2e™ Twice-Exceptional Newsletter

January/February 2009
Issue 32

For parents, teachers and professionals.
Helping twice-exceptional children reach their potential.

Featured in this Issue

Our focus in this issue – advocacy and special education law.

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Quote

"Excellence in education is when we do everything that we can to make sure they become everything that they can."

– Carol Ann Tomlinson

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Welcome!

We wish the subscribers and friends of *2e: Twice-Exceptional* Newsletter a Happy New Year! We begin 2009 with an article that features the predictions of experts in the 2e community on what the year will bring for twice-exceptional children and families.

Our main focus in this issue is advocacy and special education law. Dictionaries define an advocate as one who pleads for another, or who speaks on behalf of another, or who supports or urges by argument. In our lead article, Rick Lavoie discusses how teachers can take on this sometimes risky role without putting their jobs in jeopardy. We also interview special education lawyer Matt Cohen about his role in advocating for the rights of special needs students, including those who are twice exceptional. Attorney Doreen Philphot explains special education law and describes what takes place in a due process hearing; and educators Andrea Bennett and Lisa Frank answer some common questions about IEPs and 504 Plans. Also in this issue, on a different topic, Corin Barsily Goodwin and Mika Gustavson discuss why homeschooling can be a good fit for 2e students who are struggling in school.

2e Newsletter is pleased to announce the start of a series of articles contributed by Bridges Academy, a school for twice-exceptional students in California. The series, entitled The Mythology of Learning, will examine commonly held myths about teaching and learning that can be detrimental to children who are twice exceptional.

We thank you for reading and supporting *2e Newsletter*.

– Linda Neumann and Mark Bade
Glen Ellyn Media
January, 2009

2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter is a bi-monthly publication about twice-exceptional children, children who are gifted and who have LDs – learning difficulties that go by many names, including learning disabilities, learning disorders, and just plain learning differences. Our goal is to promote a holistic view of the 2e child – not just the high IQ, or the quirkiness, or the disabilities, but the child as a whole person. Comments and suggestions are always welcome by phone, fax, or e-mail.

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We thank our supporters and subscribers.

For Teachers Fighting the "Good Fight"

How to Advocate for Your Students Without Losing Your Job

By Rick Lavoie, M.A., M.Ed.

Editor's Note: The full-length version of this article first appeared in 2008 on the LD OnLine website (www.ldonline.org). It is excerpted here with the author's permission. Although the following article was written specifically for special education teachers, it offers recommendations and provides insights to all teachers who work with high ability students who have learning or attention challenges.

In a perfect world, no teacher should be criticized for defending, protecting, or advocating for a child. But, the world is imperfect, and teachers often find that they are asked to compromise students' services in order to maintain budgets and other real-world constraints. Teachers face this conundrum daily. Their allegiances are torn: How do I meet the needs of my students while also being a loyal, responsible, and responsive school employee?

Schools are political. In order for your voice to be heard and your advocacy to be effective, you must play and win the "political game"...

So, what can the teacher do? For your consideration, I offer some basic suggestions for the teacher who attempts to juggle her commitment to kids along with the realities of today's school workplace.

The underlying theme of these suggestions is that schools are political. In order for your voice to be heard and your advocacy to be effective, you must play and win the "political game" in the hallways, the teachers' lounge, and the administrative suite.

- Understand that the *principal* is the key player in this drama. You must have the loyalty, support, faith, and cooperation of your principal in order to advocate effectively.
- If you are a new teacher, find a mentor in the school. Find a successful, respected teacher in your building and become her protégé. She can provide you with invaluable counsel and advice.
- Ingratiate yourself to colleagues in all departments and at all levels. It does, indeed, take a village to raise a child and you will need all the teachers, secretaries, custodians, lunch ladies, and ancillary staff in order to assist you in your advocacy. Write thank-you notes. Be polite. Show interest. Be kind. Don't complain. Share ideas and materials. Compliment. Support. Smile.
- Get out of the special education classroom on a regular basis. Become an integral part of the school community.
- Get involved in staff development and in-service programs. Promote the idea of using these programs as vehicles to educate and sensitize your colleagues to the unique needs of students with learning disabilities.
- Promote the concept of Universal Design that holds that special education strategies are effective with *all* kids! If a teacher learns a few "special ed" techniques to use with the child with LD in her class, she can also use those strategies with her "best and brightest" student who may be unable to understand a specific concept. Remind your colleagues that special education is simply really good education.
- Organize and participate in teacher assistance teams. This innovative, transdisciplinary approach consists of teachers and support staff who voluntarily gather on occasion in an informal setting. One of the team members presents a brief outline of a difficulty that she is having with a particular student. The group then brainstorms various suggestions and solutions. This strategy is often used in business or medical settings with great success.
- Be positive and upbeat about your special education students. If you constantly vent (loudly and publicly) about how difficult, complex, and challenging these kids can be, your colleagues will be less willing to work with them. Give your kids good, positive, constructive PR.
- Propose a study group or Great Books Club where you and your colleagues read and discuss an educational book. Brainstorm ways that the author's concepts can be used in your school.
- If you are frustrated or troubled by a colleague, take care *not* to communicate your feelings to parents or students. Nobody wins in that type of conflict. It is unprofessional and unfair to undermine a colleague's authority or reputation.

