



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

Sally Reis and Susan Baum

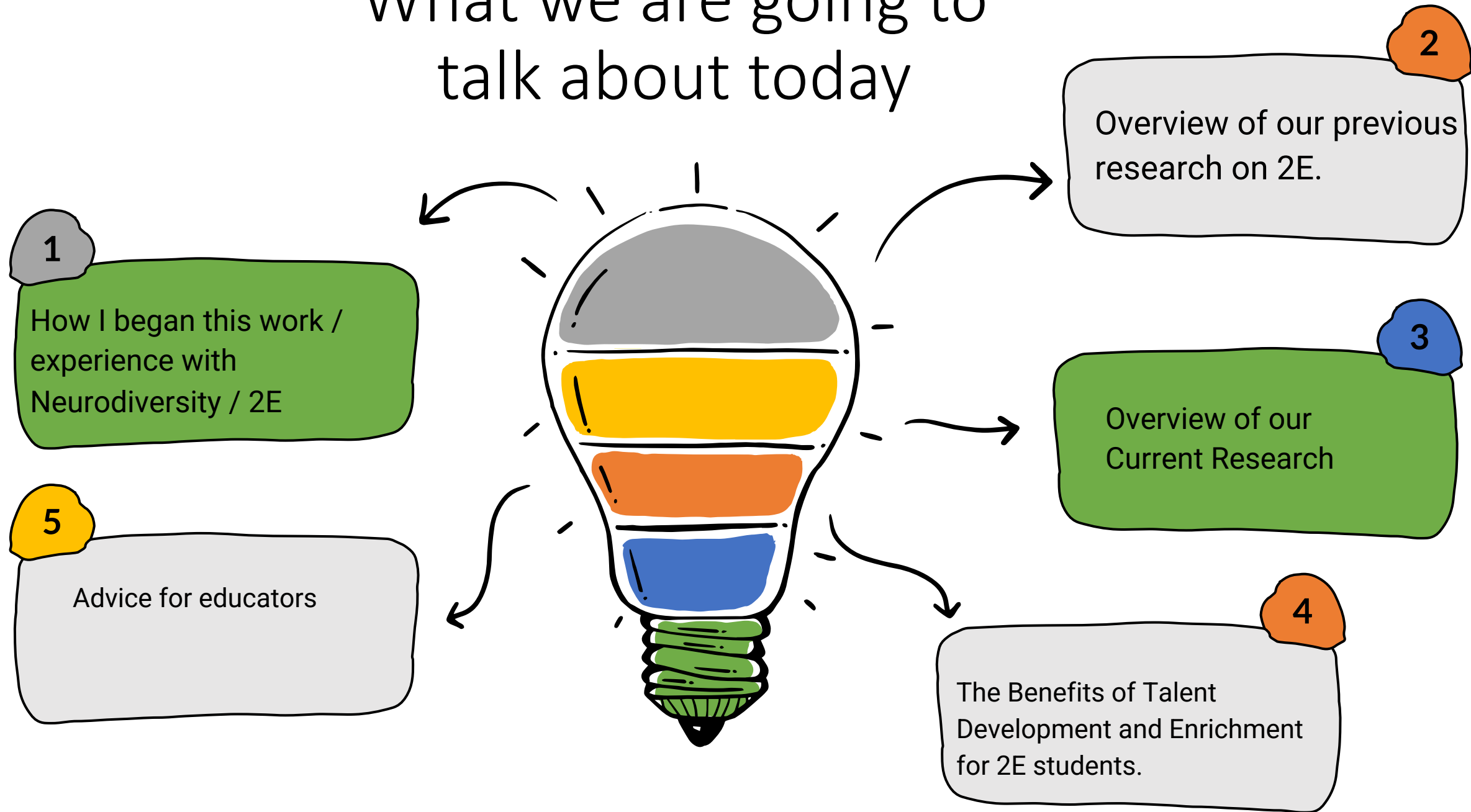
Renzulli Center

Neag School of Education  
University of Connecticut

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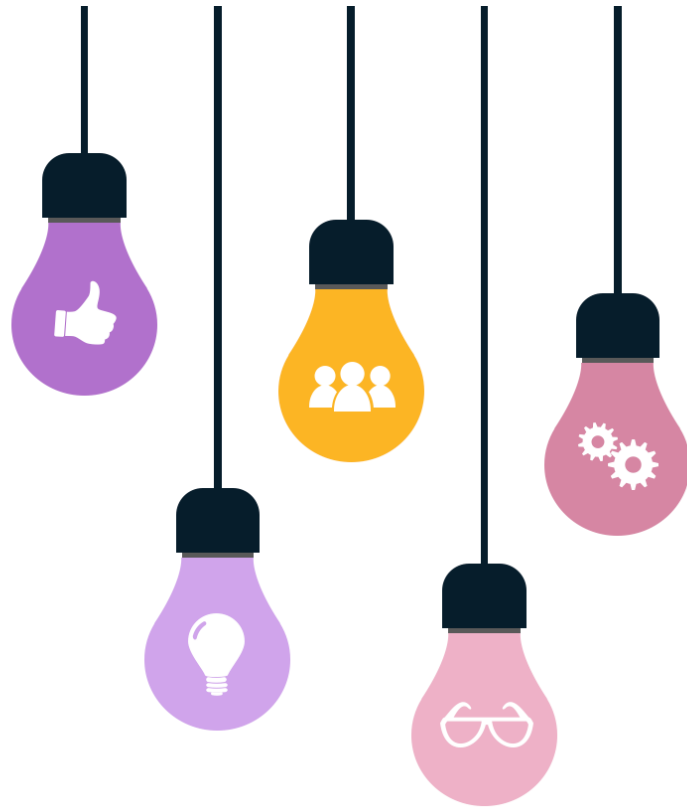
# What we are going to talk about today



# 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 challenging classes

Poor self esteem and low 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.



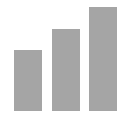
Project 2E-ASD focuses on how to identify and teach academically talented and high ability high school students with ASD.

