Featured in this Issue

Research and Interventions
By Beth M. Houskamp and Team
What research tells us about learning and behavior challenges in twice-exceptional children.

A Conversation with Susan Assouline
The new head of the Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development describes what researchers there have learned about twice-exceptional children and the Center’s goals for the future.

Interview with M. Layne Kalbfleisch
Kalbfleisch describes how imaging technology and traditional neuropsychological assessments identify ways in which the brains of twice-exceptional individuals differ in structure and function.

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Welcome!

Whether it’s mid-winter or mid-summer where you are, we belatedly wish you Happy New Year.

Our first issue of 2013 focuses on the research related to twice-exceptional children, their education, and their upbringing. To that end, we’ve turned to researchers affiliated with three teams across the country: cognitive neuroscientist M. Layne Kalbfleisch at George Mason University in Washington, D.C.; Susan Assouline of the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa; and Beth Houskamp and her team at the California School of Professional Psychology, part of Alliant International University.

In an interview with 2e Newsletter, Kalbfleisch describes how she uses imaging technology along with traditional neuropsychological assessments to identify ways in which the brains of twice-exceptional individuals differ from other brains, both in their structure and function. Assouline, a member of the 2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter Editorial Advisory Board, tells what she considers to be the most significant findings Belin-Blank researchers have made regarding twice-exceptional children — especially those on the autism spectrum. And Beth Houskamp discusses neurodevelopment in 2e kids as well as ways in which parents can use her research findings to intervene, for example to help kids keep calm and focused.

We also continue our coverage of last November’s NAGC Convention with write-ups of three sessions on the topic of Response to Intervention (RtI), and how RtI might help identify and serve (or not) twice-exceptional students.

Comments and suggestions to your newsletter publishers are always welcome, as are article contributions from parents, educators, and others who work with twice-exceptional children.

Thank you for subscribing.

— Linda C. Neumann and J. Mark Bade
Glen Ellyn Media
February, 2013
Overview of Learning and Behavior Challenges in Twice-exceptional Children

Research and Interventions

By Beth M. Houskamp, Erin T. O’Callaghan, Ashley M. Hanratty, Mark Tanabe, Kevin Gruenberg, and Dana Lieberman

We are members of a research group interested in twice-exceptional children. We’ve spent the past decade:

• Beginning to identify areas of brain functioning that often lag in 2e kids
• Understanding the impact of these children’s unique and asynchronous development
• Considering interventions to help 2e kids and their families.

In this article, we’ll summarize our major research findings plus introduce two approaches to helping 2e kids stay calm and focused. The information we’ll present is based on the neurodevelopmental understanding of 2e kids that we have gained. [To find out more about neurodevelopment in 2e children, see the authors’ sidebar on page 8.]

Results from Our Research

Historically, there has been a paucity of research carried out on gifted children and even less on children who we now consider to be 2e. In studies conducted through our research group, we’ve begun a deeper exploration of the ways in which 2e kids learn and their emotional and behavioral challenges. In this article, we will discuss the overall results of our research as they apply to 2e children, and we will provide an overview of two interventions that could potentially help 2e kids and their families with their unique challenges.

Learning Style Clusters

Recently, one of our members identified seven specific learning style clusters within a sample of gifted and twice-exceptional learners. These are summarized in the following table.

<table>
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<th>Learning Style Clusters in Gifted and Twice-Exceptional Youth</th>
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<td><strong>Cluster</strong></td>
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| Verbal Learners | • Process, learn, and perform best with oral language
• Demonstrate a tendency toward linear thinking
• Have difficulty with abstract ideas and getting the gist of information |
| Learners with Attention Difficulties | • May struggle to maintain focus on activities they experience as boring or repetitive
• May be at risk for social and emotional adjustment problems |
| Visual-Spatial Learners | • Display higher perceptual reasoning abilities and lower verbal comprehension abilities
• Have relatively low working memory capacity and processing speed
• Tend to understand overall concepts but may struggle with articulation or overlook details
• Tend to think in pictures rather than words |
| Quick Performers | • Have a relative strength with processing speed
• May perform clerical-type tasks quickly
• Challenged by lower complexity of thought, problem-solving ability, and ability to integrate complex information
• Display a tendency toward impulsivity
• More likely to struggle with verbal communication, working memory |
| Accelerated Learners | • Display relative strengths in verbal comprehension and working memory that facilitate acquiring and storing new information
• Often excel in the classroom |
| Learners with Nonverbal Learning Weaknesses | • When younger, demonstrate significantly stronger verbal abilities that make them likely to be top readers, achieve excellent spelling scores, and express themselves articulately
• As they get older, are likely to experience increasing difficulty processing information due to weakness in nonverbal tasks such as mathematics, abstract reasoning, and nonverbal communication |
| High General Ability Learners | • Have strong verbal comprehension and perceptual reasoning skills
• Tend to have very robust verbal and nonverbal intellectual skills
• Have very high potential to succeed in the classroom
• May struggle with holding information in immediate awareness while processing information |

(McDonald, 2011)
In analyzing the relationship between these seven learning clusters and academic achievement, we found that:

- The learning clusters significantly predict academic achievement with regard to reading, spelling, and math abilities (Hanratty, Tanabe, O’Callaghan, Houskamp, & McDonald, 2012).
- Members of the Accelerated Learner Cluster tend to perform better in reading and spelling tasks than those in the other learning clusters.

Therefore, we found that these unique clusters not only provide information about intellectual strengths and weaknesses and about asynchronous development across intellectual profiles, they also offer insight regarding academic achievement. Understanding a 2e child’s unique learning style may guide parents, educators, and mental health professionals in implementing tailored interventions.

**Asynchronous Development**

Our research has also explored the relationship between asynchronous development and parent-reported behavior problems in their child. To identify children with asynchronous development, we look for significant scatter in their IQ scores. Scatter refers to the gap between high scores and low scores.

We found that children with more scatter were more likely to be rated as being hyperactive by their parents (Hanratty, O’Callaghan, Houskamp, & Bell, 2012). Thus, we concluded that asynchronous development in 2e youth may be associated with emotional and/or behavioral problems. For example, a child who performs markedly better in one or more areas such as in math or language/verbal ability, but whose processing speeds are slower, may be prone to emotional challenges that could include anger, sadness, or moodiness. The result of these challenges may be behavioral problems such as a lowered tolerance for frustration, outbursts, or withdrawal.

**Executive Functioning in 2e Youth**

Another area of focus for our team has been executive functioning in 2e kids. Executive functioning is essential to more complex mental operations such as planning, attention, working memory, and problem solving; and it is equally essential to less complex activities such as initiation, monitoring, and inhibition of behaviors. Executive functioning skills mature throughout childhood and adolescence and into early adulthood.

In a just-completed study (Tanabe, Hanratty, O’Callaghan, and Houskamp, in press), we found a unique relationship between intellectual ability and conceptual-level responses. The term *conceptual-level responses* refers to the ability to demonstrate awareness and use of sorting rules, an aspect of executive functioning. The abilities to correctly sort information and follow rules are important aspects of learning. Additionally, the ability to understand patterns at a conceptual level in order to correctly sort information based on categories is beneficial when learning new concepts in an educational setting.

Children who experience difficulty in these domains may have trouble chunking facts learned in the classroom into meaningful groups in order to memorize important concepts and information. As a result, they may struggle to stay engaged in lessons and class activities, possibly predisposing these children to self-esteem, mood, or behavior issues.

Not surprisingly, findings in our study revealed that the relationship between intellectual ability and this particular aspect of executive functioning (conceptual-level responses) is affected by age. Given the unique developmental trajectories of 2e kids, this finding has important implications for the timing of appropriate interventions. For example, the development of executive functioning changes rapidly throughout childhood, presenting a window of opportunity for gifted children. During this time, caregivers, educators, and tutors can allow, and even challenge, children of gifted intelligence to take on more responsibility with regard to organizing themselves, planning, completing assignments, and taking on more complex tasks. However, adults must also take into account the deficits and difficulties that 2e children may be experiencing as well. Parents and teachers may sometimes need to function as the “frontal lobe” for 2e children in order to assist them with tasks that require executive functioning beyond their current capabilities.

