Jessica Joelle Alexander and Iben Dissing Sandahl’s book, “The Danish Way of Parenting: What the Happiest People in the World Know About Raising Confident, Capable Kids”, is an educational book that teaches an alternative way of parenting used by Danish parents. The authors deliberately avoid stating that the Danes way of parenting is the only acceptable parenting style, but instead uses psychotherapy experience, research, and facts about Danish life to provide an alternative way of parenting that strives for stronger bonds as well as overall happiness. The authors choose to educate others on how to solve problems with their children and to have honest, open communication with their children. To demonstrate their themes, The book is presented as the acronym PARENT. Each letter represents an essential principle that helps to make happy families as well as confident and successful children.

Alexander and Sandahl define play as “[children being] left to their own devices, with a friend or alone, to play exactly as they see fit, for as long as they want” (p. 11). Parents often put their children in activities, such as sports clubs and instrument lessons, that typically cause anxiety. An example to combat the issue is allowing the children to have their own space to grow and learn for themselves with parents providing minimal support when necessary. Alexander and Sandahl argue that this allows children to develop their competence as well as their confidence in their
locus of control because they oversee their own development and challenges. An example that Alexander and Sandahl provide is when children play with others. Social situations, especially for young children, can be stressful. Alexander and Sandahl argue that when children are playing with others, they should be able to manage their own emotions and learn to get along with others, without too much intervention from the parents.

Alexander and Sandahl also argue the importance of authenticity when it comes to parenting. They refer to the Danes believing that “tragedies and upsetting events” (p. 33), are important because individuals learn more about character from shortcomings rather than praise. Emotional honesty is needed, rather than perfection. Therefore, Alexander and Sandahl suggest that parents should express to their children that it is acceptable to feel all their emotions. Accepting all emotions early in childhood makes it easier to maneuver through life. Alexander and Sandahl also argue that authenticity is needed for praise. Focusing on the task rather than over complimenting the child is what is considered the Danish way. Praise is considered closely connected to how children view their level of intelligence, if there's too much praise, children develop a fixed mindset. In contrast, they argue that if a parent tells their children that their intelligence can be improved with work and education develop a growth mindset.

Alexander and Sandahl also dive into the concept of reframing and its importance on childhood development. They suggest that one’s perception of life is the truth and that individuals see things as the way things are. People can get stuck in a specific way of thinking and Alexander and Sandahl offer new ways of reframing things, such as realistic optimism. Someone who is a realistic optimist filters out unnecessary negative words and interprets “ambiguous situations in a more positive manner” (p. 54). When it comes to reframing with children, Alexander and Sandahl
argue that it’s the adult who helps the child to stop thinking that they cannot do something and to focus on a different narrative. Children often put labels on themselves and others, however parents help to show that it’s not black or white and there exists other sides.

Another important aspect of parenting that Alexander and Sandahl present is the concept of empathy. Parents are the primary example of showing empathy because children are often focused on the parents and will often mirror them. Alexander and Sandahl argue that parents can affect empathy through being overprotective and telling their children how to feel. The Danish way of teaching empathy is broken down through various examples. One used example explains that when there are two children, a parent must consider both children's emotions and needs. Another way parents can teach empathy is “pointing out to their children the emotions of others” (p. 92). Alexander and Sandahl explain that acknowledging the emotions of others and not judging their emotions teaches respect.

In addition to exploring themes of playing, being authentic with children, and teaching empathy, Alexander and Sandahl examine the times when children misbehave. In response to misbehavior, most parents provide ultimatums, however they suggest not having ultimatums. Alexander and Sandahl argue that parents should parent with respect because if a parent chooses to parent with ultimatums, “it doesn’t foster respect; it fosters fear” (p.106). Instead of ultimatums, Alexander and Sandahl suggest to explain what they are doing is wrong. An example provided is when children are hitting or biting. Telling the child no and having them apologize early on will help understand the nonuse of physicality. Aside from explaining what a child is doing wrong, a parent should also teach the rules. Explaining things in a way they understand, according to Alexander and Sandahl, fosters respect.
Alexander and Sandahl conclude with the concept of “hygge” or togetherness. They describe hygge as “putting yourself aside for the benefit of the whole” and “leaving the drama at the door and sacrificing your individual needs and desires to make a group gathering more pleasant” (p. 127). Hygge promotes strong teamwork where the family members view themselves as a team, which creates a strong sense of belonging. Alexander and Sandahl further explain the meaning of hygge stating that it’s important to slow down and savor life’s simple pleasures. Danish parents strive to create calm moments where they can recharge together as a family. Some examples that authors provide are evenings by the fireplace and walks in nature.

Filled with numerous illustrative examples, personal anecdotes, and references, detailing the parental forces that shape childhood development, Alexander and Sandahl’s book accomplish two goals. First it offers insight into “self-awareness and making conscious decisions about our actions and reactions” (p. 8) resulting in raising children who become “resilient emotionally secure, happy kids who turn into, resilient, emotionally secure happy adults” (p. xviii). Second, the book highlights the importance of strong communication between the children and the parent, helping children gain a stronger understanding of others’ emotions, societal norms, and the path to succeeding. Alexander and Sandahl accomplish these goals by drawing out their themes from research and experience - examining the patterns, as well as identifying the forces that contribute to them and contrasting the more traditional parenting methods, with the Danish way of parenting to explain how children benefit from strong communication with the parent.

Alexander and Sandahl’s intended readership, namely parents with young children trying to find alternative parenting styles and couples becoming parents, will find this book useful.
Song

believe that this book can also be used as an educational and reference resource for those in post-secondary education in various disciplines focusing on family relationships and childhood development.

Although Alexander and Sandahl synthesize facts, studies, and personal experiences on parenting - hoping that it will be used as a tool to help improve children’s happiness and confidence resulting in a successful adulthood - their book can be used as an introduction to various disciplines. Other disciplines that would benefit from this book include psychology, sociology, and education, just to name a few. Overall, I found “The Danish Way of Parenting: What the Happiest People in the World Know About Raising Confident, Capable Kids” a very pleasurable read that was organized well, balanced, engaging, and informative. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in learning about the topic of parenting and childhood development.