

Article

Managing the Emotional Intensities of Gifted Students with Mindfulness Practices

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Abstract: The emotional intensities of gifted students affect not only their learning, but also the way they live and see the world. This article examines the Theory of Positive Disintegration of Dabrowski to explore the inner world of the gifted. The five levels of development and five overexcitabilities of Dabrowski represent an abundance of physical, sensual, creative, intellectual, and emotional energy that cause inner turmoil but can result in creative endeavors. The benefits of mindfulness practices to meeting the emotional needs of gifted students are presented with examples of deep listening, gratitude, and storytelling as mindfulness practices. A culminating activity of storytelling illustrates the integration of deep listening and gratitude and its effect on the sense of identity of gifted students.

Keywords: gifted; emotion; Dabrowski; intensities; mindfulness; gratitude; deep listening; storytelling

1. Introduction

In the education of gifted students, there is a tendency of educators to focus on the intellectual growth of these students; yet giftedness has a complex emotional component that needs to be addressed. The emotional intensities of gifted students go far beyond feeling deeply about situations; they experience the world vividly, which affects not only their learning, but also the way in which they live and see the world [1,2]. In a presentation in Oviedo, Spain, in 2017, Linda Silverman described how advanced thought processes and complex emotions are held in a delicate balance in gifted students, and that idealism, self-doubt, perceptiveness, excruciating sensitivity, moral imperatives, a desperate need for understanding, acceptance, and love—all impinge simultaneously [3]. This inner world of the gifted can be explored by examining the Theory of Positive Disintegration of the Polish psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski [4]. His work adds essential information about the emotional needs of the gifted.

2. The Theory of Positive Disintegration: Kazimierz Dabrowski

In 1979, Michael Piechowski [5] introduced and translated the Theory of Positive Disintegration to the Anglo-Saxon world and to the study of giftedness in his chapter in *New Voices in Counseling the Gifted* [6]. Dabrowski said the growth and evolution of civilization and culture create more complex problems, which can only be handled by people with correspondingly advanced levels of psychic complexity, and that giftedness is characterized by greater intensity and complexity [7].

The theory of Dabrowski has five levels of development, and people with greater emotional intensity are those who have easier access to the more advanced levels of individual development. These emotional intensities are called overexcitabilities. The overexcitabilities provide a greater innate capacity to respond to stimuli. The five overexcitabilities represent an abundance of physical, sensual, creative, intellectual, and emotional energy, which cause inner turmoil but can result in creative endeavors as well as advanced emotional and ethical development. The five overexcitabilities of Dabrowski are listed with their defining characteristics.

Five Overexcitabilities



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- i. Physical or Psychomotor (OE)
 - Rapid speech
 - Marked enthusiasm
 - Pressure for action
 - Enjoyment of fast sports and games [8]
- ii. Sensual (OE)
 - Enhanced sensory pleasure
 - Keen seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, and hearing
 - Appreciation of beautiful objects
 - Appreciation of writing styles and words [8]
- iii. Imaginational (OE)
 - Facility for invention
 - Facility with fantasy
 - Detailed visualization
 - Animistic
 - Magical thinking
 - Frequent use of image and metaphor [8]
- iv. Intellectual (OE)
 - Curiosity
 - Concentration
 - Sustained intellectual effort
 - Avid reading
 - Love of theory and analysis
 - Moral thinking
 - Development of a hierarchy of values
 - Conceptual and intuitive integration [8]
- v. Emotional (OE)
 - Intensity of feelings
 - Extremes of emotion
 - Complex emotions and feelings
 - Identification with feelings of others
 - Concern for others
 - Empathy and sensitivity in relationships [8]

Dabrowski said emotional OE was the most important of all the OEs because empathic, altruistic people are the ones who could make this world a better place [7].

3. Levels of Development

There are five levels of development in the theory of Dabrowski, including primary integration, uni-level disintegration, spontaneous multi-level disintegration, organized multi-level disintegration, and secondary integration. Nelson (2000) [9] claimed that in Level I primary integration egocentrism prevails, and individuals lack empathy and self-examination, and when things go awry they blame others. In their desire for power, they can be ruthless. Level II individuals are influenced by their social group and have no clear set of self-determined values. In Level III individuals have developed a hierarchical sense of values, and their inner conflict concerns how to live up to these higher standards. They can become depressed and anxious when they perceive they are not living up to the goals they have established for themselves. They can feel inferior to others and dissatisfied.