**Verbal Memory Patterns**

Our research has also uncovered unique verbal memory patterns among twice-exceptional children with AD/HD (Hanratty, 2012). These children’s intellectual gifts appear to protect them to a degree from the negative memory effects of AD/HD, such as difficulty recalling information without being continuously provided with
Research and Interventions, continued

an organizational strategy. Nevertheless, these children still require initial organizational cues to help them utilize strategic memory, the ability to use strategies to memorize information.

In comparing two groups of youths with AD/HD—one twice-exceptional and one with average intellectual abilities—research showed that both groups required similar initial structure in order to strategize and organize information appropriately. However, unlike their non-gifted counterparts, the 2e group did not require organizational cues in order to recall and apply information already organized. They were better able to internalize strategic memory and regenerate strategic methods at later times.

What this means for educators and parents is that it may be most helpful to provide structure for 2e students with AD/HD while teaching them new concepts, but then give them increasing autonomy in order to allow the students to rely on their own organizational strategies when recalling and applying information.

Dealing with a 2e Child’s Challenging Behavior

Adults commonly label challenging children as manipulative, attention seeking, self-centered, or unmotivated. Especially for 2e children, these labels perpetuate the behaviors the adults are attempting to eliminate. The labels fail to recognize the complex neurodevelopment of the child. According to Greene & Ablon (2006), “Children do well if they can”; and if children struggle, adults are in a unique position to facilitate more effective ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

The Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) approach is a structured intervention that centers on identifying a child’s particular cognitive deficits in domains such as executive functioning, language processing, emotion regulation, cognitive flexibility, and social skills (Greene & Ablon, 2005). The CPS approach serves to demystify and ultimately predict the incidents and situations that lead to emotional breakdown. Adults capable of identifying what triggers these situations have several choices in how to respond to an emotionally reactive child. When they learn to respond in a nonreactive manner, adults can function as a regulatory model for children.

Parents who use the CPS approach have the following three options for responding to their child’s challenging behavior:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) Approach</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Options</strong></td>
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<td>Plan A</td>
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<td>Plan C</td>
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<td>Plan B</td>
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Plan B centers around three sequential steps often executed prior to an emotionally reactive situation:

1. A parent makes an empathic statement that demonstrates understanding of the child’s genuine concern or difficulty with a certain task.
2. The parent introduces a concern, showing that there may be multiple perspectives on the problem.
3. The parent invites the child to “collaboratively brainstorm ideas for solving the problem in a way that is mutually satisfactory” (Greene & Ablon, 2006, p. 60).

The agreed-upon solution must be achievable and realistic. Based on the unique makeup of 2e children, this quick-learning group will particularly flourish from the mutual dialogue and the rewards associated with solving problems in this way.

When adults shift their paradigm away from inaccurate labeling towards a model that is skill based and neurodevelopmentally informed, both they and children with whom they use this approach will have the opportunity to thrive. If implemented effectively,
Research and Interventions, continued

the CPS approach can lead adults to be more appreciative of the unique and quirky qualities of the 2e child without feeling that these characteristics are impediments to fostering connection and building attunement with the child. For 2e children, the CPS approach can help them develop with greater ease skills like empathy, handling transitions, expressing thoughts and feelings, and emotional regulation.

Mindfulness: Helping a 2e Child with Regulation

The goal of mindfulness practices is to help us separate thoughts and emotions from external events (Lee, Semple, Rosa, and Miller, 2008). Because 2e kids have difficulty regulating their emotions and behaviors, they may find mindfulness practices to be a useful tool to use when feeling overwhelmed and having difficulty regulating their emotions or behaviors.

The literature suggests that childhood may be a practical time to learn mindfulness skills because children may be more flexible in their mindset or habits (Greenland, 2010). Acquiring mindfulness skills can benefit children in various ways. For example, it can provide children with relief and comfort by enabling them to label negative emotions or view their thoughts as visitors that pass through their minds and quickly leave. In addition, in learning to use mindfulness children are encouraged to view both their inner and outer experiences with a sense of curiosity and kindness (Goodman and Greenland, 2009). This approach could be especially beneficial for 2e children, who can have difficulty regulating both their internal and external worlds.

An effective way to teach mindfulness techniques to children is through developmentally appropriate games or activities, often using parts of the child’s routine to prompt mindful moments. For example, ways to help 2e kids become more attuned with their bodies and emotions include these:

- Asking the children to notice the taste of food in their mouths as they eat
- Asking them to note the sensations they feel on their bodies as they take a bath or shower
- Having them use a prop such as a toy sitting on their stomach as they feel their abdomen rise and fall when they breathe.

Another mindfulness activity is to ask kids to envision their heads as a snow globe which encases all of their thoughts, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Explain that when they get over-stimulated, it’s as if the snow globe gets shaken up and all of their thoughts become so jumbled that they may lose the ability to see straight. Have them take some deep breaths, filling their lower abdomen with air, and notice the sensations in their body and the rhythm of their breath. Explain that they can use this deep breathing to let their thoughts settle down, as if returning to the bottom of the snow globe. Then, when they have calmed down, they can make a decision on how to react based on the emotion they are really feeling, rather than reacting impulsively.

A final example of a mindfulness activity, described by Susan Kaiser Greenland (2010), uses a bell. When a child is over stimulated and appears to be about to crash emotionally, the “mindfulness bell” can be rung. It signals to the child that it’s time to take a brief break from whatever he or she is doing, time to take note of thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions like pattern of breathing. Children can use this “mindfulness bell” approach in school, at home, or in any situation where they feel overwhelmed. Once children learn to recognize that they are overwhelmed, they can then begin to use mindfulness strategies, such as breathing techniques, to help them calm down.

Conclusion

Although the unique challenges facing twice-exceptional children and their families have been known for quite some time, research examining the specific emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges in these kids is still in its infancy. In the past several years, our research group has examined their unique learning styles, emotional/behavioral challenges, and neuropsychological performance; and we hope that these preliminary research results can help parents, teachers, and those who care for 2e children understand them better.

There is still a great deal to learn. More research is needed to help us better understand the unique difficulties and challenges that 2e kids face. Our research group continues its work in this area, currently conducting several other research studies. Our hope is to apply the results to creating tailored interventions, such as the parenting and mindfulness approaches discussed in this article, that will help 2e kids and their families cope with their difficulties at home and in school.
Research and Interventions, continued

References

Authors
The authors of this article are all affiliated with the California School of Professional Psychology/Alliant International University in Los Angeles. Two of the authors, Beth Houskamp and Erin T. O’Callaghan, are, respectively, the Founder/Director and the Clinical Director of the University’s Neurodevelopment Assessment Clinic.

- **Beth M. Houskamp**, Ph.D., is a Professor of Clinical Psychology and the Director of the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology program. Her areas of research and clinical expertise include neurodevelopmental disabilities and sensory processing issues in children and adolescents, as well as social/emotional issues of gifted children. She is the author of articles, chapters, and scientific papers; presents at national and international conferences; and consults to parents, professionals, and schools.

- **Erin T. O’Callaghan**, Ph.D., is both an Assistant Professor and a licensed clinical psychologist with expertise in child and pediatric psychology. She conducts clinical research examining both the psychological and neuropsychological effects of pediatric chronic illness, and the neuropsychological functioning in youth with learning and behavioral challenges.

- **Ashley M. Hanratty**, M.A., is a clinical psychology doctoral student who has pursued neuropsychological assessment and clinical training. She conducts clinical research examining neuropsychological functioning among various pediatric populations as well as neurodevelopmental aspects of gifted and 2e children and adolescents.
Neurodevelopment in 2e Children: A Brief Overview

By the Houskamp Team

In the past, problems such as not paying attention in school or reacting immediately and negatively when asked to do something were often thought to be “motivational,” or “emotional” problems. Over the past 20 years, neuroscientific research has focused on the relationship between a child’s brain and the child’s behavior. As a result of this research, we now see these problems within the context of the development of the child’s brain and the potential asynchronous development that occurs within the brain.

