



Episode #178:

**The Davidson Institute on Supporting & Educating
Profoundly Gifted Children**

October 8, 2019

Debbie: Hey Stacy and Jessica, welcome to the podcast.

Jessica: Hello.

Stacy: Hi Debbie.

Debbie: I haven't done a ton of episodes with two guests, but I always think it's kind of fun and a little challenging, but we'll just kind of go with it. I know you both bring different expertise to this. So before we dive into the content, can you just take a minute to introduce yourselves, maybe Stacey, start with you and then Jessica.

Stacy: Perfect, thanks. Um, yeah, so I'm Stacy Hawthorn. I am the director of online programs for the Davidson Academy and the Davidson Institute. I'm currently working on my doctorate in the field of online learning for gifted education. So this is a really exciting job for me because it matches what I'm interested in studying and my research passions as well. I'm also the parent of two profoundly gifted students who are now adults and I've been a gifted teacher before. So I've had this experience as a mom, as a teacher, as an administrator, and it's just nice to be able to see what good education does for our gifted students today.

Jessica: And my name is Jessica Potts and I am an English instructor and the curriculum coordinator at Davidson Academy online. I've been with the Davidson Academy, both brick and mortar and online, for 11 years and I absolutely love working with this population. My PhD is also in gifted education and online learning and it's a neat little niche area that's just kind of now being explored. So a lot of my research centers around that intersection of gifted education and online education. And I'm really happy to be talking about these kids today.

Debbie: And for people who aren't familiar, can you just take a minute to tell us about the Davidson Institute for people who may not have heard of it before and Davidson Academy.

Stacy: So I'll start and then Jessica, feel free to add in anything else. The Davidson Institute was started by Bob and Jan Davidson about 20 years ago or so now. And it is an organization that provides support services for students ages 5 through 18 and their families that have a qualifying score. So we're looking for students that are three standard deviations above the norm on an achievement or an IQ test. And those services include summer programs, family consultants, counseling services. They'll advocate for families to help them find gifted opportunities in their local area, connect other similar families together so that they can do outings, create their own schooling situations and things like that. So it's a completely free program unless you want to attend one of the in person events and there is a cost for that. But the majority of stuff that they offer is free.

Out of that institute, a lot of folks came to Bob and Jan Davidson and asked them, hey, will you start a school? You really understand this population. And so they

entered into a partnership with the University of Nevada in Reno to start a public school for profoundly gifted students, which is the Davidson Academy. It follows the same, it targets the same student population as the institute does. It is completely free public school for students that live anywhere in the state of Nevada and for students that live outside of the state of Nevada and join our online campus, there is a fee to offset some of the costs of running that program. So it doesn't cover the full cost of running that program but it does help offset some of the costs. We do have students in the online campus that live in the Reno area, we have students that live in the Las Vegas area, all of those students attend tuition free because of our situation as a public school with the state. And the online campus has been here for, this is our third full year for the full time online high school. Jessica, do you want to add anything to that?

Jessica: Well, I think you covered the, the vast majority of it. On the school end of it, both the brick and mortar school and the online school, our students have the benefit of being grouped according to their abilities and readiness as opposed to their age or grade. So students who are ready to accelerate past what regular education schools might have allowed them to do, are able to move at a pace that's appropriate for their abilities. And that's wonderful for the students. And it's also wonderful for the teachers because we are able to meet the students exactly where they are and help them to maximize their potential.

Debbie: I had no idea that the Davidson Institute was a free public school. That's incredible. And I imagine, do you have people who move to Nevada just to be able to attend this school?

Stacy: Most do. Most do, yeah.

Debbie: Yeah. That's fantastic. So what I would love to, you know, just as a way to make sure that listeners are really understanding this population we're talking about. Can we talk about, or maybe you explain what it means to be profoundly gifted. I mean, you mentioned three standard deviations either on an IQ test or a standardized test, but tell us more about this particular population and perhaps how it's differentiated from quote unquote traditional gifted or what we more recognize as being gifted in, in most school systems.