How to Advocate, continued

- Observe your colleagues in their classrooms and encourage them to visit your class, as well. Learn from one another.
- Volunteer for committees and assist with school functions and events. If you help the yearbook advisor design the layout, he will be more likely to assist "your" special education students who are assigned to his English class. Again, schools are political: You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.
- Deal with conflict effectively. Recognize that, in the overwhelming majority of conflicts, no party is all wrong (or all right!). Try to see all sides of an issue. Adult conflicts tend to, eventually, affect the child.
- Avoid negativity and do not get involved in the negative teacher cliques that are common in schools. These destructive groups will often try to sabotage the administration's goals and plans. Be cordial with these folks, but don't allow them to sap your energy or enthusiasm.
- Don't get involved in gossip or destructive rumor-spreading. If you hear a troubling rumor, go directly to the principal to request clarification or confirmation.

Why do Systems Place Obstacles in the Way of Student Services?

When advocating for students, you will confront common obstacles and objections from your colleagues. This does not necessarily reflect that they are insensitive or uncaring. Rather, their objections are often rooted in the reality that available time, energy, and resources are limited. Every established organization has a tendency to resist change and defend the status quo... even if the status quo is not working!

I recall a teacher once entering my office and saying, "I have kept Joshua in for recess for 15 days in a row and he *still* isn't doing his math homework!" Well, let's circle the "slow learner" in this picture -- *It ain't working!!!*

In their brilliant and groundbreaking book, *From Emotions to Advocacy,* Pete and Pam Wright *[See also the sidebar below.]* outline the most common objections confronted by those who advocate for special needs students:

1. Insistence on adhering to longstanding policies and procedures (We've *always* done it this way.)
2. Resistance to making exceptions (If we do this for Allison, we will have to do it for everyone.)
3. Resistance to setting a precedent (This will open the floodgates and all the parents will want these services.)
4. Insufficient training (Our teachers don't know how to do that.)
5. Insufficient staff (We simply don't have enough people to do this.)
6. Unavailability of services (Our school doesn't do that. We never have!)
7. Commitment to a one-size-fits-all approach (All of our students with LD use this reading system.)
8. Insufficient funds (That would cost too much. We don't have the money.)
9. Overwhelmed (We've never seen a kid with such complex needs before.)
10. Lack of understanding of legal aspects (Even if the law requires it, we can't do it.)

Lavoie on Why Kids Fail

The Wrights cite an eye-opening 2001 study conducted by Galen Alessi. She reviewed 5,000 evaluations written by school psychologists in order to determine the factors the psychologists felt were contributing to the child's failure/frustration in school. She listed five factors that are widely accepted as reasons why kids fail in school:

- Inappropriate curriculum
- Ineffective teaching
- Ineffective school management practices
- Inadequate family support
- Child-based problems/disabilities.

Her review found that in 5,000 reports, the five factors were cited in the following manner as primary causes for the child's failure. When in doubt, blame the victim!

Inappropriate curriculum	0%
Ineffective teaching practices	0%
Ineffective school management	0%
Parent/home factors	20%
Child based problems	100%

[For more information on Peter and Pam Wright and their website, see the June, 2004, issue of 2e Newsletter.*]*

How to Advocate, continued

Although these objections are understandable from the other person's perspective, all of them are contrary to the letter and spirit of current special education law. You should prepare effective, accurate, and appropriate responses to each before you approach the powers-that-be with your proposals.

Getting the Support of Your Principal

As an advocate, your key and indispensable ally is the building principal. No matter how talented or devoted the faculty is, no matter how powerful or influential the parent body is, no matter how committed the school board is, the child will *not* get responsive, effective services unless he has the support of the person in the principal's office.