We now know that some major brain systems need to develop in order for kids to regulate their emotions, think flexibly, tolerate frustration, and learn well. In our own clinical work and research, we’ve found that there’s often a rather strong brain relationship between a child’s unique gifts and abilities and the struggles that can cause so much stress for both the child and the adults in that child’s life. When we begin to understand what sets the brains of 2e youths apart from others, we can then begin to help these gifted, quirky, intense, bright, talented, and sometimes challenging 2e kids. In order to understand our research findings and our suggested interventions, it’s helpful to have a basic understanding of several areas of brain development that can affect learning and behavior in 2e kids.

The Limbic System

The limbic system is located in the base of the brain, where the brain attaches to the spinal cord. It includes parts of the brain involved with regulation such as the regulation of sleep, hunger, and pain. The limbic system receives messages from the senses — touch, balance, taste, vision, and hearing — and it plays a role in our fight/flight reaction (the extreme level of arousal triggered when we perceive danger). Struggles with regulation influence the rest of a child’s development, affecting both learning and behavior.

Infants who are optimally regulating can cycle back and forth between deep sleep and alertness, falling back to sleep easily if their sleep cycle is interrupted. Optimally regulated children can also transition from one state of arousal to another without a lot of difficulty. As infants’ brains develop over their first several years of life, they...
Neurodevelopment in 2e Children, continued

are more able to regulate themselves, rather than having to depend upon adults to help them stay regulated.

Many 2e kids are born with intense limbic systems. On the plus side, these children are often in awe of details that others might not even notice, and they have intellectual or artistic abilities in the gifted range. On the other hand, an intense limbic system is much harder to regulate. Kids with a limbic system more intense than average may have difficulty going to sleep and staying asleep; and they may also have difficulty transitioning in the morning to being awake. Their arousal system can become flooded quickly by situations that are commonplace and brushed off by most kids, leaving the 2e children prone to meltdowns — either falling apart internally or blowing up and sharing their pain with everyone in their immediate environment. When these kids have a meltdown, they often take a lot longer to become regulated than do other kids. Some 2e children struggle to regulate their emotions and behavior when they are seven, nine, or twelve years old — ages when their peers are better able to self-regulate.

The Executive System

The executive system of the brain involves the frontal lobe, the last part of the brain to develop and fully mature. Paying attention, shifting attention from one thing to another, being able to plan ahead, engaging in problem solving, and coming up with creative alternatives when plans fall through are all part of executive functioning.

We use the executive system to make decisions. In addition, the executive system involves important cognitive abilities as well, such as:

- Learning to inhibit (refrain from performing) an action
- Monitoring our behavior and self-correcting if necessary
- Holding in mind simultaneously multiple solutions to a problem
- Using hindsight and foresight to help inform our decisions.

Interaction Among the Systems of the Brain

In general, parts of the brain that develop later, like those that govern attention, planning, or impulse control, build upon the parts of the brain that develop early, like those that take in sensory information and that control the ability to regulate sleep, appetite and emotions. If the parts of the brain that should develop early are delayed, this delay can throw off the development of the later-maturing areas.

The executive system, for example, depends upon the limbic and the sensory processing systems to provide it with a solid foundation. The decisions we make using the executive system are based on data we get from the other systems of the brain — what our sensory processing system is telling us, for example, as well as how regulated we are and whether we are having any intense emotional reactions. This information helps us decide if, for instance, we should continue with an activity, stop what we’re doing, or plan never to engage in that activity again.

Corrections

We have a correction to an article in last November’s issue. Allison Hertog says that her reference to a 2011 Department of Justice regulation should have read 2010. The correct citation is: Department of Justice, Americans with Disabilities Act Title III Regulations, Final Rule, Guidance and Analysis, 28 C.F.R. pt. 36 Appendix A (September 15, 2010). Got that? Good.
New Head of the Belin-Blank Center

A Conversation with Susan Assouline

The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development was established at The University of Iowa by the State of Iowa Board of Regents in June, 1988. Since that time, it has established a national and international reputation for its research, professional development opportunities, student programs, and service to the gifted and twice-exceptional communities.

2e Newsletter Editorial Advisory Board member Susan Assouline, Ph.D., assumed the role of director of the Belin-Blank Center on December 15, 2012. Previously, she was associate director and clinical supervisor at the center and has served as the lead investigator for the Twice-Exceptional Study, which the center is currently conducting. She takes over as director from Nicholas Colangelo, who served as director of the center since its founding.

In this edited interview with 2e Newsletter, Susan Assouline discusses what Belin-Blank researchers have already learned about twice-exceptional children and what they hope to accomplish in the future.

Q: How did the Belin-Blank Center become interested in conducting research on twice-exceptional (2e) children?

A: About 10 years ago, I was interviewing a parent who had brought her son in for an evaluation. This parent was so frustrated with the lack of support she was receiving in the school. We felt doubly frustrated because we just didn’t know that much about the kinds of issues she was dealing with. At one point she said, “I’d give up all of this ‘giftedness’ if I could just have my child not have problems.”

I knew then that we were not as knowledgeable about the topic of giftedness and disability as we needed to be in order to help her — and countless others like her. Shortly after that, we had a special workshop on twice-exceptionality, which was really well attended. The next big thing that happened was that we received a Javits grant [See sidebar.] to conduct a three-year study on twice-exceptionality. That was a watershed event for us, and we’ve been deeply involved in the topic ever since.

Q: As you move into your new role as director of the Belin-Blank Center, do you anticipate any changes in the work you do with twice-exceptional children or the research you conduct on twice exceptionality?

A: I have wonderful colleagues and I anticipate being able to continue to collaborate with them, especially Dr. Megan Foley Nicpon, Dr. Alissa Doobay, and of course Dr. Nicholas Colangelo. We also have wonderful graduate assistants. Plus, I’m hoping to establish even greater connections with colleagues in the University of Iowa College of Education and across other university-based centers of gifted education. So, I expect we’ll continue to have a broad reach and I hope to remain very involved.

Q: What do you feel are the most significant findings made at the Belin-Blank Center with regard to twice-exceptional children?

A: I’d say our top five findings are these:

1. A comprehensive evaluation is critical if you want to understand fully how the student is functioning cognitively, behaviorally, and socially.
2. Students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) who have high cognitive ability — scoring at least in the 90th percentile or above in one or more areas — demonstrate extreme inconsistencies in performance and behaviors. They have large discrepancies in their cognitive, academic, and adaptive functioning profiles.
3. Cognitive discrepancies can and do affect academic functioning.
4. These discrepancies are confusing to the 2e child. Because they’re also confusing to the adults who live and work with the child, it’s important for these adults to remember this: the child’s inconsistencies are not intended to make the adult’s life more difficult. It’s not about the teacher or parent. It’s about the 2e child and how important it is to address that child’s academic strengths and vulnerabilities, while providing accommodations for the disability.
5. In studying students with a specific learning disability, we find that typical students are most likely to experience a disability in reading. For gifted students with a specific learning disability, on the other hand, their area of disability is most likely to be in written language.
**Conversation with Susan Assouline, concluded**

Q: How do you see your research findings being used — to devise better teaching strategies, to come up with more effective accommodations for 2e students, to answer skeptics who believe these kids could do better if they tried harder, etc?

A: Yes, all of that. The key is patience and dissemination; and thanks to wonderful publications like 2e Newsletter, dissemination is happening.

Q: So far, much of your research seems to focus on children on the autism spectrum. Have you learned things about these kids that you can generalize across the whole population of 2e children, or must 2e kids with each type of learning disability or challenge be studied separately?

A: Issues associated with processing speed and working memory can generalize with all students who struggle in these areas, not just those with ASD. But, we do know that there are other issues unique to students with specific learning disability and those with AD/HD. At the Belin-Blank Center, we have done very little investigation with students who struggle with other mental health disorders such as anxiety, bi-polar disorder, or who have physical impairments. I hope that we can do more in these areas as well.

Q: If researchers must focus on individual learning disabilities and disorders, what does that mean for advancing our understanding of twice exceptionality as a whole? It seems as though it would take tremendous amounts of time and money to conduct research on that scale.

A: Yes. Research is something that you continue to add to. It does take financial resources as well as time.