Jessica: So, as Stacy mentioned, profoundly gifted students are identified usually using standardized exams. So things like IQ tests or other achievement tests. And when we're talking about IQ scores, there's a lot of deviation in like what that number should be to identify profoundly gifted students. There are some researchers who say that anything over 150 is profoundly gifted. There are some who give a percentage, like for example, one that's, a stat that's cited most often is one-tenth of 1% of the population is considered profoundly gifted. So it's the very, very top percentage. But there is a lot of deviations there depending on who you are talking to. But the thing that we should note is the difference between, like you said, more traditional gifted students and profoundly gifted students is pretty vast. It's as vast as the difference between regular education students and that traditional gifted student. So they are, they are extreme in their abilities. They're able to move at a pace much faster than even regular gifted students and they may have intensities in that they are very, very interested in one thing or

another, whether it's math or science or English. And they do tend to develop asynchronously, so they may have extreme strengths in one area and they may just be in a more regular gifted level for other areas.

Stacy: Yeah. And I want to add two things onto what Jessica just said. So we take a range, both the Institute and the Academy look at a range of IQ tests and achievement tests. And those are posted on our website. It's not just one test that we say identifies giftedness. We also look for students to have taken a test with a, an individually administered test. And that way they get the opportunity to work with a tester or a psychologist that's doing the testing that understands that student a little bit better than in a mass testing situation and can identify the test that's best suited for that student's strengths. So we really want them to have a good testing experience and take that individualized test and we take a variety of them. The other thing that I wanted to add is that we also know that a test score doesn't tell the whole picture of a student.

So both of our applications, whether you're applying for the Institute or the Academy, uses a holistic review of the application. So we'll look at those test scores, we'll look at teacher recommendations, we'll look at different things that the student's interested in. And we also look for any exceptionalities. So we'll look, if a student has a section 504 plan or an IEP plan, we'll take all of that information into account when we review the application. So it's not just do you have a 145, then, you know, yes, you're qualified to be here. It's, it's really what is the whole picture, we put all that together say about the student and where they're performing at. And are they at the level that we would, you know, would fit in with our existing students.

Debbie: You mentioned the, Jessica was talking about the asynchronicities, which I know, you know, that's a trademark for many differently wired kids, especially gifted. And I'm assuming even more so perhaps in profoundly gifted kids. I'm just wondering, are kids more likely to have other sort of, you know, neuro differences, learning disabilities or other differences going on the higher they may be in, in other cognitive abilities? Like is there a connection between those intensities or those other challenges and having a really high IQ?

Jessica: You know, it's not my area of expertise, so I don't think I could give you some solid numbers, but what I could say is that oftentimes with gifted students and profoundly gifted students, we don't see some of those twice exceptional challenges until the students have been properly challenged academically. So students who do have some, twice exceptionality could do an excellent job in a regular education setting or even in, you know, a traditional gifted education setting, their atypicalities might not show up. However, once we do get students into places where they are extremely challenged, if there are any atypicalities they might, they might become more apparent. I don't know if it's more, more likely to show up in this profoundly gifted range. Stacy, maybe you have some better numbers on that.

Stacy: Yep. So I had two things. One, I can't give a generalized number. I can tell you that with our admissions process and with our students, currently about 20% of those students that we have at the online campus we would consider 2e

students. So it's about 20%. And very early on in my gifted teaching career, I attended a professional development session on that. And I, I wish I could remember her name cause I would love to give her credit on your podcast, but I don't remember, it was a long time ago. But I attended a workshop from a psychologist who specialized in working with gifted adults. And one of the things that I learned from that workshop that really stuck with me is people that are gifted, children, adults, you know, that giftedness is essentially by a really broad definition a disability. Your brain is wired differently. There just happens to be a really good upside.

If somebody was the same number of standard deviations below the norm, you know, you would definitely provide support services for them. But one of the, but her point in saying that was, it's unrealistic for us to expect just because there's this huge positive benefit of how your brain is wired differently, that there isn't some kind of, you know, other anomaly that goes along with it. So whether that's an over excitability, you know, some kind of autism, some other exceptionality that's not as, that doesn't have as good of a positive side to it. So, once I heard her talk it really helped me to understand like, okay, giftedness isn't like, oh, you won the genetic lottery. It's your brain is wired differently and there's this really good positive side to it, but it's unrealistic for us to expect that that's all there is because the brain is wired differently than the quote unquote norm.

Debbie: Yeah. I remember, and I've shared this with listeners in a previous episode, but I remember the first time a parent coach said to me that giftedness is a special need in its own right. And that was, I'd never thought of it that way before. But I, I also think that is an aspect that a lot of parents may not get understanding from other parents about because there is this, you know, stigma for lack of a better word, against even the label gifted and certainly profoundly gifted I'm sure elicits many an eye roll. So can you talk a little bit about that?

