

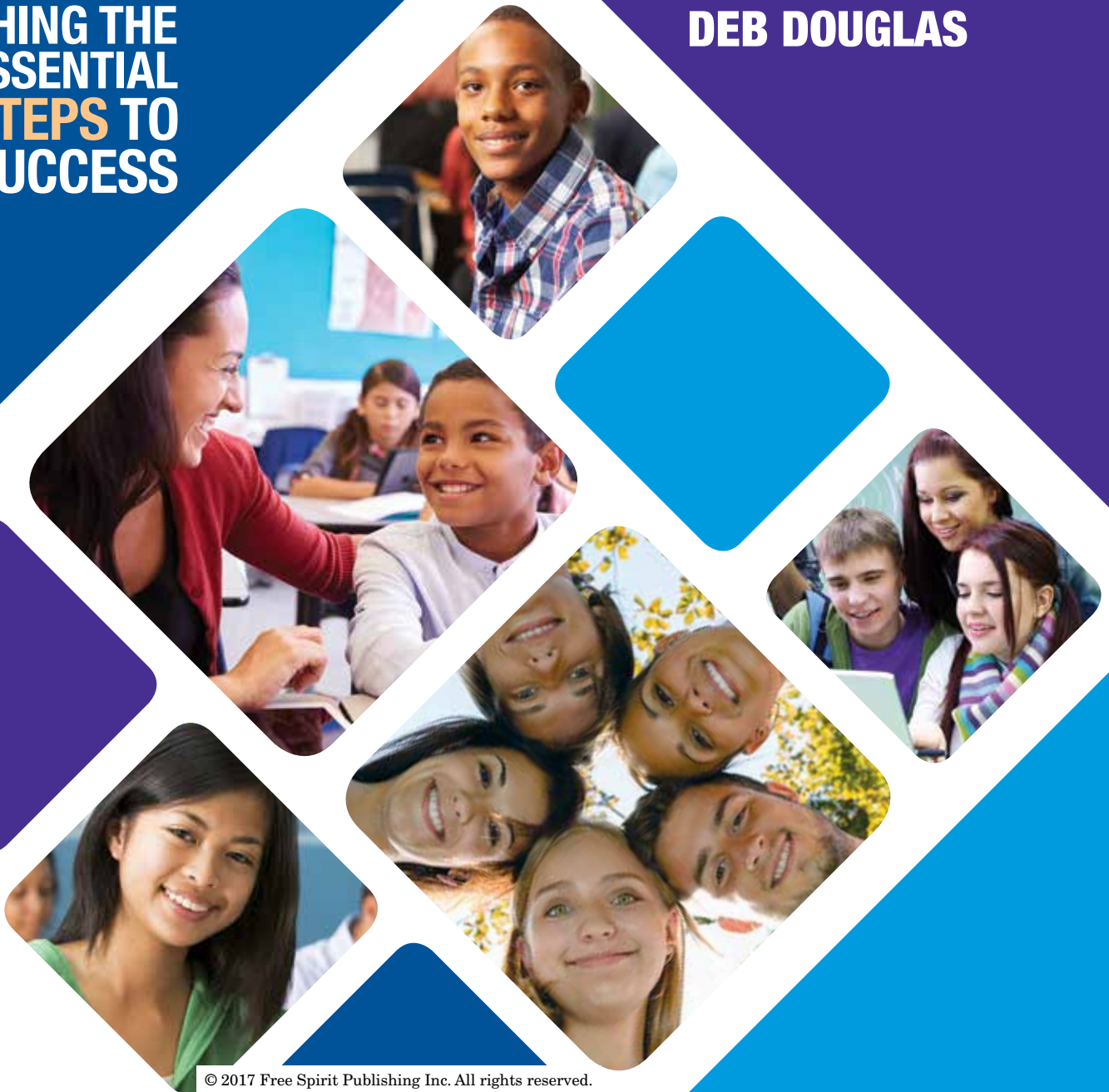
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the **POWER** of **SELF-ADVOCACY** for **GIFTED LEARNERS**

TEACHING THE
ESSENTIAL
4 STEPS TO
SUCCESS

DEB DOUGLAS



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DIGITAL CONTENT INCLUDES workshop facilitator's guide, printable student forms, and PDF presentation

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All names of students and parents used within have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

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INTRODUCTION

“What do you need?” I asked a gifted student more than a decade ago. “What do you want to do differently?”

Ryan, a highly creative eighth grader, was acting out in class and his grades were dropping. I was pretty sure the traditional path through high school to graduation wasn't going to work for him. But I was stumped about what was going to work. I'd been working in gifted education for some time, but the obvious hadn't occurred to me until that moment: “Ryan is a bright kid. I should just ask him what he needs.”

But Ryan was caught off guard by my question. He stared at me quizzically, shrugged his shoulders, and replied, “Nothing. Really, everything's fine.”

But I couldn't let it go. I was sure Ryan knew what he wanted to change; he just needed to speak up. Ryan, however, was confused for good reason. The adults in his life, including myself, had never prepared him for that question. He didn't know why he was struggling. He didn't know he had options. He didn't know he had the right to seek alternatives that would better address his specific needs. He didn't feel comfortable asking us for help.

In short, he didn't know how to be his own advocate.

And truthfully, I didn't know much about self-advocacy in education either, so I turned to the internet. My search returned over 9 million results; virtually all of them about helping students with learning difficulties rather than advanced abilities. Perhaps the strongest definition of self-advocacy came from Loring Brinckerhoff, director of the Office of Disability Policy at Educational Testing Service, who described it as “the process of recognizing and meeting the needs specific to one's learning ability without compromising the dignity of oneself or others.”¹ Since struggling *and* gifted learners fall outside the norm, it made sense that each group should be empowered to self-advocate.

