

## GIFTED STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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### ABSTRACT

*There are some students who can go through all their years of schooling and not be helped in areas where they need help. These students are gifted/talented and also have a learning disability, the twice exceptional students. The twice exceptional students may be very gifted in some areas, but may not be able to read or write, and may be labeled as "lazy". Other students have been found to have a learning disability, but are capable of so much more, but because of the "disability", their gift/talent is hidden. The challenge is identifying the twice exceptional student, recognizing their gifts/talents, and, at the same time being able to accommodate their disabilities.*

**Keywords:** *twice exceptional, teaching, dual exceptionality, gifted and learning disabled*

### Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities

There are students who are gifted, there are students who have learning disabilities, and there are students who are gifted with learning disabilities. Many of these students do not receive appropriate help in schools because they have not been identified as gifted/talented, needing special education services or, they are labeled disabled and do not receive enrichment services as a gifted student. Unfortunately, there is not a clear-cut, easy way to identify these students who are both gifted and have learning disabilities. There is neither a federal nor a state definition for students known as "gifted with learning disabilities", "twice exceptional", and "dual exceptionality". Without a clear definition, many of these students are not recognized in the schools and do not, therefore, receive either enriched curriculum or needed accommodations. Many students "fall through the cracks" (Brody & Mills, 1997, p. 13) because they may be gifted, but their disability masks that fact and students end up performing as average students instead of working at their full potential of their giftedness/talent with needed accommodations to help with their disability (Brody & Mills, 1997). Early detection (Douglass, 2008; Fetzer, 2000; Pereles, Omdal, & Baldwin, 2009) is, of course, crucial. It is important to know how to define twice exceptional students, then identify them and teach to their uniqueness, find out how the law protects them, and, finally, help these students through their struggles by understanding who they are and how they can reach their academic potential. This paper will focus on gifted students who have a specific learning disability and will use the term "twice exceptional".

### **Defining Twice Exceptional**

Although there is no true definition for “twice exceptional”, the definitions for gifted/talented and learning disabilities may help to define, as well as find, twice exceptional students. In 1972 the U.S. Department of Education adopted Marland’s definition of gifted and talented, which most states currently follow. It states,

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. (as cited in Rimm, Siegle, & Davis, 2018, p. 11)

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides the following definition of gifted and talented students:

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110 (Title IX, Part A, Definition 22) (2002)).

The federal government leaves it up to the individual state to determine who is considered gifted and talented. This can be problematic because one student may be eligible in one state, but not another. Rimm et al. (2018) reports that a survey was conducted in 2016 by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) which revealed that four states had no definition for gifted and talented students. In addition, the same survey showed that the states did not necessarily include the same areas of giftedness. The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (1988) is a federal program dedicated to gifted and talented students and a source of funding for state educational agencies, and local educational agencies, among others (Karnes & Marquardt, 1997).

Disabilities cover many areas: Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Emotional Disturbance/Behavior Disorder (ED/BD), Hearing, speech, vision, orthopedic impairments, and Specific Learning Disability (SLD). According to IDEA 2004, the definition of SLD is

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. This term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. This term does not include children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; mental retardation; or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), in response to a letter written, stated that, "IDEA is silent regarding 'twice exceptional' or 'gifted' students" (55 IDELR 172). All students who are recognized by their teachers or parents as being potentially gifted/talented or having a learning disability, go through a series of assessments to determine if they are gifted or have a learning disability. Currently there is no legislation that provides a definition for twice exceptional and many states attempt to use the definitions for gifted/talented together with the definition for specific learning disability (Brody & Mills, 1997).

### **Identification**

Identifying gifted students with learning disabilities can be difficult. Twice exceptional students are "those who possess an outstanding gift or talent and are capable of high performance, but also have a learning disability that makes some aspects of academic achievement difficult" (Brody & Mills, 1997, p. 282). Unfortunately, many people have preconceived ideas about what it means to be gifted and what it means to have a learning disability. Some believe that if students are "gifted", they are gifted in all areas of academics and should not struggle with anything at school, and they should always have straight As. However, students are usually gifted in only one or two areas (Douglass, 2006). In the same vein, if students have been labeled as "learning disabled", they are seen as having difficulty in all areas of academics and cannot succeed in school unless given remediation and accommodations (Bianco, 2005).