Stacy: Oh, I can, if you don't mind me starting, Jessica. We should, we just had a, we have a retreat every summer for our online students. So the ones that want to come in, they come into Reno, they spend the weekend, we get to know each other, we have just a really good time. And we went to a pizza place here in town for dinner one night and we had pre-ordered our food, cause there's a group of 30 of us come in and I got up to the front of the line to pay and I paid with my credit card and it says Davidson Academy on it. And the gentleman that was helping us from the other side of the counter said, oh, I've seen the Davidson Academy here. What is it? And I said, well, it's a public school for profoundly gifted students. And he responded back to me and said, well, we certainly need more of that in our society today.

And there was a couple that was standing next to me on my side of the counter, and the woman rolled her eyes and said, that's the last thing we need anymore. And I looked at her and I said, well, would you say that if there was a school for students with disabilities that needed special education because they weren't able to access the general curriculum? And she said, no, that's very different. No, it's not different. It's exactly. And so it really frustrated me and I, I felt like I needed to try to educate her just a little bit because I'm in there with 25 of our students and their parents and we're all having pizza. And she said, that's the last

thing these kids need. And it really is, you know, you wouldn't deny a type of education that brings students up to, that meets them at their level, on a special education side of the continuum. So why is it elitist to do that on the gifted end of the spectrum? You know, giftedness doesn't just fall, you know, to rich white kids' parents, you know, children, it crosses all boundaries. It crosses gender, it crosses race. We need to do a better job of identifying giftedness in more diverse areas than a lot of schools do. But it's not just, you know, an elitist privilege. It can happen to anybody just like anybody, you know, could have a student that has a disability.

Jessica: Yeah. Yeah, Stacy, you bring up the word elitist and we do hear that bandied about quite a bit when we're talking about gifted education, unfortunately. But as both of you have pointed out, this is a neuro atypicality and a lot of times funding for gifted education is housed under the same umbrella as special ed. So where the money goes, I mean we can guess where the money is going to go. It's usually going to wind up heading towards special education classes and special education needs. However, if we take a look at the Individuals With Disability Education Act, this act stated that special education students are entitled to a free and appropriate public education. And if gifted students are considered under that same umbrella as special ed students and they use this same funding, then they too are entitled to a free and appropriate public education. And right now in most public education settings, the education that gifted students are getting is not appropriate. It's that, I mean free is obviously important, but the, the big important letter is the A. It's appropriate. So we have to find educational settings that are appropriate, appropriate for these kids. It's their right under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act.

Stacy: Yeah. And we have a student, we have several students, not just a student, but we have one who came to us and at his local school, the highest level math that they would let him take because of his age was geometry. And at the time he was 12 just turning 13 and like Jessica said early on, we do all of our placements based on ability, not on age or grade or anything like that. And so we let him take placement tests and he ended up placing into our advanced calculus course. And by the age of 13 he scored fives on both the AP calculus exams and he scored fives on the physics C exams, AP exams as well. But had he stayed at his local school, they would have said, no, you need to be in geometry. Well clearly he didn't need to be in geometry.

Debbie: Exactly. Yeah. Well you know, hearing your, your stories, I just pulled up an article that just came out here. I'm, I'm talking to you from New York city and there was a controversial plan just announced earlier this week to eliminate all gifted and talented programs on kindergarten, middle school and high schools to try to address some of the inequality problems happening throughout the school system. But you know what you just said about the, the calculus example, it shows, you know, really what these kids need and what they would be missing out on. Can you talk a little bit more about the unique challenges when it comes to educating profoundly gifted kids?

Jessica: Okay. Yeah. Being one of the classroom teachers, I can say that when you first come into a classroom with profoundly gifted students, it can be a little

intimidating cause these guys are super quick. They're obviously very smart and they're very eager to learn. Some of them who are coming into these situations for the first time are hungry for knowledge. They're, they're so eager to be able to work with their intellectual peers. And so you have to figure out what kind of pacing is appropriate for them. You have to find out what they already know. And because they do tend to move very quickly and they have interests that are, that are kind of divergent, you have to also find out if there's any holes in their understanding, and work to fill those in. So one of the things that we do at Davidson Academy and Davidson Academy online is we have a diagnostic period at the beginning of the school year.