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**



**2024....**

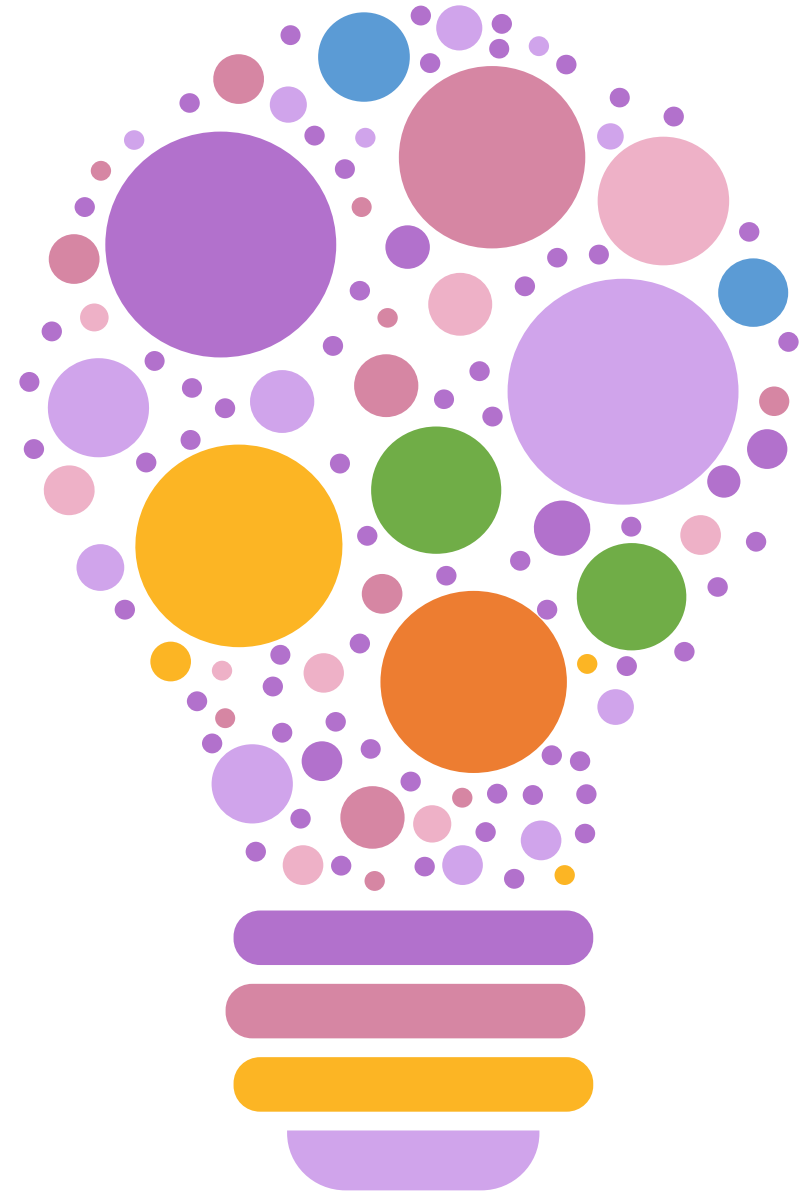


In 2020, the CDC reported increasing numbers (one in fifty-four children) are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

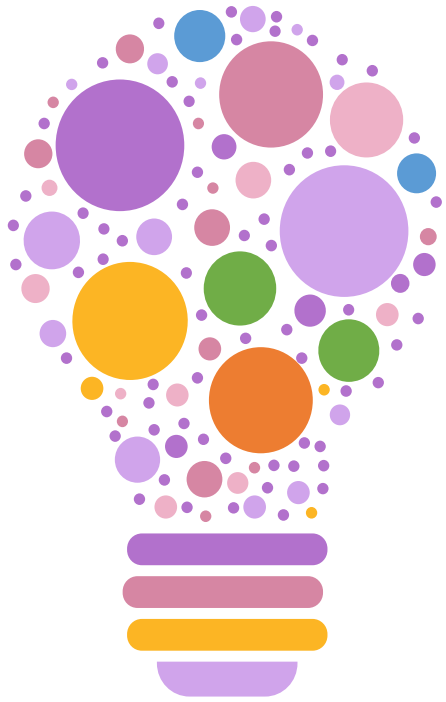
Little educational research exists on smart kids with ASD, especially related to effective instruction....

