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Gifted Intensity: The Importance of Family Understanding and Support

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Gifted/Talented Programs | Advanced Learning Options
Division of Special Education and Specialized Program



Introductions



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Here to Support



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Increasing Awareness



Participants will...

Gain a better understanding of the internal experiences of gifted students

Learn about the unique external experiences of gifted students

Acquire knowledge about allyship and advocacy for neurodivergent students

Much More Than Intellectual Ability



What were their experiences growing up?

Intellectual



Victor Glover, Astronaut

Leadership



Deb Haaland, Public Official

Visual Arts



Frida Kahlo, Artist

Creative



Isabel Allende, Author

Performing Arts



Ke Huy Quan, Actor

High Achievement



Ketanji Brown Jackson, Supreme Court Justice

Specific Academic



Christina Koch, Astronaut

Intensity Thermometer

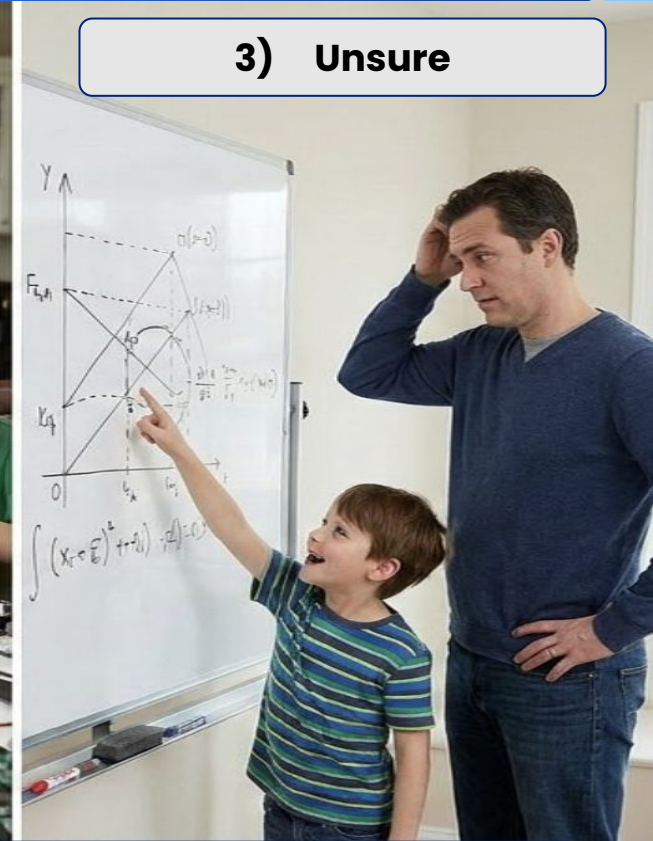
1) Energized



2) Overwhelmed



3) Unsure



Which word best describes your experience with your gifted child's intensities this week?

Internal Experiences of Gifted Students



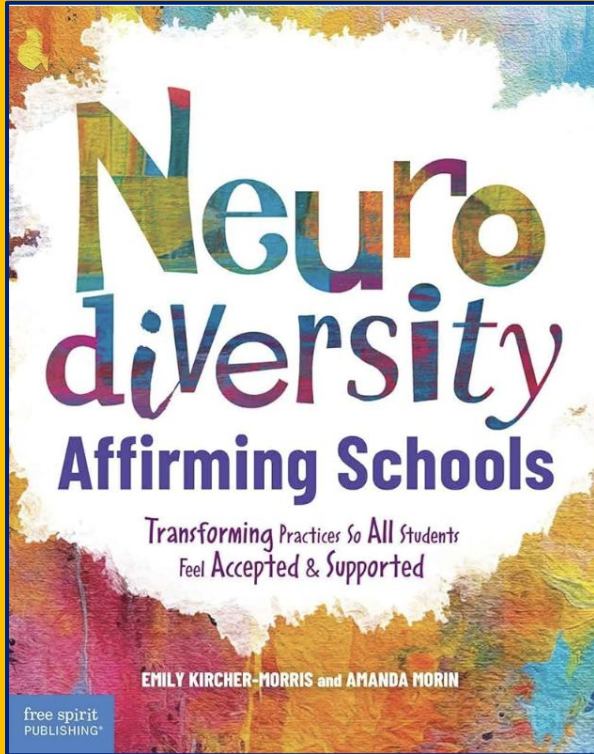
Dr. Joy Lawson Davis

“Without understanding the full scope of gifted behaviors, often even the most loving and caring parent cannot help a child tackle the external and internal challenges of being gifted.”