So the first two to three weeks of the school year are a chance for us to get to know our students as individuals, get to see what their education has been like, what they know how to do already. Like, can we bypass some things, so we have the flexibility to be able to do that. Where do we need to slow down and maybe fill in some of those gaps and also what are our students' interests? So if they have specific interests that we can, you know, tailor the curriculum to a little bit, we try to do that. And so after those first two or three weeks, we have a much better idea of what each of our classes look like and these classes will move at different paces. They'll move according to students' needs and we, we check in with our students regularly and see if things need to be altered and see if we can do a better job for individual students. So no two classes are exactly the same. No two classes from year to year are exactly the same. So, I guess that's one of the challenges as teachers is we always have to be assessing and making changes and trying to fit things to the needs of our, of our students. But that's also kind of a blessing because we're able to be creative and be flexible and have a lot of autonomy in the classroom while simultaneously meeting the needs of the students.

Stacy: Yeah. And Jessica, I'll just add one of the other, one of the challenges really with our student population is they're exceptionally bright but not exceptionally, you mentioned earlier asynchronous development, not exceptionally bright in all areas. So for example, you know, I talked about the student that was 13, and, with his calc exam scores and his physics exam scores, he's in a grade appropriate, one of our grade appropriate English and history courses because that's not his relative strength compared to the others. And the other thing too is our students ask a lot of really deep questions, they feel comfortable to ask questions. And so it takes a really special teacher like Dr. Potts who is willing to have students ask questions that she may not always be able to answer. And then lastly, we also have to remember that no matter how intelligent they are, they are still 10 year olds and 11 year olds and 15 year olds and they're going to make those same mistakes and they need that same kind of loving, supportive environment that's going to say, nope, that's, you know, you may be smarter than this adult, but that's not how we address other people.

This is, you know, and so they need some coaching on how to be human beings. Just because they're smart doesn't mean they, you know, have social and emotional maturity. Sometimes they need a little bit of help with that. It's something that teachers always have to remember a lot. I had a colleague come

in to one of the Davidson young summits. She was going to be doing some work with us and I wanted her to meet, you know, our profoundly gifted student population and try to get a flavor for what working with this population was like. And I asked her at the end of the weekend, tell me, you know, what, what are your takeaways? What's the big thing that you learned from this weekend? And she said, the number one thing I learned was nobody changed the words or the tones with which they spoke when a child was in the room. So you use the same vocabulary as if you were speaking to another adult and you didn't change the tone like they were a child, you know, you talked to them what they were intellectually equal. But you also had to understand that, you know, they were going to interrupt you because they didn't know it was, you know, it was socially appropriate to wait until the adult's done talking or things like that. So she said that was her big takeaway.

Debbie: Super interesting. And I can completely relate to that. So I'm wondering, you know, I imagine some of these kids too, especially if they're transferring in from other environments where they probably have always been the smartest kid in the class or really haven't been challenged. Do you get students coming to this school who maybe are fierce perfectionists or maybe are resistant to the, even the concept that there might be a knowledge gap there? And if so, how do you get them to kind of have more of a growth mindset in those areas?

Stacy: Yeah, so my philosophy is if a student is applying to come to Davidson Academy, whether it's the Reno campus or the online campus, something is not working for them in their local education setting. Because if they were getting educated at an appropriate level in their local community and mom and dad can just put them on a bus in the morning and they came home in the afternoon and everything was perfect, they wouldn't be applying to go somewhere else. So I always labor under the assumption that something's not working for them locally. And so that's why they're coming to us. So that tells me that, you know, typically and as a parent, you may be able to relate to this too, Debbie, these parents have had to advocate for every little challenge their students have had. They've had to fight with schools. They've had to fight with teachers.

They've had to justify that their, you know, why their student needs, you know, to go into the next grade level and heard all kinds of reasons why that's not good for their kid, but yet they know what, you know, what it is. So we always approach the situation to try to build trust with that family to establish like, we're in this as your partner. We want to push your student as far ahead as you, as we can but sometimes they want them to go farther than we think they're ready to go. So we've had students, this actually happens most frequently in Texas, not to knock on any single education system. It happens other places that have taken the algebra course there or the algebra two course in the state and passed the teaks and done very well and made an A in that class, but they can't pass our placement exam to get out of that course.