# 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



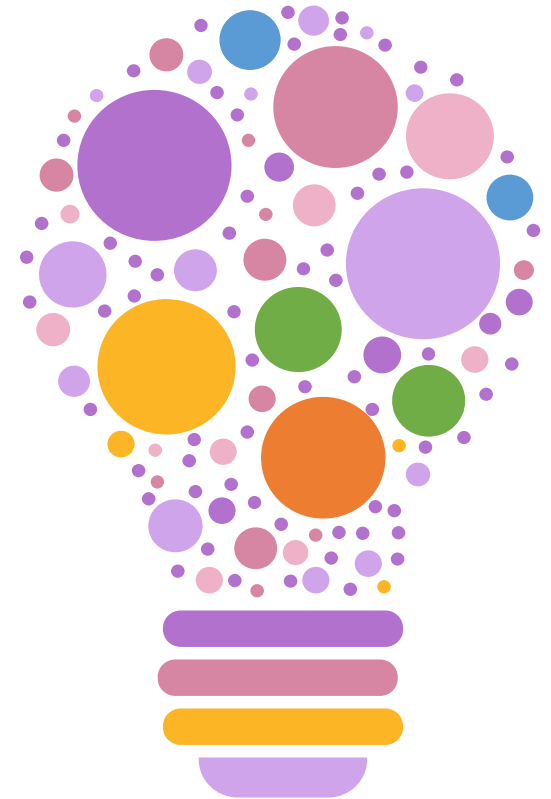


## OUR FINDINGS:

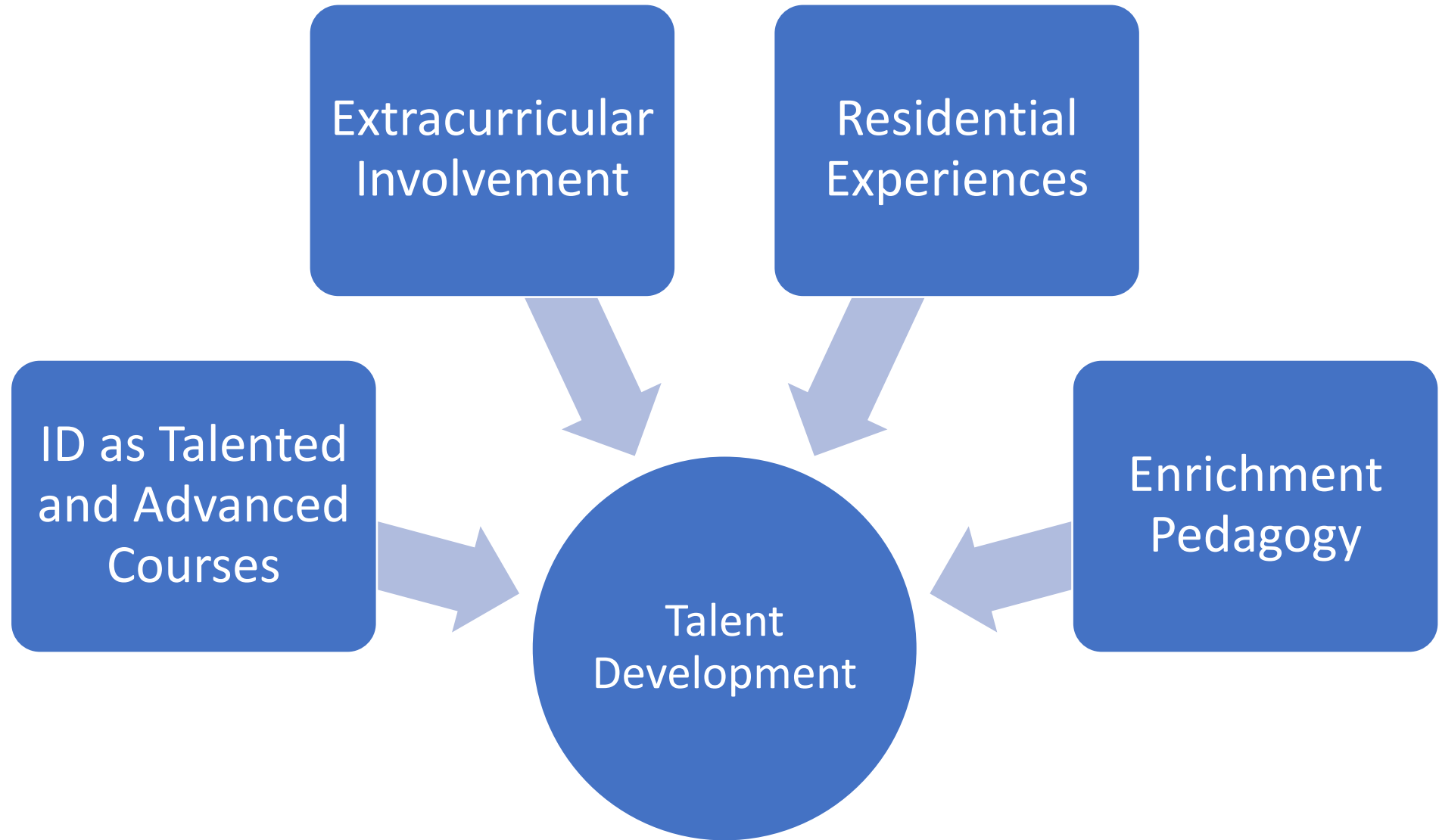
- Most participants' academic **talents were formally recognized** by their teachers and parents.
- Half were identified as being **academically talented** in elementary or secondary school.
- Almost all knew that they had **academic talents and strengths** and found teachers who supported them.

# 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%).



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 not 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. 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.

# Advice for the elementary / middle school years

- Find an interest–based 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

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

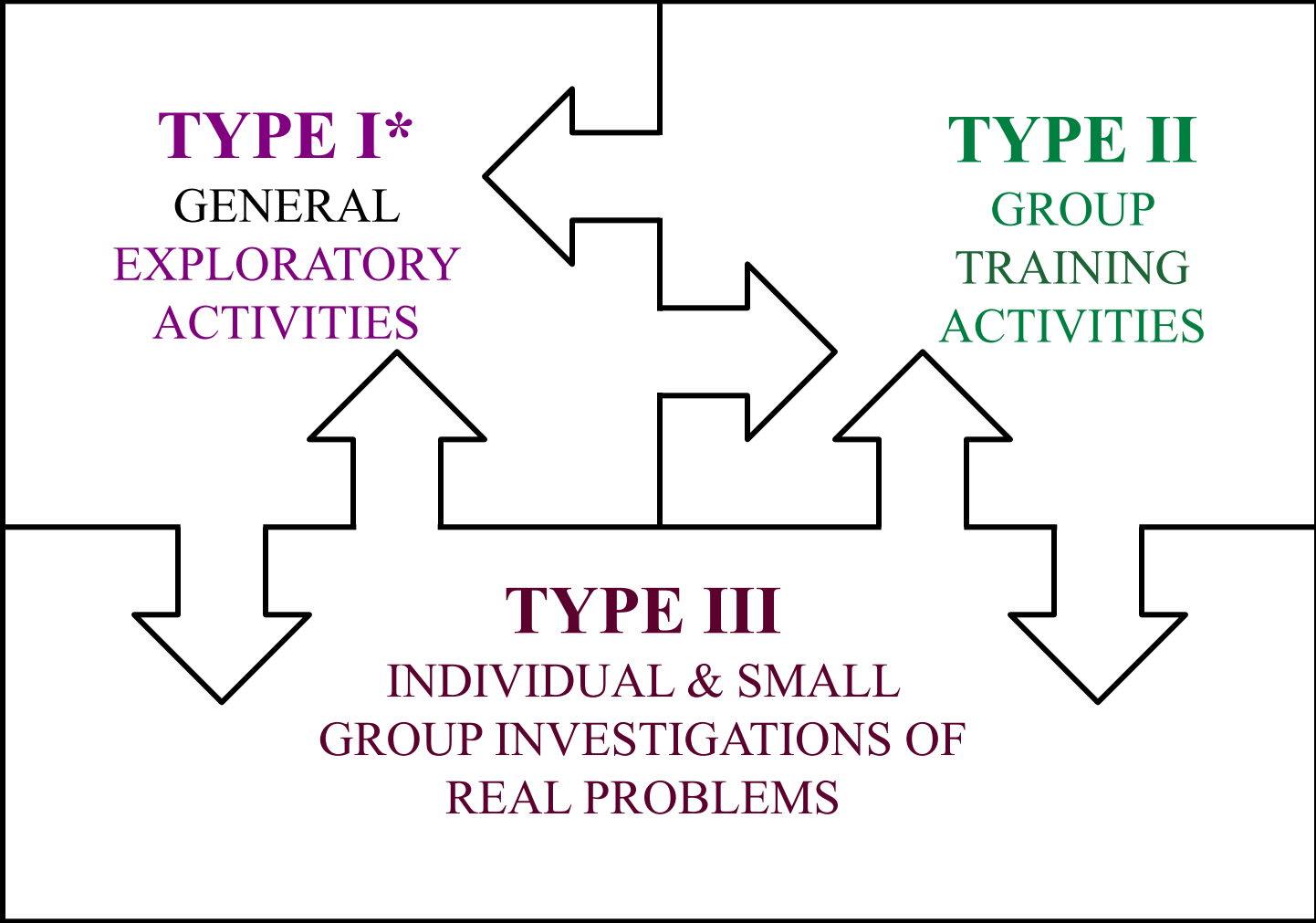
Pamela recently graduated from a competitive college and completed her MS degree



# 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*

# Don Clifton, Ph.D.

- Father of Strengths-Based Psychology:
  - *“What will happen when we think about what is right with people rather than fixating on what is wrong with them?”*



Missouri Training Institute

## Four Domains of Team Strength

EXECUTING	INFLUENCING	RELATIONSHIP BUILDING	STRATEGIC THINKING
People with dominant Executing themes know how to make things happen.	People with dominant Influencing themes know how to take charge, speak up, and make sure the team is heard.	People with dominant Relationship Building themes have the ability to build strong relationships that can hold a team together and make the team greater than the sum of its parts.	People with dominant Strategic Thinking themes help teams consider what could be. They absorb and analyze information that can inform better decisions.
Achiever Arranger Belief Consistency Deliberative Discipline Focus Responsibility Restorative	Activator Command Communication Competition Maximizer Self-Assurance Significance Woo	Adaptability Connectedness Developer Empathy Harmony Includer Individualization Positivity Relator	Analytical Context Futuristic Ideation Input Intellection Learner Strategic

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Curing the negatives does not  
produce the positives.

