

EMPOWERING UNDERREPRESENTED GIFTED STUDENTS

Perspectives
from the Field

Edited by
Joy Lawson Davis, Ed.D.,
and Deb Douglas, M.S.

PRAISE FOR EMPOWERING UNDERREPRESENTED GIFTED STUDENTS

“As a child, I was told and understood that there was something different about me. I was a little Black girl growing up in a military town in North Carolina with a vocal presence who asked tons of questions about almost everything. Once I was identified as gifted at a young age with a number of my Black friends, I gained more confidence in expressing my academic talents. Little did I know that I was much more fortunate than most Black and Brown children who demonstrate their advanced academic abilities, but never receive the support they need to flourish. Now, as the parent to a beautiful, Black, gifted daughter, thirty years since my time participating in gifted programs, we are still fighting the same social justice battles in gifted education. Not much has changed and we have to do better! *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students* was written to change the tide and help educators support children who are historically underidentified for gifted programs reach their full academic potential.”

—Shawna L. Young, former executive director of Duke Talent Identification Program (TIP) and executive director of Scratch Foundation

“The diversity of our gifted population cannot and must not continue to be ignored. Our gifted students come from a variety of backgrounds and social identities that make who they are, and as such they have unique needs. Advocating for these students and helping them grow into their own powers of self-advocacy is the goal of *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students*. This book is a must-have for families, educators, and counselors who fight daily to ensure that these students are recognized for who they are and for the value of the stories that they bring to our classrooms. We can no longer sit on the sidelines as these students go unrecognized for their academic and social-emotional needs. We must do better; we can do better. This book is an important step on that journey.”

—C. Matthew Fugate, Ph. D., assistant chair, urban education, and assistant professor, educational psychology at University of Houston Downtown, and coeditor of *Culturally Responsive Teaching in Gifted Education*

“Editors Dr. Joy Lawson Davis and Deb Douglas have brought together some of the greatest minds in the field of gifted education to help us empower underrepresented gifted students to advocate for educational justice. Each chapter is rich with the voices of students in their quest toward self-advocacy for equity, access, and excellence. The authors present the most current research and share strategies and techniques educators can use to make their gifted programs more inclusive and diverse. This text is a must-read for every educator!”

—Richard M. Cash, Ed.D., educator, author, and consultant, nRich Educational Consulting, Inc.

“In *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students*, Davis and Douglas have assembled an impressive array of diverse voices to discuss the urgent issue of representation and equity in gifted education. These expert contributors explore the change still needed, consider the challenges and opportunities ahead, and share their own stories of bright students whose talents went unrecognized for too long—and ultimately offer educators the tools and inspiration for empowering historically marginalized students to speak up for themselves and attain the visibility, respect, and education they deserve. I love their emphasis on the importance of self-advocacy. This is a truly timely and important book.”

—Scott Barry Kaufman, Ph.D., cognitive scientist, author, podcaster, editor of *Twice Exceptional*

“This book highlights the importance of empowering minoritized students to use the skills of self-advocacy while also pointing out the systemic and structuralized racism that oppresses students into needing these skills in the first place, just to obtain their very basic rights to an education. The layout of the chapters is ideal for professional learning, whether self-directed or in group settings. Of note, the vignettes help the reader to learn from multiple perspectives, and each chapter has questions that can serve as personal reflection questions or guided group discussion. Teachers, counselors, and administrators seeking to be change agents will find this text illuminating.”

—Angela M. Novak, Ph.D., Diversity and Equity Committee co-chair and Rural SIG founding coordinator, NAGC; Board of Directors, membership coordinator, CEC-TAG; and co-editor, Best Practices in Professional Learning Series

“Every so often, a book comes along that presents fresh perspectives and understandings, reveals hard truths and facts, and offers clear and direct guidance for a wide audience seeking to enact change. *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students* is that book, taking the reader on a journey of the lived experiences of underrepresented and underserved gifted and talented students while simultaneously recommending tools, strategies, and ideas for educators. An absolute must for any personal or professional library!”

—Jeff Danielian, teacher resource specialist, NAGC, and editor-in-chief, *Teaching for High Potential*

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Edited by Joy Lawson Davis, Ed.D., and Deb Douglas, M.S.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the countless numbers of gifted students from communities across America who go unnoticed and underestimated each day. Our hope is that this book will give them an opportunity to have a voice in their education and the resources needed so that their dreams are no longer deferred.

