun or stay home. It's not just because of the whole strict immigrant parents idea, but it comes from this importance of hard work and self-sacrifice. It's this constant reminder that everything you've achieved, every opportunity you're given, are by the hard work and sacrifice of those before you, passed and living. And there was a struggle with that in high school because everyone wants to go out on weekends, have fun, enjoy life, etc. But you can't. Not just because your parents are busy doing day and night shifts and you need to babysit and do chores, but also because of this idea that you need to stay home, do something.*

Maly felt that her friends could not understand the complexities of her world at home. She could not join them in social events for a variety of reasons she tried to explain.

*In high school, most of my friends didn't come from that background, so it was hard to really explain that mindset to them. It was difficult to tell them that I can't hang out that night. It wasn't just because my parents wouldn't let me. It wasn't because I wouldn't let me. It was because I couldn't afford it. There were things I needed to do and oversee. Small constant reminders that I can't hang out with friends were a constant reminder. That's why I was so involved in music, art, and volunteer work.*

My reflections included meeting Maly's father, as he attended a few events in high school – honors nights, performances, or the art show. Maly explained how her parents showed their support without being able to be very involved.



*They weren't able to do too much, but they definitely wanted the best. They always made sure we had our homework and everything done but they weren't actually able to help us. It was also difficult explaining to them how American education works. Because it doesn't make sense to them.*

In her home life, her parents were involved enough in her education to be sure she completed her work and did her best.

### **Applying to IB**

Her parents were supportive of Maly, but she did not feel that they grasped the significance of the IB Programme. Maly not only enrolled in the full IB Diploma Programme, she also continued her leadership roles and heavy involvement with band, as well as a deep commitment to her art. In many ways, she was potentially the most involved student at school, which her parents may have thought was the normal American experience. When asked about her parents' involvement in her applying to IB, she answered:

*Not at all, I don't think they really understood the difference, or, I don't think they really knew what I was doing. Honestly, I don't think I ever told them what I was doing. I had brought them the paper and asked them to sign it, and they probably signed it without even bothering to look or ask what it was. Yea, I feel like they trust me a lot.*

But Maly's application included a section for parent comments/recommendations where her father, who could speak fairly good English, wrote:

*I believe that my child can do better than what she is doing now and after attending a couple of IB meetings, I truly believe that it will challenge her enough for her to try her hardest and attempt to pass.*

My recommendation letter for college revealed how Maly applied for IB and then flourished.

*That spring, we accepted our first applications for our new International Baccalaureate Programme, and Maly was one of the first to turn hers in, applying to be a full diploma student. Frankly, I was a bit concerned about her at first. I had only seen how hard she had worked in my Honors Geometry class, and I wondered if she could manage the much larger challenge of six IB classes, the additional Theory of Knowledge class, being an integral part of our award-winning band, the CAS and Extended Essay requirements, etc. Her determination to challenge herself never wavered, however, and she enrolled in IB last year. It was only then that I began to realize the vast abilities of Maly. She loves both art and music, but she chose to pursue IB Visual Arts because she was already going to be in band class all year. The other band students wisely chose IB Music as their elective, but Maly does not believe in taking the easier way when there is an opportunity for more learning. I was amazed at how Maly devoted more and more time to studying, while continuing her commitment to band, community service, and family. At the end of her junior year, she had actually earned straight A's, the best report card she'd ever received, and she had achieved this while taking the most rigorous curriculum in the world. Last spring, she was awarded the IB Theory of Knowledge award, one of only a few IB awards we gave. Maly approaches academics with a clear vision of reaching her potential coupled with a fierce drive to do her best.*

Maly's IB application essay, written when she was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, was one of the longest turned in. Handwritten in pencil, she began with defining internationalism, used an allusion to Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat*, and then discussed the importance of the younger generation to understand the new global society and achieve "worldwide equality and suffrage."

It was a standout essay. Her teachers supported her nomination, describing her work ethic in glowing terms.

Maly described how she felt compelled to pursue the IB Programme.

*I think it was just out of pride. I think it's because I was told that this was a lot more difficult than AP. So I did it because of that. I think I was honestly just your typical high school kid who just wanted to prove, not even to prove, just heard that this was hard, don't do it, so of course I went and did it. I also felt, personally, if I didn't try my hardest course, that I would always regret it and be angry at myself for not trying. So I feel like if I apply and if I didn't get it, it's okay. But if I didn't even bother to apply, then I would not be able to be okay with myself.*

Maly's drive to push herself helped her to apply for the IB Programme, but it was also a trait that sometimes took over her life.

### **Drive for Excellence**

Once in the IB Programme, Maly's commitment to doing her best continued. She found that as she pushed herself, she asked herself why she worked so hard, and she found that sometimes, she could not achieve perfection.

*If I remember right, just about every day in IB made me question, why am I still doing this, why am I still writing this 20 page paper? It didn't matter what, I always wanted it to be as good as possible. And at that time, as good as possible meant better than I can achieve. I wanted everything I did to reflect who I was, who I am, and of course, I took more effort than I needed to. For my art show, I wanted it to reflect me, exemplify my thoughts and experiences, and at the end of it, I felt like I didn't do as much as what I would like to – but I have to remind myself that it reflected who I was at that time period*

*and that was the reason for my discontent. I wanted it to reflect who I wanted to be and be perceived as, not my current self.*

I remembered her internal assessment project for IB Math. Her paper contained incredible detail and was far more ambitious in scientific experimentation than was required. Maly seemed not to understand how to do simply a good job, but instead pushed herself far beyond what was asked. Perhaps that is why she thrived in IB, and as she hinted below, it meant she was living up to the sacrifices her parents had made for her.

*I felt like every class of IB challenged me to be more. Or at the very least, that was how I took it to be. It challenged me to grow up, to challenge my way of thinking, to challenge how I took in information and made it better. I wish I could think of one significant event, but the entire IB ride was one, long, never ending challenge that I assigned myself. Every time I stumbled, I was reminded of the sacrifices my parents made for me to be able to stress about this program. My parents never really pushed a particular field to me. They wanted me to do something that made me happy. They felt that they worked so hard and so long to ensure that we are given the opportunity to pursue something we love. And when they did want me to do something, they usually let me have a say. For that, I'm greatly and eternally grateful.*

This drive for high achievement continued in college and now, in her graduate work.

*But because of that I feel like I cannot fail, that I have to do the best I can, I always have to do the best, even if I mess up, even if I have to go back home for a bit, I have to pick myself and get the fuck on and try harder. I can't sit down and wallow in pity. I have to keep on going and use that as fuel. Because I'm not here because of myself. I'm here because of so many who have been there and sacrificed for me.*

Although she was born in the United States to immigrant parents who were reluctant to discuss the hardships they endured, Maly's sense of being the recipient of so much sacrifice affected the way she approached and overcame challenges. In a newspaper article and video that featured a few outstanding graduates, Maly explained that she would double-major in college and that she wanted to be a microbiologist, while also continuing to pursue music and art. It was the normal response for Maly, planning to try to achieve a maximum number of goals.

### **Teachers**

When I asked Maly about her teachers, she was quick to share about the teachers who inspired her, the ones who demanded the most from her.

*I think she was very strict, but you could tell she cared and she took no nonsense. She did it a different way than \_\_\_\_ did – I really liked \_\_\_\_ approach but I really respected the Spanish teacher a great deal.*

She pointed out that she did not like some classes, but not that it was personal with the teachers, yet she confessed that it was because some teachers did not try hard enough.

*It wasn't the teachers per se that I didn't like. It was more that I felt I was cheated out of a potential great education. I am especially upset because I ended up learning much later in my college career that I actually like ecology – to the point where that my masters is mostly ecological based (primate parasite ecology to be exact). But during high school, I hated it and felt it was a waste of time. I also didn't like IB Economics, but that was more contributed to my dislike of the topic in general rather than anything any teacher could had done. I'm just upset that I missed out on a wonderful opportunity with environmental science.*

## **Purpose of IB**

Maly's sense of the purpose of the IB Programme reminded me of why IB was first introduced, as a way of standardizing an international education.

*I feel like the IB program was made to give a well-rounded, fundamental, and standardized understanding of several core classes that can be applied across international borders. It's made so that an individual who travels often would still have the same quality of education in each country due to its rigorous standardization and continuous international checking system by experts. It was made to increase appreciation for globalization and challenge us to think outside of what our own society, our own culture has taught us. Whether you are in Texas, Georgia, or the Netherlands, the IB Programme strives to ensure that you will come out the same, no matter location, since location should not matter.*

She described the Lakeshore IB Programme as better than most others, explaining that despite the standardized goals of IB, that each program is unique.

