



Transcript of episode 63, Twice Exceptionality + Cultural Diversity = 3e

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:00:31] Hey there and welcome to episode 63. We're going to be talking today about supporting one of our most vulnerable neurodiverse populations. Students who are both twice exceptional and from culturally diverse populations. Dr. Joy Lawson Davis is our guest, and she will be talking to us about these 3e learners.

We are weathering the current storm along with everyone else and adjusting daily to the new expectations for this upcoming school year. Make sure to join our Facebook group to talk to other gifted parents and educators, just search for Mind Matters Gifted Ed and Advocacy Group on Facebook. You can also find our Facebook and Instagram feeds at Mind Matters Podcast, or we're on Twitter @MindMattersPod. I don't know if you've had the chance to attend any online virtual conferences yet, but I'm finally getting the hang of presenting online and I'm looking forward to the virtual SENG conference coming up at the beginning of August. That's S E N G, supporting emotional needs of gifted. I'll be presenting on executive functioning and gifted and 2e kids. And since it's an online event, geography is no concern. Although it won't be the same since I won't get the chance to meet you and talk to you in person, I would love to invite you to check out the conference. You can find the SENG website at www.Sengifted.org. Up next ...

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:02:29] This is Joy Lawson Davis. I am a passionate advocate for equity in gifted education. I am speaking with you today about twice exceptional students from diverse backgrounds that myself and others have termed 3e.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:02:47] We'll be right back.

(break)

So let's go ahead and bring on our guest. Today we're talking to Dr. Joy Lawson Davis. Joy, thank you for joining us today.

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:02:57] You're welcome.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:02:58] So, you know, Joy, we have been working to get this interview scheduled and happen for months now. It was, we had some, you know, Internet issues. And then of course there was the pandemic and all of these things that it happened, but I feel like this is the perfect time for us to really be addressing these things.

Tell me a little bit about just your background and what brought you to gifted ed. And then what also brought you to understanding these 3e students.

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:03:29] My background in gifted ed, reaches is way, way back. I've been involved in the field as a practitioner, um, as a grants coordinator, as a state specialist for gifted education here in the Commonwealth of Virginia for five years.

I've um, been in higher education as a professor of teacher education and gifted education at, at, um, the University of Louisiana Lafayette. And then later I spent five years at Virginia Union University, which is an HBCU in Richmond, Virginia not far from my home here in Virginia.

And I have written and I have spoken about gifted education. I've served as a national and international consultant, workshop presenter, keynote presenter, I served on the National Association for Gifted Children. I served on that board for about five years. And I continue my work although I am formally retired as of June, 2018. I have continued my work in this field because I am so interested in seeing equity after so many years of inequitable practices and seeing so many children overlooked, misunderstood, particularly children who are African American, Latino, low income and other marginalized groups, and to help other educators as well as parents, family members understand better how to advocate for the needs of these students.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:05:11] I feel like a good place for us to start is by talking about obstacles, because before we even start the discussion about the kids, we're calling 3e, we have to acknowledge how much harder it is for culturally diverse students to even get diagnosed as gifted, much less, twice exceptional.

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:05:28] Oh, absolutely Emily. Again, this is some of the greater work that, that I believe myself and my other colleagues are doing in the field right now. Um, and this is a good time to have these conversations more openly because we're hearing more and more about anti-black racism uh, that is permeating every aspect of our society. And as educators, we see this, uh, and we hear about this every day. Um, the view that black students are deficient, problematic, more illiterate, and looking at them through a deficit lens rather than a strengths lens. The intellectual ability bias perpetuated through the identification protocols that we still use in our schools to identify gifted students. The culturally biased IQ testing, even standardized testing that is not necessarily designed to measure the nonlinear thinking capacity of some creativity, their high levels of compassion and leadership.

When we have these kinds of, uh, systematic and systemic protocols and, um, conditions in place in schools every day, then we know we're not doing the best thing we can do for students of color, culturally diverse, black students, brown students, because they are still being overlooked. And, um, unfortunately when we overlooked them, we under identify them, then that's a great loss of talent, not only to the individual, but to the community, to the world at large.

Uh, the lack of cultural competency training in schools. We're hearing more about it today than we have in the past, but we believe that more cultural competency training needs to happen in schools and in programs where young people are learning how to be teachers of the gifted. So we need to integrate cultural competency, training and gifted education as well. It has happened. In, in many cases in some, in some graduate programs across the country, but not quite enough yet.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:07:48] We've talked before about how students of color often just don't feel like they belong in advanced learning programs because of what really appears to be discriminatory practices in some school systems, and the information about those programs just isn't even making it to those students and parents. Your story about some of those workshops that you've done was pretty shocking to me.

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:08:10] Families will come up to me and say, they'll line up sometimes, and it's really heartbreaking, to say to me that I didn't know about this until tonight. I have other children who were older, who went through the school system. They were just as bright, but I didn't have access, I didn't know much about, the advanced programs that my child could have taken advantage of.