—Joy & Deb

Acknowledgments

As co-editors, we acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Tarek Grantham, whose foreword aptly captures the themes in this important book; all expert contributors; and our Free Spirit editors—Meg, Cassie, and Alison. We will forever be grateful for your dedication to our vision.

—Joy & Deb



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Foreword

Tarek C. Grantham, Ph.D.

Too often, parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, and other education professionals have limited authentic and useful tools to understand and support the needs of gifted and advanced students from underrepresented and underserved populations who are trying to identify and access resources and opportunities to achieve their dreams. I appreciate the opportunity to share this foreword with you because I know your reading this book will be time well spent. I applaud and celebrate the editors and authors of *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students* for answering the call to increase the body of literature on and advocacy for special populations of underrepresented and underserved students. My hope is that your engagement with the content and recommendations in this book will decrease inequities and barriers in gifted and talented education (GATE) and inspire greater levels of advocacy, self-advocacy, and success for all students with gifts and talents, regardless of their cultures, languages, backgrounds, or experiences that may differ from those of the majority of students enrolled in gifted and advanced programs.

Two important perspectives guided my reading and thinking about this book and its contribution. First, as a professor at the University of Georgia in the Department of Educational Psychology, Gifted and Creative Education Program, I reflected on educator preparation programming and professional development in schools. Second, as a father of children identified for gifted education services, I considered ways in which parents and caregivers may connect with self-advocacy and the book's content. Through these perspectives, I aim to offer a view of how the book is organized and to identify some of the highlights you can expect from it. The organization of this book offers an essential framework and guide for you to:

- › empathize with the lived experiences of students with gifts and talents whose accomplishments and goals are often thwarted by institutional and systemic barriers that keep them trapped in patterns of underachievement and in debilitating feelings of inferiority, disengagement, and hopelessness
- › understand self-advocacy and why it is important for underrepresented and underserved students to develop self-advocacy knowledge and skills
- › navigate a GATE system not historically designed for culturally, linguistically, or economically disadvantaged students to fully know about or benefit from their rights to an appropriate, challenging, and meaningful education that empowers them to reach their full potential (Ford et al. 2018)
- › evaluate and apply gifted education models, culturally responsive strategies, and equity-oriented tools to empower students to be proactive in their advocacy efforts with their caregivers or allies and to pursue pathways in the direction of their dreams

As a university professor with over twenty years of experience in higher education, teaching courses in educational psychology focused on preparing researchers, teachers, counselors, administrators, and other professionals in gifted and creative education, I am always searching for high-quality resources to support my instruction and work on equity and excellence in gifted education. It is important to identify resources that are grounded by equity-oriented scholars and professionals who have authentic experiences and success with the groups they advocate for or represent. Often, research reports, books, and literature professing to support the needs of underrepresented populations and groups are produced by well-intentioned but noncredible individuals. This is not the case with the chapters in this volume. *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students* is an important resource that can be used in the instruction of

undergraduate and graduate students and in professional development associated with GATE programs. In addition, it can be a useful supplemental text in teacher/educator preparation programs and in professional learning communities, where case studies of and strategies for gifted and talented learners from underrepresented groups can be examined and applied to school- and community-based field experiences and training.

All university and college professionals in educator preparation programs and all professional development specialists in state and local agencies are governed by national standards and professional principles. For example, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) are leading associations that provide guidance for gifted and talented education. A recent standard-bearer for the design of gifted education services is NAGC's *Pre-K to Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards* (NAGC 2019). The self-advocacy focus of *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students* directly aligns with many of the NAGC standards for student outcomes shown in **figure 0.1**. Instructors and professional development specialists for GATE preparation programs build their instruction using the NAGC standards and can use this book as part of the foundation of their programs.