## **Creativity, Action, and Service**

IB students completed Creativity, Action, and Service (CAS) folders, where pictures, reflections, and documentation demonstrated that they had fulfilled the IB requirement for 150 hours of CAS. Maly created a blog, with pictures, videos, and descriptions about her experiences, which ranged from painting the team mural in the gym, to a walk to support an organization called "Invisible Children," to a Scholar Weekend where she learned about science. These were in addition to a myriad of band events, where Maly played the tuba and won music awards. Ultimately, she won an art contest, the IB Art award and many others, graduating as one of the most decorated seniors in her class.

In her recommendation letter, CAS is highlighted as one of her many strengths.

*Maly is a high achieving, creative scholar, but what impresses me most is her character.*

*Her resume would list many CAS activities involving community service and leadership; however, Maly lives every day as though she is serving others. Many students have come to me to say that she has been kind to them, reached out to them, or helped them.*

*Although Maly is a popular girl with many friends, she is that rare teenager who notices and cares about others who might be lonely. Her compassionate spirit and commitment to service reveal her integrity and kindness.*

Despite her sincere participation, Maly's blog served to temper her altruism with reality. About a Tuba Christmas event she wrote in her CAS blog: "I'm pretty sure that we intimidated the guys a bit, and made them think, 'Oh man, I must really SUCK!'" Her entire blog was full of personal comments like this, as though it was a place where she need not be perfect but could be candid and even a bit edgy, even though it was for school.

### **Family Relationships at School**

For Maly, developing deep and supportive relationships with peers was significant. On her Facebook page, she sometimes posted notes from a lecture to help her classmates who may not have had the notes. Looking back, it was a way of surviving. The students were under great pressure and had six IB classes to handle at once, and they were often overwhelmed. It seemed that only by learning to lean on each other could they have made it through a day or a week, and eventually through two years. Except for band, Maly was either at school or at home, so the IB experiences during and after school were a meaningful way for her to develop friendships.

*All that translated to classes in high school and how people making friends, because they would reminisce about that, and that is how they bonded by hanging out afterwards. And*

*the only way I could bond with people was in classes, which was why the IB program was good for me, because everyone bonded because of classes, made significant relationships. So if it weren't for that it would have been more difficult for me to make significant relationships.*

When asked about what was most significant for her, Maly described the school IB family. The document search revealed a focus on providing bonding experiences for students: monthly IB lunches; daily advisement time; teambuilding activities; study sessions; and field trips. Their purpose was to support students as they undertook the daunting task of so much rigor and stress.

*I don't know if I can think of one single moment...but I remember that being in the program itself was significant and having the people there and having that kind of family relationship was really, really great. There's a lot of small memories, but all of it was nothing compared to just being a part of the program and the people in it.*

For Maly, the most meaningful aspect turned out to be the least structured part of the school day, the daily advisement in the library. This was the 25-minute period mid-morning, where sometimes we provided snacks or some structured type of information, but where most often students sat together or in small groups. Usually someone played a guitar or a group of students clustered around a computer. We as advisors drifted about, talking with kids individually as needed, or joining conversations, often at our own expense at their jokes.

*Sitting in the library between classes, that was the best part – all the little dumb things we did there, all the jokes, where we were able to be us, where we were able to talk freely with one another, with you guys, where we were able to just sit back and enjoy it, being students, being, being there. That was nice, it was a small little family, and we call it the IB family for a reason and I really appreciate it. Yeah, as much as I loved our potlucks –*



*it was the small little things, like hanging out with one another in the classroom. That was great.*

After this point in the interview, the Internet gave out in Peru, something that Maly had warned would happen. Nevertheless she sent me a Facebook message to follow up on this theme.

*I really do want to stress the importance of the IB program as family to me, it acted as a different kind of emotional support different than the emotional support I had at home. So the one I had at home was really different. It was still good – they tried their best to help out and everything. But they just weren't there most of the time, or if they were, they didn't quite understand. They just wanted to help out.*

*And you had the family system that you kind of chose, actually, that you guys are all experiencing the same thing. I want to stress how important the whole IB family was. The unique and special situation the IB family was. The IB family provided a different sense of emotional support that I didn't have at home because it relieved me of the same kind of obligations and responsibilities. We all stressed over the same thing. We were all expected to do the same thing at the same caliber. It was nice. And the teachers were also family. Several of the teachers I saw as parental figures. It was important to all of us, I think.*

## **The IB Diploma**

Maly was not accepted into her first choice of college, and the admissions team explained that it was mostly because of her essay. She had completed the application all on her own, without any help from parents, and without asking for help from her teachers for proofreading or ideas, even though that was common practice for students. She had been accepted into a prestigious university, however, and made plans to attend, earning several scholarships. One of

my most meaningful memories is the day we found out the IB exam scores and who had earned the IB Diploma. Students could come to the school to my office to hear the results in private, or they could wait until the next day to access them online.

Maly came to the office, the shy and hopeful smile on her face, but doubt was there as well. For a moment, it was most important that she had finished it, and that she knew how I loved her and was so proud of her. Before I could say a word, she reached out to hug me, I think to let me know that it didn't matter about the result, that she loved me anyway. She was right – the family we shared was the most significant thing. As I rocked her in my arms, I whispered, “You got the IB Diploma.” We laughed and cried. And it wasn't the IB Diploma at all; it was the act of achieving so much, and of finally having that moment that says, you've done it.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Studying the lived experiences of immigrant students in an International Baccalaureate Programme addresses Subotnik et al.'s (2011) call for research that explores the relationship of talent development to opportunity and motivation, while addressing Grantham's (2012) emphasis on equity and access. From the experiences of gifted and talented immigrant students who demonstrated high achievement in an IB Programme, we learn not only about their lives and perspectives, but also the elements of effective educational programs (Crul & Holdaway, 2009). The purpose of my research was to better understand the background and experiences of successful gifted and talented immigrant students within an International Baccalaureate Programme and to consider implications for educators so they can better address their strengths and needs. Research questions that pertain to this overall focus included:

- How do gifted and talented immigrant students who were successful in the Lakeshore IB Programme describe their experiences?
- What were the cultural and contextual aspects of the students' experiences?
- What elements of the Lakeshore IB Programme addressed the strengths and needs of gifted and talented immigrant students?

Three gifted and talented immigrant students' experiences were the focus of this study. Two were first-generation immigrants who were native speakers of Spanish; one of whom immigrated to the United States as a legal resident, and the other who was smuggled over illegally. The third immigrant student was a second-generation Lao student who was born in the

U.S. and was thus an American citizen. The similarities and differences in their immigrant journeys; family backgrounds; cultural and linguistic environments; gifted status; educational experiences; and significant relationships reveal compelling themes about motivation, family, and school. Listening to their individual stories helps to focus on how each constructed meaning (Crotty, 1998) and adds to a more complete understanding of the case (Simons, 2009): the experiences of successful gifted and talented immigrant students in an International Baccalaureate Programme.

### **Findings**

My findings fall into three categories: the unique elements of the individual immigrant student experiences; the intersecting themes of their experiences; and the implications for educators. Immigrant students confront unique barriers that include: (a) differences in their educational backgrounds, (b) adjustment to a new culture and language, (c) families that are not able to help them navigate their education, and (d) other barriers associated with legal or low socio-economic status (Wells, 2010). The three gifted and talented immigrant students that participated in this study were alike in these areas. They all spoke a native language other than English and had working class immigrant parents. All three earned the International Baccalaureate Diploma at one high school where the opportunity coincided with their motivation. Overlapping themes emerged in their stories, but each of their distinctive narratives brought a new layer of understanding to the gifted and talented immigrant student experience.

### **Intersecting Themes**

Themes emerged from each student narrative, and often similar overarching ideas came out of two or three of the students' stories. Although one might expect to find more common refrains between Santiago and Alejandro, the two male students who were both first-generation

immigrants from Mexico, each shared equally significant themes with Maly, a second-generation immigrant student whose parents emigrated from Laos. Several key ideas intersected across all three participants' experiences. These overlapping themes support much of the current literature about immigrant students and introduce a few new ideas as well. The figure below shows the overlapping topics from the students' narratives. Even the ideas which seemed unique to one person shared insights into the immigrant student experience. Three sections of the circles overlap between two students, ideas that manifest themselves individually but that share a central theme. The ideas in the center are those that intersect among all three participants.