Q: Back in 2010, the Belin-Blank Center announced the establishment of the National Institute for Twice Exceptionality. What is happening with NITE?

A: The funding from the federal government, which was the impetus for the establishment of NITE, lasted for only one year; but we’ve maintained the training, service, and research focus of NITE. Last year, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation awarded funding for one year, which allowed us provide additional services to students. That funding has permitted us to update the website and to develop professional training modules. We’ve never stopped pursuing our research agenda.

Q: What are your future research plans?

A: I’m finishing up an article about RtI (Response to Intervention) and twice-exceptionality. Dr. Foley Nicpon is leading an investigation of the ADOS (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule) and ADIR (Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised) score patterns, and she’s going to be the guest editor for a special issue of Gifted Child Quarterly focused on twice-exceptionality. We have several graduate students who hope to conduct research in that area and a couple who need to get their dissertations written up for publication.

To learn more about the research conducted and the services offered to students, parents, and educators at the Belin-Blank Center, visit the website: [www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank](http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank).

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**Javits and Funding**

Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act is part of a federal law which established a program for conducting scientifically based research to meet the special education needs of gifted and talented students. The Javits Act must be funded each year by Congress; and, unfortunately, since 2011 Congress has not appropriated any money for this program.

In the hope of remedying this situation, the National Association for Gifted Children urges concerned individuals to contact their U.S. Representative and both Senators by March 16 to ask them to support $7.5 million in funding for the Javits Act. For a sample letter, see [www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=9226&terms=Javits+program+](http://www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=9226&terms=Javits+program+).
2e Researcher

Interview with M. Layne Kalbfleisch

M. Layne Kalbfleisch, M.Ed., Ph.D., is an associate professor of educational psychology and a cognitive neuroscientist at George Mason University’s Krasnow Institute for Advanced Study in Fairfax, Virginia. She directs KIDLAB, a research facility she founded in 2003. There Kalbfleisch draws on her training in the fields of education, psychology, and neuroscience as she strives to meet one of her research goals, finding the empirical basis of twice exceptionality.

In their work at KIDLAB, Kalbfleisch and her research team use imaging technology along with traditional neuropsychological assessments to identify ways in which the brains of twice-exceptional individuals differ from other brains, both in their structure and function. Following is an edited interview conducted with Layne Kalbfleisch.

Q: What has been the main purpose of your research with regard to twice-exceptional children?
A: We focus on the relationship between talent and disability. Our initial discoveries are beginning to show us clues about how the brain compensates and responds when a disability is present along with high levels of intelligence — in other words, when an individual is twice exceptional.

In general, we’re documenting patterns of neural plasticity in children. [Ed. note: Neural plasticity, in simple terms, is how the brain can change in response to experiences.] Our purpose is to better understand what it means to be “gifted” and how that giftedness influences or interacts with disability to create performance and behavior that we observe as twice exceptional.

Q: Who do you study and how do you conduct your research?
A: Our studies involve adults and children. Our eventual goal is understand these three things:
1. How cognitive processes change over the lifespan
2. How disabilities in childhood relate to the pathologies of aging
3. How having talents influences a person’s health and quality of life.

We employ three methods in our research. First, we involve our participants in a one-on-one psychometric assessment that allows us to measure qualities such as intelligence, executive function, and temperament. Second, our participants play a series of computer games that allow us to assess their speed and accuracy during tasks that require reasoning and attention skill. Finally, once we’ve identified participants who qualify and who want to participate, we use brain scanning technology called functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). During brain scans, we measure different aspects of cognition as the brain is engaged in performing tasks. This technology helps us to explore cognitive functions related to giftedness and to the patterns of strength and weakness that we see in twice exceptionality.

Q: Do you find that participants are nervous about undergoing brain scanning?
A: Before we do the actual scanning, we prepare participants by doing a pretend or “mock” MRI. This allows us to introduce them to the computer games they’ll play during the real brain scanning.

Q: What differences have you been able to identify in the structure or function of the gifted brain and the twice-exceptional brain?
A: So far, my neuroimaging experiments have focused on typically functioning high-ability children and on twice-exceptional children on the autism spectrum (2e ASD). From this work, we’ve gained three insights:

1. 2e ASDs are as fast and as accurate as their typical gifted peers on certain tests of attention control, but the brain functions that support this “same” performance are quite different. In typical children, attention control is largely the work of the frontal lobes of the brain; but in 2e ASDs, attention control is handled more by the rear regions of the brain, areas that process sensory and motor information. This finding gives us some clues about these children. For instance, it shows why they are at risk for sensory overload. One of the reasons they may struggle with social interactions is that social information may not be the most relevant to their brain as it processes other information in the environment.

M. Layne Kalbfleisch
Interview with M. Layne Kalbfleisch, continued

2. The resting state of children with ASD is very different from what we typically see. The resting state is what brain function looks like when we’re daydreaming, off task, or bored. When most people are in this state, a brain scan would show activity in both the front and rear portions of the brain. The level of activity would look balanced between the two regions and in both hemispheres. In individuals with ASD, on the other hand, it essentially looks like the brain is talking to itself, and we don’t see that same degree of balance between the levels of activity in the front portion of the brain and the rear.

Right now, we don’t have a full understanding of the consequences of this difference. It may help explain why the cognitive skills of the frontal lobes, such as pattern recognition and intuition for rule-based systems, are so well developed in individuals with ASD, and in those who are 2e with ASD in particular. For example, these individuals tend to be skilled at computer science, programming, engineering, design, mathematics, editing, or identifying flaws or errors in patterns or designs.

3. High verbal intelligence appears to influence reasoning systems in the brains of 2e individuals with ASD. Among children on different parts of the autism spectrum, we see differences in the gray matter. We’re beginning to learn that these differences may be showing us areas of cognitive strength, not necessarily where function has gone wrong.

Understanding this type of neural plasticity is fundamental to how we define giftedness and 2e from a functional perspective. Neuroimaging studies from my lab and from others are showing us that one of the key aspects of a “gifted” brain involves great use of the parietal cortex in both hemispheres. There appears to be some aspect of high-ability that is marked by this kind of support from the brain.

Q: How specific is the information that brain imaging provides? For example, can you see differences in brain activity in someone who has slow processing speed?
A: It’s important to understand that right now researchers don’t use MRI to diagnose or observe individuals in these ways. What we use it for is to observe performance differences among our participants so that we can see what they all share in common. That’s what leads us to the final result. The conclusions we draw from neuroimaging studies are based on group averages across the people who participated in the study.

Q: How about differences between the brain of someone with inattentive attention deficit and attention deficit with hyperactivity — could you see a difference?
A: Yes, but again we’re not looking at differences between individuals per se. Instead, because we need to have adequate statistical power, we’d be looking at differences between groups of people with these subtypes of AD/HD.

Q: Have you compared the brains of 2e children with 2e adults? If so, what did this tell you?
A: Not yet. It takes a long time to find the right people to study. Here are some examples of the criteria that participants have to meet:
- No history of neurological or psychiatric illness outside of the condition being tested
- No premature birth or specific types of developmental delays
- Identification or diagnosis completed with specific types of tests.

So even though we have many people with ASD calling us to volunteer, we can’t accept them if, let’s say, they have other disorders such as a reading disability, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia. Various disorders have specific impacts on the brain; so for us to gain a better understanding of autism and 2e ASD, we have to control for these other factors.

Q: How do you see your research findings being used? Can they help medical professionals better understand and meet the needs of 2e kids, or can they be used directly in the classroom?
A: Yes on both counts. Medical and psychology professionals aren’t necessarily trained to understand or incorporate the details of giftedness or twice exceptionality into their practice. Our research results can help them gain better insight into these individuals and, by extension, offer them more effective services. We also hope to be able to design better methods of instruction and interventions for gifted and 2e learners.

The immediate impact of our findings leads to greater empathy. Knowing that 2e kids are
different on a neural level can lead people directly to insights about why they are as they are. For instance, if one of the key features of the autistic brain is that the sensory and motor cortices are doing most of the cognitive work, it becomes easier to understand why these children experience sensory overload and problems with emotional control. This brain essentially tops-out on its resources early because it lacks connections that help distribute the load. People who understand this have a much more neutral and pragmatic understanding of autism — one that any teacher or parent could immediately work to support.

