



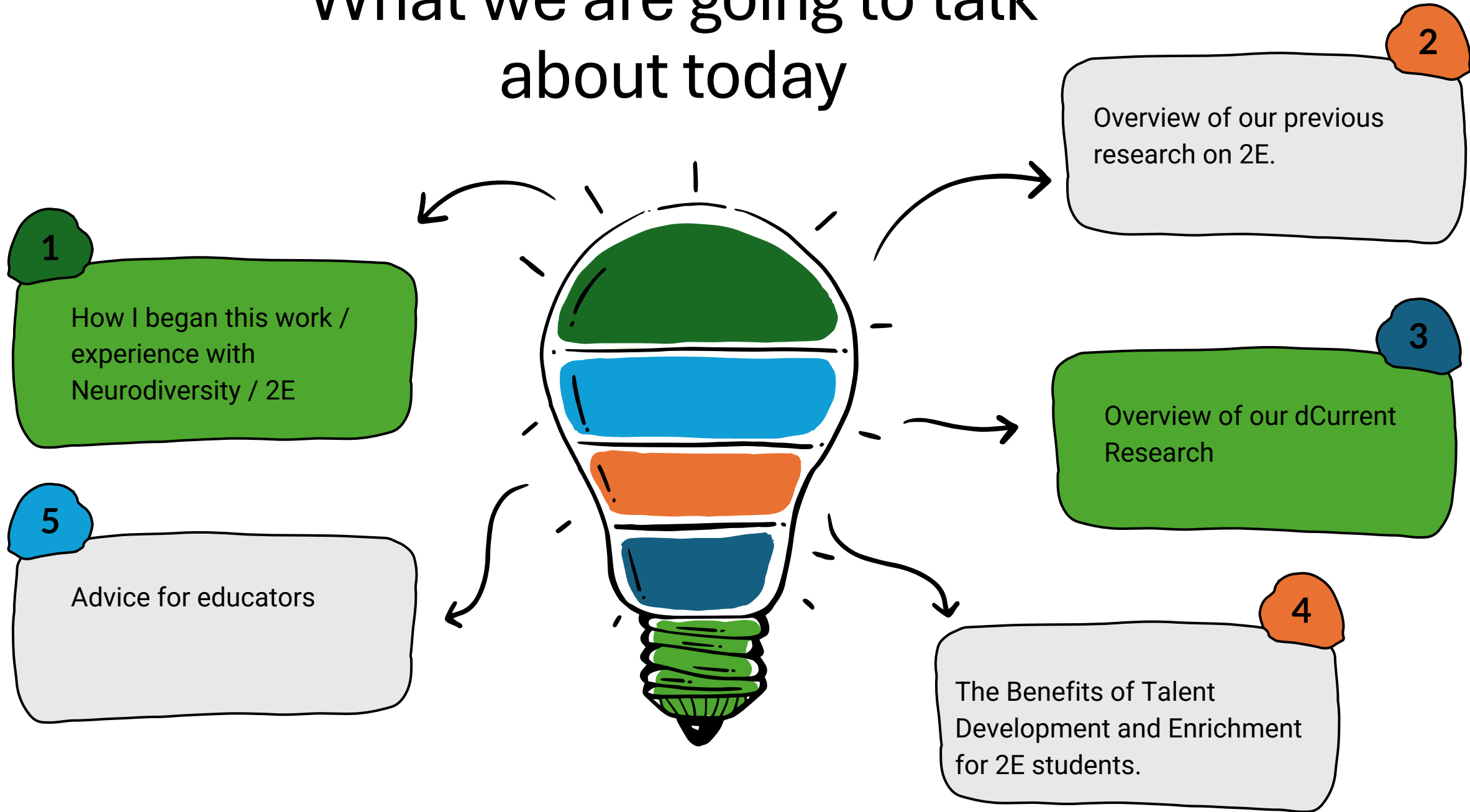
Using Strength-Based Pedagogy to Engage and Challenge 2e Students' Development: Current Research and Personal Journeys