Level IV individuals are well on the way to self-actualization. They have figured out how to reach their ideal goals, and they are self-aware and autonomous in thought and action. Level V individuals have mastered their personal struggle regarding self and disintegration by the integration of values and ideals. They live in service to humanity

according to the highest universal principles of love and compassion for the worth of other individuals.

The challenge for education is how to provide opportunities for gifted students to engage in meaningful activities that provide academic challenge and stimulation as well as meet their emotional needs. One strategy to meet this challenge is the use of mindfulness practices, which have considerable potential to meet both the academic and the emotional needs of gifted students.

4. What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness Practices?

The benefits of mindfulness for children and students are substantial, particularly for young children. Pre-K programs using mindfulness reported increases in attention and concentration, improved classroom participation by developing impulse control, and enhanced academic performance. Benefits for middle school students included reduced anxiety before testing and increased readiness to learn, as well as pro-social behavior. In addition, teachers reported that mindfulness strategies enhanced their classroom climate and increased their responsiveness to their students [10].

In addition, research has shown that practicing mindfulness can actually change the brain [11]. These changes vary from increased density of gray matter to cortical thickness of the hippocampus, a decrease in cell volume in the amygdala, and enhanced connectivity between brain regions.

Mindfulness practices have positive effects on the executive functioning of gifted students, enabling them to manage themselves and their resources in order to achieve their goals. The executive functioning skills include working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control, and these skills are controlled by the frontal lobe of the brain. One mindfulness strategy that has been successfully used to help gifted students to build executive functioning and feel a sense of connectedness is deep listening.

5. Deep Listening

According to Otto Scharmer (2009) [12] in *Leading from the future as it emerges*, there are four levels of listening, with generative listening described as deep listening. The four levels are: (1) Downloading, in which the listener hears the content and ideas and confirms what the listener already knows; (2) Factual listening, in which the listener listens for facts from the speaker's perspective; (3) Empathic listening, in which the listener listens from the perspective of the speaker; and (4) Generative, in which the listener listens with deep attention to the speaker's behavior, opinions, beliefs, and actions to allow something new to emerge. Level 4 describes deep listening as interactional between the speaker and the one who is listening.

Gifted students with their desperate need for understanding and acceptance and excruciating sensitivity [3] have shared that they often feel their parents and teachers do not listen to them; yet conversely, gifted students often demonstrate what Doell (2003) [13] identified as the two types of listening: listening to understand and listening to respond. Too often gifted students enact the second type of listening, waiting for an opportunity to respond and sometimes missing the speaker's content in their eagerness to share their own ideas.

6. Research on Deep Listening

Heather Plett (2017) [14], a writer, coach, facilitator, and speaker, conducted research by posing a series of questions on Facebook about deep listening. What do you think are the best indicators that someone is genuinely listening to you? What do you think are the indicators that someone is not genuinely listening to you? When do you find it most challenging to listen to another person? She received numerous responses and summarized their answers to her questions in six generalizations.

- a. **Genuine listening cannot be faked.** Outward signals that someone is listening include eye contact, bodily engagement, and good questions, and the speaker needs to have a genuine sense that the person listening is fully present.
- b. **Culture and context matter.** Some cultures do not value eye contact, it can be a sign of disrespect, and when the speaker has a lot of shame or trauma, this requires genuine listening by focusing full attention on the speaker.
- c. **Ultimately a good listener allows the person to whom they are listening to hear themselves.** When we interject questions, interruptions, and too much body language in the act of listening, we pull the person away from the depth and openness of their own story.
- d. **Genuine listening involves stilling your body and mind so that you can be fully present.** Indicators of someone not listening include fidgeting, checking devices, not making eye contact, looking past the speaker, and nodding too much.
- e. **The behavior of the person speaking strongly impacts our ability to listen to them.** People found it most challenging to listen to another person when the speaker was self-righteous, condescending, and not willing to be open-minded.
- f. **Genuine listening requires self-awareness and good self-care.** It is important to pay attention to our own triggers and take time to listen to ourselves first; then we are in a better position to listen to others. Plett (2017) [14] summarized her own thoughts on listening by stressing that learning to listen is a lifelong journey and to be a better listener, you need to start listening to yourself.