So, Ryan and I spent many hours together in the next few months. We talked about what giftedness is

(and isn't) and assessed his learning strengths as well as areas for improvement. We looked at what options would be available to him in high school and which were best for him. We listed his rights and responsibilities as a student and those of the district. Gradually, Ryan began to understand what I had meant when I asked him what he needed and why it was important to advocate for himself. And then, with Ryan leading the way, we created a step-by-step plan for his success. We also toured the high school and I introduced him to the adults who would be there to help him: his future school counselor, teachers, department heads, and principal. With a renewed sense of self-efficacy, Ryan's grades and behavior improved and his teachers began to see him as the smart, creative, and humorous person that he was rather than as a disruption.

My quest to help gifted students speak up for themselves is quite personal to me. And I'm guessing that it is personal for you as well. Who among us hasn't felt heartbroken for someone we care about who has experienced the challenge of being gifted? The loneliness, anxiety, humiliation, shame, frustration, despair. We are all at times insensitive to the challenges our students face, even though we work hard to stay tuned in.

I remember all too well the sixth-grade girl I knew who was partnered all day, every day, all year with a slower learner so the girl could learn humility and the “joy” of helping others.

And the brilliant little boy living in poverty whose well-worn pants split during the spelling bee. He misspelled an easy word so he could sit down and hide his shame.

And the talented teen painter who, after overhearing her mother claim her brother was their “family artist,” never again lifted a paintbrush.

And the young boy in music class who wept with joy at hearing Rachmaninoff for the first time and then endured taunts on the playground for weeks.

And the precocious but bored middle school student whose math teacher announced loudly as she handed back his test, “I expected more from someone who thinks he’s so smart.”

And the young gifted writer who stayed up all night to write a five-paragraph essay because her teacher told the class to “turn in your best work.”

We see our own experiences reflected in those of our students. We want to save them and let them know “It can be better tomorrow and I’ll work with you to make sure it is.”

This is not a book about helping students get into a selective college or preparing them for a lucrative career. It’s not about teaching kids to wait until that ephemeral, magical moment down the road—advanced high school classes or electives or graduate school—when education suddenly makes sense. Rather, this book is about helping gifted middle school and high school students satisfy their love of learning right now. It’s about making them feel excited, motivated, and challenged to use their innate abilities and passion for understanding every day.

How This Book Is Unique: Jump-Starting Students’ Self-Advocacy

As a parent or an educator, you may already believe that all children—especially those with learning exceptionalities—should take a leading role in their educations. And you may already be familiar with much of the literature on gifted learners and their academic, social, and emotional needs. So, what does this book offer that’s new? It provides you with a means to jump-start middle school and high school students’ self-advocacy. It details much of the information and support that they need to create their personal paths to graduation and beyond.

Over the years I’ve experimented with various ways to encourage self-advocacy. One of the best methods I’ve found is a one-day introductory workshop to ignite students’ interest and involvement. This book will walk you through how to create one of these workshops, an experience that unites students, parents, and educators in the common goal of advancing education through self-advocacy.

Included are real-life stories of students in grades five through twelve who have struggled to find their

way through “the system.” To the best of my knowledge, these students continue to explore life, learning to solve problems, make good decisions, and connect with those who support their efforts. Many of these students I worked with during my years in gifted education. Others I met during the GT Carpe Diem self-advocacy workshops I conduct. These students’ stories, as well as their responses to my workshop surveys included throughout the book, shed light on our role as advocates.

About This Book

I wrote this book specifically for the educators and school counselors who work with secondary gifted students and who may want to facilitate student self-advocacy workshops. However, the information and resources presented are also vital for parents, guardians, and other supporters of gifted children who are not in the school setting or who have no in-school advocate.

The first two chapters lay the groundwork for teaching students to self-advocate. These chapters provide evidence supporting the key assumptions regarding gifted learners and their ability and willingness to speak up for themselves. The meaning of self-advocacy is clarified and its benefits for all stakeholders are described. These chapters also examine why gifted students may not be advocating for themselves and the importance of talking with them about their wants and needs.

The middle chapters focus on the four steps that help students begin their own advocacy:

1. Students understand their rights and responsibilities as gifted individuals.
2. Students develop their learner profiles by assessing their abilities and interests, strengths and weaknesses, learning preferences, and personal characteristics.
3. Students investigate available options and opportunities and match them to their learner profiles.
4. Students connect with advocates who can help them accomplish what needs to be done.

The final chapters provide concrete examples of students’ action plans and describe the GT Carpe Diem Workshop and accompanying survey that I’ve been conducting with students for many years to help them

take charge of their own educations. These chapters also review the four steps to self-advocacy as they relate to the story of Ryan, the gifted student discussed at the beginning of this introduction. The workshop materials (facilitator's guide, handouts, and surveys) also are included. Here are more detailed descriptions of each chapter.

Chapter 1 begins with a look at six diverse profiles of gifted learners, the way each type of learner relates to the education system, and the needs of each learner in navigating the system and growing toward greater autonomy. It lays out the following integral assumptions about the needs of gifted students:

- ◆ Gifted students need to understand themselves as unique individuals.
- ◆ Gifted students need programming matched to their learner profiles.
- ◆ Gifted students need to grow toward autonomy.
- ◆ Gifted students need specific, direct instruction in self-advocacy.

Also included are students' survey responses, which encourage us to talk with students about their giftedness and counter the winds of chance and change that impact their lives.

Chapter 2 focuses on the basic information and beliefs that support teaching gifted learners to advocate for themselves. It discusses the key benefits of self-advocacy for students:

- ◆ More appropriate academic challenge
- ◆ Increased motivation
- ◆ Greater independence and self-direction
- ◆ Improved academic performance
- ◆ Greater equanimity and less frustration

The chapter also describes benefits to stakeholders, including benefits to other students, parents, classroom teachers, gifted education coordinators, school counselors, and the school district in general. Survey responses provided confirm that without encouragement, gifted learners are unlikely to ask for what they need.