Sally Reis

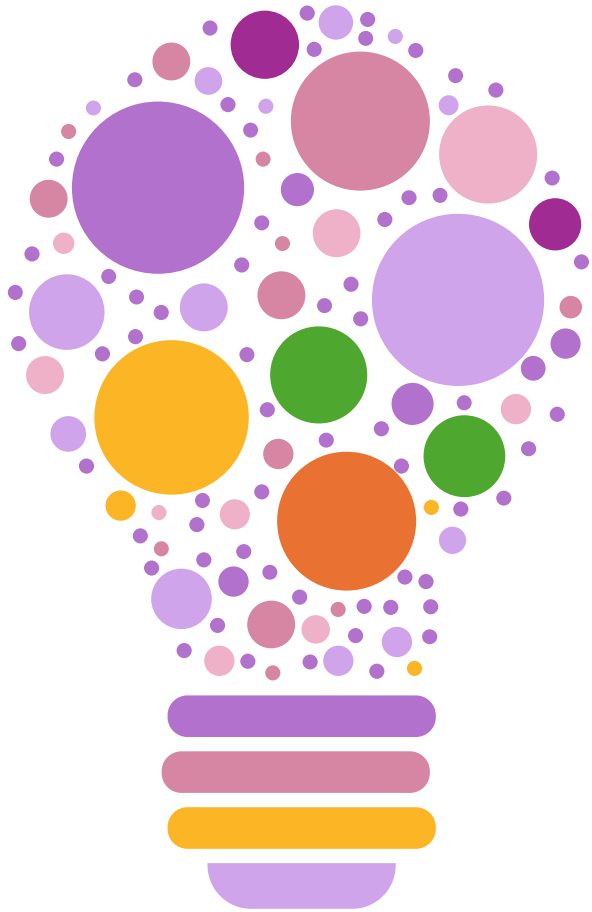
Renzulli Center

Neag School of Education
University of Connecticut

What we are going to talk about today



How I began this journey



- Calls to our UConn GT center
- Friendship with Sue Baum (who will speak next)
- LD university program in our dept
- Personal knowledge of many smart students with neurodiversity



Overview of pertinent, previous 2E research

Talents in Two places: Case Studies of High Ability Students with Learning Disabilities in a Competitive University

We studied:

- self-perceived academic strengths and weaknesses;
- specific educational intervention and assistance necessary to succeed in an academic environment;
- types of counseling/support strategies necessary to help realize their potential



Difficulties Encountered and Social and Emotional Challenges—Previous Research

Late Identification as having a learning disability

Teacher Negativity

Peer Challenges

Enrollment in less than challenging classes

Poor self esteem and lack of confidence



Difficulty in reading and writing

Retention / self-contained special education classes

Inappropriate (remedial) special education program

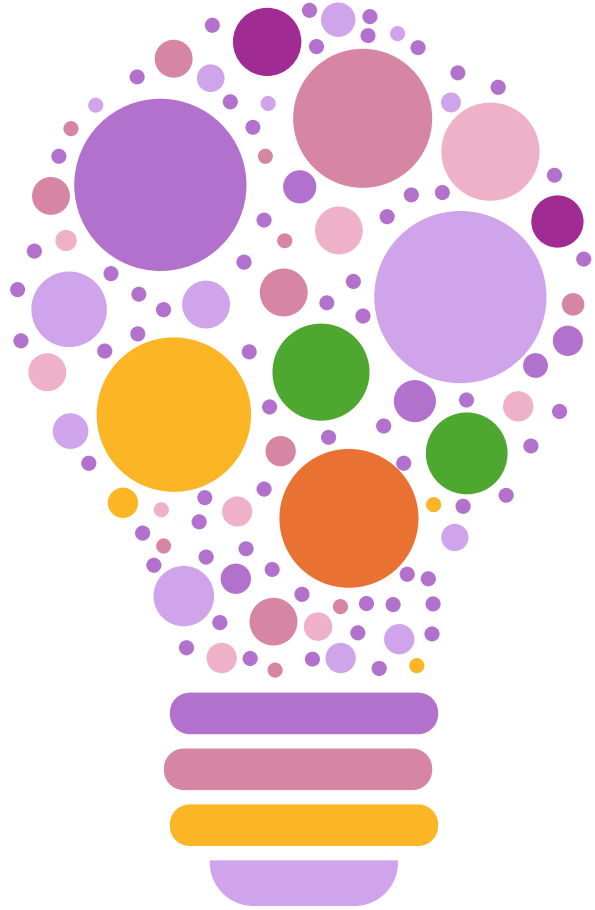
Anxiety and depression

In previous 2E studies...