7. Benefits of Deep Listening

Roger Allen (2020) [15] in the *Power of Deep Listening* reported ten benefits of deep listening, including:

- Establishing rapport with others
- Building trust and good will
- Deepening our understanding of others
- Learning new ideas and perspectives
- Making it safe for others to open up to deal with deep and not surface issues
- Gaining accurate information for better decision making and problem solving
- Overcoming friction and working through conflict
- Developing shared understanding and consensus
- Affirming, motivating, and empowering others
- Promoting personal and relationship healing

Allen (2020) [15] noted that as you improve your listening skills, people will notice that you are more present and attuned.

8. Deep Listening with College Students

As a professor in the Educational Psychology Department at the University of South Florida, I taught a Group Dynamics class and used the *Circle Way* strategy in which students are seated in a circle and use a talking stick to indicate who is speaking. There were no interruptions or cross talk while the speaker was talking, and the speaker spoke with intention as the group practiced deep listening. The students were enthusiastic about the use of the *Circle Way* and said it created a sense of well-being in their group. They learned to be better listeners with practice in each of the class meetings. The students said the *Circle Way* and deep listening encouraged them to connect, empathize, and truly hear what their fellow students were feeling and meaning. Each week there was growth in the students' ability to use deep listening skills. A list of deep listening skills used in the Group Dynamics class included:

- Making eye contact with the individual speaking
- Putting aside judgmental thinking
- Nodding to indicate you are listening
- Noticing the feelings or emotions accompanying the words

- Paying attention to the speaker's tone and inflection of the speaker
- Listening for meaning
- Empathizing with the speaker

Several of the students were identified as gifted in their K–12 schooling, and they said they would have benefited from having deep listening skills introduced to them, particularly as they moved into middle school with its anti-intellectualization and their feelings of being misunderstood and devalued. Several students in the class were parents of gifted children, and they said they planned to introduce deep listening to their children and to make sure they practiced deep listening with them.

9. Oscar Trimboli

The growing interest in deep listening is magnified in the quest of Oscar Trimboli (2018) [16], the former marketing director of Vodafone and Microsoft, who claimed that although 55% of our time in business is spent listening, it is a skill only 2% really grasp, despite the astonishing costs of failing to do so, ranging from miscommunication to job turnover to loss of sales. He noted the importance of silence and how it is used in high context cultures like Japan, Korea, and China. He said that people ask you to listen, but what they really crave is to be heard. Trimboli has a remarkable quest, he wants to create 100 million deep listeners in the world by 2030.

Deep listening is a powerful mindfulness practice for gifted students, and another mindfulness practice that is essential to meet their emotional needs is gratitude. With gratitude we acknowledge the goodness in our lives, and as a result it helps us connect to something larger than ourselves. As gifted students move from Level III in the Dabrowski theory they can become overwhelmed by not meeting the hierarchy of values and goals they are establishing. Gratitude can be considered to be a social emotion to signal our recognition of what others have done for us [17]. This reminds us that we are not alone in our struggles.

10. Gratitude

Gratitude has been conceptualized as an emotion, a virtue, a moral sentient, a motive, a coping response, a skill, and an attitude, and it is all these and more. Robert Emmons (2010) [18], one of the key researchers in the psychology of gratitude, described gratitude as an emotional response to a gift. It is the appreciation felt after one has been the beneficiary of an altruistic act [18]. Later, Emmons and Sterns (2013) [19] introduced a definition of gratitude that is both worldly and transcendent. In a worldly sense, gratitude is a feeling that occurs in interpersonal exchanges, when one person acknowledges receiving a valuable benefit from another. The transcendent notion is that one has received a personal benefit that was not intentionally sought after, deserved, or earned, but rather because of the good intentions of another person [19]. Emmons (2013) [20] also developed a 21-day program to create emotional propensity.

Ackerman (2020) [21], a prolific writer for PositivePsychology.com, has published four books, including a *Guidebook for Gratitude*. She stated that, with gratitude, we acknowledge the goodness in our lives, and as a result it helps us connect to something larger than ourselves as individuals, whether to other people, nature, or a higher power. Connecting to something larger than one's self is very important for gifted students who value moral imperatives as a characteristic as well as idealism, and they can relate to the practice of gratitude as they connect with others. The positive effects of practicing gratitude can provide the emotional armor gifted students need to meet the challenges of being gifted in a world that does not always ease their path.

