Identifying, Understanding & Supporting Twice-Exceptionality

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Presentation Objectives

- To build a better understanding for how you can identify and support students with gifts, talents and challenges.

- To remind ourselves that we teach students, not textbooks and not grade levels.
What are your thoughts?

- In the state of Colorado there are approximately 898,728 pk-12 students.

- Of the 898,728 students, 68,716 are identified as gifted & talented. (7.6%)

- Of the 68,716 identified as gifted & talented, 3,545 are identified as twice-exceptional (5.1%)

**Breakdown of twice-exceptionality:**

- 1308 students identified 2e by IEP/GT
- 2210 students identified 2e by 504/GT
- 27 students identified 2e by IEP/504/GT
What comes to mind when you hear the word gifted?

The image most people see is the super-achiever who sits in the front row, who always has their hand raised, who always gets the A.

*Sometimes this is true, but not always.*

**Shall we play a game??**

**Truth!**
There are many things you must take into consideration when working with gifted and twice-exceptional students.

**Myth!**
Twice-exceptional & gifted students will do fine all by themselves!
Twice-exceptional students are those who are:

- Identified as gifted according to state criteria in one or more of the categories of giftedness (cognitive, academic, creative, leadership, psychomotor, or arts)

AND

- Identified with a disability according to federal/state criteria – and the disability qualifies them for either an IEP or a 504 plan.
What is “normal” development?
Asynchrony?

Asynchronous development is a discrepancy between cognitive, emotional, social and physical development.

It is the reason we need to examine a child’s strengths and assets as we consider ways to differentiate and personalize their education.
Who are Twice-exceptional students?

Twice-exceptional students feel as if they are part of two worlds: one as a student with a disability and the other as a student with outstanding abilities.

Why am I so good at math but need so much help in reading? Where do I fit in?
The Twice-exceptional Dilemma

What do you see when you look at this picture?

Some people say the cup is half full; some say the cup is half empty.

It is a matter of perception and mindset.

The view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you look at situations and the way you create programming to help all students find success.
The first group consists of students who are identified as gifted and have subtle learning disabilities:

- These students may have a large vocabulary and excellent verbal abilities.
- Their handwriting and spelling abilities often contradict this image.
- Students in this category also achieve on grade level, thus causing their learning disability to be overlooked.
- Identification of their disabilities could offer these students an understanding of their academic difficulties and ease their frustration with school.
Another type of 2e student

The second group of students consists of students who are gifted/LD but they are unidentified:

- These students’ superior intelligence seems to compensate for their undiagnosed learning disability.

- They usually receive instruction in the general classroom and often perform at grade level, so no “red flags” are raised.

- These students are often functioning below their potential.

- Their abilities and disabilities “mask” each other.

- The talents of students in this group often emerge in specific content areas, becoming noticed later in life.

- This group of students may also suffer from mild depression.
Yet another type of 2e student

The third group consists of students identified with a disability but their exceptional abilities are unrecognized or unmet:

- They are identified more often than those in the previous two groups because they stand out in the classroom.
- These bright students often fail in school and are noticed because of their disability, not because of their talents.
- Because little attention is given to their strengths, these students become more aware of their difficulties in learning, feeling academic failure more often than success.
- Over time, this negative outlook on school can lead to disruptive classroom behavior and feelings of low self-concept.
Twice-exceptionality in a nutshell

- One trial learning
- Inquiring mind
- Often profound skepticism
- A creative urge to move in many directions at once (multi-tasking)
- Stubborn and goal oriented
- Independent thinkers, capable of (and prefers) working alone
- Passionate and intense, with a high activity level
- Highly sensitive and aware
- Sensory issues (including overload & distractibility)
- Personal disorganization
- Delayed processing due to analysis paralysis
- Getting lost in thought due to an excess of options and ideas
- Mental fatigue
- Asynchronous development
Meet a twice-exceptional student

- Jacob Barnett, age 11
- 11 years ago he was diagnosed with autism
- He was constantly thinking about the world in great detail so others thought he wasn’t thinking at all
- Put in special education and was “forced to stop thinking”
- Learned all of high school and first year undergrad math in 2 weeks at age 10 and was accepted into college

What would you do if he was your student?
Focus on strengths FIRST

The essential element in meeting the educational needs of students who are 2e is providing instruction that emphasizes these students’ strengths and interests while remediating their learning deficits - but focus on strengths first.

- The self-concept scores of LD students who were also receiving gifted services were significantly higher than those receiving services for their learning disability only.
- Adjust your **programming** to meet their strengths.
- When students’ services included gifted programming that focused on their strengths, the self-concepts of students who are gifted/LD matched those of their nondisabled peers.
Why is remediation alone not helpful for students who are gifted/LD?

Remediation offers few opportunities for a twice-exceptional child to demonstrate his or her gifts and talents and often focuses on weaknesses at the expense of developing gifts. This set of circumstances can result in low self-esteem, a lack of motivation, depression, and stress.
The reality is you may never get the data to identify a twice-exceptional child.

You cannot rely on numbers (data) alone.

You need a strong body of evidence.
Then What??