— *Martin Seligman* —

- Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best  
Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000



# Strength-based Approach in Education

- processes for identifying strengths involving the recognition and acknowledgment of preferences, abilities and passions.
- processes for applying strengths with teachers encouraging students to “be aware of how they can use those strengths to achieve, accomplish and overcome”.
- processes for further developing strengths to enable students to improve known competencies.
- ( Galloway , Bronwyn, and Williamson, 2020)

# IEPs and 504 Plans focus on weaknesses and are designed to bring a student up to grade level

- Overview of Strengths & Needs: Katelyn is a bright student who enjoys creative writing who has difficulties with the conventions of writing (grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc) Katelyn is shy does not enjoy participating in class but does enjoy participating in her literature circle with students with whom she feels comfortable. Katelyn is disorganized and has difficulty with multi-step directions.

**Disability:** Learning Disability  
**Class:** 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts  
**Classroom Teacher:** Mr. Abbott

**Overview of Strengths and Needs:** Katelyn is a bright student who enjoys creative writing. She has difficulty with the conventions of writing (grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.). Katelyn is shy and tends not to participate in class. She does enjoy participating in her literature circles when she is with students with whom she feels comfortable. Katelyn has difficulty with organization and following multi-step directions.

## IEP Goals and Progress Markers (P.M.)

### Writing

**Goal:** Given a writing assignment, Katelyn will write a multi-paragraph essay that includes a clear thesis statement, supporting examples and details, and no more than 3 spelling errors.

**P.M.:** Katelyn will select a graphic organizer 100% of the time when preparing a writing draft.

**P.M.:** Katelyn will generate one main idea or thesis statement for the topic 4 out of 5 times.

**P.M.:** Katelyn will be able to generate supporting examples or details for each main idea.

**P.M.:** Katelyn will correctly spell high frequency words and make fewer than 5 errors per multi-paragraph writing assignment.

## Accommodations and Modifications

### Accommodations:

- Use of pencil grips
- Allow student to type homework
- Reduce amount of in-class writing required (e.g., provide a copy of class notes, reduce length of journal entries required)
- Provide a checklist for checking conventions of writing
- Divide long writing assignments into "chunks" with individual due dates; for example, first the graphic organizer is due, then the rough draft, then the paper with teacher checklist, and finally the finished paper
- Write daily agenda and objectives on the board
- Require a homework organizer

*Modifications: (can be delivered by the general educator, special educator, or a related service provider)*

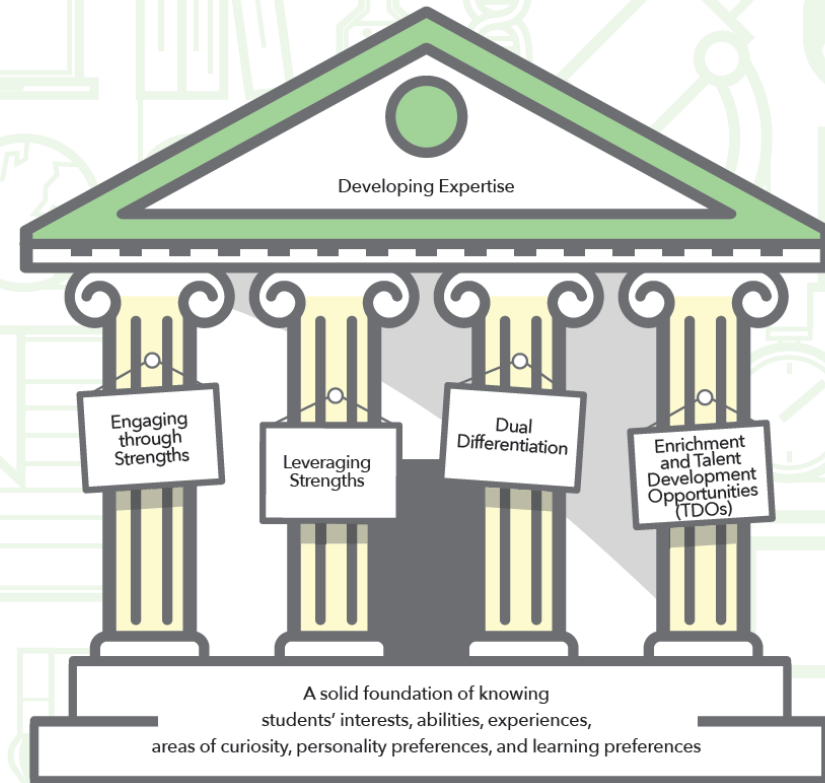
- Work on proper pencil grip
- Provide mini-lessons on grammar, punctuation, and other writing conventions
- Receive specific instruction in spelling at least 3x per week; instruction should include work with high frequency words and instruction in spelling conventions
- Teach specific writing graphic organizers such as Story Maps, Webbing, Compare and Contrast, or Sequence Chain

## TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS

- Extended time on tests
- Use of the computer, if requested by student



## Bridges Strength-based, Talent-focused Teaching



Treatment is not just  
fixing what is broken; it  
is nurturing what is  
best  
Seligman &  
Csikszentmihalyi, 2000

# Introducing the Suite of Tools™

To Connect with the PERSON in PERSONALIZED LEARNING | Section A

## C.L.U.E.S.™

Collect Information, Look for connections, Uncover patterns, Explore different perspectives, and Synthesize findings

**I. ENVISION**

What would make this a good year? List goals, expectations, hopes, and dreams from the student, teacher(s), and parent(s) perspectives.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher/Coach/Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher/Coach/Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher/Coach/Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

To Connect with the PERSON in PERSONALIZED LEARNING | Section C-1

## Quick Personality Indicator™ (QPI)

Student Version

Understanding personality attributes can help each of us establish positive relationships, communicate effectively, set and accomplish goals, and find pathways to work through differences.

**Directions:** When instructed, read the statements inside and give points to the four possible answers by putting a 4, 3, 2, or 1 in the white box next to each response.

Give a **4** to the statement that MOST describes you.  
Give a **1** to the statement that LEAST describes you.

Please be sure to assign all the numbers (4, 3, 2, and 1). Do not leave any boxes blank.


