

Twice Exceptional Learners

Issues facing learners from special populations

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Who are twice-exceptional learners?

Students who demonstrate the potential for high achievement or creative productivity in one or more of the domains and therefore ruled intellectually gifted, but are at risk for development due to difficulties in learning, attention or both

They have unique needs and require interventions that speak to both their gift and their challenge.

Like most gifted learners, these are also highly knowledgeable and can think critically, pursue topics and create solutions to problems, but are sometimes overwhelmed by particular learning difficulties that thwart their development and obscure their potential

Needs of gifted learners with disabilities

- ◆ The office of special education programs (OSEP) reported that in the 2020-21 school year 7.2 million learners (15 percent) were served by exceptional education programs
- ◆ This increased from 6.5 million, or 13 percent in the 2014-15 school year.
- ◆ <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=64>
 - PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY
 - TOLERANCE FOR ASYNCHRONY
 - TIME
 - POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS
 - CONSISTENT USE OF A STRENGTH-BASED TALENT-FOCUSED PHILOSOPHY
- ◆ A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.
- ◆ Thirty-three percent of all students who received special education services had specific learning disabilities

4 categories of twice exceptionality

Specific Learning Disabilities- one or more basic psychological processes in understanding or using language spoken or written, which may manifest in disability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do math (dyslexia dyscalcula falls in here)

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) –complex disorder of brain development - affects verbal and nonverbal communication, social interaction

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder - inattentive, hyperactive/impulsive, combined

Generalized Anxiety Disorder – persistent excessive and uncontrollable worry

Categories

- Formally identified as gifted but not having an identified disability
 - *Giftedness masks disability*
- Formally identified as having a disability but not gifted
 - *Disability masks giftedness*
- Not formally identified as gifted or disabled -- components mask one another --neither is apparent
- Poor coordination, dyslexic, dysgraphic, anxious, hyperactive, teased, bullied, misunderstood

Issues facing 2E's

These learners require talent development experiences

These learners deserve learning environments that support their academic, social and emotional needs

The families of these learners should be aware of the unique needs of their children and how to meet them

Teachers and school personnel should be aware of the unique needs of these special populations

Strategies in the past tend to be minimalistic and focus on skill acquisition rather than talent development

Myths surrounding 2E

- The learner is just not trying hard enough
- The weakness should be the top priority
- Needing accommodations invalidates the learner for advanced classes
- They should know better than to do _____
- Don't treat them any differently or they won't assimilate to the class

Identification

- Disability may obscure the expression of the gift/talent
- The intelligence instrument (IQ test) may obscure the gift
- Disability may hide the giftedness so not referred for gifted services or giftedness may hide the disability so overlooked for special ed.
- Given their experiences with feeling “smart” sometimes and incapable in others, they may question their abilities and struggle to understand who they are

What the teacher might see

The start of the school year has already proved quite challenging. I have a new student that shows high interest and ability in math and science. Her level of understanding and problem-solving capabilities are off the charts. So, why the challenge? This student has extreme difficulty with any work that requires writing and reading. So much so that homework, note-taking, and assigned reading are very hard for her to complete. Does she have a learning disability?

- ◇ I wish there was an answer for what is going on with one of my students this year. “Jim” is a bright, highly motivated 10-year-old who enjoys the STEM problems we cover in class. He’s a walking encyclopedia on the planet Mars and recent missions; he’s even designed his own plans for a new Mars rover. Despite this, Jim is extremely quiet and withdrawn, does not seem to have any friends, and rarely looks me in the eye when I try to talk with him about Mars or other subjects.

What the parent might see

Each night, homework ends in frustration, tears, and meltdowns for my middle schooler. It takes her hours each night to complete her homework, when other classmates seem to complete assignments in a fraction of the time. She often seems disorganized or clueless about what needs to be done, and her backpack is a mess. She's very creative and enjoys delving into deep, complex content-- but is having major difficulties when it comes to language arts and math.