Chapter 3 features the first step in self-advocacy: *understanding one's rights and responsibilities*. It explores gifted students' two important rights:

- ◆ The right to understand giftedness and how it relates to their unique selves
- ◆ The right to an appropriately challenging education

It also delves into the students' responsibilities to take charge of their educations and to work on developing personal characteristics that will support their success.

Chapter 4 centers on the second step in self-advocacy: *assessing and reflecting on one's learner profile*. The five fields of information that make up the learner profile are explained:

- ◆ Cognitive functioning
- ◆ Learning strengths
- ◆ Interests
- ◆ Learning preferences
- ◆ Personality characteristics and traits

Student narratives and survey responses provide insights about the value of assessing and reflecting on each of these fields.

Chapter 5 gives details on the third step in self-advocacy: *investigating available options and opportunities and matching them to one's learner profile*. Examples are given in these categories of options most often sought by students:

- ◆ Finding more challenging work
- ◆ Exploring an interest
- ◆ Spending time with gifted peers
- ◆ Adjusting their environment to accommodate personal needs

The chapter distinguishes among students who are ready for change, students who are ready and willing, and students who are able to access needed options. Information is provided for each group that will help them choose, accept, or create opportunities that match their learner profiles. The addition of student survey responses underscores the value of educators talking with students about educational alternatives.

Chapter 6 outlines the fourth step in self-advocacy: *connecting with adult advocates who can help accomplish what needs to be done*. The three major responsibilities of these advocates are described:

- ◆ Communicating the concept of self-advocacy to others
- ◆ Supporting the practice of self-advocacy
- ◆ Initiating the individual student's attempts at self-advocacy

The chapter lists a wide range of resources that help each group of primary advocates—parents, educators, counselors, and gifted coordinators—understand and carry out their specific roles in building self-advocacy in students. Included is a chart indicating the possible roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the school district.

Chapter 7 provides concrete examples of individual students' plans for change and paths to graduation, demonstrating the value of careful and thoughtful planning. It includes questions that help students consider short- and long-term ramifications of their plans. It also describes the use of a simple Action Plan template.

Chapter 8 is a primer on teaching gifted students to self-advocate. While it lists several methods of direct instruction, the primary focus is the GT Carpe Diem Workshop model. The chapter includes workshop goals, activities, and timelines—all aligned to the NAGC PreK–Grade 12 Gifted Education Programming Standards. Post-workshop input from both students and advocates gives evidence of the model's success.

Chapter 9 concludes the book and reviews the entire self-advocacy process through a final look at Ryan's story.

Appendix A includes a list of useful resources to use with students and to find more information about gifted education and self-advocacy. Books, organizations, and websites are listed for gifted students and for their advocates. **Appendix B** provides the GT Carpe Diem Workshop materials and handouts, including the facilitator's guide and pre- and post-workshop surveys.

Lastly, the **digital content** accompanying this book includes:

- ◆ Customizable versions of all the reproducible forms
- ◆ The workshop facilitator's guide and workshop handouts

- ◆ A PDF presentation for use in the self-advocacy workshops

See page 194 for instructions on how to download these materials.

How to Use This Book

This book has the potential to be used in a variety of ways. First, it can be a resource for understanding the concept of self-advocacy and the information, insights, and tools that we need to share with gifted students for them to successfully self-advocate. If you are new to gifted education and have had few opportunities for professional development, it also may serve as an overview of crucial definitions, theories, characteristics, programming, and support for gifted students.

Experienced educators may find this book to be a good review of information as well as a guide to the next steps in partnering with your students. You may also find it useful in developing staff and parent sessions that prepare adults for their roles as advocates. As a gifted education coordinator, I frequently used books to create a series of monthly blog posts and newsletter articles to share with my staff and parents, each one a summary of a chapter so that by the end of the year we had “read” the book together.

Secondly, you might use this book to create learning experiences that guide students in developing the skill of self-advocacy. Whether you use the GT Carpe Diem Workshop format or design your own model, the key steps, processes, goals, and standards outlined in this book will help ensure that your direct instruction is systematic, continuous, and grounded in research and best practices.

Additionally, this guide can be used for book studies with gifted education staff or parent groups as they consider new ways to serve their students. Regional cooperative education services, especially those including rural schools, might read the book in a study group before conducting their own workshop to bring together students from various districts. **Download a free PLC/Book Study Guide at freespirit.com/PLC.**

Finally, educators and parents may find that one of the most productive uses of this book is to share it with an individual gifted learner. We sometimes underestimate the value of presenting a bright student with “adult” material. But gifted students who are ready for change need to be given clear information, insights, and tools.

My hope is that *The Power of Self-Advocacy for Gifted Learners* will allow us to put the power for change

where it rightfully belongs: in the hands of the gifted individual.

I'd love to hear how this book has helped you in your work with gifted learners. If you have stories or questions for me, you can reach me through my publisher at help4kids@freespirit.com or visit my website at www.gtcarpediem.com.

Deb Douglas



CHANGE and CHANGE

Change happens. In fact, in the education system, change is the norm. In the time a gifted student journeys from kindergarten to graduation, almost everything changes. The national interest in addressing the needs of gifted students ebbs and flows. Sometimes there's federal funding for research and services, sometimes there isn't. Tracking, equity issues, achievement gaps, and international test scores all impact public perception and contribute to the fluctuating support. The field of gifted education itself shifts over time. Academic arguments persist regarding defining giftedness, talent development, labeling, identification, and best practices. And despite the turmoil, the truth is that the latest research may not impact students' daily lives for years, if at all.

Individual states' and provinces' support for gifted education also rises and falls with the economy, political interests, and assessment data. Often, laws and statutes

go unenforced and concerns such as programming and staffing are left up to individual districts. And those school districts also experience change. Administrators, with varying attitudes about gifted education, come and go. Classroom teachers, with varying preparation and experience in gifted education, come and go. Gifted coordinators and differentiated programming are seen as expendable when budgets are tight.