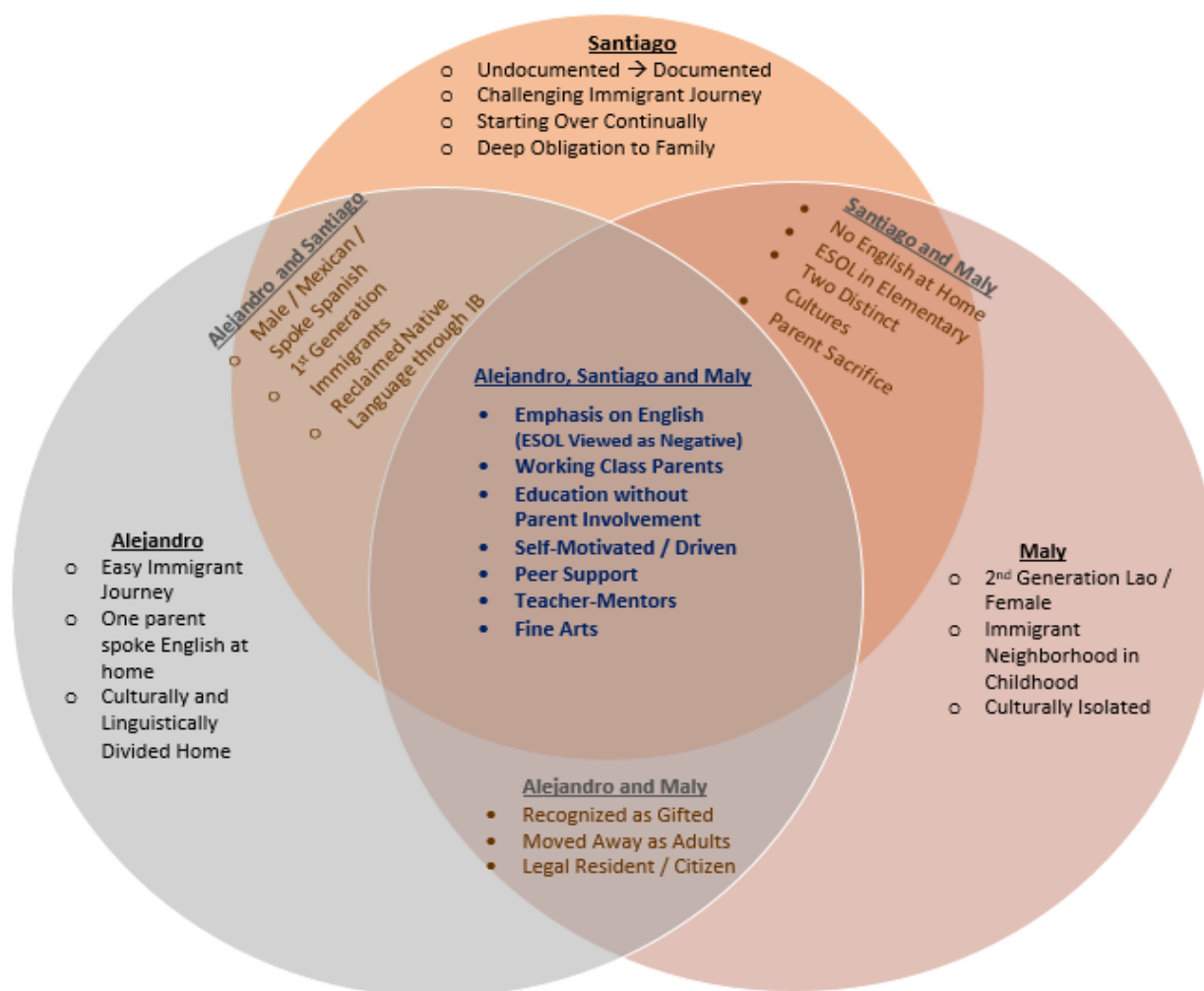


Figure 2: Thematic Intersections. This figure illustrates the singular and overlapping themes from the student narratives.

## Individual Immigrant Experiences

Immigrant students have diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, and their families come from a variety of countries (Hernandez et al., 2009). Two of my participants emigrated from Mexico in elementary school and were native speakers of Spanish, but their immigrant experiences varied widely. The third participant was born an American citizen to parents who emigrated from Laos, yet she was more culturally isolated in her high school experience because of so few Asian immigrants in her community. Their immigrant journeys, family experiences, and gifted status in the U.S. portray three areas of stark differences which nevertheless reveal overall insights into the immigrant student experience.

**Immigrant journeys.** From one student who vividly recalled a traumatic and illegal passage to the U.S. to a student born on American soil with all the rights and privileges of a citizen, all the participants had a distinctive immigrant journey that impacted their identity. Santiago described the endless walking, harrowing moments, and vivid details of being smuggled into the U.S. from Mexico:

*...They were securing the area with flashlights...And I remember telling my mom that I needed to pee. And she's like, son, I'm really sorry, but you're going to have to... you know, pee your pants.*

They arrived safely but labored to find a place to live, a job, and transportation. Both Santiago and his mother were undocumented, and his parents understood the potential capriciousness of their legal status. I listened to the details of Santiago's immigration journey eight years after I first met him as a teenager. His story provides a new dimension of understanding about the hardships of such a perilous journey and the ongoing struggle to navigate a new culture and language.

In contrast, Alejandro characterized his immigration to the U.S. as a simple trip:

*I did have a legal green card and everything. It's like getting on a plane and oh, now you are here and now this is where you live.*

Although the move itself was uneventful, Alejandro's immigrant journey continued to be lived out in the cultural and linguistic battlefield of his home, as his parents spoke two different languages to him due to their individual allegiances to separate countries and cultures. It was a more figurative passage into American culture than Santiago's physical journey, but it lasted throughout his childhood. Maly's birth into American citizenship belied the fact that she, too, had a real and ongoing passage into a new country, although her journey transpired through her parents' sacrifices to move to the U.S. She understood that her parents had suffered through internment camps and dangerous travels to provide her with better opportunities:

*So it was very tough watching them, growing up. Because like every immigrant parent, they want the best for their kid, and they do the best they can for their kid, and as kids you pick things up really fast. You know when something is not quite right and you want to help out as much as you can. So while the parents want you to not worry, you end up worrying a lot more because you know the situation.*

Even though her parents tried to shield her from their hardships, Maly described the lasting effect of her parents' sacrifices:

*I always have to do the best, even if I mess up...I have to pick myself and get the fuck on and try harder. I can't sit down and wallow in pity. I have to keep on going and use that as fuel. Because I'm not here because of myself. I'm here because of so many people who have been there and who have sacrificed for me.*

Another aspect of Maly's experience was her move from an immigrant neighborhood to a new community where she was culturally and linguistically isolated from her peers. Although she was an American citizen, she had a different home life and background that she did not share with others.

My students had three very different passages into America – one that was dangerous and illegal; another that was played out between two culturally different parents; and a third that happened before she was born but that continued to affect her sense of duty. Although they were clearly different, each had stories about their immigrant journeys that deeply affected them as children, students, and now adults. Frey and Henley (1976) wrote “The Last Resort,” a song about the history of those seeking the American frontier. One line in particular captures the common significance of their diverse immigrant journeys: “She packed her hopes and dreams like a refugee, just as her father came across the sea.” Each of them have a story that reached beyond a family history to a family mythology involving the hopes and dreams of both parents and children, a story that shaped their experiences, personalities, and lives.

**Family.** *Us Weekly* runs a feature entitled, “Stars – They’re Just Like Us.” Perhaps this section could read, “Immigrant Students: They’re Just Like Us” in terms of the universality of many of their family experiences. Although they have unique backgrounds, my participants described aspects of their home lives that were not at all unique to immigrant families. Santiago shared about the conflicting emotions he felt while learning to know and love his sister who had Down Syndrome. Being the only sibling of a special needs child was certainly exacerbated by being the only person in his family to speak English well enough to advocate for her education, yet his sense of obligation to her future seems to be the natural inclination of any sibling of a child with special needs.



