A Call for Systemic Change in Education challenges current practices. How we define gifted and talented students could evolve to be more inclusive. Gifted students enter our schools with many different colors, shapes, prior experiences, genetic influences and readiness to learn. I have worked with very young gifted students possessing a highly evolved mastery of language and a keen memory. I have interacted with a gifted 5 year-old with a refined sense of moral judgment to such a degree she was plagued by nightmares about the injustices in the Middle East. Seems she was conflicted knowing that God was Love and these opponents fought so savagely. I have worked a number of 2E students who struggle and thrive within their intensities. One could not have labels attached to any of his clothing because that texture was too intense. Another could not go to sleep without touching a sock monkey near his nose. One needed the extended touch of a cool brick wall on his cheek to focus more clearly in math. Yet another, when encountering a block in mathematical challenges, quickly completed a series of cartwheels down the hallway before retuning to the challenge. One high school, ASD student struggled with interpersonal relations and withdrew into a quiet shell. But when he was taught social skills in a group of similar students struggling with the same challenge, he was able to thrive and find success interacting with other groups. Another intense, high performing high school student introduced herself, along with her mom, explaining she was suffering from fibromyalgia and needed accommodations. She pulled a rolling book bag behind her and left class early each hour to avoid bumping into other students and harming herself. Three years into that accommodation, I watched her one morning, between hours, walking to her next class without the rolling cart. She announced to me that a bright, blue light that had filled her vision that morning, and her disease had disappeared had startled her. All of these students were gifted. All these students needed a different education to be challenged. One size fits few.

Gifted students are seldom alike. And often I was surprised. I had just moved to a new position in a different school district and was assigned to the high school. I decided to run proactive counseling groups and started recruiting students. That first week, students sought me out to determine what I was doing there. I explained what I was planning and more students sought me out. An African American, freshman knocked on my door and started telling me about himself. He joined my groups and over the next few years I learned more about him. He lived with his single mother and brother. With his mother’s guidance and demands, he pursued a rigorous academic pathway. At one point I asked him about his younger brother. He was clearly not the same and had chosen a different pathway and it was leading to gang affiliation. We talked about the difference between him and his brother. He told me he knew what he wanted and it was not what his brother had chosen. Three years later, in early fall, he raced to my office to share with me his acceptance letter to UST and his scholarship. Had universal screening been in place in his district when he entered the school system, a primary teacher would have recognized his gifts and talents and gifted services would have been available to him and his gifts would have emerged into talents at an early age.

Another student was introduced to me when her kindergarten teacher observed gifts right away in the fall. We did not have gifted programming at the K level but I connected her to an intermediate teacher and student and we created, “Study Buddies”. This young student was introduced to Inquiry Learning and her buddy guided her through a number of inquiries. I continued to work with her and lost track of her after high school. A number of years later I was having my knee replaced and an intern followed my surgeon into my surgery prep room where I was awaiting the procedure. We looked at each other and she rushed to the bedside and hugged me. She started talking rapidly and telling both the surgeon and I about the “Study Buddies” program she had been involved with during her K school year and told me she still had the first inquiry she did on a shelf in her apartment. We intervened early and made accommodations that impacted her greatly.

I was facilitating an inquiry with a 14-year old male who decided he was coming out saying he was bisexual and identifying his self, as sexually fluid. He had no identifying evidence of giftedness in the form of tests when he entered our program, as he had been homeschooled. His initial inquiry was to provide an argument that would support his decision as being gay. His younger sister provided us test data that she met the requirement of being gifted. This young man’s first inquiry provided evidence of his capacity to dig deeply and examine his topic with a complex lens. He educated his facilitators and his fellow students and soared.

I learned from another student, who brought with him any evidence of giftedness, based on prior performances. He entered school and turned off learning immediately. We knew he was raised in a home with a single mom. He developed few social skills and alienated most of his age mates. Throughout elementary school he was at odds with his teachers and with his classmates. Middle school was no better. He had found little success for 9 years. In that tenth year he was enrolled in a *Woods* course. We discovered he had a highly refined spatial sense and could build with wood. He found success and those performances influenced all his performances in other disciplines. He became a high performing and gifted learner. Universal screening opened the gifted doors and the hidden gift became a demonstrated Talent.

I was introduced to the 13-year old Muslim sister to another 16 year old we had in the program. No prior testing provided any evidence of giftedness. But her older brother had. So we observed her over a couple of days and watched her interactions with other students. We watched her willingness to engage in performances. We knew she was bilingual. We also observed a high level of hyper activity in her daily routines. She struggled to quiet her actions and appeared to be in constant flow. Yet her mastery of her second language, English, was extraordinary. Her first effort at an inquiry was written to showcase her mastery of the English language by reciting a memorized speech on the complexity and inconsistency of the English Language. We found her Talent.

A Vietnamese high school freshman moved into our district. Her parents emigrated to first California and then Minnesota. She was driven to learn and be successful by her non English-speaking parents. They did not understand gift programming. She has lots of home issues and found refuge in our groups for proactive counseling. Over a year later she was soaring in her course work, encountered some challenges with her teachers, but persisted. At the end of that first year, we invited into the gifted program as a sophomore. She connected with like minds and learned more about herself and as successful student. Applied for the college, the first in her family. Four years later she graduated. Nurturing her gifts into demonstrated talents, she was on the correct pathway.