11. Two Stages of Gratitude

According to Emmons (2013) [20] there are two stages of gratitude: (1) the acknowledgment of goodness in our life. In a state of gratitude, we say yes to life. We affirm that overall, life is good and has elements that make it worth living. Acknowledging we

have received something gratifies us, both by its presence and by the effort the giver put into choosing it. (2) Gratitude is recognizing that some of the sources of this goodness lie outside the self. You can be grateful to other people, to animals, and to the world, but not to yourself. In this stage, you recognize the goodness in your life, who to thank for it and who made sacrifices so that you could be happy.

12. Practices of Gratitude

Keeping a journal is one way to keep a daily account of gratitude, reflecting on the good things that happen in your daily life and then identifying their cause. Did someone inspire you or provide you with an opportunity to be involved? The reflection on what might have happened in your life had you not received the gift of a positive event is a powerful strategy to understand the power of gratitude. The writing of thank you notes to individuals who have given you time, effort, help, and inspiration is another way to express gratitude and quiet your mind. The benefits of gratitude include the release of dopamine in the brain, making the connection that practicing gratitude also makes you feel good.

13. Research on Showing Gratitude

Emmons (2010) [18] in a *Greater Good* article reported on his research with more than 1000 individuals ages 8 to 80. They reported the benefits of gratitude, including physical, psychological, and social benefits. They included:

- i. Physical
 - Strong immune system
 - Less bothered by aches and pains
 - Lower blood pressure
 - Exercised more and took better care of their health
 - Slept longer and felt more refreshed upon waking
- ii. Psychological
 - Higher levels of positive emotion
 - More alert, alive, and awake
 - More joy and pleasure
 - More optimism and happiness
- iii. Social
 - More helpful, generous, and compassionate
 - More forgiving
 - More outgoing
 - Felt less lonely and isolated [18] p. 2

Emmons (2013) [20] in his book *Gratitude Works* commented on the myriad benefits to the body from evidence-based research on the use of techniques to cultivate gratitude. He said, "Gratitude has one of the strongest links to mental health and satisfaction with life than any personality trait, more than optimism, hope or compassion" [20] p. 9, Wong and Brown (2019) [22], in their research on gratitude, assigned students to three groups. Group one wrote thank you letters to another person every week for 3 weeks. Group two recorded their thoughts and feelings about negative experiences. Group three did not write anything. All three groups received counseling services. Group one reported significantly better mental health in week 4 and even in week 12. Wong and Brown suggested that a combination of gratitude practice and counseling is more beneficial than counseling alone.

Giacomo Bono (2020) [23] and his colleagues conducted research on 2 urban high schools with 6 classrooms containing 152 students who had lessons and activities to instruct them about the science of gratitude. The students were given access to a gratitude web app called *Give'Thx* to express thanks to their classmates and teachers. A control group of 9 comparable classrooms with 175 students did not receive the gratitude program. In addition, 6 more classrooms of 82 students had access to the app during the 6 weeks. All

students filled out a well-being survey after the project ended. Results showed students who received the full program reported a stronger sense of gratitude. Learning about and practicing gratitude significantly improved their social and emotional well-being. The researchers reported that the students who received both components of the program gave thanks more often, more intensely, and to more people compared to students who only used the app. The Bono study provided evidence that when high school students are given opportunities to practice and express gratitude in ways that are compatible with their use of social media it helps them become happier and improves their mental health.

14. Gifted Students Reach Out to Other Students

In the 2021 Texas Governor's School secondary students (Grades 11 and 12) were introduced to the science of gratitude and to the app *Give'Thx* and asked to write three thank you notes each day to classmates and teachers [24]. In their self-reports they listed feelings of being humble, grateful, and caring and a sense of well-being. They suggested making a short list of activities other students could use to realize the benefits of giftedness, and they created a bookmark including suggestions for the students to distribute in their home schools. Their list included:

- Create visual reminders to practice gratitude with sticky notes
- At the end of the day, write down three things for which you are grateful
- Practice saying thank you in a real and meaningful way
- Be mindful of your five senses and be grateful when you use them
- Write one handwritten thank you note each week

Gratitude is good for your body, your mind, and your relationships. Gratitude practices, including gratitude journals that provide feedback on what is being expressed through the practice of gratitude, block toxic, negative emotions and allow you to celebrate the present.

Emmons (2013) [20] said you can cultivate gratitude by making a commitment to simple daily or weekly gratitude practices. Gratitude increases optimism and changes in your brain, and research has shown the benefit of expressing gratitude and its value to gifted students. Another mindfulness practice that is most valuable for gifted students is storytelling, which impacts the identity and self-concept of gifted students.