And that is, is it heartbreaking. The word that comes to me, to mind when I think about how it must have felt to those families, when they, the programs are being made available, but often times they don't think the programs belong to them. Often times also, these students are being counseled out of AP, IB honors programs, specialty school programs, by people that work in the school, who will say such things as, you're not, you don't need to sign up for these courses because they're going to be too hard for you. Uh, you won't need them because you're not going on to college. You should be in this general track instead of in this advanced track, these things are still going on in schools today.

The, um, the distribution even of literature, um, around gifted education is not as widely um, it's not being made widely available. So one of the recommendations that I always make the school systems is that they ensure that all literature about advanced programs, gifted programs, be made available in every community. Um, and so that, that information goes out out, whether it goes out online or hard copies or in churches and community centers, uh, we just have to make sure that everyone knows about the availability of gifted education and, um, advanced learner program opportunities.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:10:09] On one of our most recent episodes, we talked about test preparation, and as we were discussing it, I found myself wanting your thoughts on the concept of test prep. Now that you're here, can I ask you to tell me a little bit about that?

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:10:22] The whole idea that in some school districts, and we read about it more recently of what's about what's happened in say New York City, for example, where test preparation has been a great divider, uh, between those parents who have wealth and means, and those who are low income, and because of that, students who have access to test preparation have a greater chance of getting a seat, for example, in a specialty school, the specialty schools, or those schools for high ability advanced or gifted learners. That allowance of test preparation is a discriminatory practice that needs to stop. We just

need to put a stop to it. We don't need to put a stop to gifted programs, but we do need to figure out ways in our districts that we would not allow for parents who have means to give their students an edge, a great edge, over students who don't have means. The practice of test preparation, uh, is egregious it's, uh, you know, is this something that should not be going on in public settings in the United States today.

So those are just a few of the, um, obstacles that keep us from identifying students who come from culturally diverse backgrounds and those from low income backgrounds, and who are just as gifted. Uh, there is no evidence to say that because you happen to be from a certain cultural background would make you more, you know, more gifted than another, there's no evidence.

And so I think that we have a responsibility to insure people understand what these obstacles are and do better, and do better for these students.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:12:09] So let's look at the flip side of this. Those are some of the obstacles that face learners to be identified as gifted. When we talk about 3e students we were also then talking about kids who have a special education or maybe a 504 need. So what are some of the obstacles that culturally diverse or economically disadvantaged learners face just for receiving appropriate special education services without giftedness?

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:12:36] Typically there is an overdiagnosis of, of students of color and low income students, uh, for special education, um, programming. However, oftentimes we don't have, uh, adequately trained teachers. We don't have adequate resources, you know, to meet their needs. And again, parents are not as well informed as they should be to make good choices when they go to meetings with educators who design IEP plans or the 504 plans for them.

Um, we also have a tendency to overdiagnose or misdiagnose students, um, for behavior problems. And then they become wrapped up in the discipline system, uh, in our nation's schools. Uh, there is this proportionality in discipline practices and students who, uh, who are overly disciplined are usually just pushed out of school.

And so then we have what has been termed the school to prison pipeline, and we have to be, you know, aware that within that pipeline are the same types of students that we're looking at here, those who may need special education services and in many cases may well be gifted students whose needs are just not being met because they're not being seen as highly able or highly capable.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:14:00] Yeah.

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:14:00] Teacher training, a lack of teacher training, um, a focus again in our field on deficits rather than strengths, and the misdiagnosis, Emily, of high energy, highly sensitive students, uh, as behavior disorder is also a problem, I think. Um, our field, gifted education, has paid attention to the misdiagnosis of students as having disorders or other kinds of concerns or problems. And yet these same students may well be gifted.

Now I know you asked about what are the obstacles, but we do have to look at the intersection of these obstacles, you know, how they, how they cross over and how we pay more attention when it comes to strengths of certain students, but we don't do that with other students. And in doing so, we miss the needs that students have, that if teachers were properly trained and more sensitive to these needs, then we may, um, we may be able to do better.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:15:01] Yeah.

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:15:02] I think the whole idea of not having enough teachers in our schools who look like the students, has become a problem. What we know as cultural mismatch, where teachers who have totally different experiences, backgrounds, are standing before students who are not like them and yet they haven't had enough training to help them better understand their students is, is the norm in our schools. And so teacher recruitment, teacher training, um, just the whole notion that, um, we really have to look culturally at who students are to better understand how to meet their needs.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:15:41] Yeah. What are some of the other ways that, whether it's high expectations or implicit bias, like how do all of those things impact the child's level of success and specifically, how does that impact a 3e student, which we've kind of explained as we've gone through, you know, a child who is twice exceptional, plus they come from a culturally diverse or an economically disadvantaged background?