Research has shown that twice exceptional students will fall into one of three categories: 1) students who are identified as gifted, but are later found to have deficits, 2) students who are in special education who are found to have a gift/talent in one or more areas, and 3) students who appear to be average because their disability masks their giftedness (Baum, 1990; Bianco, 2005; Brody & Mills, 1997; Krochak & Ryan, 2007; Rizza & Morrison, 2007). Students in the first category are sometimes seen as lazy or underachievers because they have shown that they have high abilities, yet they are not able to keep up with the work and begin to fall behind in their school work (Brody & Mills, 1997). The inability to keep up with the work usually happens at the elementary level when the curriculum begins to become more challenging, expectations change, and the student has to actually "work" to complete assignments (Krochak & Ryan, 2007; Rizza & Morrison, 2007; Shevitz, Weinfeld, Jeweler, 2003). There begins to be a discrepancy between what the student has been doing and what the student is currently doing (Baum, 1990) and teachers should begin to take notice and try to find out what is causing the discrepancy.

The students in the second category are known to have a learning disability but their gift/talent may never be realized because of inadequate assessments of their intellectual abilities (Brody & Mills, 1997). Their "disability" label can affect how they are treated in the classroom and teachers may tend to focus on what the student is unable to do, instead of what they can do. These students are also identified as having behavior issues in school (Baum, 1990).

The students in the third category are the most underserved population because "their gift masks the disability and the disability masks the gift" (Baum,

1990, p. 2), they are seen as average performing students and often times the dual exceptionality is not realized until they enter college (Baum, 1990; Brody & Mills, 1997). Unfortunately, these students have not been identified and, therefore, have not been tested and found to be gifted/talented and/or learning disabled. This lack of identification means they are not receiving any services where they need it and, therefore, are not able to reach their intellectual potential (Brody & Mills, 1997).

### **Characteristics**

Knowing the characteristics of twice exceptional students can help identify them. Some broad characteristics of twice exceptional students are that they show evidence of an outstanding talent or ability, superior vocabulary, high level of problem-solving and reasoning, unusual imagination, advance sense of humor, show evidence of a discrepancy between expected and actual achievement, and evidence of a processing deficit (Brody & Mills, 1997; Nielsen, 2002). Other characteristics of twice exceptional students are that they tend to have poor spelling (Fetzer, 2000), high vocabulary (Douglass, 2008), poor handwriting, disorganized (Fetzer, 2000), have a hard time expressing their thoughts, appear as if they are daydreaming (Yssel, Prater, & Smith, 2010), frustrated, distracted, do not enjoy school, and do not complete their work (Bisland, 2004). It is important for teachers to be aware of the characteristics shown by twice exceptional students, both positive and negative, because these characteristics will show up in the classroom and the teachers are the ones who are able to observe the students. When teachers notice a student showing one or more of these characteristics, on a continuous basis, they should refer that student for further assessment. It may turn out that the student is twice exceptional.

### **Teaching Training**

Teacher training in recognizing twice exceptional students (Karnes, Shaunessy, & Bisland, 2004) is very important. Training should also include the gifted teacher as well as the special education teacher, to ensure that all teachers working with children have the ability to recognize those students who may be twice exceptional. The gifted teacher is familiar with the characteristics of gifted/talented students and should be able to recognize some of those characteristics in a student who may not have scored high enough on his IQ test to be considered intellectually gifted, however is gifted in other areas. The special education teacher is knowledgeable in learning disabilities and can recognize when a student is struggling in one those areas. Both these teachers, along with the general education teacher, are all able, and should, refer any student whom they feel may be twice exceptional to be assessed further (Bianco, 2005).

### **Parents' Role**

Parents, of course, know their child the best and, therefore, play a vital role in helping to identify if their child is gifted with a learning disability. When parents look over the assignments and grades of their child, and notice that the grades are falling, they need to step up and advocate for their child (Fetzer, 2000), request a meeting with the teachers (Karnes et al., 2004) to discuss the possibility of the

child being twice exceptional, and request testing to be done (NAGC, 2013). Early identification is important.