In short, the possibility of the education system meeting gifted students' unique needs is always in flux. Laws change, funding changes, staffing changes, and parent involvement changes. Educational trends come and go. Some trends are good for gifted kids. Some are not. Moreover, we now know students' abilities, strengths and weaknesses, interests, passions, and learning preferences can all change over time as well.

As advocates for gifted learners, it would be easy for educators and parents to be angry, stressed, anxious,

confused, or just plain overwhelmed by all these changes. But rather than waste energy worrying or debating, it's crucial to keep our focus on the students themselves. One truth that doesn't change: In order to grow, each student needs an appropriately challenging education and effective social and emotional support. As John Fischer, former dean of Teachers College at Columbia University, stated: "The essence of our effort to see that every child has a chance must be to assure each an equal opportunity, not to become equal, but to become different—to realize whatever unique potential of body, mind, and spirit she or he possesses."²

No matter what the research says is best practice for gifted kids, in most public school districts in the United States and Canada, students are not put in gifted schools or even gifted classrooms or cluster groups. Most gifted students are in heterogeneous classrooms in which teachers may try to differentiate the curriculum and instruction semi-regularly. Many gifted students spend much of each day simply waiting. Waiting to be challenged, waiting to learn something new, waiting to interact with like minds. Many are plainly unaware that their route to graduation can and should be significantly different from that of their peers. Instead they slog on day after day, sometimes challenged and interested, but more frequently not.

While we hope for changes in the system, administration, teachers, budgets, laws, or initiatives that may eventually take place, *today* many gifted kids are starving for that "equal opportunity" to develop their unique potential. Instead of asking them to wait for the system to change, we must put the power of change-making into their hands. Yes, we sometimes forget that the students are primary players in the educational process. No one knows better than the students what is going on in their heads and hearts as they sit in class, walk the halls, complete assignments, and interact with their peers and teachers. As was the case with Ryan—from this book's introduction, who inspired my interest in self-advocacy—when given the information they need, students are best able to decide when, where, and how they want their education to be differentiated.

Our role must be to create and sustain a partnership with students. We must find ways to tell them, "There is something you can do right now to change tomorrow or next week or next month or next semester. You can self-advocate by speaking up for yourself, asking for what you need." Self-advocacy, as defined by the *Oxford Dictionary*, is simply "the action of representing oneself or one's views or interests." By sharing the four steps of self-advocacy detailed in this book, we can help gifted learners better navigate the education system and adapt it to meet their needs.

Gifted Profiles and the Education System

There is a myth that all gifted students are alike: they come from educated and supportive families, enjoy school, test well, earn good grades, and are admired by peers and teachers. The work of George Betts and Maureen Neihart, in *Profiles of the Gifted and Talented*, upends that misconception.³ They describe six profiles of gifted learners, which I've summarized in the following sections and paired with real-life examples. Complete descriptions of all six profiles can be found in **Figure 1.1** on pages 9–12. *Note:* By using the monikers "Successful Learner," "At-Risk Learner," and others to refer to particular learners throughout the book, I don't intend to label students but rather to describe the different attributes and challenges they may possess at certain times during their school careers.

Type I: Successful Learners

Successful Learners have figured out how to adapt to the system. While Type I's are typically identified for gifted programs, frequently fit the stereotype described in the previous paragraph, and often have options at their disposal that allow them to grow, that doesn't mean they pursue those options. Sometimes they get bored, take the path of least resistance, or fail to develop their intellectual curiosity. Gifted students who earn good grades may seem successful, but may actually be underperforming. For instance, some students play the academic game, assuring they have just enough points

for an A, but going no further. In the second semester of his senior year, Jason told me he was only taking PE, the last remaining half-credit he needed to graduate, because he'd already been accepted to his first-choice college and thought he deserved some "time off." For him, school was a chore, a means to an end. He hadn't yet recognized the intrinsic joy found in investigating new concepts, exploring a passion, or simply learning something challenging for fun.

Type II: Creative Learners

Creative Learners find the system overly rigid and haven't learned to use it to their advantage. Type IIs are often recognized for their nonconformity but not necessarily for attributes that would indicate a need for advanced programming. In fact, they are sometimes viewed as underperforming because their interests do not align with the school curriculum. Selenia's passion for music led her to spend hours composing and playing drums with her garage band. But she refused to join the high school marching band ("Really, marching band? You've got to be kidding!"), even though district policy required it as a prerequisite to the advanced music courses in composition, theory, jazz, and independent study that would have engaged her.

Type III: Underground Learners

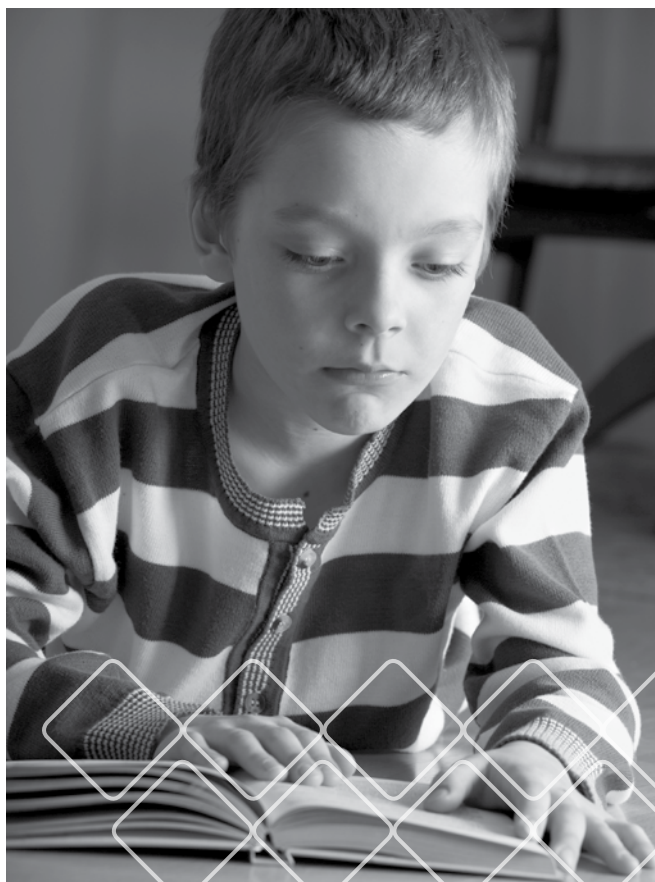
Underground Learners deny their abilities because their social milieu is at odds with the system. Type IIIs realize that friends, family, and/or their culture deem intellectual pursuits a lower priority. Nia's family expected her to fulfill traditional roles. Like other girls in her community, she spent after-school hours and weekends helping at home, babysitting for siblings, or hanging out with her girlfriends when she had time. She was expected to focus on her family's needs and prepare for marriage and motherhood. She brushed off recommendations to take honors courses, saying she just wasn't interested rather than admitting that her family and friends saw little need for her to pursue academic challenges. Students like Nia, who fail to accept challenges, may appear unmotivated or disinterested in academic pursuits.

