Improving Outcomes for 2E Children

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The term twice-exceptional (2E) is representative of a diverse group of individuals who have a wide range of gifts, talents, and accompanying disabilities. These children have the characteristics of gifted students along with the characteristics of children with disabilities. The gifted characteristics can mask the disability, or the disability can mask the gifted potential.

Dealing with both exceptionalities can be extremely frustrating for gifted students with disabilities. Many 2E children are reluctant to ask for help. In fact, they try desperately to hide the fact they are struggling in an effort to protect their gifted identity. Each year it becomes more difficult for them to compensate for their disability. Twice-exceptional children can experience years of frustration before their educational needs are addressed and optimal times for intervention are therefore missed.

Parents may first realize there is a problem when they notice increasing levels of anxiety and frustration in their child, but are not sure of the exact nature of that problem. 2E students sometime hide those feelings while in school, which leads teachers to question why the parents are so concerned. Convincing educators that your child needs more challenging work when she is achieving higher test scores than her peers. To the parents’ dismay, their child’s giftedness seems to disappear, and the disability becomes more and more noticeable. As are replaced by F’s and parents have to face the reality that their gifted child with so much potential is not interested in applying for college, and his or her progress in high school is compromised.

Improving Outcomes

The research has identified risk and resiliency factors that influence academic achievement (Trail, 2008). The following five strategies are intended to decrease risk, increase resiliency, and improve outcomes for 2E students (Trail, 2010).

1. Develop Gifted Potential

A focus on developing gifted potential is essential to increasing resiliency and promoting positive outcomes. The success gifted students experience when there is a focus on developing gifted potential builds a strong foundation. They are more likely to persist to overcome disabilities when they have experienced success in their area of strength. Encourage the investigation of interests, identify resources in the community, and enthusiastically share their quest for knowledge.

Gifted children crave stimulating educational experiences. There are a wide variety of opportunities within each community that can support the development of gifted potential. The Internet provides information on community resources. Check out local museums, zoos, theater and dance companies, and businesses to find out what opportunities they provide. Some universities offer online courses for gifted high school students, as well as Saturday and summer enrichment programs for gifted elementary, middle, and high school students. Schools sponsor activities like Destination Imagination, Odyssey of the Mind, Math Olympiads, Science Olympiads, computer club, school newspaper, drama club, and debate club, which provide additional challenge. Children can participate in a variety of national competitions on an individual basis or through their schools.

2. Support Cognitive Style

2E students are at risk when their preferred style of learning does not match the teacher’s instructional style. For instance, many 2E children are conceptual learners who have a difficult time learning sequentially. They are at a disadvantage in a school system where curricula are developed in a sequential order. Conceptual learners need an overview of the unit before beginning the instructions so they can organize the sequential information in a way they can understand and make connections. Educational videos, books on the topic, and discussions can help children gain a conceptual understanding of the material.

Executive functioning skills are closely associated with school success. A student needs these skills for planning, organizing, self-regulation, and self-evaluation (Webb et al., 2005). Many 2E students need explicit instruction to develop executive functioning skills. Technology can help students increase their productivity. E-mailing homework to students is a great way to assist organizationally challenged students. Students can copy and paste the assignment into an electronic calendar and use one of the electronic to-do lists to prioritize their homework according to due date.

3. Encourage Academic Achievement

Asynchronous or uneven development is common in 2E children. Many 2E children exhibit incredible strengths and debilitating weaknesses. These contrasting abilities can cause extreme frustration, which can result...
in defiant behavior. Support and encouragement from teachers and parents are needed to learn to persist through the frustration.

Dysgraphia is an issue for many 2E students. Speech recognition software translates the spoken word to text, but this technology is difficult for students who do not articulate their words. When perfected, this technology will eliminate many of the problems associated with dysgraphia. In the meantime, word processing programs make it easier for students to edit their writing, and the finished product is so much nicer than a handwritten paper. Abbreviation expander programs work with word processing and enable the student to create, store, and reuse frequently used words or phrases. There also is proofreading software to help students with the editing process. It is important for each student to chart his or her own progress toward a goal. The emphasis then becomes achieving personal goals rather than competing with other students.

4. Foster Interpersonal Relationships

2E students can feel like they do not fit in with neither gifted students nor with students who have disabilities. Gaining the acceptance of a peer group is extremely important for the development of self-confidence (Goerss, 2005). Students who have the support of peers achieve higher grades and are less likely to drop out of school. Friendship groups facilitated by school counselors are helpful. Some 2E students need explicit instruction on how to make and keep friends. Parents can help their son or daughter find other children who have similar interests. Participating in activities with children who have similar interests provides opportunities for them to develop interpersonal skills.

Family relations can become very strained when a gifted child is not achieving in school. If one parent assumes the role of a strict disciplinarian while the other parent is more sympathetic, the family can become very dysfunctional. It may be helpful for parents to meet with a counselor who has experience working with 2E children to learn and discuss their child’s needs. Enabling parents make excuses for their children and can become overly protective. 2E children need empowering parents who will help them to realize having a disability is not a reason to fail. Do not let school problems destroy your family or your relationship with your child. Children with disabilities need a safe home environment where individual differences are respected. Have fun as a family by exploring passion areas, modeling effective coping strategies, and showing positive ways of dealing with stress. Empower your children to be successful instead of enabling them to fail.

5. Promote Intrapersonal Understanding

Successful people are aware of their strengths and learn to compensate for areas of weakness. Many famous people have disabilities yet they were able to overcome their disability and make a substantial contribution to society. Encourage 2E children to read biographies of a famous person who has a disability similar to theirs. There also is a hereditary component to many disabilities, and there is a good chance that others in the family have the same disability as the child. Model strategies you use to organize projects and your daily life.

Perfectionism is helpful when it motivates you to improve your skills. However, for many 2E students, perfectionism is linked to fear of failure and procrastination (Beckley, 1998). 2E students may not turn in assignments because they are afraid they will receive a poor grade. Students with dysfunctional perfectionism would rather receive a zero for not handing in homework than risk handing it in and failing. Comments to a 2E child like “You are so bright—if only you would try, you would be successful” are not helpful. Gifted children who are failing do not believe they can be successful. Encourage children to learn to set realistic goals and complement them on their effort. When children experience the success of achieving their goals, they will become achievers.

Final Thoughts

As parents, we want to rush in and rescue our children when they struggle or experience failure. However, when a parent rescues a child, it robs that child of the opportunity to learn how to solve his or her own problems. More importantly, this experience builds self-esteem. When parents rescue their child, it sends the message that they do not think the child is capable of handling the problem,
and this can lead to learned helplessness. That does not mean that you sit back and watch your child fail, it means you empower your child by giving him or her the tools needed to solve problems and succeed in life.

**References**

**Author’s Note**

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For more information about NAGC’s Special Populations Network, visit http://www.nagc.org/SpecialPopulationsNetwork.aspx.