### **Labels**

Teachers should look at their students objectively, without attaching labels. Once a student has been labeled, whether it is gifted/talent, learning disabled, ADHD, EBD, Autism, or any other label, it can be difficult to look beyond the label and see what the student is actually capable of doing. There are many labels that are given to students and those labels can, consciously or unconsciously, affect how people see the student (Bianco, 2005). For some, just the word “gifted” brings up the idea that the student is so smart and will not have any problems in school, they will get straight As (Baum, 1990) and not be a behavioral problem. Unfortunately, that is incorrect thinking. Gifted students are many things: intellectual, creative, leaders, creative thinkers, and much more (Rimm et al., 2018). However, they do have problems in school, in part because of peer pressure. They do not feel as if they fit in with their peers because their intellectual ability is so much higher than that of their age-peer group. It could also be because of the creative way they do things, which is so different from their peers (Rimm et al., 2018). This can cause low self-esteem for some (Barber & Mueller, 2011; Leggett et al., 2010).

In addition, having the label “gifted” or “gifted/talented” does not mean that they are good at everything. Most gifted/talented students are only good in one, maybe two, areas (Douglass, 2008). There is a growing number of “gifted/talented” students who struggle in school because of a disability. The twice exceptional students who are extremely “bright” and can carry on amazing intellectual discussions and have an incredible vocabulary, may not be able to read a book or write a cohesive sentence (Barber & Mueller, 2011; Brody & Mills, 1997). There are many types of disabilities that affect the student’s ability to perform in school. Some twice exceptional students are able to “mask” their disability, but doing so does not give them the help they need to use their gifts/talents to their potential. On the other hand, there are students who are labeled “learning disabled” and are treated as if they are unable to perform higher-level tasks and are very seldom referred for further testing (Bianco, 2005). It is important to locate these students who are twice exceptional at an early age so that preventative measures can be taken.

### **Evaluation**

#### **Response to Intervention**

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a way many schools have chosen to identify learning disabled students, without being tested. According to the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (2008), “the RTI process is designed to identify struggling learners early, to provide access to needed interventions, and to help identify children with disabilities”. In terms of twice exceptional students, CEC (2008) states that RTI

shall consider the educational needs of children with gifts and talents and their families, particularly related to the identification of children

considered to be twice exceptional because they have gifts and talents as well as a disability. These advanced learners shall be provided access to a challenging and accelerated curriculum, while also addressing the unique needs of their disability. (p. 2)

RTI is built on a 3-Tier system. Each tier uses research-based instruction for all students. Tier 1 consists of a “universal core program” which screens all students for potential problems, especially in reading (McKenzie, 2010). Those students who are progressing as expected are “responsive” (R), those who are not progressing as expected are “nonresponsive” (NR) and need to move up to Tier 2 to begin interventions. At Tier 2, students receive individualized modifications and/or accommodations as needed in the general education classroom. For Tier 1 and 2, the problem-solving team consists of the general education teacher, who is the lead for interventions at this level, and the special education teacher. (CEC, 2008). Any student who continues to be NR, moves up to Tier 3 to receive more intensive interventions (McKenzie, 2010). At this level, the primary intervention leaders are the special education teacher, related services, and specialized teachers (CEC, 2008).

In Colorado, the Department of Education uses RTI and has developed six common core principles to work within the three tiers of RTI (Pereles et al., 2009) to address all students’ needs. The first principle is that all children can learn with research-based instruction. In addition, these instructional strategies incorporate the Gifted Program Standards developed by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) which will address the needs of the gifted students.

The second core principle addresses the importance of early intervention. Many twice exceptional students are able to mask their disability or giftedness in the earlier grades and are able to perform at grade level (Pereles et al., 2009). The problem here is that gifted students with disabilities are “not impaired enough” to receive accommodations and “not gifted enough” to receive gifted services (NAGC, 2013) leaving these students frustrated and underserved (Bisland, 2004). RTI, because of early screening, can possibly find those students and provide them with necessary enrichment and/or remediation services (Pereles et al., 2009) before any behavioral or social/emotional issues develop (Brody & Mills, 1997) due to the lack of recognized needs. In addition, RTI may lessen the number of referrals to special education (CEC, 2008), if the needs are found and interventions have successfully been implemented and are working.