A landmark study of management styles of principals rendered the following profound results: "We found some *bad* schools with a *good* principal... but we found no *good* schools with a *bad* principal."

However, research indicates that many principals hold very negative feelings about special education and may view these students as a "drain" on a system that is already strained to the breaking point. In order to effectively advocate for children with special needs, and in order to be a "shepherd of change" in the school, the principal must understand and embrace ten basic concepts.

1. Change is a process, not an event.
2. Change requires intense preparation.
3. In order for organizations to change, individuals must change.
4. Change generally occurs from the top down.
5. Mandates do not make change work; only a sound, supportive process makes change effective.
6. Change will be effective only if accompanied by support.
7. Under legislative guidelines, students are entitled to services. You are not "doing the family a favor" by creating and implementing responsive programs. You are just doing your job.
8. Each child is an individual and must be viewed as such. There is no one, solitary program or approach that works effectively with all kids, even if they have the same diagnosis or label. If the child can't learn the way we teach, we need to teach the way he learns.
9. Special education is not a place or a program. Rather, it is a flexible set of services and supports.
10. Effective special education services do not exist in a vacuum. Neither do they exist detached from the general program. They must be an integral and important part of the school-wide culture.

The key to dealing effectively with your principal or supervisor is to view situations and issues from the principal's perspective. I learned two important life lessons from two unlikely sources: a former boss and a U.S. President.

When I was appointed headmaster at a residential school on Cape Cod, I had a meeting with the chairman of the school's board. He provided me with some significant and valuable advice at our initial meeting: "Run this school in the way you think is best. I will not interfere. But don't ever let me be surprised."

Always keep your superiors informed. Don't wait until small problems grow into a crisis. If a child or a parent is having difficulty, mention it to the principal. In this way, she won't feel blindsided if the problem does become critical.

The second lesson came from Ronald Reagan. Prior to his presidency, Reagan honed his daily management skills as governor of California. He continually reminded his staff, "Don't bring me problems, bring me solutions." This approach will greatly enhance your effectiveness with your principal. All day long, people enter the office and present problems, challenges, difficulties, conundrums, and crises. What a refreshing change to have someone offer solutions!

Some other "Principal Pleasing Tips"

- Share good news with your principal occasionally. Don't go to her office *only* when you have a problem or a request, or soon she will dread seeing you. Stop by to share good news about your students or colleagues.
- Don't overuse the principal for discipline problems. Try to handle most disruptive behavior on your own. If you don't, you begin to develop a reputation among your students that you have a very limited repertoire for dealing with disruptive behavior, and they will continually push you to the edge with ever-escalating behavior difficulties.
- You will impress your principal – and make him your ally – if you "play by the rules." Be punctual. Submit paperwork on time. Stick to the schedule. Be positive. Volunteer.

How to Advocate, continued

- A hint: Most principals work during the summer months. Visit the school and spend some time with her. Ask if you can help in any way. The summer is a great opportunity to build and enhance your relationship with her.

Conclusion

In summary, if you wish to be an effective advocate for your students, remember the eleven P's that will enable you to enhance your cooperation and collaboration with your colleagues.

1. Principal: Gain the support of your school's leader.
2. Problem Solver: Be viewed by your colleagues as a person who solves problems, rather than causes them.
3. Planning: Have specific, observable, understandable goals for each student.
4. Practical: Provide your colleagues with suggestions and solutions that are pragmatic and workable. Consider their time and energy constraints.
5. Participate: Be an active, contributing member of the school community.
6. Passion: Share your passion with your colleagues.
7. Positive: Try to remain positive when dealing with colleagues.
8. Potential: Be ever mindful of the potential of your students.
9. "Polish the Apple": Give compliments and praise willingly and often.
10. Prepare: Always have evidence and data to support your suggestions.
11. Pray: It couldn't hurt...and it just might help.

But the most important *P* is *Protect*. It is your sacred duty to protect all students from harm, humiliation, or hurt. You simply cannot stand by and watch when a student suffers. As Dante reminds us: "The hottest places in Hell are reserved for good people who – in times of moral crisis – choose to do nothing."

Rick Lavoie, M.A., M.Ed., is an author, speaker, former teacher and administrator, and learning disabilities consultant. In addition, he is a columnist for the website LD OnLine. For more information, visit his website: www.ricklavoie.com.