Type IV: At-Risk Learners

At-Risk Learners find the system hostile and irrelevant. Type IVs are angry—with the adults around them and with themselves—because they have been in the education pipeline for years and their needs have not been met. They feel misunderstood and rejected and are often identified as underachieving rather than as gifted. Katie moved from district to district and school to school so often that no educator had a chance to know her well. School meant ubiquitous assessments to determine what she had been taught in the past and remediate what she'd missed through transferring. Even when her IQ was determined to be in the 99th percentile, acceleration and enrichment were never considered. With nothing more interesting on the horizon, she resorted to truancy and hanging out at the mall.

Type V: Twice/Multi-Exceptional (2E) Learners

2E Learners' time within the system is focused on their disabilities rather than strengths. Type Vs are frequently



overlooked when using traditional means of identifying gifts because their disabilities or learning differences overshadow their abilities. In other instances, their extraordinary aptitudes mask their struggles and their disabilities go undiagnosed because they appear “average.” In second grade, Alex was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD, and he was already seeing a speech therapist twice a week at school. Although his teachers recognized his creativity, advanced vocabulary, and intellectual curiosity, the elementary enrichment program required high reading skills and time away from the regular classroom. Year after year there simply wasn’t enough time in the day to address both Alex’s special needs and his need for acceleration. Remediation took priority.

Type VI: Autonomous Learners

Autonomous Learners have figured out how to use the education system to create their unique educational paths. Type VIs do not work for the system, but instead make the system work for them (and sometimes in the process wind up changing the system itself!). Like many gifted students, school often seemed uninteresting and irrelevant to Tyler. But in middle school Spanish class, he discovered that he loved languages. No other languages were offered until high school so he found a free online Latin course and took it on his own. He also started a weekly lunch club where he and others could converse in Spanish. By demonstrating his commitment, he gained approval to begin French in eighth grade. He planned his four-year high school schedule to include as many elective language classes as possible. By the time he was accepted at a college with a renowned language program, he was fluent in Spanish, Latin, French, German, and Japanese.

Of course, students may fit into more than one of these profiles and can move between profiles over time as their lives and experiences change. Ultimately, I’ve found that the students most satisfied with school are those on the path to becoming Autonomous Learners. We can help all students move in that direction by teaching them to self-advocate.

FIGURE 1.1 Revised Profiles of the Gifted and Talented*

TYPE I: SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS

FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES	BEHAVIORS	NEEDS	METHODS USED FOR IDENTIFICATION	ADULT AND PEER PERCEPTIONS	HOME SUPPORT	SCHOOL SUPPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are complacent • Are dependent • Have good academic self-concept • Have fear of failure • Have extrinsic motivation • Are self-critical • Work for the grade • Are unsure about the future • Are eager for approval • Have an entity view of intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve • Seek teacher approval • Avoid risks • Don't go beyond the syllabus • Accept and conform • Choose safe activities • Become consumers of knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be challenged • To see deficiencies • To take risks • Assertiveness skills • Creativity development • Incremental view of intelligence • Self-knowledge • Independent learning skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple criteria • Grades • Standardized test scores • Teacher nominations • Parent nominations • Peer nominations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are liked by teachers • Are admired by peers • Are generally liked and accepted by parents • Are overestimated in their abilities • Are believed to succeed on their own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental space • Independence • Freedom to make choices • Risk-taking experiences • Permission to be distressed • Affirmation of their abilities to cope with challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject and grade acceleration • More than AP, IB, and Honors courses • Time for personal curriculum • Activities that push them out of their comfort zone • Development of independent learning skills • In-depth studies • Mentorships • Cognitive coaching • Time with intellectual peers

continued 

Figure 1.1 (continued)

TYPE II: CREATIVE LEARNERS

FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES	BEHAVIORS	NEEDS	METHODS USED FOR IDENTIFICATION	ADULT AND PEER PERCEPTIONS	HOME SUPPORT	SCHOOL SUPPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are highly creative • Are bored and frustrated • Have fluctuating self-esteem • Are impatient and defensive • Have heightened sensitivity • Are uncertain about social roles • Are more psychologically vulnerable • Have strong motivation to follow inner convictions • Want to right wrongs • Have high energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express impulses • Challenge teachers • Question rules and policies • Are honest and direct • Are emotionally liable • May have poor self-control • Have creative expression • Persevere in areas of interest (passions) • Stand up for convictions • May be in conflict with peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To connect with others • To learn tact, flexibility, self-awareness, and self-control • Support for creativity • Contractual systems • Less pressure to conform • Interpersonal skills to affirm others • Strategies to cope with potential psychological vulnerabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer to: In what ways is this child creative? • Domain-specific, objective measures rather than achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are seldom liked by teachers • Are viewed as rebellious • Are engaged in power struggles • Are creative • Have discipline problems • Have others wanting them to change • Are not viewed as gifted • Are underestimated in their success • Have others wanting them to conform • Are viewed as entertaining by their peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for their goals • Tolerance for higher levels of deviance • Freedom to pursue interests (passions) • Models of appropriate behavior • Family projects • Confidence in their abilities • Affirmation of their strengths • Recognition of their psychological vulnerability and intervention when necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance • Rewards for new thinking • Placement with appropriate teachers • Direct and clear communication • Permission for feelings • Domain-specific training • Allowance for nonconformity • Mentorships • Direct instruction in interpersonal skills • Coaching for deliberate practice

