

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

### “Ayers All Access” Podcast

*Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation  
Lipscomb University College of Education*

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#### SPEAKERS:

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Dr. Emily Mofield                      Assistant Professor, Lipscomb University’s College of Education;  
Book Author, “*Vertical Differentiation for Gifted, Advanced,  
and High-Potential Students*”

#### FULL TRANSCRIPT:

**Karen Marklein:** Hello. Welcome to the Ayers All Access podcast brought to you by the Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation. This podcast is a chance for us to help you access compelling people, current topics, practical tips, and innovative solutions— all related to the field of education. To find out more about this podcast and all the work of the Ayers Institute, check out our website at [AyersInstitute.org](http://AyersInstitute.org). You can also find us on Twitter and Facebook at @AyersInstitute.

I'm Karen Marlein and I serve as the Director of Programs in the Ayers Institute and Assistant Professor in Lipscomb's College of Education. Thanks for joining us for this 'spotlight' episode focused on differentiating strategies for gifted, advanced, and high-potential students.

Today, we will be talking with Emily Mofield, esteemed author in the field of gifted education and Assistant Professor of Education at Lipscomb University. Emily is a dear friend to the Ayers Institute and we're so happy to spotlight her work in gifted education today. Emily, thank you for joining us.

**Emily Mofield:** So, thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to share about this work, and the Ayers Institute does some great things to build capacity in other educators. So, thank you so much for having me.

**Karen Marklein:** Okay. Well, thank you. So, before we start, why don't you just tell us a little bit about yourself and the nature of your work?

**Emily Mofield:** Sure. So right now, I'm an Assistant Professor here at Lipscomb University, and I've been here for about four years. I co-lead our graduate program in gifted and advanced academics. We have an endorsement program, masters, and Ed.S. I also teach in the doctoral faculty. But prior to that, I worked for Sumner County Schools and I was a gifted education teacher for about ten years at the middle school level. Loved every minute of it. I love teaching middle school. I also taught special education half the day.

But then there was a time I was a leader, to some capacity, over gifted education in Sumner County. So, I love what I do. Also do a lot of research related to achievement, motivation, and perfectionism with my colleague Dr. Megan Parker Peters. But I'm really passionate about creating resources that teachers can

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actually use. I love the research and I feel like there's so many great things we know in our field that need to be put into the hands of teachers to use.

**Karen Marklein:** Thank you, Emily. Your passion definitely comes out. You know, this is not a visual medium, but y'all, she's using her hands. She's so excited. She's moving around in her chair. And so, I can't wait to hear everything that she's going to say today.

So, we're focusing on your most recent book, and that's titled "***Vertical Differentiation for Gifted Advanced and High-Potential Students.***" And then the subtitle is "25 Strategies to Stretch Student Thinking." So, why don't you take a moment and just tell us what prompted you to write this book?

**Emily Mofield:** Yes. Well, I've often been sought out by districts to do professional learning experiences, and I've been teaching in our graduate programs, curriculum and planning for gifted education. And really, I realized, "there needs to be a book of all these wonderful strategies that are out there." And even you, Karen, had reached out to me over the summer saying, you know, "Do you have a recommendation for a resource, a go to guide that I can share with my students?" And really that day I thought, you know, I need to write that book.

And so, really what I've done is I've taken a lot of these strategies that our field knows, but I've played with them— these tried and true strategies— and given them my own spin. And really, I've made this so that regular education teachers, gifted education teachers, can hold something and see explicit examples in various content areas. How to stretch students thinking.

**Karen Marklein:** Okay, well, thank you for that explanation. And it's so inspiring to think you just see the need, you see a gap, there and you're like, "Okay, I'll fill it." You know? So, thank you so much for taking that on and providing us all a resource.

We're definitely going to come back to the book for a deeper conversation. But I wonder first, would you just talk about the role of gifted education? What is the role of gifted education in the educational landscape? And what is the greatest misconception regarding gifted education?

**Emily Mofield:** Thank you for that. That's a great question and helps me zoom out to the whole purpose of what we're doing. So, the role of gifted education in schools is really to make sure that every single child has an opportunity to learn something new. And for many gifted children, they already— if they enter the classroom— already knowing the content that's presented. So, the purpose of gifted education is to provide an avenue so that every student can make progress in their learning. What does that look like for a child to make a yearly growth who's gifted? In second grade but they're at a fourth-grade reading level. We need to make sure they still grow one year's amount of progress. And then for some students, they're going through school 'friction free.' They're just going through they never have to put a lot of thought and effort. And that's going to catch up with them, that's going to lead to underachievement later.