Alejandro had parents who were in conflict for years and who ultimately divorced. He was left without a father present and had not spoken to his father for the past five years. This may not happen in all families, but it is not unique to immigrant families. I have known the participants for the past eight years, but I had never realized that they were going through these commonplace experiences. At school, their teachers and I viewed them in terms of their academic strengths and needed supports. We were aware of their cultural diversity, but that may have dominated our perspectives rather than understanding them as regular teenagers whose families struggled as all families struggle. I can recall reaching out to students whose parents were divorcing, or whose siblings had special needs, but I did not include these students. Perhaps their teachers and I defined them too narrowly by their cultural background. Their stories revealed that they had different challenges from each other, but that many of their family trials were similar to those of their non-immigrant peers.

**Gifted status.** When diverse students are perceived in terms of their challenges instead of their strengths, they can be overlooked for gifted programs (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Garcia et al., 2008). My students encountered very different gifted nomination and qualification processes. Alejandro, who was highly gifted, bilingual, and spoke almost perfect English, was nominated for testing and qualified for gifted services early in elementary school and continued to be served in gifted until graduating from high school. Santiago, however, did not speak any English in elementary school, attended ESOL classes, and was never nominated for gifted testing. It was not until high school that he was placed in an honors class based on his potential or achievement.

Similarly, Maly did not speak English in elementary school and was served in ESOL, but she lived in an immigrant community and attended an elementary school with many immigrant students. She was nominated and qualified for gifted services among similar peers. Interestingly,

when she moved to a non-immigrant community, her gifted records were not sent and were never requested by her new high school. She was able to access honors, AP, and IB classes, but the counselors and teachers did not recognize that she may have qualified for gifted services. The different gifted status outcomes for the participants support Esquierdo and Arreguin-Anderson's (2012) conclusion that bilingual gifted students may be overlooked.

Although participants had widely different immigration stories, family lives, and gifted recognition, each student's experience amplified understanding of what it means to be an immigrant student in America. Santiago, Alejandro, and Maly were acutely aware of the journey of the immigrant family, packing their hopes and dreams in pursuit of a better life. Santiago and Alejandro grew up in a family that also encountered the more common challenges of special needs children and divorce. Finally, the differences in gifted identification and service supported the literature about how diverse students may be perceived through a deficit perspective rather than viewed in terms of their strengths and potential.

### **Common themes between two participants.**



No two (or three) life stories are alike, but the place where two layers overlap may reveal additional dimensions of the gifted and talented immigrant student experience. These are noteworthy, not so much because of their number, but because the theme is strengthened in intensity and more insightfully expressed by two perspectives.

*Importance of native language.* In the past several years, researchers have called on schools to provide opportunities for potentially bilingual students to learn in both English and their native language as a way of building on their strengths and meeting their learning needs (Esquiedo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Sadowski, 2013; Garcia et al., 2013). Both Santiago and Alejandro emphasized the significance of studying literature in Spanish, their native language. They had learned Spanish from an early age, although Alejandro spoke both English and Spanish at home. Since the early years of elementary school in the U.S., neither had studied Spanish at school. As a sophomore, Alejandro took Native Speakers of Spanish I, but Santiago did not. It was not until they enrolled in the IB Programme that they began to study literature in Spanish. Santiago wrote:

*...The fact that I was able to like study literature in Spanish just the way I would in Mexico seemed really intriguing to me, and it sort of felt like I was sort of regaining something that I had lost by being here [the U.S.].*

Similarly, Alejandro described the impact of studying Spanish literature on his developing a sense of his academic identity:

*It kind of reawakened a part of me that had been dormant for a long time...I think it helps my identity because I have this unique perspective that's different from even other Spanish speakers.*

Both young men spoke eloquently about the significance of being able to delve into their native language, reclaiming something that seemed lost while adding a deep dimension to their identity as bilingual scholars. Their accounts support the idea of the importance of ongoing native language development at school and the importance of receiving instruction in both languages (Matthews & Matthews, 2004; Bernal, 2002).

*Impact of parent sacrifice.* Both Santiago and Maly spoke continually of their strong sense of obligation to family due to the sacrifices their parents endured to provide better learning opportunities. Immigrant students often have deep-rooted connections to family and often assume adult roles as the primary speakers of English in their homes (Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Crul & Holdaway, 2009). Santiago spoke of needing to help to advocate for his sister with special needs as well as helping his family, both as a child and now as an adult:

*...My focus is to bring up my family with me and to not solely focus on myself but at the same time make sure that they're experiencing growth just as fast as I am. So, that has been something that's been really troublesome in my mind lately, because how do I balance that? How do I continue to grow professionally but at the same time, how do I make sure that my parents are okay, that they get a credit card, that they sign up for automatic bill payment?*

He spoke of trying to figure out how to navigate his own dreams while fulfilling his obligation to his family who would always need him.

Maly's sense of obligation was channeled into her relentless drive to succeed, because she could not fail when her family had suffered so much, seemingly on her behalf. She shared that she often could not attend social events because her family could not afford it, which might be a normal experience for many students. She explained, however, that it was not just the issue of having enough money that influenced her.

*In high school, most of my friends didn't come from that background, so it was hard to really explain that mindset to them. It was difficult to tell them that I can't hang out that night. It wasn't just because my parents wouldn't let me. It wasn't because I wouldn't let me. It was because I couldn't afford it. There were things I needed to do and oversee.*

*Small constant reminders that I can't hang out with friends were a constant reminder.*

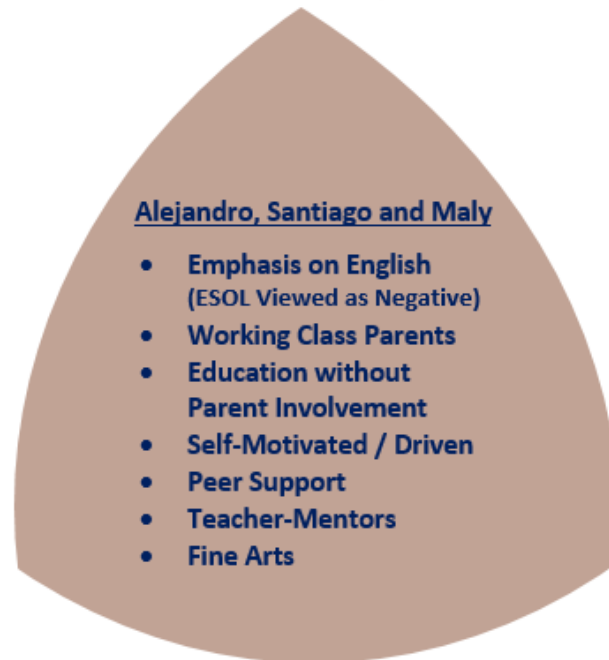
*That's why I was so involved in music, art, and volunteer work.*

Her parents' sacrifices meant that she could not simply hang out with friends. Her activities might have had a social element, but they also had to have a purpose to justify her involvement – to her family? To herself? Researchers have explored the impact of perfectionism on gifted students and Neumeister (2007) called for cross-cultural studies to research how different cultural groups demonstrate perfectionism. Maly exhibited perfectionism in her schoolwork, but she experienced a different kind of pressure due, at least in part, to her cultural and immigrant background.

Both Santiago and Maly's experiences support the idea that immigrant students have a strong sense of responsibility to their families. Their stories also raise the question of how deeply this impacts their future opportunities for high achievement. Only Santiago is currently living close to home for the express purpose of being close to his family, although he is aware of consciously making that choice. Despite her emphasis on always doing her best for her family's sake, Maly was able to achieve independence and pursue her dreams all the way to Peru to study primates. Alejandro moved away as well, although his mother was able to speak English and assimilate into American society without his help. Further research about the multifaceted ways that a sense of family duty impacts immigrant students is needed.

**Intersections among all three participants.** The participants shared their stories, responding to open-ended questions about their experiences of being in a family that spoke another language besides English; of being an immigrant student; of their relationships with teachers; and of their experience in an IB Programme. Each told unique stories, but several overlapping topics emerged: (a) the influence of the English language, (b) parental impact on

motivation and lack of parental involvement with school, and (c) supportive relationships from peers and teachers.



*Influence of English language.* The majority of immigrant students in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home, and one-fourth of the students have limited English-speaking ability (Hernandez et al., 2009). My participants' responses support the finding that learning to speak, read, and write English is a significant factor for achievement and success as immigrant students (Sadowski, 2013). Santiago described how quickly he picked up on English after his father started to make fun of him for not knowing English well. He explained with some pride how he moved out of ESOL classes in elementary school so that he could be in classes with regular students:

*Eventually I went from being in ESOL classes to eventually going into like, normal classes with just regular students, people who had always spoken English.*

Santiago associated ESOL with being different and moving out of ESOL as an achievement that allowed him to join normal classes. Soon he realized that learning English was both his path

towards accessing higher academics and also the tie that would bind him as a caregiver to his non-English speaking family. Speaking English was powerful.