15. Storytelling

We live events in our lives at least twice, once when the events happen, and the second time when we review those events and organize them into some sort of narrative or storytelling [25]. McAdams stated that people are natural storytellers, ranging from folk tales to reality television, and stories are told or performed in every known human culture. McAdams, a professor at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, has spent over 30 years conducting research on storytelling and narrative identity, and he said through narrative identify, we convey to ourselves and to others who we are now, how we came to be, and where we think our lives may be going in the future. He called this internalized story our own personal myth.

Miraca Gross (2011) [26], a noted educator in gifted education from Australia, claimed that the process of identity development in intellectually gifted children and adolescents is complicated by their innate and acquired differences from age peers. To be valued within a peer culture, gifted students may mask their giftedness and develop alternative identities that are perceived as more socially acceptable. Gross called this a protective mask.

In recent studies, narrative identity researchers have focused on psychological adaptation and development. Research into the relationship between life stories and adaptation has shown that narrators who find redemptive meanings in suffering and adversity construct life stories that feature themes of personal agency and explorations and tend to enjoy higher levels of mental health, well-being, and maturity. These research findings align well with the theory of Dabrowski and the struggle to integrate values and ideals.

16. Stories Can Influence the Self-Concept

Beliefs we hold about ourselves are part of our self-concept, and these beliefs are relatively stable. However, the beliefs we hold as part of self-concept can be altered by self-reflection. In addition, there is research indicating that reading stories of fictional protagonists and their struggles provoke changes in self-ratings. Djikic, Oatley, Zoeterman and Peterson (2009) [27] asked one group of students to read a short story and a second group to view a documentary with the same content, and then both groups completed the Big Five Personality Inventory before and after reading. Students who read the short story showed a greater change in their ratings in the five personality traits of extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, neuroticism, and openness to experiences, than the students who read the documentary control story. Other researchers have found that being mentally involved in stories with visual imagery and emotional affect motivates students to take a mental journey into the world of a narrative, which helps to explain the positive impact of stories [28,29].

17. Techniques to Merge Storytelling and Mindfulness

Marusya Price (2019) [30], an English teacher, shared techniques in *Thrive Global* on ways teachers and parents can merge storytelling and mindfulness. She stated that storytelling is a powerful tool to connect with others, to look deep inside our self and heal. Price used storytelling in her classroom to help students embrace their creativity and imagine themselves beyond this reality. Price used several techniques, including visualization, mindful walks, personification, and hidden smells. Sometimes she would display a beach *visualization* and then ask the students to write a story about a beach trip they may have experienced, expressing their feelings about the trip: what they saw, heard, smelled, felt, or tasted. Then she would ask them to bring a pencil and paper for mindful walking. Before the mindful walk, the students would close their eyes and take five deep mindful breaths, and then walk around a nearby park jotting down what they saw, felt, or smelled and their feelings on the walk. Price invited them to share their notes or to write a story about the trip. In *Personification*, the students bring a favorite toy or object to school, and then close their eyes and ponder questions such as: What material is the object made from? How does it feel? Is it soft or rough? Does it have a particular smell? If this object could speak, how would it sound? When the students open their eyes, they then write a narrative story from the point of view of the object. The students keep connected to the object by holding it as they write their story.

In *Hidden Smells*, each student brings an envelope to school with a hidden smell in it, cinnamon, pepper, ground ginger, lavender, etc. The envelopes are mixed up and each student takes an envelope and smells the envelope without opening it and ponders these questions: What could the smell be? Does it bring certain memories? What people are involved in that memory? What sensations are you feeling? They can touch what is in the envelope and respond to how it feels. Then the students are asked to write a narrative inspired by this smell. Price said storytelling improved self-awareness, sharpened visual imagery, and developed a sense of community in the class.

18. Research on Storytelling

Mello (2001) [31] conducted a meta-analysis of eight studies regarding the use of storytelling as an educational strategy. The studies demonstrated that the literacy of the participants was enhanced in the academic areas of fluency, vocabulary, writing, and recall. In addition, she found self-awareness, visual imagery, and cultural knowledge of others increased.