- Parent advocates were a primary reason that gifted students with learning disabilities are able to succeed in school—they never gave up and knew, intrinsically, that their children had strengths and talents, even when all educators refused to see them.

Our previous research..



- Neurodiverse students more often receive services focusing on remedial intervention
- Effective teaching should find a balance between developing students' academic strengths and interests and helping them compensate for their learning differences
- Extra-curricular activities can be extremely beneficial
- The use of enrichment and strength-based strategies enhance learning and healthy social and emotional development



- Twice-exceptional learners are students who demonstrate the potential for high achievement or creative productivity in one or more domains such as math, science, technology, the social arts, the visual, spatial, or performing arts or other areas of human productivity **AND** who manifest one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria (Reis and Baum, 2014, p. 222).

Current Research: What is Project 2E- ASD?



<https://giftedasd.project.uconn.edu>

Our Research Team



<https://giftedasd.project.uconn.edu>

Project Twice Exceptional with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2E- ASD)



U.S Department of Education, Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program. Award amount: \$2,587,924.



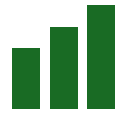
Project 2E-ASD focuses on how to identify and teach academically talented and high ability high school students with ASD.

Can you give me some advice on my college bound 2e/ASD student? Where should she go? Should she start at a smaller college? Have you conducted any research about this group? How can I help her?

Why study this population?



2020



In 2020, the CDC reported increasing numbers (one in fifty-four children) are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

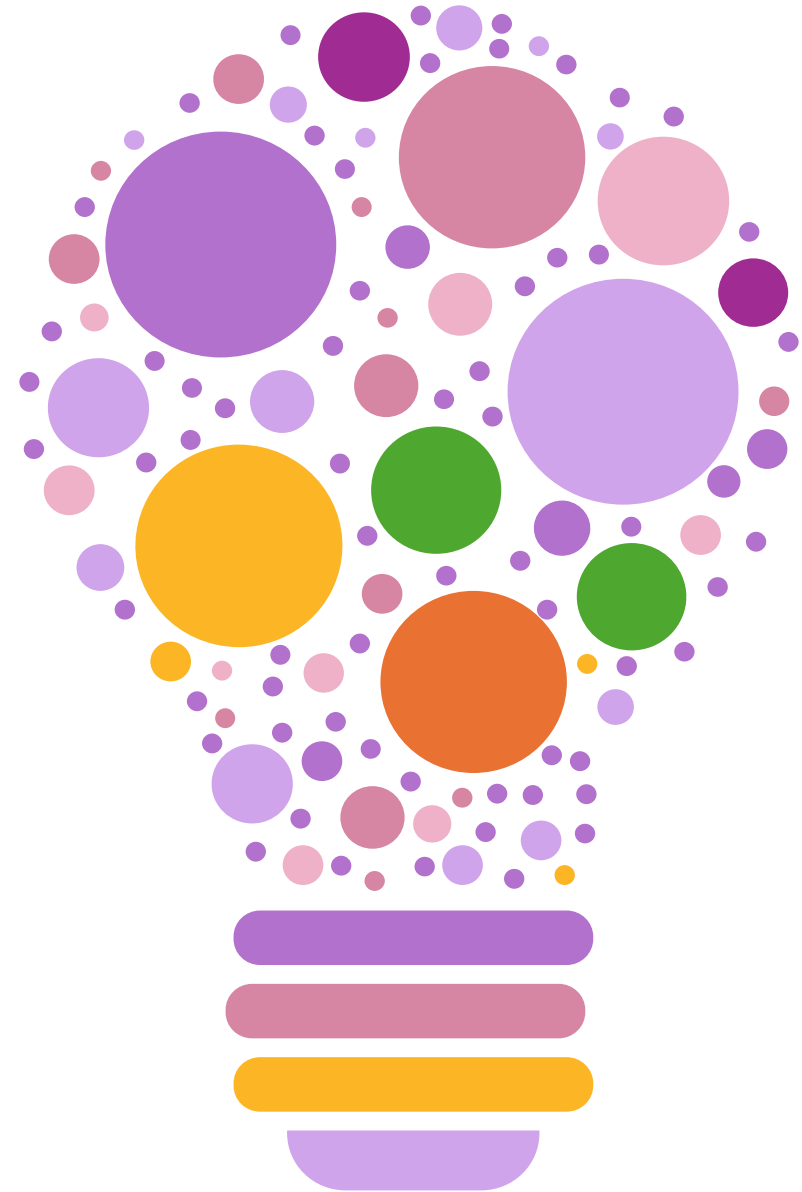
2024....