Embrace Neurodiversity



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**Gifted students are
neurodivergent...**

Important Distinctions

Neurodiversity:

COMMUNITY PICTURE

“All spaces that contain people- including schools- are neurodiverse because all people have nervous systems with degrees of variation”



Neurodivergence:

INDIVIDUAL PICTURE

“Variation in the human brain in terms of socialization preferences, learning, mood, and other mental skills”

Twice Exceptional (2e)



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Gifted and Other Special Needs



Destigmatizing Neurodivergence

Call Something What It Is

- ✓ Empower students and reduce shame by helping them name and understand their neurodivergence



Normalize Accommodations

- ✓ Students learn what works for them
- ✓ how & where to access them
- ✓ Builds Self-advocacy

2e: Identity–First Language

Person–First Language: “A student with ...”

Note Student Preferences

Identity–First Language or IFL:
autistic,
dyslexic,
ADHDer,
AuDHDer, etc.



- ✓ Their neurodivergence guides how they experience the world and has shaped **WHO** they are
- ✓ IFL helps them become a self advocate and find community
- ✓ A person cannot be separated from their neurodivergence
- ✓ Without it they would be a totally different person

Inner Experiences of the Gifted



- Involves emotional **sensitivity** and **intensity**
- Creates qualitatively different life experiences
- Is often **the experience of being an “outsider”**
- Leads to a set of issues unique to this group, making them vulnerable
- Is lifelong

Asynchrony

Asynchrony:

Uneven development of skills across areas (verbal, nonverbal, academic, social, emotional, and motor).



Example:

A 9 year old can read/comprehend at a 10th grade level but struggles to ride a bike, write neatly, or socialize with peers

Lessons From Lived Experience



If I'd only known...



Executive Function

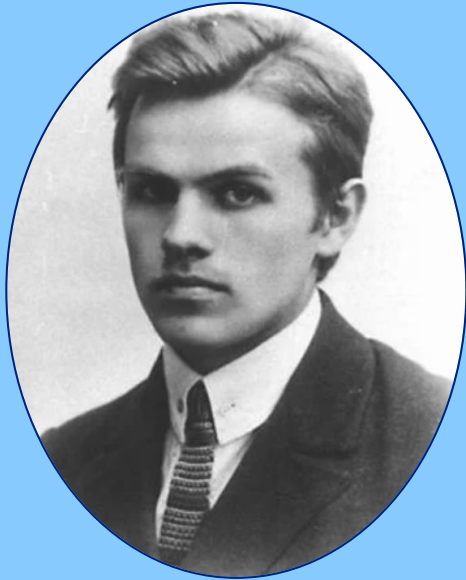
Executive Functioning (EF): a set of skills that help everyone get things done.

- Plan & organize tasks
- Start & finish work
- Manage time & materials
- Pay attention & remember instructions
- Regulate emotions & impulses
- Adjust when things don't go as planned



EF needs scaffolding...remove it gradually

Dabrowski's Theory



**Kazimierz Dabrowski
(1902-1980)**

“He was struck by their intensity, sensitivity, and tendency toward emotional extremes.”

(Daniels & Piechowski, 2008)

Intellectual Overexcitability

- Intense thirst for knowledge
- Voracious learners, can't ever get enough
- Analytical, logical, inquisitive



Imaginational Overexcitability



- Intense imaginative play
- Daydreamers
- Creative/Artistic
- Magical thinking

Psychomotor Overexcitability

- Active and energetic
- Love of movement for its own sake
- Derive great joy from their boundless physical and verbal energy



*Sensory Overexcitability

- Intense experience from the five senses
- Very sensitive to their environment
- May crave or avoid sensory input



*Known as Sensual Overexcitability in Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration

Emotional Overexcitability



- Remarkable capacity for deep relationships
- Deep sense of personal and social justice
- Compassionate
- Easily excited and emotive

Self-Awareness Check-in...



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Which overexcitabilities (*intellectual, imaginal, psychomotor, sensory, or emotional*) do you most recognize in your gifted loved one?

Do you see echoes of those same intensities in your own life experiences growing up?

What messages did you receive about those traits at home or at school?

External Challenges of Gifted Students

External Challenges

- **Relationships**
- **Masking & Camouflaging**
- **Perfectionism**
- **Questions About Identity**



Masking & Camouflaging



- **Adaptation to asynchrony**
- **Gifted compensation**
- **Common with 2e students**
- **Masking Executive Function difficulties**
- **Perfectionism**

Beware of Perfectionism

- Response to Competition
- Achievement over Socialization
- Response to Compliments
- Negative Self-talk
- Sensitivity to Criticism
- Procrastination
- Intense Attention to Detail



Burnout *“arises due to ongoing exposure to stressors that are unable (or seem unable) to be changed”*

- **Overwhelming exhaustion**
 - Feel profound fatigue
 - Significant drop in energy
 - Limited motivation to perform basic tasks
- **Cynicism**
 - Feelings of helplessness & negativity
 - May grow skeptical of others' intentions
- **Ineffectiveness**
 - Profound feelings of lack of accomplishment





Protect from Burnout

- Minimize masking
- Don't just push through stress or tasks
- Teach the signs of burnout and help them recognize them in themselves
- Teach, promote, and **model** self-care

Social Emotional Learning is Transformative

Emotional Intelligence!