- ◇ I've been receiving complaints from the teacher about my son, who is concerned he is distracting and annoying his classmates. She described him as interruptive and rude, often not paying attention. He has a high IQ, but is viewed as a "behavior problem." He has deep interests outside of school, and can engage for hours in topics he cares about. Normally outgoing with a great sense of humor, he is becoming withdrawn and hates school. I wish for more than negative phone calls and emails from the school.

Social and emotional challenges

Several studies show that mainstreamed 2E learners frequently are not accepted by peers in the regular classroom

Identity Development – identity defined by whether or not they are successful

Frustration

Low self esteem

Social isolation

Dependency

Trauma

Gifted- ASD

- ❖ Bill Gates, Albert Einstein, Howard Hughes, Sir Isaac Newton, Vincent Van Gogh
- ❖ Asynchronous profile allows them to succeed in some tasks while being challenged by others. They may excel in academics but perhaps the sensory overload of recess and group projects causes them to seemingly withdraw.
- ❖ https://www.ted.com/talks/rosie_king_how_autism_freed_me_to_be_myself/transcript

Characteristics Gifted vs ASD

Signs of Giftedness *Taken from [NAGC](#) & the [Davidson Institute](#)

- Enthusiastic about unique interests
- Difficulty connecting with same-age peers
- High expectations of self and others, often leading to feelings of frustration
- Rigid rule-following at play time
- Issues with executive functioning
- Greater sensory sensitivity - overexcitabilities
- Impulsive, eager and spirited

Signs of Autism Spectrum Disorder *Taken from the [CDC](#)

- Has obsessive interests
- Has trouble relating to others or has no interest in others
- Has trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings
- May not enjoy pretend or interactive games
- Has trouble adapting when routines change
- Has unusual reactions to the way things feel, sound, smell, taste or appear
- Impulsive, hyperactive and/or inattentive

Attention Deficit Disorders

- Difficulty with concentration, distractibility, impulsivity, disorganization and hyperactivity
- Most tests are observational
- Some characteristics are the same as those for overexcitability
- *There are no definitive biological tests for attention deficit disorders*
- *Stimulant drugs are overused and misused*

Next steps: at school

Creativity and an open mind; flexibility

Acknowledge strengths and build in scaffolding to support weaknesses

Allow learners alternate ways to demonstrate knowledge

Eliminate rote or repetitive work

Social coaching and sensitivity training for the class

Develop emotional self-awareness

Next steps: at home

Parents can serve as advocates by knowing their learner's strengths, weaknesses and learning style
A difference does not equal a deficit

It's important to take a collaborative, not combative approach

Suggest alternate ways for your learner to show mastery, and make the most of the IEP

(be preciously persistent)

Focus on what your learner CAN do rather than can't ... encourage healthy expression

vocalize it and map it!

In conclusion:

Who would appreciate a compliment?

Best practices include:

- ❖ Interdisciplinary curriculum
- ❖ Management procedures
- ❖ Student inquiry
- ❖ Include passion areas either in instruction or self directed study
- ❖ Provide the same services afforded to other advanced learners
- ❖ Rely on student strengths and offer alternate ways – focus on ability
- ❖ Avoid the term “you ‘re gifted” to address behavior problems or areas of weakness

Be loving, caring and understanding

20 things adults need to know- from Gifted Children and how Trauma Impacts Them Laningham, Sadin and Levy

1. Don't use the G word on me (and avoid deficit based language)
2. Your label doesn't help
3. Just because I have the potential to excel at things doesn't mean I want to
4. I am not the tutor or teacher assistant
5. Writing is sometimes hard (emotional task)
6. I may seem lazy but maybe I am just not motivated
7. Just because I am academically mature doesn't mean I am socially mature
8. Just because I am smart doesn't mean I should naturally be organized
9. & 10. Sometimes I just know things- but still need to acquire basic knowledge

11. School is not designed for kids like me, and being gifted does not mean I will like or will automatically do well there.

12. I have passions that I must explore- I cannot explain why I become fixated or why my interests change

13. My brain is motivated by novelty

14.& 18 I am most engaged when I can make connections or see the big picture

15. I need true differentiation

16. Please do not stop me from questioning things

17. I need you to help me think and problem solve

19. I need you to help me manage my time

20. Please take a breath .. I am going to be fine

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