

# Twice Exceptional: when your gifted child has other challenges

Notes from talk given at March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014 meeting of GEAC (Gifted Education Advisory Council) [Updated 5/14/14]  
For further information, contact Carol Lewis at [president@lwsdgeac.org](mailto:president@lwsdgeac.org). website: [lwsdgeac.org](http://lwsdgeac.org)

## Introduction

**“What’s 2e?”** It’s short for **twice-exceptional**, a term often used to describe kids who are exceptional because they’re gifted and because they have learning disabilities, learning disorders, attention difficulties, or just plain learning differences.” Twice-Exceptional Newsletter

Common types of other exceptionalities in the gifted population:

- Specific learning disabilities
  - Dyslexia – reading
  - Dysgraphia – writing
  - Dyscalculia – e.g., difficulty with math computation
  - Auditory processing disorder
- Asperger’s (aka high functioning autism)
  - Difficulty with social interactions
  - Difficulty with transitions
  - Overly rigid, rule-focused
  - May have difficulty with abstracting concepts
- ADD/ADHD
  - Attention, concentration issues
  - Hyperactivity
  - Impulsivity
  - Judgment, ability to evaluate quality of work
- Sensory processing disorder
  - Can overlap with typical “over excitabilities” of the gifted
  - Sensitivity to noise, light, movement, texture, emotional atmosphere, etc.
  - Difficulty concentrating due to sensitivities
  - Handwriting (e.g., grip strength)
  - Might need proprioceptive input (wiggle seat, elastic band)
- Learning “differences” such as Visual Spatial Learning style
  - “phenomenal abilities to solve items presented to them visually or items requiring excellent abilities to visualize” (Silverman, 2013)
  - Traditional classrooms are often taught in an auditory-sequential style
- And yes, a child can have more than one other exceptionality
  - “uniquely exceptional” and ADHD is not uncommon

### Key areas of impairment/difficulty

- Executive dysfunction
  - Planning
  - Organizing
  - Initiation of tasks
  - Completion of tasks
  - Judgment/evaluation of quality
  - Time management
  - Maintaining attention and concentration
- Short term and working memory deficits
- Forgetful/distractible
- Materials management (aka keeping track of things)
- Processing speed
- Output dysfunction (producing work)
- Written expression
- Fatigue and limited mental energy
  - Frequently has difficulty sustaining attention
  - But may be able to concentrate for long periods on areas of interest
    - Hint: let them work in their areas of interest!
- Frustration
- Discouragement
- Sleep deprivation
- Fun deprivation
- Fear of poor quality work
- Fear of increased expectations if do good work

### **What do they need and why?**

The Twice Exceptional Dilemma NEA 2006 <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/twiceexceptional.pdf>:

**A student who is formally identified as gifted but not having an identified disability may:**

- Go unnoticed for possible special education evaluation.
- Be considered an underachiever, often attributed to perceived laziness, poor motivation, or a low self-concept.
- Maintain grade-level expectations until the difficulty level of the curriculum increases, often during middle and high school years.

What they need:

- Provide challenging instruction in their areas of strength
- Provide explicit instruction to improve the areas of weakness
- Provide individualized accommodations
- Empower 2e students to self-advocate
- Teach compensation strategies
- Provide social/emotional support and monitor progress

“Students who understand their personal pattern of strengths and weaknesses are better equipped to actively participate in their learning. The ideal fit for a twice-exceptional student and his or her educational environment is one where both the student’s giftedness and disability are evenly accounted for through appropriate education and services.” The Twice Exceptional Dilemma NEA 2006

## Working with schools

- Good assessment is important
  - What are child's strengths and weaknesses
  - Rule out other issues
    - \**Vision* – tracking/teaming/convergence
      - Is not obvious in regular vision screening!
    - hearing, health concerns, hypoglycemia
- Meet with guidance team/student support team
- Brief look at IEP versus 504 plan
  - IEP: Individual Education Plan. Special Education law (IDEA)
  - 504 Plan – Americans with Disabilities Act. Antidiscrimination law, accommodations or modifications provided to “level the playing field”
  - Not every twice-exceptional child will need a formal 504 plan or IEP

## Accommodations

- Note: Idaho Department of Education PDF on Twice-Exceptional has a thorough list of 9 pages of possible accommodations ([http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/gifted\\_talented/twice-exceptional/docs/2E%20Manual.pdf](http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/gifted_talented/twice-exceptional/docs/2E%20Manual.pdf)).
- Montgomery County Public Schools – good lists of accommodations <http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/curriculum/enriched/programs/gtld/2010%20Twice%20Exceptional.pdf>

Some useful general accommodations:

- Allow keyboarding (can be hard to learn, but worth it)
- Allow movement breaks
- Allow preferential seating
- Assess specific content in spelling, writing skills separate from other content
- Allow extended time on tests and assignments
- Allow use of sensory items (fidget, water bottle, etc.)
- Check back for understanding of assignments
- Check planner for accuracy/provide written instructions
- Allow extra time for packing up
- Allow quiet space for test taking or working on projects/allow use of headphones
- Assist child with desk/binder organization

Some sample accommodations for writing issues:

- Allow keyboarding
- Allow scribe/dictation
- Allow use of graph paper for handwriting/math (Provide sufficient space for math calculations!!!)\*
- Limit copying from whiteboard, textbooks
- Provide shorter writing assignments
- Allow drafts to focus on content, not spelling, grammar, punctuation
- Provide scoring rubric, models, and anchor papers for students