The third core principle of RTI, is the three-tiered interventions. Throughout the three tiers there is a problem-solving team which consists of the general education teacher, the special education teacher, and any related service providers. The purpose of the problem-solving team is to monitor the progress of any student who has been found to be struggling in school and given interventions. As the student moves up the tiers, the special education teacher and related service providers take a more active role in making sure the necessary interventions are in place and helping the student. The hope of RTI is that the interventions will be enough and testing for special education will not be needed (Pereles et al., 2009).

Core principle four is about the importance of data. Having reliable data can help uncover those students who mask their weaknesses. When struggles appear, interventions, based on the data collected can take place. However, the CEC (2008) does not feel that the data collected is enough and, if needed, the student should be tested to determine if placement in special education is needed.

Core principle five discusses the importance of collaboration between educators and families. The data collected is used by the different educators involved with the student in decision making regarding interventions. The students will be monitored on how well the interventions are working and the educators and families can discuss the data and work as a team to make any necessary changes and/or adjustments.

The sixth and final core principle is family engagement. The RTI model recognizes the importance of family involvement in the education of their child. Families are the advocates and their input about the strengths and weakness of the child can assist in the development of interventions and should support their child's education at home (Pereles et al., 2009).

RTI has many good aspects imbedded in the system and is a promising way to find some of the twice exceptional students in the schools, but more intentional scrutiny and testing is still necessary to find even more students. As students grow and develop in school, their needs may change and it is important to continuously reevaluate their needs and make any necessary changes as soon as possible (Brody & Mills, 1997).

### **Other Ways to Evaluate**

Evaluation and testing students to determine if they are twice exceptional is necessary in order for identified students to receive services for gifted programs and special education. "Trying to find one defining pattern or set of scores to identify all GLD students is probably futile" (Brody & Mills, 1997, p. 284). There are several methods used to identify gifted and talented students. The RTI is one way to evaluate students, as noted above, but most schools continue to focus mainly on measuring intellectual ability to determine if a student is gifted/talented, though it is controversial (Brody & Mills, 1997; Krochak & Ryan, 2007). The "gold standard" tests, the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children-Revised (WISC-R) and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales are used most often by schools (Brody & Mills, 1997; Rimm et al., 2018) to measure intellectual abilities. In order for a student to be considered "gifted", and recommended for the gifted program, the student must have a score of 130+. Unfortunately, most twice exceptional students, or other gifted/talented students, are not able to reach that score so some school districts may lower the score to 120+ (Krochak & Ryan, 2007; Nielsen, 2002) to accommodate them. Brody and Mills (1997) cautions about "rigid cutoff scores for program participation that discriminate against students with the atypical profiles that characterize gifted children with learning disabilities" (p. 284). An interesting fact found, when using the WISC-R, was that the results in this test of twice exceptional students typically resembled that of their gifted peers in intellectual ability and the results for reading and written language resembled students with learning disabilities (Krochak & Ryan, 2007; Nielsen, 2002). Silverman (1989), as

cited by Neilson (2002), reports, after reviewing the results from studies done using the WISC-R by the Twice-Exceptional Child Projects, that “it is insufficient to simply compare Verbal and Performance Scores when assessing this population, due to the fact that there are extraordinary strengths and unusual weaknesses in both domains...which can average out in the composite scores” (p. 96).