8 Core principles of RtI

- We can effectively teach all children
- We will intervene early
- We will use a multi-tiered model of service delivery (MTSS)
- We will focus on strengths as well as weaknesses
- We will use scientific, research-based, validated interventions and instruction to the extent that they are available
- We will monitor student progress to inform instruction
- We will use data to make decisions
- We will use assessment for screening, diagnosis and progress monitoring
Affective needs take precedence

One of the most common characteristics of the twice-exceptional child is low self-esteem. They often disguise this low self-esteem through the use of one or more of the following behaviors:

- Anger
- Self-criticism
- Crying
- Disruption or Clowning
- Denial of problems
- Withdrawal
- Daydreaming and fantasy
- Apathy

It is important to remember that often effort DOES NOT equal success for the 2e Student.
Twice-exceptional students report that they experience anger, frustration, and resentment because of recognizing the discrepancy between their potential and their social and academic problems, which can further influence relations with peers.

- Difficulty using appropriate social skills, generating solutions to social problems, and interpreting social cues
- Less likely to be leaders in their peer group
- Are less likely to be popular
- Are often more rejected than their nondisabled peers
- Struggle with perceptions of being different and feeling isolated
- Frustrated with their peer relationships
- Three of the four appeared to relate better to adults than to their peers
Why Identify 2e Students?

- All students deserve the opportunity to reach their potential.
- While 2e students have difficulties, they also have high potential strength areas.
- 2e students deserve our efforts.
- Focusing on deficits will encumber these students from reaching their potential.

Who knows ?? Maybe you will have the next Bill Gates, Albert Einstein, Bela Bartok, Marie Curie, Orlando Bloom, Dan Aykroyd, Ozzy Osbourne, Tom Cruise, Helen Brooke-Taussig, Thomas Edison, Bob Weir, or Whoopi Goldberg in your midst! (You guessed it… they are all 2e!)
Profile 1: Johnny Rocket ~ Elementary

Cognitive Profile

WISC-IV
- Processing Speed Index 78
- Perceptual Reasoning Index 129
- Verbal Comprehension Index 155
- Working Memory 113
- Full Scale IQ 129

Strengths/Challenges

Strengths
- Exceptional critical thinking skills
- Vast knowledge of high-level concepts
- Exceptional verbal skills

Challenges
- Significant reading deficits
- Significant written output deficits
- Attention deficits in large group instruction
- Diagnosis of OCD and Anxiety
Cognitive Profile

WISC-IV
- Processing Speed Index 121
- Perceptual Reasoning Index 131
- Verbal Comprehension Index 121
- Working Memory 107
- Full Scale IQ 127

Strengths/Challenges

Strengths
- Creative and artistic
- Quickly finishes works in class

Challenges
- High level of anxiety
- Atypical presentation from peers dresses different
- Draws fantasy characters in class (My Little Pony)
Established CDE relationship with 2e Project - 2 year commitment
  • Began building 2e infrastructure
  • Creation of a PD model targeted at increasing 2e capacity at the building level
Established internal relationships & initiated large-scale 2e awareness
  • 10 minute “commercial” approach at building SPED Team meetings ~ GT was invited
  • Focused 2e presentations with already established groups:
    • Parent Groups (GT & SPED), Job A-likes, District Mental Health, Secondary SPED Coordinators
Collaboration & Shared Consultations with SPED Coordinator Colleagues
  • Focus was concentrated in all areas of identification and programming
Intensive Individual Consultation with Individual 2e cases district-wide
  • Focus of these consultations and cases were concentrated in the areas of identification and programming in response to crisis
• Continued development of Year 1 initiatives:
  • 2e awareness, identification, collaborative efforts at building and district levels, intensive building level consultations, and continued development of internal resource/training materials
• New storehouse and data tracking among IEP’s, ALP’s, and 504 plans (Enrich)
• Development of resources to capture necessary data for GT identifications sensitive to compliance requirements
• Community and Private Sector relationship building
  • Professional development delivered in cases where out of district placement of 2e students exists
2e Program Development in Cherry Creek School District ~Year Three (2016-2017 School Year)

- Refined Referral Process
- Established 2e Leadership Team
  - Continued development of a resource and training internal infrastructure
  - Strong district 2e resource library
  - Establishment and development of viable and sustainable 2e Professional development
  - Addition of district-level 2e Support Specialists
- Identification has doubled since 2014 but still vastly under-identified
  - Continued exposure and awareness efforts
- Establishment of a 2e Parent Group
One final thought from a twice-exceptional adult

- Jonathan Mooney, you will quickly discover, is a twice-exceptional individual.
- As a child he did not fit the “norm.” His disabilities prevented anyone from ever seeing his gifts.
- He was diagnosed with Dyslexia, Autism, ADHD and dropped out of school with a plan to commit suicide in 6th grade.
- He had a counselor tell him “people like you” are lucky to be able to flip burgers and usually end up incarcerated.

No one stopped to see his potential - that one day he would end up graduating from Brown University to write books and teach others …
For questions about the Colorado Department of Education’s Twice-exceptional Project please reach out to Lisa Conner, Conner_L@cde.state.co.us, 303-886-6414