Q: What does your research tell us about giftedness? For example, does it lead us to a better definition giftedness, or does it reinforce the need to provide programs for GT children?

A: These new findings help us understand what we’ve already observed in gifted children: their capacities to think faster, to absorb greater amounts of information, and to perform at high levels of expertise. They highlight that these children do differ on a physiological level. Empirical evidence of these differences must eventually have an impact on how we define giftedness and lend credence to the idea that specific programs and supports play an important part in the ability of gifted children to be healthy and successful. The findings also make the call for equity for gifted kids that much stronger.

Understanding Research Results

The study of 2e crosses many disciplines, all of which struggle with the problem of defining terms like giftedness, disability, and executive function — constructs that all contain multiple definitions. The important thing to keep your eye on in the research is to watch for the specific definitions that are used in a study and to try to understand how that definition fits with the larger and more general understanding of 2e and the population being studied.

—MLK

Q: When you say that gifted children do differ on a physiological level, what exactly does that mean?

A: The collective work of neuroscientists who study giftedness shows that it’s represented, in part, in the brain by greater activity in the parietal cortex of both the brain’s left and right hemispheres. This difference has been shown in studies of spatial reasoning and imagery, and in mathematics.

In studies of gifted musicians, researchers have seen that expertise correlates with more brain activity, not less. This is contrary to other models of expertise that show that less effort is needed as the brain becomes more efficient and automatic.

These findings tell us that we are still in the very early stages of understanding the neural plasticity of giftedness. I wrote a chapter with that title in 2009, where I made the case that giftedness is a special type of plasticity similar to other types that we know more about. These include:

- Phantom limb syndrome, in which you can lose your limb and still feel it
- Hemispherectomy, in which children with seizures have their brain’s left hemisphere removed but experience no change in their intelligence
- Synesthesia, in which individuals perceive numbers and letters in terms of sensations of color, feeling, shape, and even sound.

Q: What do you feel are the most significant findings that you’ve come up with so far with regard to twice-exceptional individuals?

A: Aside from the three preliminary neuroimaging results I mentioned earlier, we’re also learning more about the relationship between talent and disability. In studying 2e children with ASD, we found that although they may struggle with regulating themselves, certain children in this population still display executive function skills for planning, organizing materials, and monitoring their work. These are children whose verbal intelligence is more than 15 points higher than their performance intelligence, which is equal to one standard deviation on a Wechsler
Interview with M. Layne Kalbfleisch, concluded

Measure of intelligence. This study is the first to elaborate the relationship between what has been compromised (i.e., emotional control, ability to initiate, working memory, processing speed) and what skills may be supported or protected by high levels of intelligence.

Now, there’s some question as to the strength of this finding. For one thing, some aspects of executive function are known to correlate with intelligence. For another, our sample size is small. You need about 25 kids in a group, and our total numbers were at that level; but our subgroups were smaller. Nevertheless, continuing research is leading us to an operational definition of twice exceptionality that can be rooted in the tools and metrics already in use. Our findings are preliminary and positive.

Q: What are your future research plans with regard to twice exceptionality?
A: We’re now in the early stages of studying 2e AD/HD. We’re applying our model of intelligence and executive function to identify the skills that correlate with the strengths we see in this population for creative and divergent thinking. We’re also planning to extend our studies of 2e ASD into the adult population.

For coverage of a session at the NAGC Convention in November by Layne Kalbfleisch, see the November, 2012, issue of 2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter. For more information about her work – articles, book chapters, and recent press – see the 2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter website.

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► Guiding the Twice-exceptional Child: A Collection of Columns by Meredith Warshaw
► The Twice-exceptional Child with Attention Deficit
► The Twice-exceptional Child with Asperger Syndrome
From NAGC 2012

Perspectives on Response to Intervention

A hot topic at the November, 2012, National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Convention in Denver was RTI — Response to Intervention. It was the subject of a number of sessions, some of which focused on how well it serves the needs of twice-exceptional students. 2e Newsletter was able to cover three of the sessions offered:

- RTI: The Promising Future of Gifted Education
- Reflective RTI: Rationale and Resources to Create Instructional Plans for the 2e Learner
- RTI and the Twice-exceptional Child.

Presenters in all three sessions agreed that RTI has the potential to significantly change the way educators meet the needs of gifted and twice-exceptional students. All agreed that the implementation of RTI in schools is still a work in progress — especially, as some presenters pointed out, in terms of meeting the needs of 2e learners. Following are highlights from these sessions.

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**Rti: The Promising Future of Gifted Education**

Presenters: Daphne Pereles, Lois Baldwin, Stuart Omdal

The three presenters in this session have worked together to implement Response to Intervention (Rti) for the Colorado Department of Education. Each also has extensive experience with gifted or twice-exceptional children.

Rti as a Problem-solving Process

Lois Baldwin described the problem-solving process that is the heart of Rti in Colorado:

1. Definition. What is the problem?
2. Analysis. Why is the problem occurring?
3. Plan implementation. What should we do?
4. Evaluation. Is the plan, the intervention, working?

According to Baldwin, this four-step process is continual, a contrast to the more typical sequence of events that occurs in schools of evaluating students and implementing interventions late in the school year.

Daphne Pereles explained that the four-step Rti process is supported by research. However, to be effective it requires both a functional educational system and a shift in perspective. That shift is from, “What is it about the student that is causing the problem?” to “How can we alter the curriculum or the environment to solve the problem?”

The result of a successful perspective shift is a problem-solving culture where everyone “owns” all of the kids and collaborates together on an on-going basis for their benefit. In addition, she pointed out, it’s a culture that depends on facts, not assumptions.

The problem-solving culture is one of six components that comprise Rti, as implemented in Colorado. The presenters listed the six components as being:

1. The problem-solving process
2. Assessment
3. Positive school climate and culture
4. Family and community partnerships
5. Leadership
6. Curriculum and instruction.

Rti Advantages

Lois Baldwin described how the view of Rti is different in New York, her home state, than in Colorado. In New York, Rti is for children in grades K-4 who are at risk; in Colorado, Rti encompasses all children, including the gifted. Baldwin calls the Colorado effort “more cutting edge than in other parts of the country.”

Baldwin noted that one of the advantages of Rti is the speed with which learning challenges can be identified and addressed. Without Rti, students might have to wait until they are two years behind to be identified as having a learning disability. For a third-grade child with an IQ of 140 who reads at only a first-grade level, for example, this means the passage of two...
RtI: The Promising Future of Gifted Education, concluded

frustrating years before educators pay attention. With RtI, educators can look for problems from Day 1 and provide help where necessary — without labeling the child. Similarly, a child’s strengths may be quickly addressed as well, through means such as acceleration.

Agreeing with Baldwin, Daphne Pereles said, “It’s not about labeling the kids, but about the supports they receive.” She noted that Florida, Kansas, and Michigan all have RtI models involving multi-tiered systems of supports that are part of an integrated curriculum. The integrated approach breaks down the distinctions among students, and the accompanying labels, that have been common. In previous approaches “at risk,” gifted, and special ed students were all viewed and treated differently and by different systems. The result of these distinctions and labels, according to Baldwin, has been redundancy and a lack of communication and coordination. She said that RtI’s goal, on the other hand, is to increase collaboration.

Stuart Omdal talked about another advantage of RtI, enabling twice-exceptional students to qualify for services. In the non-RtI system, just one test might determine a child’s eligibility for services, in essence serving as a “gatekeeper” to services. Twice-exceptional students, he noted, might not score low enough on that single test to qualify. His point was reinforced by a photo he displayed of an actual iron gate, a gate bearing a sign that read, “Do Not Challenge the Gate.”

Pereles pointed out another benefit that RtI offers 2e students. It allows them to qualify for two Tier-3 supports (intensive individual work or tutoring) — one support for strengths and one for challenges.