The evaluation process used to identify twice exceptional students must be multifaceted to include ways to determine both the students’ strengths as well as weaknesses. However, giftedness and talent are more than just intelligence. One must not forget creative or productive thinking, psychomotor ability, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and mathematics (Brody & Mills, 1997; Rimm et al., 2018). In order to get the broadest pictures of the capabilities of a student, assessments should include a test of intelligence, academic tests, creativity tests, dynamic assessments, and parent/teacher reports, portfolio reviews, and behavior assessments (Al-Hroub, 2010; Krochak & Ryan, 2007). Other tests to determine if a student is gifted is the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability test, Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking, Frasier Talent Assessment Profile (F-TAP) for disadvantaged and minority groups, to name just a few. Also included in recommending students for gifted and talented assessments are teacher and student nominations (Rimm et al., 2018). Any discrepancies between the potential of the student and the actual performance should be a clue of a student who may need to be referred for evaluation (Al-Hroub, 2010; Krochak & Ryan, 2007; McKenzie, 2010) to determine if a student is twice exceptional.

In order to be identified as both SLD and GT, a sufficient discrepancy between academic skill development and general cognitive ability must be established, which effectively necessitates that either the learning disability is sufficiently mild so as to not dramatically affect the full-scale IQ, or the general intelligence is so robust that the impact of the disability does not preclude establishing a discrepancy (McKenzie, 2010, p. 164).

More than one method should always be used to determine the eligibility of students as gifted/talented, having learning disabilities, or both (Krochak & Ryan, 2007) in order to give the clearest picture of the capabilities of students.

### **Teaching**

The National Association for Gifted Children (2013) recommends five strategies to help identify twice exceptional students. The first strategy is providing a comprehensive assessment to any gifted student showing a possible disability or a student having a disability showing signs of advanced reasoning, creativity, or problem solving. The second strategy is using parent information regarding underperformance of their gifted child, advising them of their child’s rights in regards to comprehensive assessments, and how to request an assessment. The third strategy is adapting RTI to make sure that the screening that is done identifies all potential twice exceptional students by looking for students who show a discrepancy in their performance both at school as well as outside of school. The fourth strategy is to include the gifted education teachers in planning RTI interventions and to continue monitoring the student throughout the school

year, making sure the interventions are working to help the student progress. The fifth strategy is to provide professional development to all teachers in regards to the characteristics of twice exceptional students and how to identify these students.

Teaching twice exceptional children can be challenging because they are gifted in one or more areas, yet are low in other areas. "Students who have both gifts and learning disabilities require a dually differentiated program: one that nurtures their gifts and talents while accommodating for learning weaknesses" (NAGC, 1998, as cited by Baum, Cooper, & Neu, 2001). With this in mind, collaboration between the general education teacher, gifted teacher, and special education is needed to determine what type enrichment and/or remediation is to be used in the general classroom (Bisland, 2004; Pereles et al., 2009). The most important part of teaching twice exceptional students is to focus on and develop their gift/talent (Baum, 1990; Brody & Mills, 1997; Leggett, Shea, & Wilson, 2010; Neihert, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002).

At the same time, these students need specific accommodations in order to reach their academic potential. There has to be a balance between working on the student's strength while compensating for his/her weakness (Baum et al., 2001; Rimm et al., 2018). Twice exceptional students "spend their school lives feeling trapped by their learning deficits and totally ignored with respect to their talents...these students need to experience the freedom to succeed as learners – for the first time in their lives, perhaps" (Baum et al., 2001, p. 488). Teachers can help students feel better about themselves by focusing on their gifts/talents and help in areas where they struggle. Talking to students and finding out what they are interested in can help to build enrichment activities that promote critical thinking and creativity (Neihert et al., 2002). Collaborating with the gifted teacher will help with finding appropriately enriched activities.

Many twice exceptional students struggle with processing, reading and writing and should, therefore, be allowed to have a choice in how they obtain information and present the information to the teacher (Baum, 1990; Baum et al., 2001; Mann, 2006). Teachers should keep in mind that most twice exceptional students do not necessarily want less challenging work, they just may need different ways to receive the information (Neihert et al., 2002) due to their disability. For example, students can be given extra time to do research, allowed to use books-on-tape, have the material read to them, or use text-to-speech technology. For writing projects, they could use graphic organizers, sequencing work sheets, word processors, spell check, a scribe, or work with partners. In addition, allowing the students to present their project in alternative ways would allow them to use their creativity to find the best way for them to present information, such as making PowerPoints, drawings, drama, film, or to present orally (Baum et al., 2001; Mann, 2006; Neihert et al., 2002; Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler, Shevitz, 2005; Yssel et al., 2010). Using various means to present information is also good practice for the students in terms of their future career, where they may have to be able to come up with some alternative ways to present information at their job (Baum et al., 2001).