**Here's an example:**

My favorite ice cream is...
Vanilla (I really love vanilla ice cream the most, so I give it 4 points in the white box.)

To Connect with the PERSON in PERSONALIZED LEARNING | Section D

## Creating Possibilities

This tool reminds us of the importance of offering daily opportunities for students to experience joy in learning.



## Magic happens when interests and abilities intersect.

The two sections in this document use information about a student's interests and abilities in distinct ways:

- ★ **Plan for Success™** is a place to note how interests and strengths can be leveraged to build necessary academic and personal skills.
- ★ The **Talent Development Maker™ (TDM)** is about finding opportunities to develop the student's expertise in particular areas of strength, interest, and talent.

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For more information: [www.bridges2e.org](http://www.bridges2e.org)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_


To Connect with the PERSON in PERSONALIZED LEARNING | Section B-1

## My LearningPrint™

Student Version

A tool to discover, consider, and record unique combinations of interests, abilities, learning preferences, and experiences.

Your responses to the questions inside will help you create your own LearningPrint.  
This paper portrait of yourself as a learner will be distinct and individual, much like a fingerprint.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Robin Schader, Ph.D. and Wanying Zhou, Ph.D. (2004, revised 2014)  
The 2e Center for Research and Professional Development at Bridges Academy • 2921 Laurel Canyon Road, Studio City, CA 91604  
For more information: [www.bridges2e.org](http://www.bridges2e.org)

Bridges 2e Center for Research  
& Professional Development  
Studio City, California

## IV. Times of Personal Best

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**Mother:** When she's involved in art, especially animation

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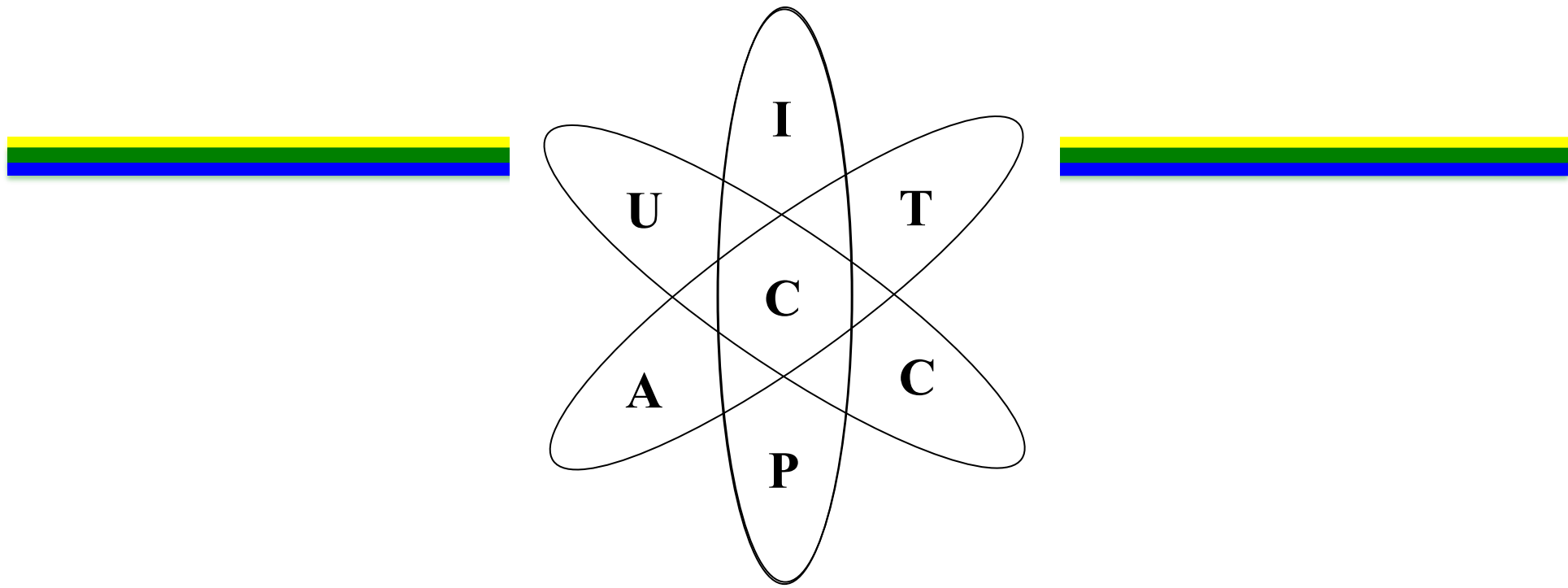
**Father:** Talking politics or about movies we have seen together

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**Teacher:** Participating in discussions. When working on an art project.

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**Student:** Creating images, animations, or performing on stage



"...we believe gifted behaviors take place in certain people (not all people), at certain times (not all the time), and under certain circumstances (not all circumstances)."

# Bridges Strength-based, Talent-focused Four Pillars Model

***Engaging through Strengths:*** Connecting students' interests and strengths to learning objectives.

***Leveraging Strengths:*** Bridging from students' strength areas to create learning in deficit areas.

***Dual Differentiation:*** Targeting ways for learning within lessons by building on student strength areas and avoiding deficit areas.

***Enrichment and Talent Development Opportunities (TDOs):*** Personal reasons to learn necessary skills in the pursuit of a high interest or passion area (“just in time learning”).

Engaging students through strengths. What kinds of activities, resources, and projects did I include in my unit that align to this students' profile?

### **What is it?**

- Creating curricular units that invite engagement and production through strength-based choices in resources and performance tasks that connect to both the students' profile and learning outcomes.

### **Thinking**

- If students' have sufficient opportunity to engage in the topic, process learning, and communicate learning in ways that align to their unique brain wiring, learning preferences, interests, and talent they would be more willing to participate and produce even if some activities are in their deficit areas.

### **Outcome**

- Mastery of unit's objectives

# Strength-based grouping

Talent groups  
Multi-talent groups  
Opinion groups  
Jigsaw groups  
Readiness groups  
Friendship groups  
Interest groups

[Matrix of Strength-based Groups](#)



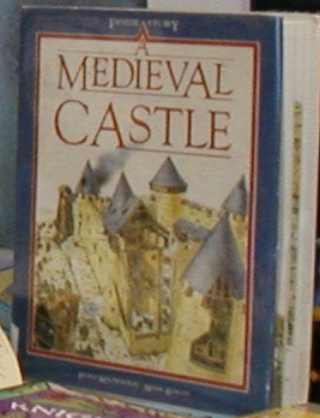
# *The Assignment*

- Middle Ages:
- Big Idea - Interdependence
- Essential Question: How do elements of a system interact to make the system work?
- Resources: See interest center



# DAYS OF KNIGHTS AND DAMSELS

  
Medieval Task Cards  

# Learning activity

- Represent at least four classes of the social system in feudal times. Your product must show the relationship of the classes.
- Use the assigned expression style. (Talent groups: writing, performing arts, building and constructing, visual arts (drawing))
- Your group will present your final product to the class for a pass fail evaluation.