TYPE III: UNDERGROUND LEARNERS

FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES	BEHAVIORS	NEEDS	METHODS USED FOR IDENTIFICATION	ADULT AND PEER PERCEPTIONS	HOME SUPPORT	SCHOOL SUPPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire to belong socially • Feel unsure and pressured • Are conflicted, guilty, and insecure • Are unsure of their right to their emotions • Have diminished sense of self • Are ambivalent about achievement • Internalize and personalize societal ambiguities and conflicts • View some achievement behaviors as betrayal of social group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devalue, discount, and deny talent • Drop out of gifted and advanced classes • Reject challenges • Move from one peer group to the next • Are not connected to the teacher or the class • Are unsure of direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom to make choices • Conflicts to be made explicit • To learn to code switch • Support for their abilities • Role models who cross cultures • Self-understanding and acceptance • An audience to listen to what they have to say (to be heard) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Parent nominations • Teacher nominations • Peer nominations (used with caution) • Demonstrated performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are viewed as leaders or go unrecognized • Are viewed as average and successful • Are perceived to be compliant • Are viewed as quiet/shy • Are viewed as unwilling to take risks • Are viewed as resistant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normalization of their dissonance • College and career planning • Gifted role models • Models of lifelong learning • Freedom to make choices • No comparisons with siblings • Cultural brokering • Appreciation for multiculturalism and diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic concepts framed as societal phenomena • Welcoming learning environments • Role models • Help for developing support groups • Open discussions about class, racism, sexism, etc. • Cultural brokering • Direct instruction of social skills • Teaching of the hidden curriculum • College planning • Discussion of the costs of success

continued ▶

Figure 1.1 (continued)

TYPE IV: AT-RISK LEARNERS

FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES	BEHAVIORS	NEEDS	METHODS USED FOR IDENTIFICATION	ADULT AND PEER PERCEPTIONS	HOME SUPPORT	SCHOOL SUPPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are resentful and angry • Are possibly depressed • Are reckless and manipulative • Have poor self-concept • Are defensive • Have unrealistic expectations • Feel unaccepted • Are resistant to authority • Are not motivated for teacher-driven rewards • May be antisocial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create crises and cause disruptions • Are thrill seeking • Have intermittent school attendance • Pursue outside interests • Have low academic achievement • May be self-isolating • Are often creative • Criticize themselves and others • Produce inconsistent work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety and structure • Alternative learning environment • An individualized program • Confrontation and accountability • Professional counseling • Direction and short-term goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual IQ testing • Achievement subtests • Interviews • Auditions • Nonverbal measures of intelligence • Parent nominations • Teacher nominations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have adults angry with them • May have peers who are judgmental of them • Are viewed as troubled or irresponsible • Are viewed as rebellious • Have others who may be afraid of them • Have adults who feel powerless to help them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family counselling • Avoidance of power struggles • Involvement in extracurricular activities • Monitoring for dangerous behaviors • Open dialogue • Accountability • Minimal punishments • Confidence in their abilities to overcome obstacles • Preservation of relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations not to be lowered • Diagnostic testing • Nontraditional study skills • In-depth studies and mentorships • GED option • Academic coaching • Home visits • Promotion of resilience • Discussion of secondary options • Aggressive advocacy

TYPE V: TWICE/MULTI-EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS (2E)

FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES	BEHAVIORS	NEEDS	METHODS USED FOR IDENTIFICATION	ADULT AND PEER PERCEPTIONS	HOME SUPPORT	SCHOOL SUPPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have learned helplessness • Have intense frustration and anger • Have possible mood disorders • Are prone to discouragement • Have poor academic self-support • Don't see themselves as successful • Don't know where they belong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make connections easily • Demonstrate inconsistent work • Seem average or below average • Are more like younger students in some aspects of social-emotional functioning • May be disruptive or off-task • Are good problem solvers • Have behavioral problems • Think conceptually • Enjoy novelty and complexity • Are disorganized • Are slow in information processing • May not be able to cope with gifted peer group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on strengths • Coping strategies • Monitoring for additional disorders, such as ADHD • To learn perseverance • To learn to self-advocate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure of current classroom functioning • Achievement test scores • Curriculum-based assessment • Examination of performance over time • Evidence of declining performance paired with evidence of superior ability • Do not rely on IQ scatter analysis or test discrepancy analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are thought to require too many modifications because of disability • Are viewed as "weird" • Are underestimated for their potential • Are viewed as helpless • Are viewed as not belonging in a gifted program • Are perceived as needing a great deal of structure • Are seen only for their disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on their strengths and accommodations for their disabilities • Development of their will to succeed • Recognition and affirmation of their gifted abilities • Challenges in their strength areas • Risk-taking opportunities • Assurance that college is a possibility • Family involvement • Nurturing of self-control • Information on how to set and reach realistic goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges in their areas of strength • Acceleration in areas of strength • Accommodation for disabilities • Answers to: What will it take for this student to succeed here? • Teaching of self-regulation strategies • Time to be with gifted peers • Teaching of self-advocacy • Teaching of SMART goal setting

continued

Figure 1.1 (continued)