Marc Kuby (2015) [32] from Winnipeg, Manitoba, described storytelling as a common language that facilitated communication with his students as they heard and understood each other's stories and recognized themselves in the stories of others, no matter how varied the cultural backgrounds. Kuby shared a storytelling experience in which Winnipeg high school students from Newcomer, First Nations, and Settler backgrounds were brought

together to share stories. As they told each other stories, the students came to understand the common challenge of being recognized as individuals with unique identities within their school. This problem was particularly noted in the case of Newcomer and First Nations students. Their stories revealed discriminating practices within the school and community. Having discovered a common challenge, the students wanted to act. They formed into groups of Settlers, Newcomers, and First Nations students, and together chose to act by telling stories to their teachers.

As teachers honored the students' stories, the students began to think and act differently. Kuby summarized the storytelling experience by saying that when we look at the world through the eyes of our students, we can find the way to build classroom communities that turn into healthy, robust, and just places where students can develop their talents. He stressed the importance of placing the cultivation of empathy, mutual concern, and understanding at the top of any list of educational outcomes, and the path to achieving those outcomes can be advanced by the incorporation of storytelling into our practices.

19. Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling uses multimedia tools including graphics, audio, video, and animation to tell a story. Students of today grew up surrounded by digital technology and are routinely exposed to computers, electronic games, digital music players, video cameras, and mobile phones. They are immersed in instant messaging, emails, web browsing, log, wiki tools, portable music, social networks, and video sites, so digital storytelling is a natural practice for them. Smeda, Dakich and Sharda (2014) [33] conducted a multi-site study in Australia at the primary and secondary levels to see if digital storytelling would provide students opportunities to engage in innovative learning experiences. They found digital storytelling to be a meaningful approach to creating a constructivist learning environment and that digital storytelling had the potential to enhance student engagement and provide better educational outcomes for students.

20. How Mindfulness and Storytelling Help Students Heal and Learn

Reach Academy in Oakland, California, represents a great success story of the use of mindfulness and storytelling. Mason Musumeci, a literacy teacher at Reach Academy, was concerned that so many of their students had witnessed high levels of conflict. He described the students as having bodies knotted with feelings of worry and fear, emotions that he knew propelled them into the fight or flight mode. Many had witnessed the death of a parent, experienced emotional neglect and even homelessness. These issues were preventing them from feeling safe enough to focus on class. The faculty reached out to Laurie Grossman (2016) [34], a teacher and founder of Mindful Schools. She came to the Academy and asked the students to close their eyes, and not one of them did so. They just stared at her. Over a period of time the students eventually became comfortable with the mindful breathing and practices, and they loved practicing these mindfulness skills.

The students asked to lead the mindfulness practices themselves. One student took his fellow students through the mindfulness activities and gave them the traditional instructions, "Close your eyes add focus on the breath, see if you can feel your breath in your belly".

The teachers reported that a sense of serenity entered their classrooms after the mindfulness training, and the administrators recognized that mindfulness changed the school climate. The students wanted to write a book sharing their stories, and they worked with Laurie Grossman [34] to create their book. *Master of Mindfulness (2014)* was published, and the students shared their book with another school in Oakland and in classes in their own school. Mindfulness taught the students that they are all connected by way of the breath, and this awareness helped them to feel calmer while strengthening their sense of self and sense of community.

21. The Power of Storytelling to Build Community and Heal Emotional Pain

Storytelling was one of the evening activities of the Texas Governor's School and this year the counselors were amazed at the depth of the stories the students shared with one another. Selected stories included:

I came to the United States with my mother from Mexico and she enrolled me in Liberty elementary school. They placed me in a class with other students who all spoke English and I only knew Spanish. I tried to do the work and even though I didn't speak English, I did my best. I was good at Math and it seemed like the class work in Math was really easy. When they tested us on a State test, I tested at the 90% in Math and they moved me to the Gifted program. It was only then I realized they had placed me in a Special Education class because they thought I was retarded. This hurts me so much to think about it even now and how unfair it was to me.

As she shared her story, a silent tear crept down her face and the other students spontaneously embraced her. The irony is that she was 18 years old and the incident happened when she was 8 years old. However, by sharing her story and receiving compassion from her fellow students, the pain was put aside for the moment. At this point, another student wanted to share her story. She said:

In my first-grade class the teacher asked me to read in front of the class. I told her I could not do that, you see I stuttered really bad. She took my hand and pushed me in front of the group and said, "Now read", I started but stuttered, the words just wouldn't come out. She had me start again, and again I stuttered. She raised her voice and said again. Again, I stuttered and she told me to go sit down. The class laughed at me and I will never forget that day and I wet myself right there in class.