Individual Differences in Learning Conference

Clarksville, Maryland, was the site of IDL's first conference, called "What Works and Why: Unmasking Student Strengths." Held on November 20 and 21, 2008, the event drew approximately 200 parents, 2e students, and professionals from a range of disciplines, including education, art, science, and mental health. According to IDL member Katharina Boser, the mission of the conference was "to engage discussion not only on best practices for twice-exceptional children but for *all* children who struggle in the classroom."

The conference featured keynote presenter George Lynn, author of the book *Genius! Nurturing the Spirit of the Wild, Odd, And Oppositional Child*, who discussed the skills needed to "nurture the spirit of genius and strength" in students. Breakout sessions featured 36 education experts who presented techniques and tips for teaching students in a more hands-on, career-focused, multi-intelligence, emotionally sensitive, and interdisciplinary way. A number of the sessions focused on the integration of technology and the arts into all curriculums as a means for teaching the skills that, as Boser described it, will be essential in the 21st century.

Coverage of sessions at the IDL conference is available here: http://individualdifferencesinlearning.org/Whatworksandwhy/files/dec08newsletter.pdf. To find out more about IDL, see articles about the organization in the January, 2008, issue of *2e Newsletter*.

Advocacy Resources

Readers looking for more information about advocating for twice-exceptional children may find it worthwhile to check the following resources.

Books

- *A Guide to Special Education Advocacy: What Parents, Clinicians and Advocates Need to Know,* by Matthew Cohen (Jessica Kingsley, 2009)
- *Academic Advocacy for Gifted Children: A Parent's Complete Guide,* by Barbara Jackson Gilman (Great Potential Press, revised edition, 2008) *[See the review in this issue.]*
- *From Emotions to Advocacy: The Special Education Survival Guide,* by Pam and Pete Wright (Harbor House Law Press, 2nd edition, 2006) *[See the review in the June, 2004, issue of* 2e Newsletter.*]*
- *Special Education Law*, by Pam and Pete Wright (Harbor House Law Press, 2nd edition, 2007)
- *Special Needs Advocacy Resource Book: What You Can Do Now to Advocate for Your Exceptional Child's Education,* by Rich Weinfeld and Michelle Davis (Prufrock Press, 2008)

Publications

- *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter*:
  - Issue on advocacy: June, 2004
  - Articles in the March, 2007, issue:
    - "Advocacy – Transformation from Fruitcake to Powerful Organization"
    - "Open Congress: A Tool for Advocacy"
- *Parenting for High Potential* (an NAGC publication) issue on advocacy: December, 2008 [See a listing of the contents here: www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=1180.]

Websites

- Council for Exceptional Children:
  - Legislative Action Center (www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/PolicyAdvocacy/LegislativeActionCenter/default.htm)
  - Sign up for the *Policy Insider* e-Newsletter here: www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Public_Policy_Updates&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=29&ContentID=4857
- Hoagies Gifted: Gifted Advocacy (www.hoagiesgifted.org/advocacy.htm)
- National Association for Gifted Children:
  - NAGC Advocacy Tooklit (www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=36)
  - Legislative Action Network (www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=3642)
- SpecialEdAdvocate.org: articles on advocating for your child (http://ldadvocates.com/Advocateforyourchild.html)
- Wrightslaw: an outstanding resource that covers a wide range of topics on special education advocacy (www.wrightslaw.com); highlights include:
  - Advocacy Library (www.wrightslaw.com/articles.htm)
  - 10 Tips for Good Advocates (www.wrightslaw.com/howey/10tips.advocates.htm)
  - Yellow Pages for Kids with Disabilities – resources listed by state (www.yellowpagesforkids.com)
  - From Emotions to Advocacy – Learning How to Advocate (www.fetaweb.com)
- Advocacy outside the US:
  - Canadian advocacy (www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/PolicyAdvocacy/CanadianAdvocacy/default.htm)
  - Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (www.aaegt.net.au/info_advocacy.html)

What is Special Education Law?

By Dorene Philpot, J.D.

Parents often lack information about their child's rights in terms of the education and services offered by the public schools. Parents are often intimidated by the number and demeanor of the school staff during meetings and feel that they have little input into their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). This lack of knowledge can have a serious impact on the progress a child is able to make in school.

Federal and state laws govern the creation of an *individualized* education program for a child in the public schools. The IEP must be based on the child's specific needs (not on the school's staffing or budget problems), and the program must be reasonably calculated to confer *meaningful* educational benefit. Anything less than that does not comply with the law and is actionable through a due process administrative proceeding. This proceeding is conducted like a trial, with both parties presenting evidence to a hearing officer who acts as both judge and jury.