TYPE VI: AUTONOMOUS LEARNERS

FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES	BEHAVIORS	NEEDS	METHODS USED FOR IDENTIFICATION	ADULT AND PEER PERCEPTIONS	HOME SUPPORT	SCHOOL SUPPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are self-confident • Are self-accepting • Hold incremental views of their abilities • Are optimistic • Are intrinsically motivated • Are ambitious and excited • May not view academics as one of their highest priorities • Are willing to fail and learn from it • Show tolerance and respect for others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have appropriate social skills • Work independently • Set SMART goals • Seek challenge • Are strongly self-directed • Follow strong areas of passion • Are good self-regulators • Stand up for convictions • Are resilient • Are producers of knowledge • Possess understanding and acceptance of themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More support, not less • Advocacy for new directions and increasing independence • Feedback about strengths and possibilities • Facilitation of continuing growth • Support for risk-taking • Ongoing, facilitative relationships • To become more adept at managing themselves • A support team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated performance • Products • Nominations • Portfolios • Interviews • Standardized test scores • Awards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are admired and accepted • Are viewed as capable and responsible by parents • Are positive influences • Are successful in diverse environments • Are psychologically healthy • Have positive peer relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for students at school and in the community • Opportunities related to their passion areas • Permission to have friends of all ages • Absence of time and space restrictions for learning • A support team • Involvement in families' passions • Involvement in family decision-making • People to stay out of their way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of long-term, integrated plan of study • Removal of time and space restrictions • Development of multiple, related, in-depth studies, including mentorships • Wide variety of accelerated options • Mentors and cultural brokers • Waiving of traditional school policies and regulations • Help to cope with psychological costs of success • People to stay out of their way

*Neihart, M., and Betts, G. (2011). *The Revised Profiles of the Gifted: A Researcher-Based Approach*. Keynote address; 19th Biennial World Conference of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, Prague, Czech Republic. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

Navigating the System

What information did each of these students need to help them better navigate the education system? How could their paths have been changed?

Jason (Type I: Successful Learner). Jason needed to reflect on his personal interests and passions. By “checking out” during the last semester of his senior year, he was foregoing one eighth of his high school experience, missing the chance to further investigate his interests and interact with knowledgeable teachers, career mentors, and intellectual peers. For him, high school courses and graduation requirements were just a checklist and he had ticked all the boxes. He hadn’t stopped to consider what he was interested in pursuing beyond a diploma. What was he willing and eager to spend time on? What were his passions? What was intrinsically motivating to him? What enriching possibilities already existed in his school and the community? What exciting adventures could he create for himself?

Selena (Type II: Creative Learner). Selena needed to discover more about the system’s rules, the marching band requirements, and the music department policy. For example, why was the policy in place? Could it be changed? If so, who could overrule it? How could Selena prove to the powers-that-be that she deserved a waiver?

Nia (Type III: Underground Learner). Nia needed to determine ways to bridge the gap between school and her cultural community. How could she have multiple role models within her community? How could she enlist these people to help her match her abilities to options her family would approve of?

Katie (Type IV: At-Risk Learner). Katie needed to connect with adult advocates. Who would take the time to hear her story and get to know her? Who had access to records from her past schools and could assure that they would transfer to the next school? Who could help her family discover ways to create consistency when changing schools? Is a residential school a possibility for Katie, so she could remain grounded at least part of the year if her family moves again?

Alex (Type V: 2E Learner). Alex also needed an advocate to help the school focus on his gifts, strengths, and abilities. How could he spend more time with gifted peers? How could the timing of various special services be coordinated? What alternative resources and programming options could provide him access to advanced skills and knowledge despite his reading difficulties?

Tyler (Type VI: Autonomous Learner). Tyler needed to take charge of his own education and he did. In fact, his path exemplifies autonomy and self-advocacy. He recognized his passion for language, understood his rights as a student, took responsibility for bringing about the change he wanted, worked with the adults who could support him, created a practical plan, and followed through with it.

It's important to note that Tyler wasn't always an Autonomous Learner, but provided with the information and support he needed as he worked through the process, he developed skills of self-advocacy and grew toward autonomy. Indeed, armed with basic self-advocacy skills, these students might have sought the help, solutions, resources, and support they needed to flourish.

Four Integral Assumptions About Gifted Students' Self-Advocacy

Regardless of their gifted profiles, gifted learners must begin the process of advocating for themselves, grounded in the following assumptions regarding their individuality, programming options, educational autonomy, and need for self-advocacy instruction.

1. Gifted students need to understand themselves as unique individuals.

Young people are empowered when we help them recognize what makes them different: their strengths and weaknesses, attitudes and interests, pleasures and passions. They may be aware they are different, but they often lack the self-reflection or even the vocabulary to describe the ways they feel different. In the first

edition of their book, *When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers*, Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith list the "Eight Great Gripes" expressed by students they surveyed.⁴ What was number one? "No one explains what being gifted is all about—it's kept a big secret." That struck home for me because I knew that as a gifted coordinator I had not explained to my students exactly what it means (and does not mean) to be gifted. Yes, our district was systematic in identifying students for our gifted program and had communicated with parents what that programming would be and which assessments qualified their child for it. But in some ways, we had a *stealth* program, hoping that by not communicating too much or too loudly about what we were doing, no one would feel left out or raise charges of elitism or ask for something we couldn't provide. It now seems probable that our children and parents alike believed the common notion that *gifted* simply meant you were a good student and scored well on exams. That notion does a disservice to everyone. If, in an attempt to be egalitarian, we pretend that all children are alike, that all are gifted, or that all have the same abilities, then our children will think we're either lying or stupid. They are well aware of their differences.