The students all sat quietly, listening deeply to the story, then they hugged her, and the first student who shared her story said, "You were so young just like me to be made to feel so bad". Then one of the girls asked if she could read her story. She shared:

Everyone always refers to my cerebral palsy, what I can do and what I can't do! But my cp is not me, and here I have found no one mentions my cp and I do what everyone else does. I am me and it is ok. I think of my cp as a backpack and I want to put it down. Her voice quivered and the girls hugged her saying we never even thought about your cp. One said, "I thought you just needed extra time to walk to class and I enjoyed walking with you and having time to talk about stuff".

Each evening the girls met with their counselor, and they wrote stories in their journals that they could share with one another, if they chose to do so, or keep their story private. The sense of trust and compassion the students expressed for one another was remarkable. In their self-reports of their experiences in the summer program, storytelling was listed as a high point in their evaluation of the mindfulness practices. The students said they were grateful to share their experiences of pain and humiliation with one another, and then let them go. The deep listening they demonstrated for one another helped them to heal, as well as to form a strong supportive community. Each counselor worked with 15 girls and the groups were called a "family", and storytelling made their families a safe haven for the students [24].

22. Discussion

The emotional intensities of gifted students affect not only their learning, but also the way they live and see the world [3]. The Theory of Positive Disintegration with its five levels and five overexcitabilities, representing an abundance of physical, sensual, creative, intellectual, and emotional energy, help to provide an understanding of the inner world of gifted students and the need to address their emotional needs.

Silverman (2017) [3] described how advanced thought processes and complex emotions are held in a delicate balance in gifted students. The emotional needs of the gifted, including idealism, self-doubt, perceptiveness, excruciating sensitivity, moral imperatives, desperate need of understanding, acceptance, and love, all impinge on them simultaneously. As a result, it is essential that educators and parents find ways to help the gifted

deal with their emotional needs, and research has shown that mindfulness practices of deep listening, gratitude, and storytelling yield positive results in meeting their emotional needs. The three mindfulness practices of deep listening, gratitude, and storytelling can be integrated into discussions and activities with individuals and groups for positive results in self-awareness and understanding of self, which are essential to the full development of gifted children and youth.

23. Conclusions

The emotional needs of gifted students can be addressed by using mindfulness practices, including deep listening, gratitude, and storytelling. The research of Allen (2020) [15] on the effectiveness of deep listening, Ackerman (2020) [21] on positive outcomes of the use of gratitude, and Breen (2015) [35] on how storytelling impacts our identify indicate the positive impact that mindfulness practices have on gifted students by building a sense of identity and helping them to manage their emotions through reactivity, regulation, and reappraisal. Davidson and Goleman (2017) [11] also reported that using mindfulness practices actually changes the brain.

Mindfulness practices can assist gifted students who may be at Level III in the Dabrowski Theory of Positive Disintegration in establishing their hierarchy of values and encourage them to move on to Level IV of Dabrowski and positive integration of their values.

There is growing interest in the use of mindfulness practices to address the emotional needs of gifted students, evidenced by increases in the number of mindfulness presentations at educational conferences and the number of mindfulness publications. These increases demonstrate the recognition that gifted students need assistance in meeting the challenge of their emotional needs.

Students who experience mindfulness practices become strong advocates for mindfulness, as demonstrated by the 5th grade students of Musumeci at Reach Academy in Oakland, California, who published their book *Masters of Mindfulness: How to be your own superhero in times of stress* chronicling their positive experiences with mindfulness. The foreword to their book was provided by Jon Kabat-Zinn, an international leader in mindfulness as part of his life work.

We are living in a time in which there is daily stress and constant accessibility to what seems like an endless flow of news. This nonstop stream of information can be daunting to sensitive gifted students, who need to learn how to withstand the stresses of daily life, and mindfulness practices can become the “emotional armor” they need to successfully cope. Linda Silverman (2017) [3] described the movement through the levels of Dabrowski as a personal journey into higher realms of existence, a journey that enriches the self and the world.

Dabrowski (1972) [7] said that the growth and evolution of civilization and culture create more complex problems, which can only be handled by people with correspondingly advanced levels of psychic complexity, and that gifted people characterized by greater intensity and complexity can use their talents to make this world a better place.

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