Alejandro's mother insisted he learn English while they were still living in Mexico, providing him with a bilingual background that, coupled with his highly gifted mind, meant that he could ease seamlessly into the American school system. He remembered how important it was to his mother that he speak English well and not take any ESOL classes. It was important enough for him to repeat his kindergarten year – even though he was a precocious reader with a very high I.Q. – rather than spend even a day in an ESOL class.

Although Maly was actually born in the U.S., she had the most challenging time learning English and remained in ESOL for the longest period of time. She did not know if she had an actual speech problem or just a Lao accent, but she was embarrassed by her teacher's interest in improving her speech and hid this from her parents.

*But um, I think I was still in ESOL classes up until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. And I remember in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade a teacher approached me about taking a speech class. But I never did that, because I was actually ashamed about that. I thought it meant that like I didn't know English or didn't know how to speak. So I pretended like I didn't understand and walked away. He actually called my house one day and asked if he could talk to my parents about it, and I just said that the parents weren't here and I could leave them a message, and I just never told them.*

Maly described how the entire immigrant community felt the shame of not speaking English well. Teachers reinforced this feeling.

*No, I actually had to take ESOL when I was in grade school. It was a little bit frustrating because growing up in an immigrant area, everyone didn't really speak English or some*

*of them did but it was broken. And when you go to school, you are kind of told, “Oh, you don’t know English very well,” and some teachers try their best to pound it out of you, giving you stern looks with each mispronunciation. Even though I lived in a neighborhood of people who could speak multiple languages, they all felt inferior because they could barely speak English and did their hardest to learn. It created this strange atmosphere of shame within the immigrant community as we all strove to embody this wonderful idea of what it means to be American, even though society, schools, institutions, continued to see us as outsiders. That kind of atmosphere, along with some of my teachers...I remember I was actually ashamed to speak a different language other than English growing up.*

The participants spoke with pride about learning English. They seemed to want to avoid ESOL either from their parents’ pressure or their own sense of shame at not being able to speak good English. Immigrant parents want their children to learn English, viewing it as “the yellow brick road to better jobs and a better life,” and schools emphasize learning English for non-native speakers above all else (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). An unintentional outcome is the embarrassment students feel when they are learning English, casting a negative pall over their actual potential strengths in language and aptitude for bilingualism.

*Parental impact on motivation and lack of involvement in school.* Overwhelmingly, my findings support the research about immigrant parents whose limited language skills and/or familiarity with American schools resulted in a profound lack of direct involvement with their children’s schools (Callahan & Gándara, 2004; Crul & Holdaway, 2009; Hernandez et al., 2009). My participants navigated honors, AP, and ultimately IB classes without any parental input. Santiago wondered if his parents were even aware he was in the IB Programme, and all



explained that they applied and enrolled in the IB Programme independent of any substantial parent contribution.

This continued throughout their college applications and college experiences. My participants applied to colleges either on their own or with help from teachers or counselors. They applied for and received large scholarships, partly because of the absolute necessity to do so. Alejandro set off to an Ivy League university that he did not know was any different than the corresponding state university. Santiago applied to the state research university in one day's time, without his parents' knowledge or help, and was accepted. Meanwhile, he earned a full scholarship to a smaller state university. Maly was not accepted into her first choice university because of not asking for help, unaware that university admissions officers may have regarded her application differently if they had known she was not a native speaker of English or the first in her family to attend college. The students may not have had any direct involvement from their parents throughout their educational courses of study, but they were driven to manage it on their own in great part due to their parents' sacrifices for them.

A common theme was how students felt that their parents expected them to do their best at school, and that this expectation influenced their achievements (DiGiorgio, 2010). They felt it was normal that their parents trusted them to figure things out for themselves. Sadowski (2013) found that parents were a large factor in motivation, communicating the need for students to work their hardest in order to achieve a better life for themselves. Although what actually happened in terms of curriculum, achievement, and college was left up to the students themselves, my study supports the idea that sacrificial parents pushed them to succeed and had a profound influence on their motivation, work ethic, and identity (Crul & Holdaway, 2009).

*Supportive relationships from peers and teachers.* My participants' stories provide a confirmation of the research about the importance of supportive relationships with peers and teachers for immigrant students' success (Sadowski, 2013). Santiago discussed the importance of having friendships with his Mexican peers as well as making new friends who were in the IB Programme. Maly made a point to communicate that the most important aspect of the IB Programme was the sense of family:

*I remember that being in the program itself was significant and having the people there and having that kind of family relationship was really, really great. There's a lot of small memories, but all of it was nothing compared to just being a part of the program and the people in it.*

Both Santiago and Alejandro relied on the peer group of native speakers of Spanish to take on the task of relearning Spanish. For Alejandro, supportive peers enabled him to be his eclectic self. The teacher focus group and document analysis supported the idea that the intense IB experience helped students to draw together as a team and rely on each other for support.

The student interviews, document analysis, and teacher focus group emphasized the significance of meaningful relationships with teachers who had high expectations and who provided support when needed. Maly singled out the extremely strict Spanish teacher as the one who impacted her because she demanded excellence. This same teacher provided the Spanish literature course and became the teacher in their American school who would speak to them only in perfect Spanish. Santiago described the Spanish literature class as "a beautiful thing," and shared about the lasting impact of the art teacher who believed in him. Although each could mention IB teachers with whom they did not build strong relationships or whom they did not appreciate, each student had several teachers and their IB advisors who invested in them on a

daily and ongoing basis. Aside from helping the students traverse high school and the IB Programme, the teachers and advisors were key factors in supporting the immigrant students as they applied to college.

Another interesting shared theme was creative expression through fine arts for all of the participants. This may have been partly due to the IB Art and IB Music that was offered as an elective in the program, but it is notable that the language of music or art (or in Maly's case, both music and art) were a way for the students to have a different kind of voice besides their native languages and English.

In a more perfect world, I, too, would possess this gift and could share through music, art, or poetry the beauty of their stories, both as they were lived in my memories and as they were told in a sunshiny garden, through a Google chat, and via FaceTime from the Peruvian jungle. I rely on their voices to share their struggles and their shining moments. What is found in their stories are themes of courage, resilience, risk-taking, and curiosity: The promise of America as a new frontier for their hopes and dreams; the universal experiences of family conflict, parent sacrifice, and unconditional love; the foundation that motivation and hard work can help to achieve lofty goals; the significance of languages for connecting with the past and future; and how gifted potential can turn into reality when students are given the opportunity.

### **Implications for Educators**

The IB Programme at Lakeshore High School emphasized equitable access for immigrant students; a positive attitude towards their potential for success; and accommodations such as further study in Spanish for native speakers that addressed cultural and linguistic strengths (Frasier, 1997; Grantham, 2012). From my reflections and those of the teachers, this was not the realization of a carefully laid plan. Instead, it was the almost unexpected result of willing

teachers, a supportive administration, an international program of study, and a courageous group of diverse teenagers. The context of the IB Programme and the data analysis of documents, reflections, teacher discussion, and student interviews add a new layer or dimension to the research about the lived experiences of successful gifted and talented immigrant students. The findings invite implications for educators who wish to pursue similar success with immigrant students:

- 1) Take a proficiency view of immigrant students through Frasier's (1997) attitudes, access, accommodations, and assessments;
- 2) Provide preparation, support, and access for immigrant students to advanced programs;
- 3) Develop immigrant students' native language;
- 4) Understand immigrant students both as culturally diverse and as normal teenagers;
- 5) Create a classroom and school environment that celebrates diverse cultures and that provides needed support for immigrant students (Castellano & Robertson, 2014);
- 6) Involve immigrant parents beyond silent partners;
- 7) Make time for enrichment, advisement, and teambuilding experiences;
- 8) Support immigrant students as they navigate school and college;
- 9) Start something new...

A more intangible theme that seemed to weave through all aspects of data collection was the power of starting something that had never been done before. The teachers' willingness to work harder and maintain high expectations for students from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds picked up momentum as we planned, struggled, and dreamed together about a new vision for our students. The students understood that they were not joining an established program, but were instead helping to create a new program. Yes, we called them guinea pigs, but

so were their teachers. Throughout the inaugural two years of IB, we often shared the metaphor of jumping off of a cliff together. But the image always started with us linking arms and trusting each other as we hurled ourselves into the unknown. Our bond and the excitement of adventure empowered us to believe that we could jump off that cliff, knowing that although we might plummet to the bottom, we'd be together, and...we just might fly.