Leveraging strengths:  
Where does the  
student already show  
some mastery of  
concept or skill that  
could be bridged to  
new area of  
challenge?

### **What is it?**

- Bridging from students' strength areas to create learning in deficit areas

### **Thinking**

- If students understand a concept or have access to a skill using another symbol system, domain, or context it then starting with that schema would reduce anxiety, provide familiarity. Through careful scaffolding that awareness would bridge to the skill in need of development.

### **Outcome**

- Growth in skill development

# Music to teach graphing

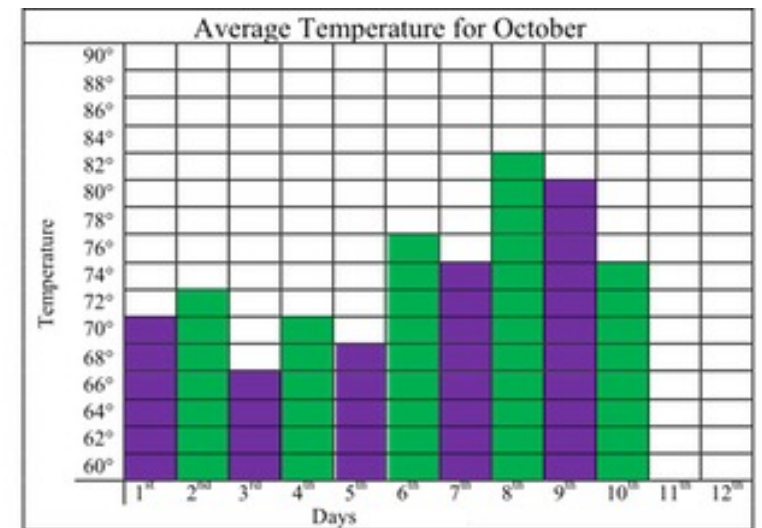
## Musical Staff

And Pitch

LOW HIGH

Remember that we said that Pitch was how high or how low a sound is. We can assign a specific note to describe exactly how high or how low a sound is.

RECORDED WITH SCREENCAST-O-MATIC







**Dual Differentiation**  
How can we address  
the students' gifted  
needs while  
circumventing  
obstacles?

### **What is it?**

- Targeting ways for learning within lessons by addressing students' advanced abilities or positive traits while avoiding deficit areas

### **Thinking**

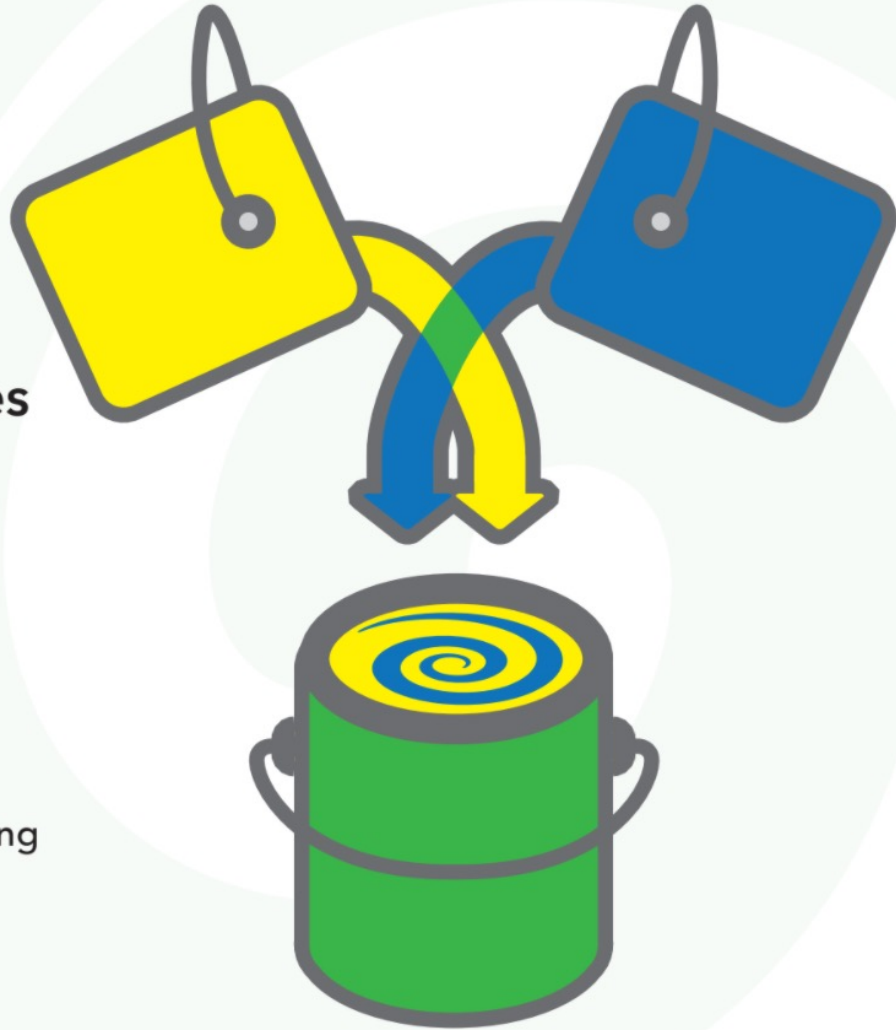
- If students can engage in a lesson in ways that avoid problematic challenges and at the same time not feel different, then anxiety will be reduced and learning will more likely be a positive experience

### **Outcome**

- Mastery of lesson objective

## Differentiation for Strengths & Abilities

- Offer intellectually challenging content
- Integrate critical and creative thinking
- Investigate authentic problems (think & act like a professional)
- Use curriculum compacting
- Provide assignments with depth & complexity
- Consider acceleration