FIGURE 0.1 Sample of Student Outcomes from NAGC Standards Embedded in *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students*

NAGC STUDENT OUTCOMES	DESCRIPTION
Personal competence	Students with gifts and talents demonstrate growth in personal competence and dispositions for exceptional academic and creative productivity. These include self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, confidence, motivation, resilience, independence, curiosity, and risk-taking.
Responsibility and leadership	Students with gifts and talents demonstrate personal and social responsibility.
Self-understanding	Students with gifts and talents recognize their interests, strengths, and needs in cognitive, creative, social, emotional, and psychological areas. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate understanding of how they learn and recognize the influences of their identities, cultures, beliefs, traditions, and values on their learning and behavior.
Awareness of needs	Students identify and access supplemental, out-of-school resources that support the development of their gifts and talents (families, mentors, experts, or programs).
Cognitive growth and career development	Students with gifts and talents identify future career goals that match their interests and strengths. Students determine resources needed to meet those goals (supplemental educational opportunities, mentors, financial support).
Equity and inclusion	All students with gifts and talents are able to develop their abilities as a result of educators who are committed to removing barriers to access and creating inclusive gifted education communities.
Ethics	All students with gifts and talents, including those who may be twice-exceptional, who are English language learners, or who come from underrepresented populations, receive equal opportunities to be identified and served in high-quality gifted programming as a result of educators who are guided by ethical practices.

continued >

FIGURE 0.1 Sample of Student Outcomes from NAGC Standards Embedded in *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students* (continued)

NAGC STUDENT OUTCOMES	DESCRIPTION
Cultural competence	Students with gifts and talents value their own and others' languages, heritages, and circumstances. They possess skills in communicating, teaming, and collaborating with diverse individuals and across diverse groups. They use positive strategies to address social issues including discrimination and stereotyping.
Communication competence	Students with gifts and talents develop competence in interpersonal and technical communication skills. They demonstrate advanced oral and written skills and creative expression. They display fluency with technologies that support effective communication and are competent consumers of media and technology.

Used with permission. National Association for Gifted Children. 2019. *Pre-K to Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards*. nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/national-standards-gifted-and-talented-education/pre-k-grade-12.

As a father of children who are identified for gifted education services and as a member of several formal and informal parent and family networks for gifted and advanced students from underrepresented groups, I find *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students* to be a great tool for network or advocacy group leaders to engage parents and families of culturally diverse students. Davis and Douglas's well-selected contributors speak to issues faced by parents and families in some of the most adversely impacted special populations of students in GATE. The student stories in each chapter are engaging and poignantly unpacked by leading scholars and professionals who have consistently done the work for equity in gifted and advanced programs. I applaud the authors for their careful and intentional analysis of the experiences of some remarkable students and of the barriers these young people have had to confront.

Parents and caregivers of gifted children or GATE advocates who represent young people with gifts and talents will find the stories of Black, Hispanic, American Indians and Alaska Natives, LGBTQ+, low-income, and other special populations of students and their parents compelling. They will also ponder important questions and recommendations posed by chapter authors and be invited to empathize and take action. Regardless of their own background or connection to the special populations featured, parents, caregivers, and GATE advocates who strive for equity will have an opportunity to connect with the contexts and experiences of students within and outside their own group. For example, as an underachieving creatively gifted Black male, I identified with the disciplinary concerns raised by Lucas's teachers and parents that are presented by the authors

in chapter 6. I also recalled how my experiences and some of my friends' backgrounds were connected to Sam, his single mom, and their grandparenting challenges in chapter 7. Written with credibility and passion, *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students* will guide and ground you and other educators in your individual and collective efforts to empower gifted and advanced students to self-advocate.

Written with credibility and passion, *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students* will guide and ground you and other educators in your individual and collective efforts to empower gifted and advanced students to self-advocate.



Introduction

Joy Lawson Davis, Ed.D.

Harlem

by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes, one of America's greatest bards, shared his poem "Harlem" at a time when the United States was recovering from its participation in World War II, a battle in which it was seen as one of the victors. But although the war was over, the nation was in turmoil regarding the equal rights of all its citizens. "Harlem" was Hughes's examination of the conditions of his life as an African American in a racially unjust society, with the American dream out of reach for so many. It was 1951, and for most African Americans, the dream of prosperity, fair housing, access to healthcare, and equal education was unfulfilled. "Harlem" was considered one of the most influential poems of its time. It was a call for a better understanding of the barriers, inequities, and challenges faced by so many Americans who deserved conditions that would allow them to accomplish their dreams. It shares what potential outcomes may result when others don't believe in those dreams or fail to help in accomplishing them.