### **Future Research**

This study focused on the experience of gifted and talented immigrant students in an IB Programme by exploring the background and stories of three successful immigrant students, all of whom also earned the IB Diploma. More research about the experiences of gifted and talented immigrant students in advanced high school programs would help to deepen understanding of their perspectives and offer more insights about how educators can increase opportunities for immigrant students to reach their potential. Further study of the impact of building on the potential strengths of bilingual students by providing opportunities for them to learn in both English and their native languages may serve to influence federal, state, or local educational policies. Research questions might include:

- How does viewing immigrant, diverse, or at-risk students through a proficiency lens impact their achievement in school?
- How does offering bilingual opportunities to immigrant students or students who are native speakers of other languages impact their sense of identity and their achievement in school?

Another area of future research suggested by this study involves the social and emotional experiences of immigrant students related to motivation and perfectionism. Action research about how to create ESOL enrichment experiences that include building positive academic

identity may result in ESOL having a more lasting and positive effect on student identity and achievement. Finally, research that continues to delve into the experiences of gifted and talented immigrant students may guide the American education system to develop the national resource of often hidden talents while enabling teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the students they teach. Research questions might include:

- What are the particularly significant social and emotional needs of immigrant students?
- How does an ESOL course impact a student's perception of his or her identity?
- How does the perceived sacrifices of immigrant parents impact a child's motivation or tendency towards perfectionism?

Holland and Eisenhart (1990) conducted a 1979 ethnographic study about why American women enrolled in college were not choosing math and science careers traditionally held by men. Their approach included surveying their participants during their initial college years; the year they were expected to graduate; and then four years later. They found that the longitudinal perspective offered larger generalizations about women and identity beyond what they had originally purposed. In the same way, this study occurs at a critical juncture in my former IB students' lives, the year after they graduated from college and five years after graduating from high school with the IB Diploma. I plan to revisit the study when my students are 30 years old, to see then what their lives have become. Perhaps the longitudinal look at their lives can offer Bassey's (2010) fuzzy generalization, the more open-ended conclusion that suggests the possibility that something found in one place may occur in another. Research questions might include:

- How do gifted and talented immigrant students who were successful in the Lakeshore IB Programme describe the impact of the program ten years later?

- How do gifted and talented students who were successful in the Lakeshore IB Programme define success as adults?

## **Conclusion**

This study supported much of the research regarding the challenges that immigrant students share with other special populations: Uninvolved and/or uneducated parents; lack of early learning or cultural capital; and a deficit perspective from educators, especially in the elementary and middle school years for my students (Callahan, 2005; Hernandez et al., 2009; Gándara, 2005; Holdaway et al., 2009; Garcia et al., 2008; Frasier, 1995). My research focused on what happens for immigrant students who encounter opportunity and motivation (Subotnik et al., 2011) and equity and access (Grantham, 2012). The purpose was to illuminate a deeper understanding of the experiences of immigrant students to answer the call for research about what motivates them, what makes them successful, what affects their achievement; and what specific factors (family and school) influence their access and achievement (Sadowski, 2013; Subotnik, 2011).

The student narratives support the impact of parents on immigrant student achievement, even when the parents are not directly involved with their children's education. My students confirmed the positive influence of further developing their native language while also raising questions about the potential negative connotation and experience of ESOL classes. Although there are many differences between first and second generation immigrants, all of my students shared stories about their sense of an immigrant journey and its impact on their identity. In the case of the three immigrant students who were successful in the IB Programme, Frasier's (1997) four A's were significant. Teachers' positive attitudes towards student potential; the ability of

immigrant students to access the IB Programme; and the accommodations of support and teambuilding were key factors that influenced the students' success.

Beyond the findings of the research study, several key themes resonated with me personally. My students had rich stories, family mythologies, cultural experiences, and personal journeys that I had never imagined, that I had never understood, as an integral part of who they were. I thought I had a sense of their beauty because I loved them, but the wonder of them is as infinite as their potential. Finally, I came away with a deep realization. Seeing students through a lens of friendship and love in terms of their strengths and potential is not just a lovely idea or gift that teachers can give. It is the closest thing to arriving at an immaculate truth that qualitative research might endorse. Perhaps to see another truly, one sees most clearly through a lens of love. When teachers see their students from a proficiency view, not through a mirror dimly, but face to face, they will perceive their strengths, their imperfections and challenges, their beauty, and their infinite potential.



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## Appendix A: Screenshots of Parts of Document Analysis

Document Analysis											
Document/ Theme	Planning	Challenge	Learning	Stress / Students Overwhelmed	Diversity/ Internationalism	Community	Different	Laughing / Humor	Food	Possible Original Purpose of Document	Year
Lakeshore HS Flyer 2007	A 2 year-plan, schedule, etc.	"High expectations of students and development of full academic potential in all subject areas"	"Rigorous, comprehensive, and cross-curricular education based on a global perspective that truly prepares students for success in college"			Clipping of many hands holding up the globe	An all or nothing approach: "In 11th and 12th Grade, students begin the IB Curriculum and take 3 higher level courses (2 semesters each) and 3 standard level courses (1 semester each)"			To promote the school and the IB Programme	Nov-07
Mission Statements		"Rigor... for All"	"lifelong learners for a global society"		"more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect"					To publish the 3 mission statements in our IB application to show how they worked together to achieve the same goals	Jan-08
IB Lunch meeting with Students	Checking with teachers; timing; summer plans	Idea of summer learning continuing	Summer learning continuing			Fun get-together	Instead of the regular school day		Lunch!	To have a fun lunch and plan for the summer - a last hurrah!	May-08
First IB Teacher Meeting Agenda	Planning for the year; Teachers retreat; Google calendar and spreadsheet		Time to plan for teaching more effectively			Teacher community	Very different for teachers - retreat, morning meetings, a real team			To plan for the first year of IB for students and teachers	Aug-08
Document/ Theme	Planning	Challenge	Learning	Stress / Students Overwhelmed	Diversity/ Internationalism	Community	Different	Laughing / Humor	Food	Possible Original Purpose of Document	Year
Novel Selections	Planning for 2 years of novel reading	"I applaud you on your willingness to take the higher academic road."	Reading 12 novels		World Literature and translations	That which doesn't kill us makes us stronger, hal	Unheard of 2 year schedule of 12 novels			To give students a sense of what was to come in the following years as far as novels for English	Aug-08
Ropes Course outside picture	Planned field trip	Ropes course behind them	Learning something different - leadership, teambuilding		Team building	Reliance on each other and private jokes "It's a freaking Christmas Tree"	Instead of a day at school, a day outside challenging themselves physically, emotionally, mentally	Laughing in picture	Chik-Fil-A!	To capture some memories of the teambuilding day	Sep-08
Ropes Course / Teambuildin g Picture	Planned field trip	Look at their faces - having fun pretending to be tough, but being tough in this scenario			Teambuilding	They are drawn in, turned to each other, a team	Instead of a day at school, a day outside challenging themselves physically, emotionally, mentally	Subtle humor		To capture some memories of the teambuilding day	Sep-08
Hosseini Picture	Parent involvement in planning - reading the book; evening event	A grown-up event - the youngest people there, for some, the first time reading a novel in English class	Meeting a novelist; hearing a speech; Analyzing literature		Diversity in the novel and the students	Shared experience	Once in a lifetime experience			To capture a special moment, meeting an author whose book we had all read and studied	Feb-09
Inaugural Class Photo					Faces	Learning in. Touching; all types of kids involved	During the school day, a trip outside to the sign	Laughing and cutting up		To get a picture for the yearbook of the first IB class	Feb-09
Document/ Theme	Planning	Challenge	Learning	Stress / Students Overwhelmed	Diversity/ Internationalism	Community	Different	Laughing / Humor	Food	Possible Original Purpose of Document	Year
Name Badges					Different language	Teambuilding	Craziness - name badges gave them access to school - inside and outside, for the day	The badges were tongue in cheek		To give students free passes all day during an unusual day of learning at school	Mar-09
TOK Day	Activities planned	Different kind of challenge - blindfold and trust	Hands-on (literally) learning		Faces	Their hands are clasped, on each other, supporting each other	This is in the library, normally a quiet place	Laughing students		To help teachers stay organized and focused while orchestrating TOK Day for students	Mar-09
TOK Knowers Creed		In a humorous way!	Making learning and intellectual humor fun		The "Trans-national Order of Knowers"	Joining something akin to a cult!	This was awarded at the end of TOK day - a unique certificate from school	"wherever ear wax is thought to be a nutritious food additive," etc.			Mar-09
WL Pizza - Spoons Memo	Support for writing paper	Making it fun with pizza and play	Writing World Lit paper			Write together, play together	Evening at school to write papers	Spoons!	Pizza	To get students interested in a study night and give them the details	May-09
Newspaper Article	Bilingual Diploma - recognition after the 1st 2 years	Bilingual Diploma for Native Speakers of Spanish	"classes that nurture their native language while developing proficiency and high- level thinking skills in English."		For Native Speakers of Spanish		Offering the highest curriculum in the world to students who may not have fully proficient English speaking skills			To report on an award for internationalism received by our school	Sep-09
In library Picture		It appears as though they are confronting a challenge	Learning what works and what doesn't		Their faces	Shared concern, focus	They are focused, concerned, engrossed in what is happening			Someone capturing a candid moment	Sep-09