And so, in gifted education, it's really about providing the rigor and the challenge, but also authentic, meaningful, joyful learning experiences so that they stay excited about learning and so that they can reach their potential. Now, I do believe that there are more gifted children than we are identifying. So perhaps that's a misconception. A gifted child is not just— we're not talking about just these children with IQ's of 140. I think giftedness is relative to context. So, you know, if we look at a school where right

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now there may be no identified gifted children: well, that's a misconception. There are high-potential students there, and perhaps their giftedness isn't pulled out yet.

And so, I see giftedness as potential that can emerge. When high-quality curriculum and robust instruction is provided, it reveals talent. And so that's the role I see of these materials that I'm presenting, is 'how can we allow talent to emerge and reveal itself?' Because it could be latent. And until a student has an opportunity to show creativity, we're not going to see it.

**Karen Marklein:** Again, your passion was just so obvious. Thinking about the potential in every child and every child should have that opportunity to really seize that potential, believe in his or her own potential. And so, it's just exciting to think about, you know, these how these resources will help teachers really guide children to reach that potential.

And so, let's go with— Let's think about those 25 strategies in your book. And I know all 25 of them are extremely important, so I'm not trying to minimize any of them. But if you could narrow that list to just the three that maybe could be easily applied? Or just, you know, easily shared conversationally— What would those be?

**Emily Mofield:** Yes. Well, I will explain. All of these strategies are situated in some stretch prompts that I've created. So, I've created ten stretch prompts that take a level like 'analysis' is one of those. And they take 'analysis' to a deeper level. It's a stretch. Or if the teacher is already teaching critical thinking, it takes that critical thinking to another level of decision making and criteria.

And so, the first example that I'll talk through is the "See, Think, Wonder," but I'm calling this "See Beyond." A lot of classroom teachers, they may be familiar with "See, Think, Wonder." It's a Project Zero strategy. If they use Wit and Wisdom in the classroom, it's "I notice, I wonder." And so that's a great instructional strategy, but we can bump that up. So, beyond students noticing the details, "What do I think? What do I wonder?" Which is great. To go deeper, we're going to have students name concepts, make connections, and then apply to other contexts.

So, for example, if students were reading "The Dog and His Bone" (that Aesop's fable), after looking at the details and the thoughts and the questions, they're going to identify these abstract concepts. And I'm telling you, first graders can do this. I have been with kids who can do this. So, what are these fluffy words we can't see in the story? What are these ideas? And the students would say, "This is about greed. This story is about fear. This is about foolishness or regret." And then from there asking students, "Put two of those concepts together in a sentence." And so, they're going to come up with really thoughtful things. And I promise you, first and second graders even do this. But things like greed can lead to loss or ingratitude leads to discontentment. Very thought-provoking statements. And then from those connections, translating it into context. So, "Where do we see greed leading to loss in the real world, here at school, or— you know, on the news?" So, that's one example.

I feel like it's an easy way to bump up what students already do. And perhaps in a group situation or a gallery walk, adding that extra layer can bring it up a notch for the gifted.

**Karen Marklein:** Yeah. So, it's really "See, Think, Wonder" becoming the concept, connections, and contacts. So, we're making those connections. I do have to 'see' and 'think' and 'wonder' in order to make those connections. So, it's a 'bump up' idea.

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**Emily Mofield:** Yes. For sure.

**Karen Marklein:** Okay. All right. Well, what about strategy number two?

**Emily Mofield:** Okay. So, the other strategy that I love sharing is "The Iceberg of Why's." And it's very much related to the "Five Why's" strategy, but it's leading students to arrive at a 'so what' kind of conclusion.

So just to kind of introduce this, I like to think about, well, I have moles in our in our yard. Like moles are just taking over. And so, I ask myself, "Why do we have moles in our yard, but our neighbors don't have moles?" Well, the answer is because we have some kind of little grub worm or there's a food source in our yard. Right. So, it might be easy at a surface level to think, well, let's just get rid of that. But if I dig deeper? "Well, why do we have grub worms in our yard?" Well, because there's a water source, so I'm going to dig deeper. So, what's the next 'why'? "Why is there a water source? Why is there water in our yard?" Because something's happening where water is draining into our yard. So, the root issue is this drainage system. So maybe to really solve the problem, we need to look at our drainage.

Now, in our applying this to students in the classroom, you would take a key question such as, "Why is there an overpopulation of deer here in Tennessee, you know, or middle Tennessee, wherever we are?" And so, students would be able to say, because there are a lack of predators. Well then, "Why is there a lack of predators?" Because their environment is getting smaller and smaller. "Well, why is that? And then, what conclusion can we make so we get to the 'so'?" So, human progress is interfering with natural systems. Now that's deep. You know, that gets to a whole other level related to their study of ecosystems and interdependence.