## Differentiation for Learning Challenges

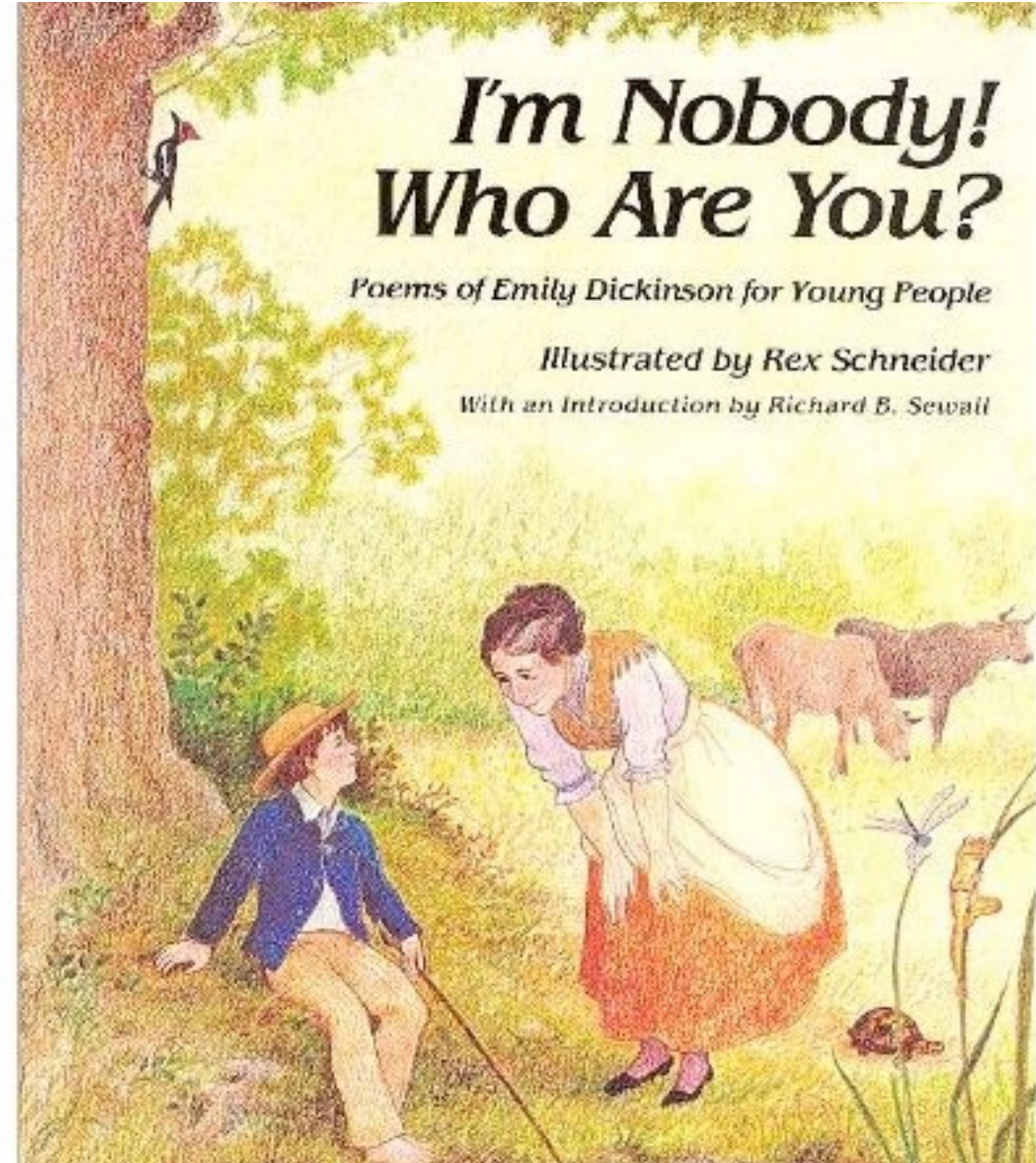
- Make content & resources accessible
- Include performance-based assessments
- Accommodate need for movement
- Minimize distractions (for those with hypersensitivities)
- Provide ways for students to recover emotionally



High comprehension  
but poor decoding  
skills

A WORD IS DEAD  
WHEN IT IS SAID  
SOME SAY

I SAY IT JUST  
BEGINS TO LIVE  
THAT DAY





*Let's Make  
You Think*

# Enrichment and Talent Development Opportunities (TDOs). What opportunities are available to grow talents and interests?

## **What is it?**

- These are opportunities where students engage in experience purposefully designed to enrich students' abilities through high interest and authentic learning that aligns to their areas of talent and interests. During those inquiries or experiences students may require “just-in-time” learning to pursue their goals.

## **Thinking**

- When students are working in a self-selected pursuit of a goal, there is high motivation to achieve their vision. At these times students are receptive to learning skills that help them overcome obstacles such as meeting deadlines or writing a business plan.

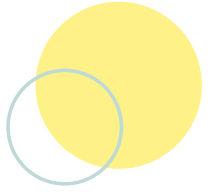
## **Outcome**

- Skill development

# TALENT DEVELOPMENT & ENRICHMENT AT BRIDGES ACADEMY

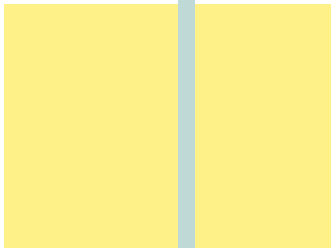
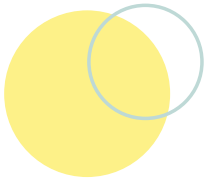


# ENRICHMENT CLUSTERS



- EVERY FRIDAY
- STUDENT CHOICE
- ACTIVE LEARNING
- GROUP SIZE = 2 TO 6 STUDENTS
- TEACHER AS FACILITATOR OR COACH

“CULINARY CRITICS” ARE INVESTIGATING AND WRITING A GUIDE WITH RATINGS OF KID-FRIENDLY RESTAURANTS AROUND THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD.



# THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

MATHEMATICIANS AND BUILDERS AT WORK



# SCIENTISTS



# THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM: ARTISTS DECORATING THE SARCOPHAGUS





# Talent Development and the Badge Program



# UPCOMING YOUNG EXPERT

## GAME DEVELOPMENT



### Interest Exploration Badge

Game Design

Vector math and Math for 3D Environments (in progress)

Game Marketing & Focus Groups (in progress)

### Professional Development Badge (professional-level skill)

Game Development with Unity

Programming with C#

Debugging and Troubleshooting

3D Vector Operations

# MUSIC PROGRAM



**JamFest IV**  
2010  
made possible by  
THE AL SHERMAN FOUNDATION

March 14th  
THE ROXY THEATER  
9009 Sunset Blvd  
2:00 - 5:00 PM

**FEATURING BANDS FROM:**  
BRIDGES ACADEMY NEW COMMUNITY JEWISH HS  
HARVARD WESTLAKE CROSSROADS SCHOOL  
CAMPBELL HALL JOIN THE BAND

TICKETS: \$15 in advance, \$20 at the door  
All proceeds benefiting **MusiCares** © - [www.musicares.com](http://www.musicares.com)



## BRIDGES WINTER COFFEE HOUSE

MONDAY, DEC. 5TH, 7 - 9.30 PM  
[doors open at 5.30pm]

THE FEDERAL BAR  
5303 Lankershim Blvd  
North Hollywood, CA 91601

**FEATURING**  
THE ROCK BAND  
BLUES EXPLOSION  
SHREDDERS  
ELECTRIC POP ORCHESTRA  
+ Guitar Workshop  
+ The Shaunt Avakian Trio

**COME HUNGRY!**  
Full kitchen available



# ROBOTICS FIRST COMPETITION

# TALENT DEVELOPMENT...IT'S NOT AN OPTION. IT'S A NECESSITY!



## The Talent Development Opportunity Maker™ (TDO)

First, build a TDO Menu by developing a list of classes, lessons, experiences, workshops, etc. that will foster this student's passion(s) in \_\_\_\_\_, include authentic Explorations (to broaden), Experiences (for skill development) with professionals, and Opportunities for performance and production that will support progression toward expertise.