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:16:04] Let's start with, um, implicit bias. A student, as you mentioned, who was seen every day when they enter school as lacking in the ability to master school subjects, just because of the color of the students skin, the community they come from, um, the teachers misunderstanding of parents and misunderstanding of the community.

You know, immediately the students are labeled. Um, they are seen as a threat to society, they're seen as anything but capable of high performance and creativity. And so they are doomed almost on the beginning of, of their schooling experience. In schools where teachers are unfamiliar with this culture of students and lacking in cultural training, students are at a grave disadvantage for experiencing school success. And as you said, particularly those who may also exhibit behaviors of the student who has exceptional needs regarding a disability. Um, because what happen in those cases is that the focus and the attention for meeting the student's needs will be on the disability, and there won't be any attention paid to the strengths that the student has, they will not become a part of the 2e population necessarily because, um, the tendency in our school, the culture of most schools, is to pay attention to their lack, rather than what their strengths are. Their inability to do things, or their behaviors, the way they may act out, as opposed to paying attention to, um, to where their strengths are, where the sparks are.

You know, if there's a teacher who can see the sparks in these students and see their aspirations and set high expectations for them, they're going to get a different result in the classroom than a teacher who sees anything in this student, you know, anything else, but you know, a spark, you know. Anything, but, um, the creative responses, they take the

responses of the student and then label their student as being a behavior problem, separate the student from all the others, and, um, and not give that student the opportunities.

Um, implicit bias affects the entire school culture. The overly discriminatory practices to the systemic barriers in schools like funding, teacher training, you know, poor resources in schools, and as I mentioned earlier, standardized testing. When we test students to prove them to be deficient rather than to prove them to have no aspirations, what we're doing is saying that they are less than, they have no aspirations or their potential for school success is minimal. And so if that is the culture of the school, then that that's what the outcome will likely be. High expectations, on the other hand, have the opposite effect. When teachers believe students to be capable, and they hold high expectations for their response to instruction, they teach them differently, they treat them differently, they care about them differently Emily, and the outcome is like a self fulfilling prophecy. When they, they want the students to behave as though they're highly capable, gifted, they teach them to think critically and they respond likewise.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:19:25] Right!

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:19:25] So teachers who are trained, teachers who care, teachers who don't harbor those implicit biases, are likely to have better results.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:19:36] So I know that you're writing a book with Deb Douglas, who is one of our past Mond Matters guests, and I'm curious if you can tell us about some of the success stories that you found through that process.

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:19:48] The book is titled, uh, first of all, No More Dreams Deferred. That comes from a very, um, a very popular poem that we are familiar with. And what we have done is we've gathered experts from many different special populations categories. Experts who, uh, work with, do research and write about, uh, black students, who write about, um, native American, 2e, low income students, Latino students, um, families. And, um, what we've asked for them to do is to provide stories for us.

And, um, I was invited when you said stories, I smiled right away because I thought about these kids. I was invited to, uh, come down to the Pineview School in Florida by a student actually, my first contact was from a student who had formed an organization with other diverse students in their school, because they were very concerned that there were not enough students like them in their school. This is a specialized school for gifted learners at the high school level, a very popular school, a very successful school. But these students felt as if, when they look around and they see only a few of them, they can understand why they are not more.

And so they have made a very strong effort to advocate and to bring this to the attention of the school culture, the school community. Eventually I heard from the principal, really a great guy, who made, who, you know, we set up all of the logistics and everything and had me come down for a Saturday symposium, a forum, so to speak, uh, at the school to talk about diversity.

And I met the students who were members of this particular organization who were very outspoken, and each of them had a different story, Emily. And their stories uh, we're about being culturally different. They were about being different because they were 2e, they were low income, and they come in, a couple of them had come in from other locations in the nation whose families actually moved them there just to go to that school. But they also still recognize that I'm the only one here like me, you know, or one of two out of this huge group of students.

And so their stories were so compelling to me at the forum, I did my keynote and then about four or five of those students came up and told their own stories briefly. And by the time they finished, my, my face was awash with tears. I couldn't help myself because I was so taken by their voice, you know, by the fact that they actually, you know, express themselves so well about this whole issue of inequity in gifted education.

And not that I had not heard from other students across the country over the years, because I have. But to hear it all at once and to hear their stories at this particular time that I'm working on this project with Deb, it just, oh, things started coming together in my head. It was like a bunch of puzzle pieces coming together. I said, this is what, this is why our book is so important. And so we invited these kids to actually write a chapter for the book and they did, and were very, very excited about their contribution to the book.

But within the book, we also have other stories. Each of the authors found students or had worked with students that had done research with students in their are different categories. And in the book, they, they tell the stories of these students. It is so important for us as a field to recognize that these students from these different population groups that have been underrepresented, underserved in this field for so long, that we listened to their voices. We need to hear from them to hear how distressful it is to be overlooked. And if you identify you only one of two or one of three in a larger group, and how nobody within that group really understands you.