And I actually use this when I teach doctoral students, when they're writing chapter five. You know, so it's "why" and it goes "because > because > because" and then "so." And so, this is also a great opportunity to dig deeper even into the "Three Little Pigs" or a novel, "The Giver." So, it's a thought-provoking discussion and what a great thing to ask students to do instead of answering chapter questions from the end of the chapter. They could do this.

**Karen Marklein:** The 'why, because, because, because, so.' Okay. All right.

And here's what struck me. You were talking about *digging deeper* and we started talking about *moles*! You know, so yeah, we want to dig. You know, we want the students to be able to dig through those answers so that they are really going deeper in many ways.

**Emily Mofield:** Yes!

**Karen Marklein:** And so, the image of the iceberg really speaks to me, too. You know, you can see what's on the surface, but you really need to get beyond the surface level.

**Emily Mofield:** Yes. The overused image. And so...

**Karen Marklein:** Oh, I don't think so. I think it's great, you know, because it communicates so many great things. We don't want to just stay above the waterline. We need to we need to go deeper with that.

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Okay. So that was number two. How about strategy number three?

**Emily Mofield:** All right. So, strategy number three. I call this "Show You Know Board" and it's inspired from a lot of work I've done in the classroom. And even for myself, I used to have students, you know, do creative things like, all right, you can make a model or you can stand up and do a monologue from the character in your book, or you can make up a song. You know, those fun things. And I think in differentiation, sometimes we think differentiation is providing choices to students. But what I've noticed, even a lot of the 'gifted ed' books I have on my shelf, it stops at that choice. I mean, any child should be able to make up a song or, you know, have a choice to make a newspaper article versus a proposal, right? And so, I thought, you know, we need a structure for teachers to be able to provide options for students, but to make sure we're bumping things up.

So, this starts out with an essential question. You know, good teaching we have or essential question. So, if it's what motivates a character, the product must address that essential question. But then from there, I have three different areas that could be offered to students: a critical thinking prompt, a creative thinking prompt, or a contextual thinking prompt. And these are based on Sternberg's theories of intelligence. There's the rooted in something. I won't go too into that. So, for example, one of the prompts is to 'show how \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ causes or relates to \_\_\_\_\_.' And then in the creative thinking would be show how to improve so that or show a plan for solving showing multiple effects. And the contextual thinking would be okay if this were applied to another context, what would be the same? What would be different? So, when you add that layer to the song or to the model or, you know, the Alamo made out of sugar cubes or whatever it is. This this allows for the deep thinking, the deep creative thinking.

Creative thinking is not– Creativity is not about buying glitter from the dollar tree and throwing it on the poster. The creativeness here is– the creativity is where students have to apply insightful connections or improve something or come up with a new idea. And this is a structure that would just make sure whatever the students are producing is truly rigorous.

**Karen Marklein:** Okay. Yeah. And here's what I kept thinking about when you were describing the sugar cubes at the Alamo. I used to call that 'literary art' in my in my English high-school classroom. Like, it's nice. It's nice, but it doesn't really tell me what you know.

**Emily Mofield:** Right.

**Karen Marklein:** It really doesn't go to the level of, "What do you think now that you didn't think before you made this tombstone of this dead author?" And so, we want to really go deeper with that. And so, it is so important to do that.

**Emily Mofield:** Yes!

**Karen Marklein:** So, thank you for those for those three strategies. Definitely makes me want to read the other 22. So, we will look forward to that!

So, we're talking all about stretching thinking. So, the whole purpose of these strategies and all 25 strategies is: 'how can we get students to stretch their thinking?' I wonder if you could share a story, that kind of epitomizes that stretching thinking or you know, some inspirational anecdote you have about that.

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**Emily Mofield:** Oh, well, sure. So, this spring, I've been teaching my practicum course in gifted education. So, of course, my students who are 'gifted ed' teachers, they are using these strategies in practicum placements or in their teaching. And it was so inspiring— our last night of class, they were all reflecting on how they view strategies. And one of my practicum students said that they had used this idea to connect everything to a big idea: like power in truth (that's another strategy in here) with their first graders. And it in she said it just brought everything up to this whole other level. She didn't even realize her six and seven-year-olds could think this way. And she was receiving emails from parents that their children were coming home and talking about "which is more powerful: telling the truth, or..." I can't remember what else she said. But they were talking about concepts. They were talking about the ideas in stories, not just, you know, what stories were about or facts.