Consider Opportunities to Explore:	Classroom and Extracurricular Options	Enriched Options Beyond School
Take Classes or Lessons:		
Observe or Attend events:		
Create:		
Perform:		
Find a Mentor:		
Join Special Programs/Clubs:		
Interview Experts:		
Apprentice:		
Enter Contests or Competitions:		
Other Options:		

Then create a TDO Agenda from the possibilities above:

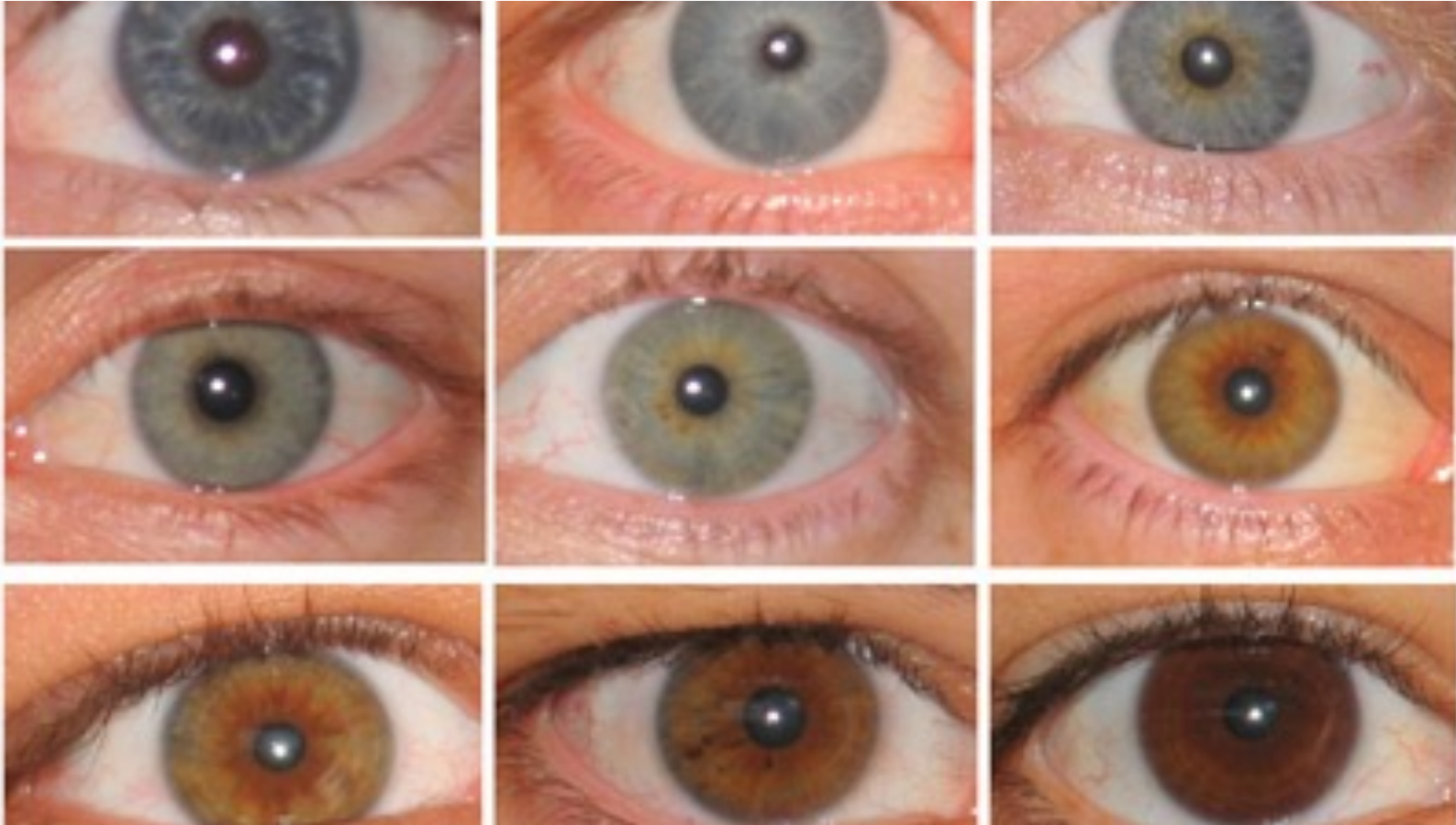
Options Selected (with dates)	Frequency and Location	Date to Revisit
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# Summarize and Apply

<b>Taking Stock</b> “This child is...”	<b>Creating Possibilities</b> in the classroom	<b>Talent Development Opportunities (TDOs)</b> at home & in the greater community	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is an avid &amp; advanced reader</li> <li>• prefers historical novels</li> <li>• thinks metaphorically</li> <li>• is passionate about art</li> <li>• is drawn to drama</li> <li>• loves to argue</li> <li>• shows leadership capacity</li> <li>• primarily a creative problem solver / learned expert</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage reading with historical novels, manuals, &amp; graphic novels</li> <li>• Include point-counterpoint arguments, mini debates, &amp; moral dilemmas as pre-writing</li> <li>• Use visual arts integrated lessons</li> <li>• Use Synectics to encourage writing</li> <li>• Incorporate performing arts experiences</li> <li>• Suggest comic books as products</li> <li>• Allow doodling to help with attention &amp; working memory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debate Club / Team</li> <li>• Advanced Art classes</li> <li>• Credits earned as teaching assistant in visual arts</li> <li>• Drama Club</li> <li>• Shakespeare Boot Camp</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enter drawings for exhibit at local gallery in Culver City.</li> <li>• Take classes during the coming term at Art Center in Pasadena (sculpting &amp; drawing)</li> <li>• Visit Manga exhibition and continue to study Japanese for trip to Japan this coming summer.</li> <li>• Apply for prestigious Cal Arts summer program, <i>Inner Sparks</i>.</li> </ul>







I think I will  
study eyes  
this year



Anime

Hey Dingis!

Seniors of 2011

*“I have learned first and foremost to look for interests, talents, strengths, shades of strengths or the mere suggestion of a talent.*

*Knowing that a person builds a happy and successful life not on remediated weaknesses but on developed strengths, I have learned to place those strengths at the top of what matters.”*

Edward Hallowell (2005)