RtI Resources on the Web
The presenters handed out a partial set of rubrics used in Colorado’s implementation of RtI. These rubrics serve as a guide to implementing RtI at the levels of the classroom, the school, and the district. Each rubric describes how the six components look at the particular level of implementation and also what RtI is like at each stage of implementation: emerging, developing, operationalizing, and optimizing. The rubrics may be found at [www.cde.state.co.us/rti](http://www.cde.state.co.us/rti) under “Tools and Resources.”

What is RtI?
The presenters of the session RTI and the Twice-exceptional Child, one of the three NAGC sessions covered here, provided an overview of Response to Intervention. They explained that RtI is:

- A regular education, rather than special education, initiative
- Mandated by federal law for disabilities, with emphasis on below-grade-level performance
- Designed to help struggling learners who may not have responded to regular classroom instruction and who need a different approach or more individual help in order to achieve at grade level
- Intended to help distinguish between two groups of students: those who have not benefited from instruction and those who may have a genuine disability and should be referred to special education
- Able to meet advanced learning needs as well, but that use is optional.

In addition, they explained that RtI:

- Has three tiers of “scientifically-based” interventions that increase in intensity
  1) Differentiation in the regular classroom
  2) Individual or small-group work outside the classroom focusing on specific deficits and aimed at gaining specific skills
  3) More intensive work that consists of individual work, or one-on-one or one-on-two tutoring
- Calls for frequent progress monitoring
- Offers the benefit of providing academic help at early signs of difficulty instead of waiting until there is a discrepancy between a student’s potential and performance scores large enough to qualify for special education.

For more information on RtI, see the September, 2007, issue of 2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter and this article from the September, 2010, Issue: “The Promise and Potential of Response to Intervention (RtI) for 2e Students — and All Students — in Minnesota.”
Reflective RtI: Rationale and Resources to Create Instructional Plans for the 2e Learner

Presenters:
- Susan Baum, Director of The 2e Center for Research and Professional Development, Bridges Academy, Studio City, CA
- Robin Schader, assistant professor, University of Connecticut
- Sherry Dismuke, RtI facilitator, Boise State University, Boise, ID
- Robin Sly, Trail Wind Elementary, Boise, ID (who contributed to the content of this session but did not present)

According to presenter Sherry Dismuke, RtI, as it’s currently being implemented, is totally ineffective for twice-exceptional students. One reason it’s not working for them, she explained, is that it’s limited to “drill and kill” — focusing intensely on remediating their areas of weakness at the expense of developing their talents.

All speakers agreed that what’s needed instead for 2e students is to make RtI a more reflective process than a prescriptive one, a process that takes into account a 2e student’s strengths as well as weaknesses, and how each informs the other. In explaining how we can think reflectively about meeting the needs of these often misunderstood students, the speakers offered these guidelines:
- Give attention to the gift.
- Provide challenging curriculum.
- Offer dual differentiated environment accommodations.
- Provide targeted remediation for needed skills.
- Give social and emotional support.
- Use a strength-based, talent-based approach.

The presenters told the story of a fifth-grade girl named Sydney. When teachers were asked to list the strengths and challenges of this student, here’s how it looked, with far more challenges identified than strengths:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>Is argumentative – ODD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High verbal ability</td>
<td>Little productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Severe attention issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Handwriting difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Won’t participate in physical education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor social awareness, social skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This approach was a disaster, the presenters explained. The reading class required a great deal of writing, which Sydney refused to do. In the social skills class, none of the other students could relate to her.

It was at this point that Sydney went to Bridges Academy, a school for twice-exceptional children, and that reflective RtI came into the picture. This approach, as described by the presenters, is built on data collection using a multi-part form the presenters developed. On this form, teachers, parents, others involved with Sydney such as mental health professionals, and Sydney herself recorded information about her strengths and challenges. The goal was to get a multi-dimensional picture of the child. Among the information requested on the form is:
- Behaviors and challenges at home, in school, and in extracurricular situations
- Expressed interests and strengths
- Learning preferences
- Testing results
- The degree to which certain behaviors (academic, emotional, social, cognitive) are demonstrated.

One part of the form is reserved for the student to complete. Here Sydney was able to provide information such as:
- Best conditions for learning
- Preferred ways to show what she has learned
- Hobbies and collections
- Preferred activities and experiences outside of school.

As a result of this exercise, the picture of Sydney that parents and teachers now had was much more balanced than the earlier one:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Is argumentative – ODD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High verbal ability</td>
<td>High verbal ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very good in drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insightful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interested in current events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High-level thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wants to make a mural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The decision was made to place Sydney in a gifted class for reading and a remedial class for social skills. In addition, she worked with an occupational therapist on handwriting.
Beyond this list of strengths and challenges, they learned more about Sydney as a person. For example, they found that she:

- Had low academic self-efficacy
- Used her creativity for survival
- Had poor self-regulation
- Use disruptive behavior to hide disability.

The presenters explained that among the advantages of getting a fuller and more balanced view of the student are these:

- It brings a different conversation to the table, changing the dynamic between educators and parents.
- It helps create a partnership with parents, inviting them to take part in the problem-solving process in a non-adversarial way.
- It showed teachers when Sydney was at her personal best, enabling them to use those situations to address her weaknesses.

In dealing with a student’s challenges, Susan Baum cautioned that it’s not practical to try to address them all at once. A better approach is to start with a limited number to address at one time — no more than three — and to select those likely to bring quick success.

Some additional cautions from the presenters related to the emotional fragility that 2e kids display:

- Start with talent development opportunities rather than remediation.
- Be careful not to overdo it. Avoid taking over their gift and ruining it for them.
- Consider how to meet the needs of the child — not how to fix the child.
- Make sure that all students have the opportunity to do what the 2e student is doing so that the student is not made to feel different.
- Give choices when possible; and when it isn’t, provide scaffolding (temporary support until the student masters the needed skills).

The presenters concluded by sharing the outcome of using Reflective RtI with Sydney. She was given the opportunity to carry out an independent project, painting a mural on a school wall, which gave her not only an outlet for creative expression but also the opportunity to enjoy success at school. Teachers at Bridges decided to use acting class rather than more traditional remediation to teach Sydney social skills; and instead of working on improving her handwriting, they allowed her to keyboard all of her assignments. The result was that Sydney became a productive student who did well in school and made friends among her classmates. Now, six years later, she works as a professional artist.

Private testing determined that Annie’s ability was in the superior range, but also showed that she had deficits in working memory and processing speed. In addition, Annie had auditory, visual, and sensory processing deficits. In school, she would need an IEP that provides for:

- Reading intervention
- Accommodations for sensory, visual and auditory processing weaknesses
- Use of a keyboard for writing
- Separate grades for writing content and spelling
- Extra time in the classroom for test-taking, reading, and writing
- Instruction at her gifted conceptual level, with accommodations for weaknesses
- Gifted enrichment options.

### Reflective RtI, concluded

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RtI and the Twice-exceptional Child, concluded

The presenters asked: How can RtI serve children like Annie?

RtI and 2e kids

The presenters explained that RtI offers potential benefits to gifted and 2e students, citing these examples:
- When extended to gifted students, RtI can address their needs along with those of struggling students.
- Gifted educational provisions can move primarily into regular education, instead of being offered as supplementary (often part-time) programs.
- For 2e students, both their gifts and weaknesses can be addressed together.

However, for both groups of students, especially those who are twice exceptional, RtI can have some drawbacks as well. Among the drawbacks the presenters noted were:
- Local interpretations of RtI vary.
- Since RtI was designed for students performing below grade level, the goal is most often to get children up to grade level, not for them to achieve in relationship to their potential. (2e children can “fall through the cracks” because, if they’re performing at grade level, there’s no problem in terms of RtI.)
- The RtI process is curriculum-based and not intended for diagnosing the often complex types of issues that 2e children like Annie face.
- RtI depends on classroom teachers being knowledgeable about how disabilities manifest in very bright children and being willing to refer a 2e child for evaluation.
- Given today’s overcrowded classrooms with other struggling children, a teacher may view a 2e child as “not impaired enough” to warrant participation in RtI.
- The types of research-based interventions used with RtI tend to be strongly remedial and dull for 2e children, who need conceptual complexity to engage their minds.