And what we try to explain to parents is this is the first time that all the curriculum is specifically geared to students that are like yours. It's not a general algebra course that they're trying to get everybody through. You know, ours is a very deep course that really studies the philosophy behind the math. The

students understand the why, not just the how to do the math. In our English courses where Dr. Potts instructs there's a lot of critical and analytical thinking skills. It's not just write a five paragraph essay and you know, write a story and and do those kinds of things. And so the biggest adjustment that students have when they first come to us is learning how to be the average student. And we tell parents in the interview process, this will be the worst adjustment that your student has, as for the first time in their life they're not going to be the smartest kid in the room every single minute of the day.

They will be at some point in the day, but somebody else is going to be smarter than them before and after that as well. And so we really try to gear parents up for that and we try to gear them up to understand that, you know, it's okay to work with us and to trust us. We don't want, we're, we never want to hold a student back. But we also don't want to put them in a situation where they're not capable of being successful. So if we do our placements right, and if that diagnostic period works out right, that Dr. Potts was mentioning earlier, then every student should be able to work and achieve to earn an A in that, in the course. But they should have to work and achieve for that. And if they can't get an A then we put them in a course that was too hard. And if they get an A without having to do anything, we put them in a course that was too easy. So that's what that diagnostic period is really about. And once they get through those first two or three weeks, they really start to appreciate that. But it is a tough adjustment those first two or three weeks.

Debbie: I bet. Jessica, did you have anything to add to that?

Jessica: Oh sure. Yeah. I agree with everything that Stacy said and I think it's really prevalent in the English courses. Cause like she mentioned, a lot of these students do not come in with the same level of instruction or the same type of instruction. A lot of students have only been given instruction in creative writing or writing in narratives. A lot of them have never had instruction in analytical writing, which is what we ask them to do. And so when they come in and we're giving them all of these comments on their papers, they're a little shocked because they're used to earning 100% without any comments. And it's just a gold star and an A and you're out the door. So when we're asking them to do something else and to rethink and to revise, it can be a little bit of a shock.

But we are always there with them. We're there to support them. We walk them through everything. They have lots and lots of opportunities to revise. So we're really big on process in this school. Having opportunities to take intellectual risks and to fail well. And I don't mean fail as in like earn an F, but fail as in to like make mistakes and to figure out how to do it better the next time and to revise and to change and to rethink. And there's a couple of different effects, like research effects, that we talk about when we're looking at gifted students shifts into gifted education. The first one is called the big fish in the little pond effect. So these students are always used to being the big fish. They're used to being the smartest kid in the room. And when they shift, they have to, like Stacy said, be used to, get used to being the average sized fish.

But they're swimming with other fish. You can swim at the same pace that they're swimming at. And once students get used to the kids around them, we shift into a different effect. It's called the basking and reflected glory effect. So they realize that everyone around them is also shining and that this is their opportunity to shine as well. And they rise to the occasion. And when we see both of those effects happening in that order, then usually we have a student who winds up quite happy to be in this different pond with a different set of fish.

Debbie: That's super interesting. So I'd like to hear a little bit about the online school. So I'm wondering is that something that's a primarily homeschooling resource or what kind of students are attending that and also how do you replicate the same system? You know, I imagine it's just different being online versus in person.

Stacy: Yeah, it's, it's different and in some ways, we actually have a student that attends the online campus that lives here in Reno and she thinks it's better than going to the in person school, but we have more students that live in Reno. They go into the in person school than online, obviously. But the thing that's really important for us with the online program is one of the research based benefits of gifted education for gifted students is the opportunity to interact with their intellectual same age peers. And that's what's really special when you walk into the Reno campus, you just see this, this whole community of gifted learners just being themselves and really enjoying themselves.

One of our students the first year, when I asked him what he liked about being a Davidson Academy online student, and he said to me, you know, for the first time in my life I get to be myself all day long. Because when he went to another school, he had to pretend to be somebody else during the day so he could hide his giftedness. And so we wanted to really emulate that in the online campus. And so one of the things that's the hallmark of what we do is our online live sessions. So for every single core course, students meet live online using zoom video conferencing with their web camera, with their audio on for three hours a week, two 90 minute sessions, where they're interacting with their classmates and having conversations about the content area so that they really get that opportunity to have that rich discourse and intellectual discussion with an instructor there but with their classmates. Dr. Potts, do you want to talk about what it looks like in one of your classes when you're having a live session?