Here we are so many decades later, and conditions are much the same. This poem was selected as a foundation for *Empowering Underrepresented Gifted Students* to help readers understand the critical importance of the role of all stakeholders providing support for gifted learners from underserved groups to help them in the fulfillment of their dreams. It is our belief that with the consistent and steady support of parents and educators, and through the self-advocacy of students themselves, more of them will be able to accomplish the goals they set to achieve their dreams.

Current research and practice have demonstrated that gifted learners come from a variety of racial, cultural, income, gender, and geographic backgrounds and may also be neurodivergent. However, the US federal definition of giftedness does not specifically address the unique psychosocial needs of gifted students from these diverse backgrounds. This definition, which appears on the next page, focuses heavily on the academic needs of the majority of identified gifted students, who are typically White and affluent:

"Harlem [2]" from *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* by Langston Hughes, edited by Arnold Rampersad with David Roessel, associate editor, copyright © 1994 by the Estate of Langston Hughes. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (US Department of Education 2004)

For over half a century, the field of gifted education has worked to develop, research, and advocate for appropriate instruction and support systems for our nation's students with high performance and ability across multiple domains. Sometimes these students have been labeled as genius, profoundly gifted, exceptional learners, or high-ability learners as compared to their same-age peers. Regardless of the label used, one very contentious issue has yet to be sufficiently addressed: the systemic underrepresentation of gifted students from racially diverse groups, of those who originate from low-income environments, and of those who may differ from the majority in gender identity, sexual orientation, other exceptional conditions, and language. Collectively, the aforementioned groups are known as “special populations.” As underserved gifted learners, they struggle daily to have their exemplary strengths valued and developed in school settings that are often ill-equipped to support their unique needs and where, sadly, they sometimes even seem to be

invisible. As school programs for gifted students continuously overlook these populations, these students' gifts and talents continue to be underdeveloped and their future potential to become productive and innovative members of society continues to be destroyed, their dreams deferred.

Attempts to address the needs of underserved gifted students have typically been focused on how students are identified for programs and how educators are trained to work with gifted learners (Davis 2019; Ford 2014; Grissom and Redding 2016). Seldom has the conversation about improving education and support services for underserved gifted learners turned to asking students

As school programs for gifted students continuously overlook these populations, these students' gifts and talents continue to be underdeveloped and their future potential to become productive and innovative members of society continues to be destroyed, their dreams deferred.

themselves what they believe they need. The importance of listening to the voices of students has historically been understated. Only recently have scholars begun to focus attention on the power of student voice (Douglas 2018; Simmons 2020). In the past several years, more attention and conversation have focused on the need to teach gifted students to self-advocate, to tell us what their own needs are (Douglas 2018).

Student self-advocacy has the potential to bring the needs of underserved gifted students to the attention of advocates, administrators, policymakers, and practitioners. Hearing about students' lived experiences being gifted, underserved, and overlooked can have a more powerful effect on educators than hearing only from researchers and other adult advocates. Teaching students to self-advocate enables them not only to be a voice for themselves, but also to empower other students to speak up and ask for what they need from education to be able to realize their dreams.

About This Book and Its Definition of Self-Advocacy

To frame our conversations in this book around the self-advocacy of underserved and underrepresented gifted students, we developed a new and expanded definition of self-advocacy specifically for the gifted students who are also part of one or more special populations:

Self-advocacy is the dynamic process that enables high-potential students to claim their right to an education that addresses their unique intellectual, academic, psychosocial, and cultural needs without endangering their self-esteem or that of others. It is a compilation of culturally responsive and inclusive empowerment strategies that open opportunities for positive academic and life outcomes previously precluded for some students due to stereotyping, systemic biases, and limited access to resources.

This definition urges all stakeholders to action, prompting them to engage in creating and supporting dynamic and inclusive strategies that can lead to typically underserved students having their dreams fulfilled rather than nullified or deferred. It sets educators on a new course of action that centers equity-based conversations and program development in student voice. Gifted students are typically the most socially cognizant and sensitive of our student populations. It is our expectation that among this group are those who will, with some guidance, share with educators, parents, and policymakers their specific intellectual, academic, and social and emotional needs.