If you don't have teachers there that are like you, if you go on summer experiences, and then you're the only one who perhaps doesn't have enough money, you know, to go on expensive travel excursions like some of the other students may have. Um, and then when you have opportunities to actually be with students like yourself who are also gifted, how empowering that is.

And so, you know, we can talk about it all day and all night as educators. Well, when we began to listen to the stories of the students, that's a missing piece of this whole puzzle of our advocacy is that we haven't heard enough from the students themselves.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:24:40] How can we bring families into this process for our 3e students? How can we help parents advocate, and how can we help teachers support those families?

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:24:51] Parents need to know, families need to know, that these programs belong to them too. And so as an institution of schooling, we have to change the way we reach out to families to make sure that all of our literature gets out into these

communities to make sure that we invite those families to be a part of the conversation. So that they can contribute. We have to have a different level of respect for them. And, and in contributing, they bring themselves and their culture into the table and so it changes everything. So it's not a situation where one cultural, one group dominates, but it's a mix of, of cultures coming together and sharing.

And we value the experiences, the understandings of all groups, but we need to change, change the way we've done things in the past. We need to distribute that literature into the communities. We need to, um, have families serving on advisory councils. We need to make sure that at every school district the, the communities in the school district are represented fairly. So their advisory councils and committees are demographically representative. It's absolutely imperative that that happens. The demographics of the committee oftentimes will change the way the committee contributes. And then how the board, or how the administrative, uh, group within the school, who's running things, those people who make the decisions, listen, when they know that everyone has a voice, and that it doesn't appear to be tilted or to be, um, a 90% white committee who's representing a district that is only 40% or 30% white and 70% or 60% students of other cultural groups.

We also need to ensure that other individuals besides parents, community leaders, faith leaders, people who know these students in a different way, business leaders, people who own businesses, um, can be, um, you know, involved and engaged in this process too.

Recruiting and training and retaining teachers of color to work with three students is very, very important as well. I know you asked the question about parents, but once those individuals become involved in schools as educators, then we have a better chance for their representation, that voice to be strong enough so that other families will know that they, you know, that they have someone there to speak up for them.

Giving parents information is so important. You know, my first book, *Bright, Talented, and Black*, was a, um, a book written for African American families of gifted students. And in my book, um, I placed a glossary of terms of gifted education terminology. I believe then, and I believe, and I still believe that once families can, can speak to educators the same language and understanding about what this is all about, then there is no, um, no us and them, you know, we all in this together, that were all, um, on an even level. Um, as I say, parents, their families, once they learn the terminology, they can speak toe to toe to these educators, or with these educators.

So when they have a seat at the table, then they start developing. As you mentioned earlier, the IEPs or the 504 plans for the 3e students, then parents would, once they understand the language, then we know that there's a better chance that they can speak more appropriately and feel more empowered, it's a collaborative effort. And I think that collaboration is, uh, very, very important, uh, as we meet the needs of, of these students who are differently gifted and at the same time, that originate from communities where they have been underrepresented in gifted programs in the past.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:29:12] Dr. Joy Lawson Davis. Thank you so much for your expertise and time today.

Joy Lawson Davis: [00:29:17] Thank you.

Emily Kircher-Morris: [00:29:23] It's widely recognized and understood that the typical school is set up for the success of white middle class families. The language of academics may require students to code switch if they are from a culturally diverse family. In episode 50, we talked to Haley Taylor Schlitz about how students of color can face barriers to accessing appropriate educational opportunities like gifted programming.

Think about what that means for our 3e students living in that intersectionality of being gifted, disabled, and a student of color. Twice exceptional individuals face risks that many of us are privileged not to even have to think about. An autistic student who struggles with social communication is at risk of being misunderstood in many situations. But if they're white, they have the privilege of being defined as quirky. An individual of color is battling not only against the disadvantage of their skin color, but also fighting their way through a world that is often, unknowingly, abelist. Awareness is key. Identification is necessary. And support is non negotiable.

We're getting better at recognizing that giftedness is present in all populations. And we have to remember that that means twice exceptionality is too. I'm Emily Kircher-Morris. I'll see you next time on Mind Matters.

(music)

Dave Morris: [00:31:12] Our thanks to Joy Lawson Davis, who went above and beyond to find a good internet connection so we could record this episode. Podcast producers sleep better at night with guests like her. Thanks to the relentlessly generous listeners who contribute to our efforts every month. There are a couple of ways that you, too, can help, through Patreon or PayPal. Go to mindmatterspodcast.com and click 'support' from our menu at the top of the page.

For Emily, I'm executive producer Dave Morris. Thanks for listening. Stay safe. Stay healthy. See you next time.

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