Jessica: Sure. Yeah. It's, we try our best to replicate, you know, the same kind of practices as you would have in a brick and mortar school. So the students come in, we chat, we socialize, and we get to really know our students. We go over their homework, we're able to help them through questions, we can workshop. So we can break students into small groups where they can workshop each other's papers live on video with their papers right in front of them. We have discussions, we can do debates, we can work through math problems together. We can watch videos, we can do science experiments. Anything that you can do brick and mortar, you can replicate online. The only difference is that you're not in the same space.

So the fixed physical proximity thing is different. And maybe the energy feels a little bit different. But I have to say after teaching online, this is my fifth year online, I do know these students. I, I know them as people. We have jokes, you know, we make jokes together. We know each other's personalities, we know our strengths, we know our weaknesses. It's a real community. And, and I will echo Stacy and say that I think the synchronous sessions are the hallmark of our program. I think it's something that we do better than just about anybody else out there. Students have experienced online classes where there is no synchronous session where it's only discussion boards or chat boards or things like that. And they will say that the synchronous sessions are the things that they like best about our school.

Debbie: Very cool.

Stacy: Debbie, I want to go back and answer the first part of your question 'cause I realized I got so excited talking about live sessions that I forgot that. The Davidson Academy online campus is a full public, it is a public school. We are the same school as the Davidson Academy Reno campus. It is a full time school. The majority of students are home during the day. They're taking our classes full time. We do require a minimum of five classes. They are still doing things in the local community. As much as we love online learning, we do think they need to turn their computer off and get outside as well. But it really depends on the age of the students. Some students if they're older are home alone, I know we have a couple of students that go to work with mom during the day and there's a place at their mom's office where the student can take their live sessions.

Occasionally students can take live sessions if they're traveling somewhere or going between appointments, but we really want them to treat this as if it is their main school and they're in a, a safe standard desk place. You know, whether they have a standing computer or a sitting computer, but there's a quiet place where they call it their school. Students over the years have, we have one student that's painted the walls in his bedroom to Davidson Academy colors so that he has a nice background when he's on his live session and things like that. They'll put different things up behind them, and they do that. And then just this year we, for the first time, have started to offer two a la carte courses. So you could take one of our English courses or one of our math courses and those live sessions happen a little bit later in the afternoon.

So the students could go to another school during the day and then take one of those. But the majority of our students are full time students. The a la carte courses, those single courses, those students are in their own live session. They're actually not intermingled with our full time students. And that's deliberate because our full time students told me that they don't want single core students in there because they spend so much time collaborating with their classmates and they were worried that if a student was just taking a single course, they weren't going to be as invested in their learning and weren't going to be around for clubs and all of those other things that make it a quote unquote real school.

- Debbie: Hmm. That's great. Thank you. Thanks for circling back to that. So if there are parents who are listening to this, and I guess this is a two pronged question. One is if they suspect their child is profoundly gifted, what do you recommend they do? Like how do they start to determine if that's what's going on? And then I'd like to hear also how they can learn more about Davidson and get connected and apply for the program.
- Stacy: Yeah, so the first step is they're going to probably want to get some testing. And sometimes they may take a iowa test of basic skills or a CogAT in their local school and that will give them kind of a baseline to show where they're at. And if they think that there's something there it's worth talking to a local tester or a psychologist. There's lots of testing centers. There are websites where you can Google search, you know, testing for gifted students and find somebody reputable in your area. The Davidson Institute website, which is Davidsongifted.org has some resources for parents on there as well. And then once you have that confirmation, you can apply to either one of our programs. For information on the Davidson Institute, the best way to get ahold of them is info@Davidsongifted.org. And then if you're interested in the Davidson Academy, whether it's the online campus or the Reno campus, I'll give you our easy email address is online@Davidsongifted.org and that would go to me and I can, if you're interested in the Reno campus, I can certainly forward that along. But info@Davidsongifted.org is the Institute and online@davidsongifted.org would be for either the Reno or the online campus if you're interested in more information.
- Debbie: Very cool. And I will, you know, listeners as always, I will include links in the show notes page for this episode so you can easily click through and learn more. I just have one kind of last question 'cause I'm just curious. Assuming the trajectory for these kids is not typical and you probably have some great stories of some of the extraordinary things that these kids are doing and when, when they are supported and are able to share their gifts with the world. So, I don't know, could you maybe share an example of the kinds of things that are possible for a profoundly gifted child when they're supported and able to really thrive and learn the way they learn?
- Stacy: Yeah, I'll share one. We have a student who did his first year with us at the online campus, he's back now for his third year. At the end of his first year, he was around seventh grade by age, his mom contacted me and asked if he could take a gap year. And I was a little taken aback by that cause he's, you know, middle school by age and he's ready for a gap year already. And I said, well, let's, let's talk, what's up? And it turns out that he wrote a letter to a local university where he lives and talked to a professor and told him that he was really interested in neuropsychology and the professor was very impressed by his letter and invited him to spend the summer studying with his graduate students. And so it worked out really well. And so the professor invited him, he's 13 years old, to come back and spend the rest of the year working with his, studying with the undergraduate students for a full year.