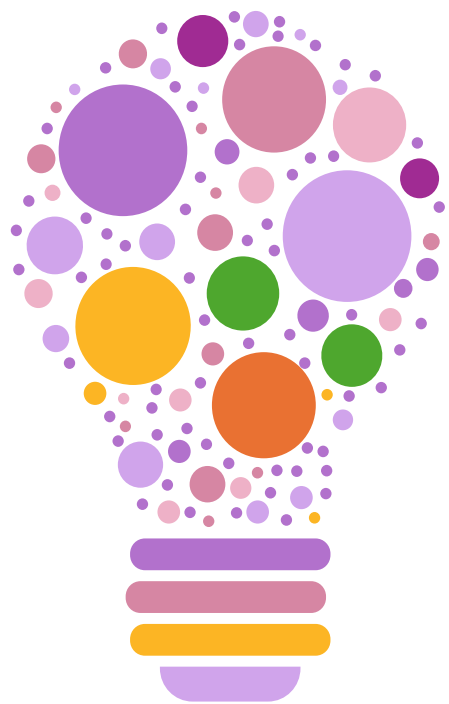
Little educational research exists on smart kids with ASD, especially related to effective instruction....

Transition to competitive colleges..

- Students with ASD currently **enroll at lower rates than their peers** with all other types of disabilities (Gelbar et al., 2015; Shattuck et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2016)
- They **leave college programs prior to completion at higher rates than their peers** (White, Ollendick, & Bray, 2011).
- Low rate of college participation has **significant economic and personal costs** for youth with ASD, their families, and society (Wei et al., 2016)



What do disability providers believe, in their work with this population...



- Students with ASD experience:
 - anxiety (91.2%)
 - social isolation (85%)
 - loneliness (81.4%)
 - depression (62.8%)

Interviews with 40 Successful College Students Identified as 2e/ASD

Some Colleges and Universities Attended

- NYU
- UConn
- Cornell
- USC
- Cal Arts
- BU
- BC
- Drexel



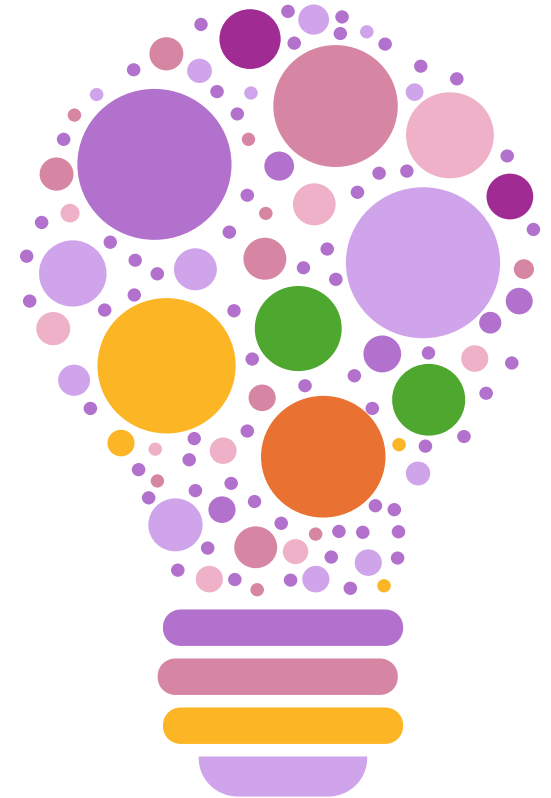



OUR FINDINGS:

- Most participants' academic talents were formally recognized by their teachers and parents.
- Half were identified as being academically talented in elementary or secondary school.
- Almost all knew that they had academic talents and strengths and found teachers who supported them.

Findings include:

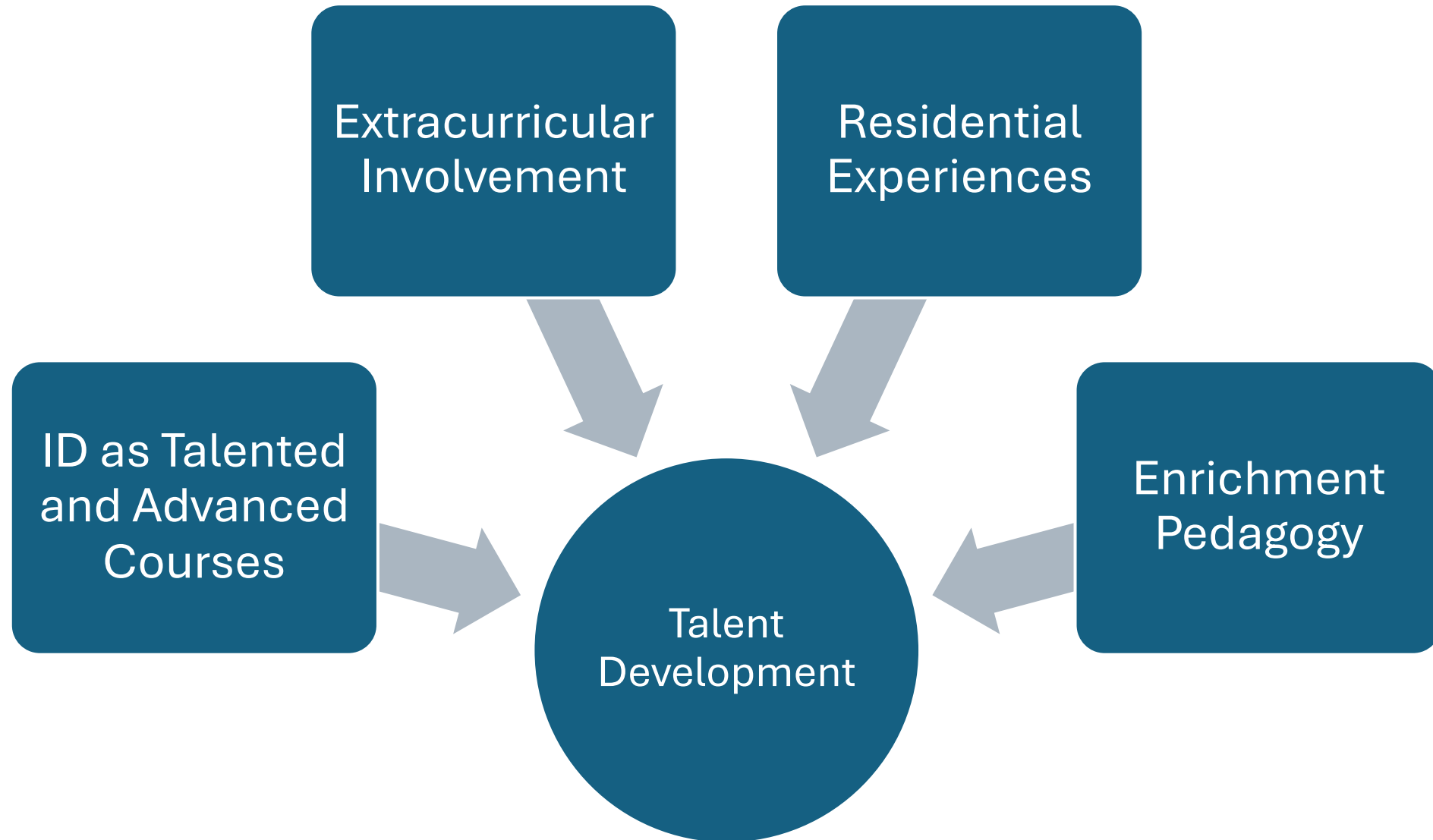
- A majority of our participants (n=21; 53%) received enrichment and/or talent development opportunities and were identified as having talents/strengths.
- 90% of the sample (n=36) participated in at least one extracurricular activity in high school and 50% (n=20) had participated in at least one residential (camp or enrichment) experience.
- Almost three quarters of participants took AP or honors courses (or courses in which they could earn college credit) while in high school (n=29, 73%).



A middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a white button-down shirt, is seated in a room with dark wood paneling and bookshelves. He is looking slightly to his left with a neutral expression. The background features large windows with yellow and blue vertical stripes. The lighting is soft and focused on the man.

and what to do if one was
coming, how to head one off.

Talents can be developed in these students in high school...



Which Extracurricular Activities Worked Best?

Many trials and changes...

Molly explained:

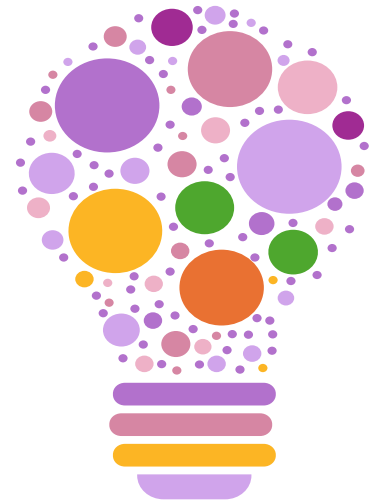
Robotics team—I loved that as I struggled a lot socially growing up but in robotics, I liked having a team. It made me feel good about myself... I was part of the women's science club. I founded a girls who code club. I was a math tutor. I am a STEM nerd.

Dylan explained:

Tennis, documentary film, senator for senior year, mock trial, band, and choir. Every year we make a film for a competition, there's a topic, we made one about education declining because there are funding problems in my town. I did it for two years.


Interviews with secondary high school teachers, counselors, and special ed teachers.

- Most teachers had never reflected on what they do with their 2e/ASD students
- Very few had clear ideas about what works well.
- High school teachers and counselors explained that they have so many different types of learners, all with different interests and motivations. One Jason, simply explained, “I learned that I had to treat each student differently.”





- All participants explained that having self-awareness, self-advocacy, and time management/organization skills were essential to their success in college.
- Seventeen participants (43%) indicated that they attended a community college, smaller regional campus, or another college before transferring to their current/final college.
- When faced with challenges, difficulties, or adverse conditions, rather than give up, these participants found a reasonable path, figured out how to cope, compensate, or pursue a new direction.

A man with dark, curly hair and glasses is wearing a white button-down shirt. He is sitting in an office with dark wood paneling and windows in the background. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera and has a slight smile. The lighting is soft and indoor.

and I said to them, I want to
find a good liberal arts school.

Advice for the elementary / middle school years

- Find a non-academic hobby/extra-curricular activity
- Have conversations about learning differences
- Advocate for academic modifications that align with students' strengths and interests
- Learn how to use compensation strategies, assistive technologies, and different techniques to enhance your own learning that work for you
- Find a safe haven/place in school
- Develop an interest/find a strength





High School

- Have a transition plan entering high school – make sure you learn how to utilize accommodations
- Advocate to be assigned to teachers that work well with students with learning differences
- Have in school or out of school non-academic activities
- Let your own voice, needs, concerns and ideas be heard
- Start all meetings with a positive update from all teachers present
- Discuss post-secondary goals early in high school career and plan accordingly