Colleen Thrailkill (1998) shared her son, Patrick's, story on how he was able to present a report using an art project instead of a written report, which he was unable to do because of his disability. He was also given an independent study project and was allowed to present it orally. When he met the special education teacher at his mother's school, she asked him, "Oh, do you have a learning disability?", his response was, "I used to. Now I have a spell checker on my computer." Patrick found an accommodation that helped him work within his disability. It is beneficial to the students to have opportunities to do "authentic" projects where they see value in what they are producing (Mann, 2006; Yssel, et al., 2010) and receive recognition for a job well done when the project is finished. Teachers need to keep students engaged in the classroom by allowing the student to use both their gifts and talents, as well as any accommodations they need.

### **Strategies**

Twice exceptional students need to be taught various strategies to help them be successful in the classroom and become more independent learners. By "giving gifted/learning disabled students opportunities for enrichment and tools to compensate for their disability, teachers are giving them the chance to reach their full academic potential" (Bisland, 2004, p.58). Students need to look at themselves and find out how they learn best then share that information with their teachers. Teachers can help by allowing the student to choose topics for research, and allow them to work independently on a project. Giving students more autonomy in their work can be a motivator (Karnes et al., 2004).

With the collaboration of the general education teacher, special education teacher, and gifted teacher, the area of weakness for the student should be accommodated in a way that will assist the student to be able to do his or her work more proficiently (Bisland, 2004). Some twice exceptional students have problems with memory. Strategies that address memory weakness can be developed to help with memorization skills, such as the use of mnemonics, LINKS, FIRST, LISTS (Baum, 1990; Bisland, 2004), to name a view. Students could also develop their own strategy for memorization.

Another beneficial strategy is addressing organization, or the lack of. Many twice exceptional students are found to be quite disorganized (Baum et al., 2001) which can pose a problem for them when it is time to take notes in class or even finding their notes (Baum et al., 2001; Yssel et al., 2010). When students have a difficult time writing down information in a sequential and orderly fashion, it makes it difficult for them to go back and use their notes as a study guide. One strategy for writing notes is dividing the paper in half, giving them two columns. One column could be for dates, names, events, and the other column is for details about what was written in the first column. In addition, using time lines or flow charts will help with sequencing. If taking notes is really a big struggle, receiving copies of the teacher's notes would be beneficial to the student (Baum et al, 2001; Bisland, 2004). Another strategy to help those students who struggle with writing is using written expression strategies, some of which are working on sentence structure and paragraph organization. Another writing strategy is using DEFENDS which breaks down writing into seven organized steps (Bisland, 2004). When a

student begins to feel overwhelmed or cannot focus, teachers can break up the tasks into smaller chunks, or create a lesson using multiple stations, giving all students the opportunity to get up and move around. In the general education classroom, teachers should be using differentiated teaching (Yssel et al., 2010) to meet the needs of the students as well as including enrichment curriculum.

### **Accommodations**

Accommodations are used to give students an equal opportunity to show what they know. Accommodations can change based on the needs of the student (Weinfeld et al., 2005). By no means should accommodations give the student the feeling of dependence, on the contrary, accommodations are used to build skills to allow student more independence, empowering them to “take control of their own learning, allowing their performance to match their potential” (Bisland, 2004, p. 54). Some accommodations that are helpful to twice exceptional student, is the use of a word processor, extended time for assignments, a calculator, copy of notes, reduced assignments, recording of reading material, graphic organizers, flow charts, story webs (Baum, 1990; Baum et al., 2001; Weinfeld et al., 2005)

### **Individualized Education Program**

Unlike students in special education who are protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504, gifted students have no laws to protect them (NAGC). However, according to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, it would be unlawful to deny twice exceptional students, who qualify for gifted programs to participate.