And so the mom wanted him to be able to take a gap year to do that because it was such a unique opportunity for him. And we were able to customize his schedule because he started early. One of the things we, we encourage folks if they're gonna, if they're interested in a Davidson Academy education, to start early so that they can do things like this. So he was already earning high school credits because of some of the courses that he was taking. So we were able to adjust his schedule so that he could work at that, work with that professor in that lab. He now has his own research website on the university website. He's listed as an intern for the professor. He's now 14 years old. And so, you know, we were able to do his schedule in such a way that he could continue his university studies but still get his English and his history instruction with us and his math instruction with us.

And so, you know, it was just a really neat story that at 13 he's ready for a gap year, but we were able to help facilitate that. But we, you know, the Reno campus is one of their most famous alumni, you know, was the youngest student ever to build a nuclear fusion or fission. I'm not sure. I'm not a scientist. A reactor in his garage, you know, so those are the kind of kids that we have, but we also have students that do amazing things in music, and art. So it's not just always math or science that our students excel at.

Jessica: I was going to mention that student as well. It's fusion, if I'm remembering correctly.

Debbie: Nuclear fusion. Okay. Just so we're clear. Yeah.

Jessica: Right, right. And he actually earned funding from the department of Homeland Security and The Department of Energy to continue working on nuclear detection. So that's one end of the spectrum. But we've, we have a handful of kids who have earned fellowships, who have Fulbright's and have traveled the world. One of our students is now working for some government agency, I can't remember which, but she's researching China and she's lived, she's lived in China. She speaks Chinese. We have a bunch of students who have visited China and Taiwan and the Koreas and they were able to do some research into these cultures and have learned the language along the way. They're doing amazing things. We have a student who owns a yoga studio. We have one who is in a successful punk rock band. We have some that are, they have their own radio programs. So it's not just fusion reactors and you know, high level mathematics. It's also poets and yoga instructors and linguists. They're, they're out there doing amazing things and they're full, complete, happy human beings. And I'm really happy that we've had an opportunity to be part of their lives.

Stacy: Jessica, I want to tell you, a couple, last year Colleen Harson, who's the director of the Reno campus and I were invited to Los Angeles to have lunch with the academic chancellor of MIT. That was the year that we had four Reno campus students were accepted to MIT, which is unusual for any school to have four students, let alone a school our size and our online program had started. And so he was really interested in how, MIT can help support our online programs and the Academy and what was happening. So he invited Colleen and I out to lunch.

But as we're at the airport getting ready to board the plane, we happen to see that student who did the fusion, at the airport. And Colleen talked to him. And then after a few minutes we realized we were boarding the same plane as that student however he was sitting in first class and we were in coach. Like this is awkward, I'm passing the student as we get on the plane and he's waving at us.

Jessica: He's living the life.

Debbie: I love that.

Stacy: So he's doing quite well as a graduate.

Debbie: Very cool. I love those stories. I mean, I think, you know, and I, I believe this is the case for all differently wired kids. They have such incredible gifts to share with the world. And so it's always inspiring to hear what's possible when kids are again, supported for who they are and they're allowed to learn the way that they learn and to feel good about themselves. You know, to not feel like the aliens in the room, but get to, to be really in a, in their competency and feel secure. So, super interesting. And I'm just grateful for the insights into your work with profoundly gifted children in this population and also for the work that Davidson does. So, again, listeners check out the Davidson Institute. I will have links in the show notes pages, and Stacy and Jessica, thank you so much for sharing all this with us today.

Jessica: Thanks for having us.

Stacy: Thank you.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- The Davidson Institute for Talent Development
- Davidson Academy
- Davidson Academy Online