A child's right to due process can be violated in procedural and/or substantive ways. *Procedural* due process violations result from failing to follow the procedures specified under the law. *Substantive* due process violations result from failing to grant to the child what the law guarantees, such as a free appropriate public education. Additional examples of how schools commit procedural and substantive violations of the law include the failure to do the following:

- Devise an appropriate IEP based on the child's individual needs.
- Implement the IEP as written.
- Allow the parents to meaningfully participate in the IEP development process.
- Have the proper personnel present during the case conference committee meetings. (At a minimum, these meetings should include the child's special education teacher, parent(s), an administrator who can make decisions about allocation of resources, and a regular education teacher if the child will be participating in general education activities or services. Also, if a school evaluation is being discussed for the first time, the evaluator or someone in his/her stead must appear to answer parent questions about the assessment.)
- Give notice of rights and planned meetings.
- Prevent punishment of the child for actions or inactions caused by the child's disability.
- Train staff and aides in the child's areas of disability.
- Train parents in the child's areas of disability.
- Maintain proper records.
- Determine placement and services *after* the IEP, using input from the meeting.
- Conduct necessary evaluations of the child.
- Provide education and services in the least restrictive environment, based on the child's individual needs.
- Offer extended school-year services to the child, resulting in regression of skills during the summer vacation that cannot be recouped quickly.
- Convene a case conference committee meeting.
- Identify the child as one in need of special education or services, despite evidence that the child is struggling academically or behaviorally.
- Provide records either within 45 days or prior to a due process hearing when requested by parents.
- Allow the special needs child to participate in activities to the same extent as his non-disabled peers when the child could participate with accommodations provided by the school. (This would apply to sports, extracurriculars, gifted and talented programs, field trips, etc.)

When violations such as these occur, and parents are unable to reach agreement with the school on how to remedy the situation, the parents have the right to take the matter to court. The court proceeding is referred to as a *due process hearing*. A favorable outcome for parents forces a school to comply with the federal and state protections afforded children with special needs.

The Due Process Hearing

Here are the events that make up a due process hearing.

1. A request for a due process hearing is submitted to:
   - The state's education agency
   - The school
   - The cooperative or interlocal. (These are most often found in smaller school districts and rural areas where schools form a pool or group in order to provide better resources to the special needs children in the general geographic area.)

Special Education Law, continued

The request describes what the issues of contention are and what the proposed resolutions are, to the extent known by the parents.

(Note: An attorney is not required to file a due process hearing request. A parent can file the request on his/her own. All states are required to devise and make available, usually through a website, a simple form that can be used to request a due process hearing. Parents can use the state's form, or they can submit the request in the form of a letter or in the form of a formal complaint-style pleading.)

2. The state education agency assigns an independent hearing officer (IHO) to the case. The officer is selected from a rotating list.
3. The IHO contacts the school and the parents' attorney to set up a time for a prehearing conference, a telephone conference to address all of the details of making the due process hearing happen. At this point, the parties are not arguing the merits of their cases, and the hearing officer is not making any decisions about the outcome, although he/she might form general impressions of the parties.
4. Both parties (the school and parents) prepare their case for the due process hearing. (In my practice, I give parents "homework assignments" to help me prepare their case for hearing. The assignments are useful to me and also help to keep parents' legal fees lower. Before the hearing, I share my due process trial plan with the parents to give them a roadmap of where we're going and how the hearing will be conducted. We generally meet the night before the case begins to go over any last-minute questions.)
5. Sometimes the parties can avoid a hearing, resolving the case through mediation. The school or state must pay the cost of the mediation, and generally the parties attend without their attorneys, who are on call via phone for questions. (I highly encourage my clients to make an attempt at mediation if they believe there's a chance of resolution with the school.)
6. According to law (IDEA 2004), a resolution session must take place within 15 days of the hearing request unless both parties agree to waive it. Attorneys are discouraged from attending the resolution session and may only come if both sides are bringing an attorney.
7. The due process hearing is conducted according to the plan devised at the prehearing conference.
8. Each party presents its opening statement, with the party requesting the hearing going first. Then each side has its witnesses speak. To conclude the hearing, each party presents one of the following: verbal closing arguments, written closing arguments, or closing briefs.
9. At the end of the hearing, the IHO states when the decision will be made and mailed to the attorneys for both sides. Each party has a choice of receiving an electronic or printed-out copy of the transcript. (Electronic versions are easier to use, copy, and e-mail to others. However, if you decide you want a printed version later, you are faced with printing out what can be more than a thousand pages of transcript.)
10. Each party has a right to appeal the decision of the IHO. In some states the appeal is heard by the Board of Special Education Appeals, referred to as a "second tier." In most states, there is no second tier, and the party who is appealing can go directly to state or federal court after the hearing officer renders his/her decision. Check with your state's Department of Education to learn whether your state is a one- or two-tier state.