And that really is powerful! Because these little ones, (you know, this is not just for middle schoolers) they were excited to share that and to know that they had become deep thinkers. And for a child to realize that at a young age, that they're capable of that type of thought and they're excited to share that with your parents, I thought that was really, really insightful.

**Karen Marklein:** So inspiring! And to think this little— we've really encouraged all this thinking. And what an impact that's going to have with that child throughout his or her educational career. Thank you for sharing that.

**Emily Mofield:** Sure.

**Karen Marklein:** All right. So, you've mentioned differentiation a few times. Okay. And I do want to, you know— As a former classroom K-12 teacher myself, differentiation can seem very daunting. So, I just wonder what would you suggest as maybe first steps in this big task of differentiation to make it feel like it's manageable? Maybe incorporating a strategy from your book or something else that we've highlighted here? What makes that manageable?

**Emily Mofield:** Well, you don't have to do— You don't have to reinvent the wheel. I mean, and really, differentiation is not just what you do necessarily for these five little children in the class. You're just going to do something different for them. I don't really see it that way. I've created this where you may bump this up for everyone and build scaffolds along the way for students. Or you take what you already do, like the "See, Think, Wonder" that I've mentioned, and most of the strategies that are in this book are 'how to take what you already do and bump it up a notch.' And that's what all of these stretch prompts are for.

Even "The Iceberg of Why's" it's like, I'm sure you're going to ask a why question! But to keep going further. And so, I don't really see this as you creating different things for a group of students in your classroom. It may be that you teach an honors level class and you're pulling a lot from these strategies and you're doing these for all students. I do state in this book that these strategies are useful for all students, not just gifted students. It's just if we are using these with it with gifted, we probably want to pair it with more advanced content to really pack the punch.

So, I would say not to feel completely overwhelmed. To start small, and to think about what you already do and how one of these strategies can fit.

**Karen Marklein:** All right. Thank you. Thank you.

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I love that. Start small, gain some momentum, and see what happens. Thank you so much.

Okay. So, before we close out, I just want to say, what have I not asked you that you want teachers to hear today?

**Emily Mofield:** Sure. Okay. So, you know, I know teachers want a strategy to use the next day. Like you go to a conference like I want to learn what I can use tomorrow. Right? And I do know that these strategies are so important. But I really think what teachers need are frameworks for guiding instructional decisions. And so I do spend a lot of time in this book discussing Hattie's framework of "surface, deep, and transfer learning," because when you understand that and how that fits in the context of "depth of knowledge" (depth of knowledge: 1, 2, 3, and 4), you're able to see how these strategies actually bring surface level learning to deep learning. And you'll understand how, "Okay, this was the DOK 2 task that I've now brought up to a DOK 3 because this strategy is requiring students to justify, explain why and show how different aspects of the content relate and then apply to new context." So, I do want to say that I do think that these frameworks are important and that when teachers are equipped to understanding those, they'll understand why these strategies are so impactful.

**Karen Marklein:** Thank you. So, while you were talking then, I was thinking about we want students to understand 'the why.' So of course. Of course, we want the teachers to understand 'the why.' And it's not just I'm going to use this tool. But what is the framework, the research, that supports this tool. You know, all of the information we have that supports this tool. So very powerful ideas indeed.

**Emily Mofield:** Thank you!

**Karen Marklein:** So, Emily, thank you so much for sharing this information with us today. And thank you for all your work in gifted education.

**Emily Mofield:** Yes. Well, thank you so much for having me. And again, thank you for allowing me to share my passion and everything that you all do to make this happen.

**Karen Marklein:** Thank you. And I know I can't wait to see the book. It's going to be a great contribution not to just the field of gifted education, but in general. You know, as you said, I mean, teachers— all teachers— should be stretching thinking. So, we're really looking forward to getting that resource.

So, how can we? How can we get that book?

**Emily Mofield:** Yes. So, it's available on Routledge Press and also on Amazon.

**Karen Marklein:** All right. So, we'll look forward to that.

And to all our listeners, be sure to check out the show notes for this episode where you'll find links to helpful resources and anything we've mentioned today. I hope you've been encouraged and inspired by Dr. Mofield's ideas today! You can find more episodes of Ayers Institute podcasts at <https://podcast.AyersInstitute.org>, on Apple Podcasts, and anywhere podcasts are found.

Do you have questions about gifted and advanced education? Let us know using the 'Ask a Question' form on the Ayers podcast website and we may feature it in a future episode. Or do you know an author

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