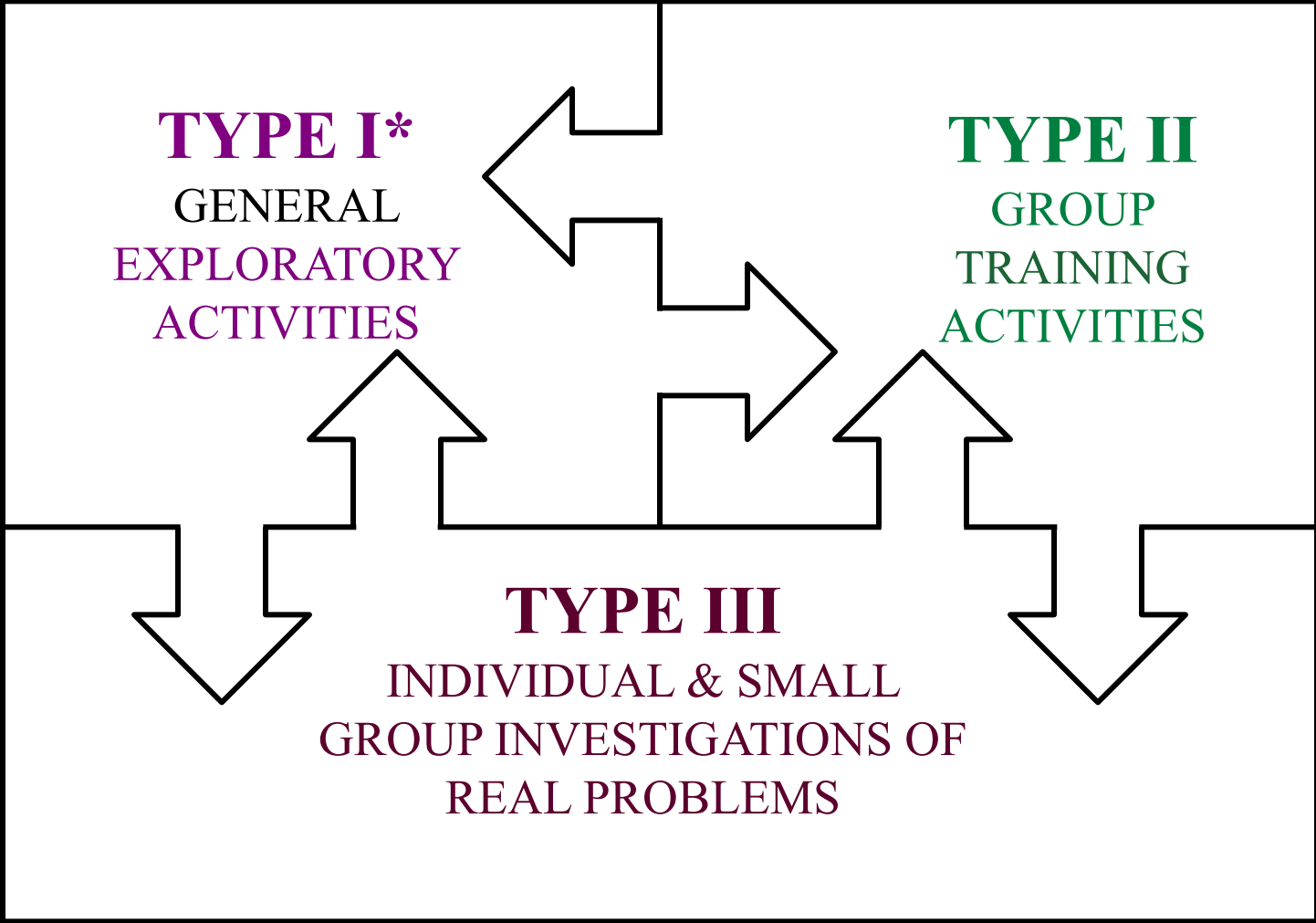
Pamela recently graduated from a competitive college and completed her MS degree



Enrichment Pedagogy

Developed by researchers and educators whose classrooms and practices have served as laboratories for enrichment and innovations that have subsequently become mainstays of our field.





*Regular
Classroom*

*Environment
in General*