Document/ Theme	Planning	Challenge	Learning	Stress / Students Overwhelmed	Diversity/ Internationalism	Community	Different	Laughing / Humor	Food	Possible Original Purpose of Document	Year
GT Field Trip Picture	I remember the planning for this field trip!				Faces	Learning in; going as a group	School day at GT	Taking a picture of the picture taker		To document a fun visit to GT	Nov-09
9-picture Facebook Photo		Tired in class; Studying; Saturday Community Service	Studying in class		Faces; socio-economic status	Learning into each other; Service	Service Walk	Thumbs Up!	Eating in 2 pictures	Kids posting fun memories 2 years later	April, 2012
Advisement Memo: Protocol for Teachers	Attempt to generate interest; reach out to a variety of students, etc.	*Rigorous college-level curriculum...designed for students who are motivated to do their best, learn about internationalism and community service, and to dedicate themselves to	College level work		"ALL students...focus on active and meaningful community service and what it means to live in a global society" Generate discussion about service and/or	Community Service - what it means - CAS for ALL students				To generate discussion among students about IB Programme and highlight ways to become involved	Oct. 2007
Student invitation to attend information meeting	Planning for getting students interested in IB; reaching out to native speakers of Spanish				A teacher has nominated you as a possible candidate...		A teacher has nominated you as a possible candidate...		Candy!	To reach out to a large group of students and help them to begin to see themselves as potential IB students	Nov. 2007 (repeated in following years)
IB English B Proposed Syllabus for IB	Intensive planning for IB English B (support English class for	Similar to American Literature, focus on internationalism and culture	Similar to American Literature, focus on internationalism and culture		Similar to American Literature, focus on internationalism and culture		IB English class for students whose second language is English			To gain IB approval to offer course	Fall 2007
Document/ Theme	Planning	Challenge	Learning	Stress / Students Overwhelmed	Diversity/ Internationalism	Community	Different	Laughing / Humor	Food	Possible Original Purpose of Document	Year
Field Trip Permission Form for Native Speakers of Spanish	Plan for teachers and students to understand English B/ Spanish A option	IB for Native Speakers			Visit to private International School	Larger community and talking to other students	Proficiency view of students and special programs designed to challenge them and build on their strengths as bilingual students		Lunch on field trip :-)	To bring potential IB bilingual students to see a program in action	April, 2008
Khaled Hosseini field trip (Kite Runner)		Modern novel that explores human rights	Both English A and English B read it		International author and novel - about a different culture and time	Brought together English A and English B students held at night	Idea of taking a night field trip, that it was fun to go hear an author speak as a group during your free time	Funny pictures!		To enhance book study and increase internationalism	Spring, 2009
Student Survey	Planning: to get feedback to make improvements while program in first year; students asked that teachers plan and coordinate more	Wide variety of responses: Some were appreciative of challenge; others were concerned that it was too much, varied widely by teacher's subject	Wanted classes more interesting; do more fun things; More interactions; more coordinating so that all tests not on same day; come to school early; better preparation in earlier classes; more field trips; better teacher planning; needed more time to prepare; wanted more hands-on activities; overwhelmed by	Wanted classes more interesting; do more fun things; More interactions; more coordinating so that all tests not on same day; come to school early; better preparation in earlier classes; more field trips; better teacher planning; needed more time to prepare; wanted more hands-on activities; overwhelmed by		Concern that they were not a community of students, especially certain classes described as disfunctional			Wanted more IB lunches!	To improve program, get feedback	January, 2008
Document/ Theme	Planning	Challenge	Learning	Stress / Students Overwhelmed	Diversity/ Internationalism	Community	Different	Laughing / Humor	Food	Possible Original Purpose of Document	Year
Interview Requested Letter - response to application	Careful placement of students						Instead of saying no, working with student for best placement			Response to applications	Spring, 2008
IB Student Brunch Program	Careful planning of why IB, plans for next fall, etc.	"Most rigorous curriculum"	With support from coordinator, teachers	De-stress interventions: Lapdog, IB lunches, schedules, online classroom; but also stressful because	Discuss internationalism	Lapdog	Brunch, include parents, etc.		Brunch	To help students and parents understand summer and next fall expectations	May, 2009
Student/ Parent Agreement	Anticipating the need for common understandings, student and parent commitment, etc.	Wow - lots of challenge inherent in the document - CAS, EE, Exams, TOK, plagiarism, college-level coursework, etc. Daunting document!		Reading this makes me think of the amount of stress generated by each section			Asking for commitment from students and parents on front end			To ensure students and parents understood the commitment they were making	Spring, 2009
IB Student Interview Questions	Showing how carefully screened students were - and what we were looking for	Asked about a challenge, more interested in response to challenge than background in academics, etc.	What do they like to learn about? What do they have a passion for?	Asked about time management			Asking for qualitative responses about passions, internationalism, challenges,			Do work with students to find best path for them, either IB or otherwise	Spring, 2008
TOK Day Agenda	Moment by moment plan of TOK day; also the way to add to minutes to ensure full 100	ethical and philosophical challenges throughout	Math, science, cell phones, surprises!	This was a way of coping with stress and learning as fun		Forged community with small groups, also with teachers	Unlike any day of school ever before!	Lots - IB Lunch, Initiation ceremony with Seth on boards, Baby ethical dilemma	IB lunch and break food	To plan TOK day for seniors	Feb. 2009



## Appendix B: Student Interview Guide

The purpose of my research was to better understand the background and experiences of successful gifted and talented immigrant students within an International Baccalaureate Programme and to consider implications for educators so they can better address their strengths and needs. Research questions that pertain to this overall focus included:

- How do gifted and talented immigrant students who were successful in the Lakeshore IB Programme describe their experiences?
- What were the cultural and contextual aspects of the students' experiences?
- What elements of the Lakeshore IB Programme addressed the strengths and needs of gifted and talented immigrant students?

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

As you already know, my name is Laurie Ecke and I am a doctoral student in the Gifted and Creative Education program at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research project on the key components of the 2008-2010 Lakeshore International Baccalaureate Programme and in particular the stories and experiences of students in that program who have parents who immigrated to the United States. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study, and I look forward to finding out more about your perspective and experiences. The attached form will give you more information and asks you to sign indicating that you agree to participate.

[Student reads and then signs consent form.]

Before we begin, I want to explain that while I will be asking you questions, if you have any questions for me during the interview, please feel free to ask. Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Opening:

This is not what you might think of as a typical interview where I ask and you answer questions. I am interested in whatever you remember, and I want especially to hear your stories. The questions I'm going to ask are to help you think back about what stands out in your mind and our time together will be more like a conversation. I would like to start the interview by getting a little background about your family.

### **Participant's family and cultural background**

1. What was it like for you being raised in a family that speaks a language besides English?

*Follow-up Questions: What stories did your family tell about coming to the U.S.?*

### **Participant's enrollment in IB Programme**

2. Tell me the story of how you became involved in the IB Programme.

*Probing questions: How did you first learn about IB? How were your parents or family involved in choosing IB?*

### **Participant's experiences in IB Programme**

3. Think back to when you first started IB, what was that like for you?

*Probing questions: Can you share a story about something you remember from that first year?*

### **Participant's relationships with teachers**

4. Tell me about a teacher or a particular class that stands out to you.

*Probing questions: You told me about \_\_\_\_\_ - was there an experience that was different for you? What about a teacher with whom you did not have as good a relationship – tell me about that.*

### **Participant's experience as a student immigrant**

5. We talked about your family and their stories about immigrating to the U.S. Can you think of a time when your being an immigrant student stands out for you? Tell me about that.