Furthermore, the speakers noted, RtI is not a comprehensive solution. Other resources that might be enlisted in identifying and meeting the needs of 2e students are often in short supply due to fiscal cuts to education, for example:
- Gifted education programs and professionals
- Access to comprehensive assessment
- Teacher training.

What Schools and Parents Can Do

The presenters expressed their belief that RtI has promise for bringing gifted education into the regular classroom. Furthermore, they see in this approach the potential to both differentiate for a child’s advanced abilities and intervene for learning and processing disabilities. Fulfilling the promise and the potential of RtI, they assert, requires action on the part of both schools and parents. Following are some of their suggestions for both.

Schools can:
- Provide teachers with information on giftedness and twice exceptionality.
- Remove the requirement that a child’s performance must be below average to qualify for RtI.
- Avoid making 2e kids “jump through double hoops,” requiring them to qualify separately as gifted and disabled.
- Develop students’ strengths to remediate their weaknesses.
- Collaborate with parents and professionals.
- Understand the law.
- Preserve access to comprehensive assessment with school psychologists and other specialists for the evaluation of learning disabilities.
- Use classroom, psychoeducational, and other assessments by specialists in a complementary manner to support students.
- Ensure that specialists familiar with the characteristics of gifted children can still determine diagnosis and learning needs.

Parents can:
- Stay involved with the child’s education.
- Formally request a school comprehensive assessment.
- Advocate for appropriate programming.
- Ensure that intervention is timely.
- Know state law.
- Collaborate with the school (keeping in mind that an adversarial approach generally doesn’t work and the school has the power).
- Consider private assessment, which might be necessary to provide a complete picture of what’s going on with the child.
NEWSbits

Still Fighting for FAPE — Years Later

Subscribers who remember the 2e Newsletter article “Fighting for FAPE,” about a family’s struggle for educational justice, will undoubtedly be saddened to know that the 5th Circuit Federal Appeals Court overturned a lower court decision awarding reimbursement to the Hovem family for placing their son in an appropriate school setting after the public school district failed him. A hearing officer initially supported the family’s requests; that decision was upheld by a lower court. But the school district persisted. The family is now trying to take their case to the US Supreme Court. Read Signe Hovem’s account of the past few years at [http://smhovem.tumblr.com/](http://smhovem.tumblr.com/) under the heading “May I Have a Moment of Your Time.” Pass the word if you can.

NU Center for Talent Development

Northwestern University’s Center for Talent Development in Evanston, Illinois, is offering in the next few months two events of interest to the 2e community. One event, on February 18, is a free seminar for parents. Megan Foley Nicpon, Ph.D., will present “Parenting Your Twice-Exceptional Child: Developing Talent and Accommodating Needs.” Find more information at [www.ctd.northwestern.edu/ctd/outreach/parentseminar](http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/ctd/outreach/parentseminar). The second event, a conference titled “Opportunities for the Future: Conference for Gifted Students,” is on June 29, 2013, and features a keynote address by Del Siegle, Ph.D., and D. Betsy McCoach, Ph.D. Find more information at [www.ctd.northwestern.edu/ctd/outreach/familyconference](http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/ctd/outreach/familyconference).

Davidson Institute

Applications are now available for the 2013 THINK Summer Institute, a three-week residential summer program on the campus of the University of Nevada Reno, where students can earn up to six college credits by completing two university courses. THINK will run from July 13 through August 3. Tuition is $3,250 and covers course credits, books and materials, room and board, and the cost of planned activities. Need-based scholarships are available. To qualify, students must be 13 to 16 years old during THINK and must meet or exceed composite SAT score of 1130 (excludes writing portion) or ACT score of 26. The application deadline is March 1, 2013. Homeschooled students are eligible to apply.

Diamonds in the Rough

The Weinfeld Education Group has scheduled the fourth annual “Diamonds in the Rough” conference for March 3 at the University of Maryland/Shady Grove. Eustacia Cutler, mother of Temple Grandin, will speak on “Coming to Terms with Your Child’s Disability.” Find more information at [www.weifeldeducationgroup.com](http://www.weifeldeducationgroup.com).

A Facility for Academic Research on Twice Exceptionality

Bridges Academy is a college preparatory school which serves twice-exceptional students in grades 5 through 12. Located on its campus in Studio City, California, is the 2e Center for Research and Professional Development. Headed by Dr. Susan Baum, the Center is committed to conducting, encouraging, and coordinating research focused on identifying and educating twice-exceptional students. Equally important parts of its mission include:

- Developing research-based curriculum for 2e students
- Conducting webinars, workshops, and graduate-level training for teachers
- Providing information and resources to families and professionals.

This center has been in development over the past two years and is now conducting research, presenting workshops and webinars, and developing custom programs for schools and organizations on a variety of topics. These range from twice-exceptionality to strength-based education, differentiation, curriculum, parent education, and other education topics. In addition, the Center is interested in working with those looking to conduct research in the field of twice-exceptional education at Bridges Academy.

Overseeing the 2e Center for Research and Professional Development is an advisory board which is currently seeking additional members. To nominate a candidate for the board, the Center asks that you send the candidate’s name, contact information, and biographical information to this e-mail address: 2ecenter@bridges.edu. Service would begin in the Fall of 2013. Ideal candidates for the board would be educators, education therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, advocates, etc., with either a master’s or doctorate degree. To find out more about the 2e Center for Research and Professional Development, see: [www.bridges.edu/center](http://www.bridges.edu/center).
News from the Blog and Briefing

These are some of the highlights over the last two months from our 2e Newsletter blog (http://2enewsletter.blogspot.com) and semi-monthly e-mail briefing (www.2enewsletter.com/topic_news_briefing.html). We provide shortened URLs here.

AD/HD AND LIVE LONGER? Researchers have concluded that a genetic variant linked to those with AD/HD, among other conditions, may help people live longer. Such genes lead to “active personality traits,” which motivate people to engage in social, intellectual, and physical activities. A Science Daily write-up of the research says, “The variant gene is part of the dopamine system, which facilitates the transmission of signals among neurons and plays a major role in the brain network responsible for attention and reward-driven learning. The DRD4 7R allele blunts dopamine signaling, which enhances individuals’ reactivity to their environment.” The gene appears in significantly higher rates in older persons — meaning that those without the gene die out earlier. http://goo.gl/TFb2a

DEMYSTIFYING LDs in a way that allows students to understand their strengths and challenges can empower those students. An educator writes about her success with the “demystifying” process on an extremely smart ninth grader with AD/HD. The educator writes, “When we were finished with our conversation, it was like a light bulb had gone off in his head. He had always had the tools to succeed — he just didn’t know what they were.” Chances are you know someone who might need “demystifying.” http://goo.gl/i2zQs

HIGH FUNCTIONING AUTISM. Kids with high-functioning autism spectrum disorders can respond well to intensive, five-week, five-day-a-week intervention, according to a study. From a report on the study: “Following the 5-week program, children in the treatment group demonstrated significantly higher scores on child measures of non-literal language skills and knowledge of appropriate social behaviors, as well as significantly higher parent-ratings for targeted and broader social skills and significantly lower ratings of autism symptoms compared to children in the control group.” http://goo.gl/vxrDS

RULING IN SPECIAL ED PLACEMENT. According to Education Week, a federal court has ruled that a Colorado school district is liable for reimbursing parents of a child with learning disabilities for the cost of an out-of-state residential treatment facility, even when the parents unilaterally moved the child to the facility. The case pitted the district as well as school boards from the region against the parents and the U.S. Department of Justice. http://goo.gl/5gRpo

TOURETTE’S, TICS. If you happen to have read a recent issue of Deutsches Ärzteblatt International, you’d have evidently found a report on the available modes of diagnosis and treatment for Tourette Syndrome and other tic disorders in children. According to a write-up of the article in Science Daily, “Tic disorders usually take a benign course; in about 90% of patients, the tics regress spontaneously in adolescence. Specific treatment is indicated only if the tics are severe or cause evident psychosocial stress. On the other hand, 80% to 90% of all patients with Tourette syndrome have comorbid disorders such as attention deficit—hyperactivity disorder, depression, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorder.” http://goo.gl/FbDUL

ANXIOUS GOLFER. A talented professional golfer who has issues with anxiety was the subject of an article in The New York Times. Charlie Beljan, described as “a people magnet,” won a recent tournament in spite of an on-the-course panic attack. Of the publicity he has received, he says, “I still think it’s pretty neat that I brought the issue that affects millions daily to the public eye.” http://goo.gl/zCnp2

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Bob Seney on Books

The National Association for Gifted Children’s annual convention continues to be a great resource for so many things. This year in Denver, my “new” home state, it was also the source for this review. After finishing my presentation What’s New in Young Adult Literature: 2012 Edition, I had a conversation with Jesse Wilson, a storyteller and performer who has just published his first novel. He was wondering if I would be interested in taking a look at it, and I’m glad I said yes!