Focusing on the Social Emotional Learning Competencies



Adapted from the *Collaborative for Academic & Social Emotional Learning (CASEL)*

The Six LAUSD SEL Competencies



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Self Awareness

The ability to recognize one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose.



Self Management

The ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations.



Growth Mindset

The belief that one's abilities can grow with effort.



Self Efficacy

The belief in one's own ability to succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal.



Social Awareness

The ability to empathize, understand social and ethical norms, and access available resources.



Responsible Decision Making

The ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Transformative SEL (T-SEL)



Adapted from CASEL, 2020

An approach to SEL that helps students develop social-emotional skills while also building **identity, belonging, agency, and relationships** that promote equity, inclusion, and positive change in their schools and communities.

T-SEL is Culturally Responsive

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy



Research says CLRP elevates:

- Engagement, motivation, & achievement
- Empathy, respect, & positive classroom climate

Families should anticipate:

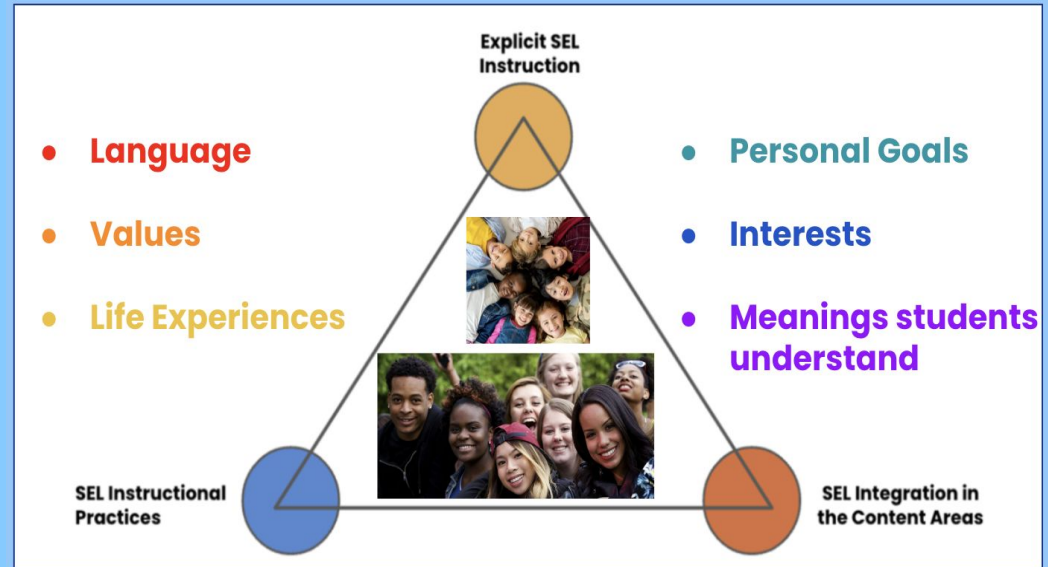
- Cultural & Linguistic inclusivity
- Curriculum that reflects languages, histories, & lived experiences

T-SEL in Gifted Classrooms

SEL



Transformative SEL (T-SEL)



T-SEL Advances Educational Equity



**Partnerships with school,
families, and community
members**



**Fostering trusting &
collaborative relationships**



**Rigorous, meaningful
curriculum & instruction**



**Ongoing evaluation of policies,
practices, & outcomes**

Families as Allies and Advocates

Allyship & Advocacy at School



- Begin with an open mindset for collaboration
 - Connect with child's teacher (ask about strengths, thinking, reasoning, leadership, creativity and SEL skills)
 - Ask about differentiated instruction
 - Ask how you can support
- Review GATE report
<https://schooldirectory.lausd.net/schooldirectory/>
- Attend GATE Parent Hour
<https://gate.lausd.org/>



Destigmatizing Neurodivergence

Community Education

- ✓ Advocate for increasing the knowledge within a school community which *reduces shame* and *increases empathy*
- ✓ School environments become supportive of neurodivergent students and neuro-normative students can advocate



Fresh Perspectives

- ✓ Don't do things just because it's how it has always been done.
- ✓ Ask relevant questions about purpose, goals, and alignment to needs

Beyond School



Supporting Your Child Outside of School:

- Provide enriching extracurriculars
- Connect with peers with similar interests
- Learn more about giftedness (books, websites, podcasts)
 - Explore Parent Webinars and Newsletters on GATE Website <https://gate.lausd.org/>
- Share what you learn with family & friends

Neurodiversity Affirming Language

Moves from deficit-based to asset-based language

Recognizes it's not something about the student that needs to be "fixed"

Uses language that acknowledges the way your child experiences the world

Accepts who student is, and presumes competence. There's no "right/wrong" way to do it

Allows students to "unmask" and be their **authentic** selves

Sees and honors the whole child

Parent/Family Resources



<https://tinyurl.com/ycyurcdb>