*Probing questions: How did your IB Programme experience interact with your family?*

### **Participant's critical experiences**

6. Tell me about a significant moment or experience during your time in IB.

### **Participant's range of experiences**

7. You told me about a time when you...was there a time when things did not go so well (or did go well)?

### **Participant's experiences/goals after the IB Programme**

8. What was your college major? Tell me the story of how you chose that course of study.
9. What are your career goals or what do you hope or plan for your future?

### **Participant's perspective about IB Programme**

10. Tell me about your understanding of the purpose of the IB Programme.

*Probing questions: Did that purpose work for you?*

## **Conclusion**

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your time in the IB Program? Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share?

### **Conclusion of interview:**

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me today. I appreciate your willingness to speak about what was meaningful in your time in the IB Programme. It is my hope that through this study we may be able to better understand your experiences and the experiences of other immigrant students in IB.

Please feel free to continue reflecting on today's questions. If you think of anything you'd like to share with me, there will be time when I reach out to you to ask that you review the transcript for any additions or changes you would like to make. If you have any questions before I contact you again, please email me or call me at 678-617-7558.

### *Follow-up questions:*

*You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ - tell me more about that.*

*You mentioned ... Can you give me an example of that*

*You mentioned...What was that like for you?*

*And by \_\_\_\_\_, you mean?*

*Tell me the story of...*

*You talked about a time when it went well, was there a time when it did not go as well?*

## Appendix C: Teacher Focus Group Questions

The purpose of my research was to better understand the background and experiences of successful gifted and talented immigrant students within an International Baccalaureate Programme and to consider implications for educators so they can better address their strengths and needs. Research questions that pertain to this overall focus included:

- How do gifted and talented immigrant students who were successful in the Lakeshore IB Programme describe their experiences?
- What were the cultural and contextual aspects of the students' experiences?
- What elements of the Lakeshore IB Programme addressed the strengths and needs of gifted and talented immigrant students?

### Notes:

Our goal is to create a comfortable, permissive environment in focus groups...The interviewer encourages comments of all types— positive and negative. The interviewer is careful not to make judgments about the responses and to control body language that might communicate approval or disapproval. The role of the moderator is to ask questions, listen, keep the conversation on track, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. The groups are held in locations where the participants will be comfortable.

Focus group interviews typically have five characteristics or features. These characteristics relate to the ingredients of a focus group: (1) a small group of people, who (2) possess certain characteristics, (3) provide qualitative data (4) in a focused discussion (5) to help understand the topic of interest.

You are looking for a range of opinions, perceptions, ideas, or feelings that people have about something like a...program... (Krueger & Casey, 2014)

**What people to include?** Teachers involved in the creating and teaching of the first 2 years of the program.

- Summarize relevant findings in final 2 minutes to be sure no major issue overlooked
  - Alert group members about what will be discussed
  - Use examples or artifacts – pictures, etc. from doc analysis
- Goals: evoke conversation
- Clear, easy to say, short, open-ended questions
- Begin with a question that is easy for everyone to answer
- Questions should flow into each other
- Start with general questions and narrow to more focused topic
- Begin by welcoming folks and sharing documents.

**Opening Remarks:**

Welcome and thank you for participating in this focus group. I'm recording this so that I don't miss anything you share. No names will be included in the study and your comments are confidential. We want to hear from everyone, make this into a conversation. It's ok to build on what someone else says or take it in an entirely different direction or offer a different point of view. I'd like for you to think back about when we started the IB Programme and that first group of students as we share our memories.

**Questions**

**Opening question:** *to get everyone talking, easy to answer quickly, asking for facts rather than attitude or opinion*

Tell us your name, your role in the IB Programme, and how long you have been working with the IB Programme.

**Introductory Question:**

What comes to your mind when you think of how you first became involved in the WH IB Programme?

**Transition Question:**

How was teaching your IB class different from how you taught your other classes or how you had taught before?

**Key Questions:**

1. Look at the newsletters, pictures, and other documents I've brought – do these bring back any memories?  
     How did you feel about the IB Programme? What did you like best? What did you like least?
2. What structural elements of the IB Programme stand out for you? Why?
3. Did you know which students might be children of immigrants? If so, how did you know? Did this impact your class in any way?
4. Tell me about a time you perceived any unique challenges or advantages for immigrant students who enrolled in the IB Programme.
5. Think back to that first group and share a story about a significant moment or experience with students during your time in IB.
6. Last, tell me about your understanding of the purpose of the IB Programme.

**Ending Questions:**

1. Reflect on this discussion and identify what you felt was most important to you? To students?
2. *Analyst gives brief summary of discussion:* How well does that capture what was said here? If you were summarizing the conversation, what would you add or change?
3. Have we missed anything? Is there anything you wanted to share but didn't?

**Probes:**

Would you explain further? Can you share an example? Tell me more about...

## Appendix D

<b>Timeline and Process for Creating Student Portraits</b>	
<b>Phase 1:</b> Setting up interviews and focus group July – early August, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contacted participants via email</li> <li>• Facebook message to each of them (because they don't always check their emails)</li> <li>• Set up interview dates/times/locations</li> <li>• Emailed teachers to request participation in focus group</li> <li>• Set up teacher focus group dates/times/locations</li> <li>• Emailed consent forms to participants</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2:</b> Conducting interviews and focus group August, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• August 9, 2015: Interview Santiago in public garden (1 hour: 42 minutes)</li> <li>• August 13, 2015: Interview Maly via FaceTime (1 hour: 2 minutes)</li> <li>• August 18, 2015: Interview Alejandro via Google Chat (1 hour: 10 minutes)</li> <li>• August 20, 2015: Teacher focus group at high school library (1 hour: 5 minutes)</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3:</b> Transcription; Member Checking, Part I August – September, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcribed interviews and focus group</li> <li>• Sent interview transcripts to each participant via email for approval or editing (followed up with Facebook message to ensure they checked their emails)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ One participant added more explanation to one of the interview questions via email</li> <li>○ Two participants acknowledged receipt of the transcripts but requested no changes</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Sent teacher focus group transcript to teacher participants for approval or editing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ One participant added to one of the questions</li> <li>○ The other participants requested no changes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Phase 4:</b> Creating First Draft of Student Portraits September – October, 2015	Narrative Analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read over transcripts and listened to student interviews</li> <li>• Organized individual student data, based on topic, theme, and time, into spreadsheets</li> <li>• Pasted transcript text into Wordle to find words most emphasized by individual students (Feinberg, 2014)</li> <li>• Merged the topics from each student's transcript and spreadsheet into bigger ideas</li> <li>• While continually reflecting, wrote individual stories according to time whenever I could do so without losing the thread of each theme</li> </ul>



<p><b>Phase 5:</b> Member Checking, Part II October, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emailed each participant and shared the respective student portrait (also used Facebook message to ensure they received the email)</li> <li>• Asked for their suggestions, concerns, or changes</li> <li>• Each responded immediately and we engaged in email dialogue about their portraits</li> <li>• Participants became the co-investigators as they expressed concerns, changes, suggestions</li> <li>• This became the most meaningful time of my study as my theoretical framework of constructivism, dialogue, and shared experience became a tangible reality</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 6:</b> Data Analysis October, 2015</p>	<p>Analysis of Narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After finalizing the distinct narratives, I read them again and again, using an inductive approach to finding insights into their meaning</li> <li>• I recorded the thematic topics from each story in a spreadsheet that included the various places in the individual student text that alluded to a theme; the notes from my reflections that pertained to those themes; the text from the teacher focus group that mentioned anything that related to the topics; and insights from the document analysis that pertained to the ideas</li> <li>• I repeated the process across the same spreadsheet for every student to find patterns and themes shared by more than one of the students. I pored again through the constructed narratives to allow intersections among the stories to emerge</li> </ul> <p>Cross-Case Analysis (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compared the embedded cases or subunits to uncover themes common to two or more cases</li> <li>• This was an iterative process as my notes or documents gave new insights into the themes and served to add a new layer of meaning to recurring themes and to return my perspective to the larger unit of analysis</li> <li>• I listed the individual and intersecting themes and portrayed them in a 3-circle Venn diagram to illustrate the overlapping areas that amplified the overall understanding of the immigrant student experience</li> </ul>