It is unlawful to deny a student with a disability admission to an accelerated class or program solely because of that student’s need for special education or related aids and services<sup>2</sup>, or because that student has an IEP or a plan under Section 504. The practice of conditioning participation in an accelerated class or program by a qualified student with a disability on the forfeiture of special education or of related aids and services to which the student is legally entitled also violates the Section 504 and Title II requirements stated above. Section 504 and Title II require that qualified students with disabilities be given the same opportunities to compete for and benefit from accelerated programs and classes as are given to students without disabilities. 34 CFR 104.4(b)(1)(ii) and 28 CFR 35.130(b)(1)(ii).

If the twice exceptional student is on an Individual Education Program (IEP), any accommodations and modifications are noted in the IEP and must, by law, be followed. The IEP team must have at least one general education teacher, special education teacher, gifted teacher, local education agency (Yell, 2016), parents, and any related services. For identified twice exceptional students, goals are written for both gifted and learning disabilities. The goals for gifted can be on developing problem solving and decision making, the development of critical thinking, and the encouragement of creativity. The objectives may be developing and expanding thinking skills or to promote critical thinking and reasoning abilities. In the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) may note that the student requires advanced enrichment activities that are not available in the regular education curriculum,

allowing for the student to attend a gifted program, where available, to work on the goals and skills to promote the development of the student's gift/talent. On the same IEP, goals for the disability are written. These would be in the areas of eligibility (reading, math, writing, etc.). The IEP would also include a list services, such as gifted program or resource class, and the amount of time in each (Fetzer, 2000).

### **Emotional/Social Issues**

Twice exceptional students can feel as if they live in two worlds – gifted and disabled. This can create emotional problems because they know that they are able to do higher-level thinking, yet cannot complete certain assignments because of their disability (Barber & Mueller, 2011). For example, the student may be great at solving problems, but does not know how to put it down on paper, unable to read the research information, or do the math calculations needed to solve a math problem. Behavior problems in class can begin to happen, out of frustration from knowing that they cannot do the work assigned (Brody & Mills, 1997). It is common for the twice-exceptional student to have a low self-concept, be hypersensitive, have anxiety, depression, poor motivation, and poor social skills (Barber & Mueller, 2011; Leggett et al., 2010). Twice exception students can be two to three years behind in social/emotional maturity than their same age peers (Douglass, 2008). Social and emotional issues may be tied to their lack of achievement in school, which is a reason that the strengths of the student should come first so as to build up their confidence which will, in turn, positively affect their behaviors and attitudes (Yssel et al., 2010). It would also be beneficial to find like-minded peers who have the same interests and abilities, one avenue would be through social networking (Baum et al., 2001; Yssel et al., 2010).

It is important for twice exceptional students to know and be familiar with their own strengths and weaknesses (Neihert et al., 2002). When they understand themselves, what they can do, and what they need help with, they can begin to change how they see themselves, and that can lead them to a successful future (Bisland, 2004). Knowing what they are capable of doing can give them more freedom to do their work, because they feel more comfortable using their gifts and asking for help where and when they may need it (Mann, 2006) while they take on more responsibility for their learning, instead of, perhaps, being a behavior problem in the classroom (Brody & Mills, 1997).

### **Mentors**

Mentors can play an important role in the success of twice exceptional students. The students should be matched up with a mentor who is an expert, or someone knowledgeable in the area of interest of the student. Once a match has been made, the mentor works with the student to answer questions, work on projects together, teaches them all kinds of information about the area of interest, which helps the student build knowledge and skills, and makes learning fun. The mentor is a role model on how to be a success in school and in the work place. One mentor program, the Wings Mentor Program (Shevitz et al., 2003), works closely with the school and teachers to share and collaborate instructional strategies that

can possibly help in the classroom. The purpose of this program is to give some extra support to twice exceptional students who continue to struggle in the classroom. The Wings Mentor Program has four basic principles: 1) Focus on Strengths: find the strengths and interest of the student; 2) Build in Success: once the mentor knows the interest of the student, they work together to find the student's abilities and are given opportunities to be successful; 3) Enhance Self-Esteem: the goal is for the student to gain self-confidence through successes and enhance his or her self-confidence and self-esteem; and 4) Plant a Seed: The desire is that the student will see what he or she can do and begin to want to succeed in school and continue to be successful in the future (Shevitz et al., 2003).