### Home Strategies

- Help them develop good habits and routines
  - Regular study time (even if they don't have homework)
  - Regular backpack "tidy"
  - Communication folder (from/to school)
  - Preparation habits
    - Backpack packed the night before
    - Clothes, other items laid out
    - Get enough sleep
    - Get a good breakfast
    - Get up and out the door with time to spare
- Dedicated study space with necessary supplies
  - This may not be a desk, ask child to help design area
  - Have a kid-friendly timer ("Time Timers" are good visual)
- Provide extra time for homework (and everything else!)
- Don't overschedule activities
- Get little tasks done ASAP
- Just 15 minutes
- Homework's not done until...
  - It's packed up
  - It's turned in
- Intersperse breaks (rest and recharging physical activity)
- Provide healthy snacks
- Provide reminders (they may be distractible and have memory weaknesses)
  - "natural consequences" may backfire if used inappropriately
- Be a good role model for working
- Provide supervision if necessary: "Lend them your frontal lobe"
- Empathize – these kids are working very hard!
- Help them approach complex assignments
  - Acknowledge anxiety
  - Just 15 minutes approach
  - Strategize steps to completion
- Let them offload unnecessary aspects of work
  - Be their scribe
  - Ask guiding questions
  - Help review rubric when editing
- Focus on effort and progress, not ability
- Help them find ways to reward themselves for extra effort
- Discouragement is toxic
- Build on successes
- Work in areas of strength
- Work in areas of interest, especially for remediation of deficits
- Educate child about his/her strengths
- Educate child about his/her weaknesses
- Share your own struggles and triumphs with similar issues
- Teach compensatory skills (e.g., Sticky note on laptop "desktop" for reminders)
- Teach child to advocate for him/herself (e.g., ask for breaks at school, etc.)

### **Hopeful words:**

“These 2e children should be helped to expand their strengths as well as overcome their weaknesses. They should also be given a hopeful vision for their future, because there is indeed strong reason for hope. Many of the world’s most successful and creative people, both now and in the past, have been twice exceptional as children. In fact this pattern is so common that many people (ourselves included) believe that childhood disability often fosters adult creativity and success. Children who’ve been forced to find creative approaches for doing things most people do without effort often develop a “habit of creativity”--- but only if they don’t lose sight of their gifts and fall into a cycle of underachievement and despair. That’s why...it’s absolutely crucial to help children who are struggling in school maintain a positive vision of themselves and their future. This is especially true for 2e children, who are often troubled by the tremendous disparity they perceive between their abilities and their performance.” p. 447, *The Mislabeled Child* (Eide and Eide)

The following are commonly thought to have been Twice-Exceptional:

- Albert Einstein
- Nikola Tesla
- Thomas Edison
- Isaac Newton

Inspiring 5 min video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSVV7SuMvWY> “Outside of the Box Gifted Learners” 2010 IAGC

### Twice Exceptional (2e) Web Resources

- Gifted homeschoolers brochure <http://giftedhomeschoolers.org/ghf-press/twice-exceptional-smart-kids-learning-differences/> - awesome brochure that captures a lot of good info.
- Idaho Department of Education [http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/gifted\\_talented/twice-exceptional/docs/2E%20Manual.pdf](http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/gifted_talented/twice-exceptional/docs/2E%20Manual.pdf) 144 pages of thorough coverage of twice exceptional and education.
- Hoagies Gifted [http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/twice\\_exceptional.htm](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/twice_exceptional.htm) Hoagies is an awesome resource for gifted in general, but has lots on 2e as well.
- National Association for Gifted children <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=5094> NAGC Position Statement: Twice-Exceptionality.
- 2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter <http://www.2enewsletter.com/> Really good resource. You can sign up for a free email briefings or subscribe to the newsletter.
- Uniquely Gifted <http://www.uniquelygifted.org/> some links may be out of date, but there are lots of treasures here.
- Gifted Development Center – info on visual spatial learning style. [http://www.gifteddevelopment.com/Visual\\_Spatial\\_Learner/vsl.htm](http://www.gifteddevelopment.com/Visual_Spatial_Learner/vsl.htm)
- Wrightslaw Twice Exceptional Children (2e) <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/2e.index.htm> lots of good legal/educational info for 2e.
- Montgomery County Public Schools -Twice Exceptional Students: A Guidebook for Supporting the Achievement of Gifted Students with Special Needs. <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/enriched/gtld/>  
\*Also excellent FAQ page with “GT/LD Checklist for Parents.” <http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/enriched/gtld/faq.aspx>

### Twice Exceptional Book Recommendations:

- Parent's Guide to Gifted Children (Webb et al.)
- Sensational Kids (Miller) – Sensory Processing
- Myth of Laziness (Levine), A Mind at a Time (Levine)
  - Myth of Laziness has an Excellent section on writing
- The Mislabeled Child (Eide and Eide)
- The Motivation Breakthrough: 6 Secrets to Turning On the Tuned-Out Child (Lavoie)
- Organizing Solutions for People with ADHD (Pinsky)
- Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults: ADHD, Bipolar, OCD, Asperger's, Depression, and Other Disorders (Olenchak, Webb, etc.)
- Smart But Scattered, Smart But Scattered for Teens, Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents (Dawson and Guare)
- That Crumpled Paper Was Due Last Week (Ana Homayoun)
- And many more listed on the above websites!