Jean Sunde Peterson, counselor of gifted students and longtime coordinator of school counselor preparation at Purdue University, noted: "Gifted individuals are no different from anyone else in terms of needing to be heard and validated as a child, adolescent, adult, son, daughter, friend—certainly more than just an achiever, underachiever, delinquent, or star performer. They may even need to have their intelligence validated, because academic self-confidence in underachieving individuals, for instance, may have been eroded over time."⁵ Understanding and accepting themselves as unique learners *outside* of the norm helps gifted students consider their educational desires *beyond* the norm.

Chapter 3: Rights and Responsibilities

provides specifics on what gifted students need to know about giftedness.

2. Gifted students need programming that is matched to their individual learner profiles and geared toward their academic, personal, social, and emotional readiness.

It's not unusual for the public to think of gifted education as giving more to those who already have a lot. But what would have been the future of Olympic medal-winner Michael Phelps if his practice had been confined to his parents' backyard pool? Or if a young Hilary Hahn were required to repeatedly rehearse "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" with the other budding musicians? As a high school English teacher, I discovered that too often the kids who had to work hardest each day in my classroom were those with below-grade-level skills. The gifted kids could whiz through the curriculum without breaking a sweat. That didn't seem fair. I wanted each of my students to work hard, learn something new every day, occasionally risk failing at something they found difficult, and then succeed when supported in their efforts. Gifted learners, like all other learners, can only grow when they are stretched. If they receive good grades with minimal effort, they can come to see themselves as impostors who are not as capable as other people believe them to be. Or they may become addicted to the success of high grades, rather than experiencing the joy of being successful at something they know to be difficult. Or, out of boredom, they may exhibit behavior challenges and therefore be less likely to be perceived as gifted. Without an appropriately challenging curriculum, gifted learners may not develop persistence, study skills, and self-efficacy. They may decide that school is simply something to be tolerated because meaningful learning takes place somewhere else, and sadly, they may lose interest in developing their abilities altogether.

Finding the right fit between student and programming is essential to gifted learners becoming autonomous. But the huge variation in their strengths, interests, learning preferences, and personal characteristics complicates the issue. In her seminal work, *Re-Forming Gifted Education: Matching the Program to*

the Child, Karen Rogers explains the difficulty:

"Educational planning for gifted youngsters . . . is somewhat like high-level negotiation in the business world. In simplest terms, it is matching the child's needs to the school's ability to meet those needs. But such planning is far from simple. And it requires advocacy, diplomacy, and persuasion . . . Such a plan is surely worth the effort."⁶

By matching gifted students' programming to their learner profiles and academic, personal, social, and emotional readiness, we ensure they have the intellectual challenge every student deserves.

Ideas for matching the program to the student as well as examples of successful and unsuccessful attempts are included in **Chapter 5: Options and Opportunities**.

3. Gifted students need to grow toward autonomy and take charge of their own educations.

For gifted students to be challenged, they frequently must go beyond what is offered in the regular classroom. However, even if a wide array of high quality differentiated educational options is available, many gifted kids choose not to take advantage of those opportunities for a variety of reasons. Some fear they may not be successful at more difficult work and their grades may suffer. Others worry that doing something different from the rest of the class might increase the chances that they will be viewed as outsiders. Some are lazy, some unmotivated, and some complacent. It's also possible that the available options are no more rigorous or better at meeting their needs than the regular classroom work. Yet gifted learners remain unwitting captives of the status quo unless we help them take the lead in affecting change. As Rick Olenchak, head of the Department of Educational Studies at Purdue University, puts it: "Regardless of ability level, it seems that youth in our society rarely have the opportunity to take initiative, and their education largely encourages passive adaptation to external rules instead of extending

opportunities for them to explore pathways toward personal fulfillment.”⁷

While we might wish for all students of every ability level to become more autonomous, it’s generally believed that intellectually gifted children are predisposed to it, especially those with a greater internal locus of control—the feeling that control of one’s life rests in one’s own hands. Yet while they may be intellectually ready, many gifted students do not have the information they need to be successful at crafting their own educational path. They need encouragement to drive their own education. When they become the driving force, they have much to gain. They grow to be more independent, responsible learners. They increase their knowledge base and decision-making skills. They develop more positive self-concepts and greater self-esteem. Over time, they move from consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge.

4. Gifted students need specific, direct, and intentional instruction in self-advocacy.

I think it’s fair to assume that educators and parents intend to provide young people with the information they need to be comfortable speaking up for themselves. But our attempts must be systematic, continuous, and specific for our message to come across as clear, consistent, and well-informed.

There are a variety of ways to teach the skills, concepts, and attitudes of self-advocacy—from extensive instructional models to simple ongoing conversations. The most comprehensive example of direct instruction in self-advocacy is found in *The Autonomous Learner Model* (ALM) developed by George Betts, who also identified the six gifted learner profiles with Maureen Neihart. The first of the ALM’s five parts is Orientation, which encourages students to reflect on the concept of intelligence, the ways their school is helping them use their intelligence, and how they can work as partners in guiding their future. The Orientation phase includes understanding giftedness, talent, intelligence, and creativity;



group-building activities; personal development; and school opportunities and responsibilities.

Of course, not every school district is willing or able to adopt the Autonomous Learner Model. But the information acquisition, assessment, networking, and reflection can be achieved in other ways. For instance, it can be incorporated into a continuum of self-advocacy conversations—both individual and small group—that coordinators have with their students beginning in the early grades and continuing through high school. School counselors can include it in mentor/mentee programs, counseling sessions, or college and career planning. Classroom teachers could make it part of their differentiated curriculum. Parents, too, have an important role in this process, either by working in conjunction with the school or, if the district chooses not to encourage self-advocacy, by instructing their children at home on how to make the education system work for them. Key to the success of any method is that we are specific, direct, and intentional about the *who*, *why*, and *how* of self-advocacy.

Chapter 6: Advocates and Advisors details more of adults’ responsibilities in teaching self-advocacy. **Chapter 8: Workshops and Ways Forward** includes several possible methods of delivering information about self-advocacy.