The book is The Night the Moon Ate My Room! (2012, Tate Publishing & Enterprises). While the folksy narrative and dialogue, very appropriate for performance, may not always translate smoothly to the written page, the content and message are extremely valuable.

Although the plot is integral to the story, this little book is more importantly a collection of five great teaching tales or fables — lessons that our gifted and twice-exceptional students especially need to hear and learn. The story is told in first person. An unnamed lad has just failed miserably at his violin recital. The music just wouldn’t come, and his classmates laughed at him as he walked embarrassed off the stage. “On my way home, I told myself I would never, ever, play the violin, ever again. It was the worst day of my life,” he says.

That night, so disappointed and angry that he’s unable to sleep, the boy experiences something strange. As he is gazing out his window, the moon seems to be coming closer and closer. It keeps getting bigger and bigger, and then an amazing thing happens. “The moon ate my whole room!” our hero declares. He then finds himself inside the moon, floating way above his home; and here he begins a conversation with the moon.

At first reluctant and then finally responding to the friendly, conversational nature of the moon, the boy tells his story. The understanding moon provides the first of many lessons: “I can certainly see why you’re so angry,” the moon said. “But did you know that some of the greatest things in life come from what you call ‘failure’?” And then the moon shares a series of stories, each with an important and poignant message.

Wilson, through the moon, shares a number of life lessons with his readers that focus on issues such as the importance of taking risks, of dreaming and turning dreams into reality, of self-discovery, and of not giving up. Laurel Schmidt, author of Severn Times Smarter (2001, Three Rivers Press) comments, “In lyrical prose, Jesse Wilson explores fundamental childhood issues: overcoming adversity, discovering your courage, and the power of dreams.” The stories are tied together by a theme introduced in a quote from an anonymous source found in the first pages of the book: “Dreams are like the paints of a great artist. Your dreams are your paints; the world is your canvas. Believing is the brush that turns your dreams into a masterpiece of reality.”

If our students can begin just to scratch the surface of these lessons, their successes will begin to flow and they will start moving toward a realization of self — a concept educator Annemarie Roeper believed to be so important for gifted and twice-exceptional students.* Roeper understood giftedness as “…a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences.” (Roeper, 1982, p.21) Roeper suggests that because the depth of awareness and sensitivity are different in gifted children, the structure of their self — the center of their inner life — is different as well. A child’s understanding of this self can be enhanced with stories such as Wilson has provided in The Night The Moon Ate My Room!

*More on Roeper’s thoughts can be found in Educating Children for Life: The Modern Learning Community, which has just been re-released in a new edition by Royal Fireworks Press.

The Guardians

The magic of The Night the Moon Ate My Room! was partially opened to me by a simultaneous reading of William Joyce’s The Man in the Moon: The Guardians of Childhood (2011, Atheneum Books). This picture book introduces his series The Guardians, books which are soon to be made into a movie and which Joyce will co-direct. This series is truly remarkable and a perfect companion piece for The Night the Moon Ate My Room! Both emphasize the importance of following your dreams and discovering your courage.

—BS
Dear Dr. Sylvia

Our family is facing a dilemma. Our daughter, 6, was identified as gifted when her kindergarten teacher referred her for an assessment for AD/HD. Although transitions, lack of written output, and difficulty expressing anger disrupt her at school, no AD/HD was found. This year, when the school referred us for an autism assessment to check for a double exceptionality, she scored borderline Asperger’s. I’ll also note that she’s gifted in gymnastics, cycling, running, and swimming, which isn’t typical with an Asperger’s diagnosis.

I remain on the fence. Based on her borderline score and the behavioral evidence, the doctor is willing to diagnose her so that we can access services for her challenges; but I’m torn. Should we pursue the diagnosis and all the self-esteem risks associated with a label if, as the doctor said, she’s just “flirting with Asperger’s”? I must add that the psychologist on her educational committee stated that she wouldn’t send a child with a behavioral disability to a gifted program. This sounds absurd to me, but the psychologist is the one who ultimately gets to make the decision.

Here’s a summary of my original answer: Gifted children are as similar and different from each other as are other children. While it appears from your daughter’s evaluations that she shares enough traits with some who have Asperger’s, she also has many characteristics of a gifted child. It’s tempting to accept the disorder label because it will provide your daughter with special services. Because the school receives funding to pay for those services, they’ll be willing to accept the diagnosis even if it’s a borderline one. Funds are either non-existent or much smaller for gifted children than for children with disabilities. When a child clearly meets both criteria, schools should provide for both; but they rarely do. You may end up battling the school to have your daughter in the gifted program with an Asperger’s label.

It might be better to resist the diagnosis in the hopes of finding good academic and athletic opportunities and getting some additional mental health help outside the school for now. Private psychologists can help your daughter learn anger management, better communication, and social skills. Involvement in gifted academic and athletic sports programs can also improve her social skills. If these aren’t sufficiently helpful and her problems become worse with maturity, you can then have your daughter re-evaluated for services.

Because I haven’t actually evaluated your daughter, please regard this letter as only providing some thoughts to consider. You’ll have to get guidance from the psychologists who are evaluating her in and outside of school.

Here is the mother’s update: “I want to thank you for your great advice last year when we were struggling with the decision of whether to accept an Asperger’s label. We often receive interesting follow-ups to past columns, and I’ve included one here. First, I’ll share an abbreviated form of the original question and answer, and then the exciting update from the mother of a child who was described by her doctor as “flirting with Asperger Syndrome.”

Moon, concluded

By the way, Jesse Wilson is available for performances of these stories and lessons for children. He can be contacted through www.jessewilsonproductions.com. What a wonderful way to not only introduce this interesting little novel but also to emphasize these life lessons!

Reference

National and International Events in 2013

February 15-17, 2013, California Association for the Gifted Conference (CAG), Anaheim Marriott, Anaheim, California. For educators, professionals; parents’ day. More information at [www.cagifted.org/](http://www.cagifted.org/).


Please note: For state association conferences relating to giftedness, see Hoagies’ website, [www.hoagiesgifted.org](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org). For additional conferences on learning differences, see the website of the Council for Exceptional Children, [www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org).

Dear Dr. Sylvia, concluded

Diagnosis for our gifted child based on a borderline score. Turns out that was the right advice for the school we were in at the time. Fortunately, we obtained a new school placement that is providing support for the whole child. She’s loving it! Her disruptive behavior has completely evaporated. Depression and anger around school have lifted. The improvement in her eye contact within weeks of leaving the previous school astounded a doctor.

It appears that the disruptive behavior at school was mainly about improper educational setting. We’ve become very aware now of how rare the proper setting is for twice-exceptional kids. We’re personally still on the fence about the Asperger’s label; but since the services are now available in an equitable and inclusive way, it’s looking like a win-win situation. We feel very lucky for this outcome. Thanks so much for your help.”

Dr. Sylvia Rimm is a child psychologist and clinical professor at Case University School of Medicine, author, newspaper and magazine columnist, and radio/TV personality. For free newsletters about gifted children, AD/HD and/or learning disabilities, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for each newsletter to P.O. Box 32, Water town, WI, 53094. Read Dr. Rimm’s articles for parents and teachers and submit family questions online at [www.sylviarimm.com](http://www.sylviarimm.com). All questions are answered.