### **Peer Relationships**

Peer relations are important to all students, but especially twice exceptional. The unique abilities of twice exceptional students sometimes make it difficult for them to fit in with their peers and they can feel isolated (Barber & Mueller, 2011; Nielsen, 2002). Bringing together students who have the same abilities and disabilities can help them form friendships and help build social skills. This can be done through joint projects, after school programs, field trips, or clubs (Rimm et al., 2018). Outside school activities can be an avenue where twice exceptional students thrive.

### **Parental Support**

Twice exceptional students who have strong parental support tend to do better in school (Douglass, 2007). Parents are, of course, a big resource for finding what the strengths and weaknesses are for their child. This information should be communicated to the teacher which could help facilitate needed accommodations and, may even help to make changes throughout the year, if necessary. Parents should nurture the skills of their child at home, give encouragement, support, and be willing to give a lot of time to help to the child (Fetzer, 2000; Thrailkill, 1998). Parents can also encourage their students to become involved in extracurricular activities (Karnes et al., 2004). There are many resources available to help parents of twice exceptional children that can be found on the Internet, in books, and from professional organizations (Fetzer, 2000; Karnes et al., 2004). All of these resources can help parents with any concerns they might have such as peer pressure, the emotional state of their child and how to advocate for the child (Barber & Mueller, 2011; Karnes et al., 2004) to make sure he or she is receiving the appropriate education, including enrichment activities and any needed accommodations.

There is a world of opportunities for twice exceptional students. Transitioning from secondary school to college may be difficult for some, but if they are comfortable in their abilities, they will be fine. If they have spent their time at school learning, not only academics, but also about themselves, they will be able to make decisions about their future. When they know and understand how they learn and what they need to do to be successful in their work, they can choose careers that will use their strengths (Baum, 1990) and gifts in a productive way. Hopefully they will have benefited from any and all enrichment activities and

projects that they did in school and have some experience in the area that they enjoy the most.

### **Conclusion**

The schools need to do all they can to find those students who are twice exceptional. The earlier they are found, the better chance there is to teach them strategies to build up their gifts/talents and work on their disabilities. Douglass (2007) says, "talents must be nurtured, learning strategies must be taught" (p. 6). There is no federal or state definition of "twice exceptional" so it is up to teachers, parents, or the students themselves, to pick up on clues and refer for further testing. It can be very difficult to find twice exceptional students because, for some, their gift/talent masks their disability or their disability is such that their gifts/talents areas are not seen. Teachers need to be aware of the characteristics of twice exceptional students, and when found, work together with the special education and gifted teachers to build a curriculum that works for the student. Twice exceptional students need both enrichment as well as accommodations to be the best students they can be and reach their highest educational potential. This could mean being part of the gifted/talented program with pull-out sessions with like-minded students to work on critical thinking projects, and/or a remedial class for math or reading. Accommodations play an important part in the classroom. Giving twice exceptional students the option to use their gift/talent to present work, such as through a diorama instead of a written report, is very helpful and worthwhile for the student. Some students may need to use assisted technology, such as a word processor or calculator. What is important is that the focus be on the gift/talent, in other words, the student's strengths.

The twice exceptional student, when identified, is protected under IDEA for the disability. Because of that, the student will have an IEP with annual goals for both gifted and for the disability. The IEP will contain specific services for the student, such as going to the gifted program or a resource class, along with any accommodations and/or modifications to assist the student in his or education. Parents play an important part in their child's education. They are the best advocate for their child to make sure he or she is receiving all the services needed to provide the best education possible, to make sure that the child's gift/talent is being developed in school, and appropriate accommodations are being provided. An abundance of resources can be found to assist parents of twice exceptional students to help with any issues that they might encounter. Twice exceptional students should be seen as being "at promise" instead of being "at risk" (Nielson, 2002). The most important educational piece for twice exceptional students is focusing on, developing, and nurturing their gift/talent so that they may live up to their potential in school and in life.

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