This book contains chapters that describe our expanded view of self-advocacy and has chapters written by students and expert scholars who specialize in addressing equity in our nation's gifted and advanced learner programs. Chapter one shares the stories of a group of secondary-level students from a specialized school for gifted students in Florida. These students formed an organization to advocate for the need to increase the number of culturally and racially diverse students at their school. Their self-advocacy convinced the school administration to host a forum to discuss the issue of equity so that they could share their stories and discuss why they believed more students like themselves should be able to attend a school like theirs. Other chapters in this book provide descriptions of specific groups of underserved gifted students whose academic and social and emotional needs have not been met in their schools. The expert authors share student vignettes, rooting each chapter in the voices of those we're serving.* At the close of each chapter, authors present key concepts and questions that readers can use to guide their own reading or discussion of the book (whether independently or with a PLC or book study group) and their pursuit of increased equity in their school gifted and talented program. One chapter is devoted to the voices of parents of diverse learners and provides advice to strengthen their advocacy skills.

Intersectionality: Navigating Multiple Worlds

The special populations of gifted students included in this book are also those students whose lived experiences are very often characterized by challenges with converging identities and multiple worlds. These challenges can be framed by the concept of intersectionality. The term *intersectionality* was coined in 1989 by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the overlap of social identities that contribute to the complexity of oppression and discrimination individuals face based on their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic status, or other social constructs. Crenshaw suggests that these unique social identities cannot be examined separately from each other, but only when consideration is given to the impact of the lived condition in each. Earlier, in 1903, Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois articulated his converging experience as a highly gifted Black man in a segregated society as “double-consciousness.” Du Bois described navigating between these two worlds as his constant state of “two-ness”:

*Throughout the book, the authors have used the terms *African American* and *Black* as well as *Latina*, *Latino*, and *Hispanic*. These terms are used interchangeably and varied authors have taken the liberty of using the terminology best suited to their work.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 1903, 3)

Crenshaw's description of intersectionality is an even broader view of Du Bois's double-consciousness. She posits that multiple identities create a more complex sense of self that is constantly impacted by social oppression.

Although the chapters in this book are separated by specific identities, readers must understand the complexity of the intersectional status of gifted special population groups. For example, consider the gifted low-income Black teen who lives in a rural community where many students may not be encouraged to pursue education beyond high school. His intersectional status impacts his life daily and should be considered as resources are made available to increase his self-advocacy. Or consider the twice-exceptional learner whose gender identity poses challenges in the social atmosphere of their school and community. Being twice-exceptional has its own unique traits and must be clearly understood for the student to become a strong self-advocate. Thus, educators and parents who are teaching this student self-advocacy need background knowledge of her disability, giftedness, and gender identity. Native American students with high potential who attend underresourced schools are at a particular disadvantage, as are gifted STEM students from culturally diverse backgrounds who typically have less access to high-level science, technology, engineering, and math courses than students from affluent White backgrounds do. It is recommended that readers, as they review each chapter, keep in mind the intersectional status of the students discussed, as well as that of students at their own school.

For too long, stereotypical beliefs have led many educators to presume that special populations lack the intellectual strengths that White and affluent students possess. Underserved gifted students have very likely encountered bias and even neglect in their education; and beyond missed opportunities, real harm has been experienced. The impact and oppression of racism and discrimination in school and community settings need to be considered when seeking to understand who students are and how they respond to schooling. Listed below are some of the realities and identities experienced by students discussed in this book:

- › Socioeconomic status
- › Language
- › Race and/or culture
- › Twice-exceptionality
- › LGBTQ+
- › Gifted/talented

How to Use This Book

We have intentionally organized the book to provide, up front, a foreword and introduction to help readers understand why self-advocacy for underrepresented student populations is important. We highly recommend that readers begin with those two sections and then read how diverse students respond to the need for self-advocacy in chapter one. After that, we welcome you to read the book in any order that works for you.

Each chapter presents one or more student stories that portray the lived experiences of particular gifted students and their experiences with self-advocacy. Also included in each chapter are recommended strategies and key questions educators may use to target the needs of their students. We urge readers to review and utilize strategies that reflect all of the potentially intersecting identities of their particular student groups.

It is our belief that students' multiple, intersecting voices are the key to securing the attention they so desperately need and deserve in school programs for gifted learners. We believe that arming special populations of gifted students with self-advocacy strategies will move all of us closer to ensuring equity, access, and excellence in GATE and AP programs and empowering these remarkable students to fulfill their dreams.