    The appeal will not be successful if the basic argument is "We disagree with the hearing officer." Typically, a successful appeal must show that the hearing officer's decision was one of the following:

    - Arbitrary and capricious
    - An abuse of discretion
    - Contrary to law or contrary to a constitutional right, power, privilege or immunity
    - In excess of the jurisdiction of the independent hearing officer
    - Reached in violation of an established procedure
    - Unsupported by substantial evidence.

Special Education Law, concluded

11. If parents in a two-tier state are unhappy with the outcome of the appeal with the board, they can appeal again, this time to either a federal or state court. As before, the reason for the appeal cannot be that you want to reargue the case or say merely that you disagree with the decision. It must be because of some violation made by the board in a two-tier system or by the hearing officer in a one-tier system in rendering the decision.
12. In some situations it may be necessary to file a suit for fees in either a local or federal court. A suit for fees is needed when there is no appeal and no agreement from the school on the payment of prevailing parents' attorney fees. To be successful, the parents' attorney must show that the parents prevailed on some substantial issue and that the hourly rate and hours expended on the case were reasonable. (In my experience, I have not yet had anyone argue that the hourly rate or hours expended were unreasonable. Usually the argument is: Did we prevail on a substantial issue? Our definition of "substantial" can vary from the school's definition. Then the court decides.)

Dorene J. Philpot, of Philpot Law Office LLC, is an attorney who represents children with special needs and their parents in Indiana and Texas. She is a frequent speaker for parent advocacy organizations and disability advocacy organizations on the rights of children with disabilities. Her website, which is at dphilpotlaw.com, has free educational resources for parents. 2e

Special Education Attorney

Interview with Matt Cohen

Matt Cohen is co-founder of Monahan & Cohen, a Chicago legal practice specializing in health, human services, special education, and disability law. In addition, he teaches law; lectures and writes on special education topics, among others; and serves as legal commentator for LD Online, answering questions regarding legal issues for people with learning disabilities. He is the author of the book A Guide to Special Education Advocacy: What Parents, Clinicians and Advocates Need to Know, *scheduled for release in early 2009. In this edited interview with* 2e Newsletter *in late 2008, he discussed his work.*

2e Newsletter: What led you to a career in special education law?

Cohen: My parents worked as mental health professionals, and in law school I had an interest in civil rights law and education reform. It seemed like a natural combination for me. Then I clerked for a legal aid clinic doing special education law.

2e: Have you had any experience working with the families of twice-exceptional children?

MC: Much experience.

2e: What typically leads these families to seek your help?

MC: They come because services aren't working. For example, the child needs a more or less restrictive program; there are problems with discipline or with the methods being used; the child is being denied access to therapy or technology; the student's not making progress; promises are not being fulfilled; teachers are not adequately trained; the child's not getting appropriate services for giftedness.

Problems with the implementation of IEPs [Individualized Education Programs] are very common. So is disagreement between the school and parents over where the child should be placed – in regular education or special education.

What I find is that there's a lack of awareness about kids who are once exceptional and even less awareness about kids who are 2e.

2e: At what point in the problem are you typically consulted?

MC: Sometimes I'm called in early, but more often it's when the situation is at the conflict stage.

2e: Does that mean a court case?

MC: Few cases get to court. Most are resolved before they reach that stage. Often, we can resolve the issues by creating an IEP for the child or through informal meetings with the school district.

2e: Do cases involving 2e children present special challenges?

MC: Each case has its own type of challenges. A main issue with 2e children is that many hearing officers in courts accept the view that a student must be functioning below average, and the perception is that it must be way below average. But the language in the 2004 amendments to IDEA [the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] help with that. The law now states that public schools are responsible for dealing not only with academic problems but functional problems as well. Plus, the process of identifying disabilities was changed in 2004. Now the law allows using the child's pattern of strengths and weaknesses in relation to intellectual ability or state standards. A high pattern – high strengths as well as high weaknesses – nicely describes a child who's 2e. The law also states that the fact that a child is getting passing grades doesn't mean that the child is receiving FAPE [the free appropriate public education mandated by law].

2e: Can you give some examples of cases you've handled that have involved twice-exceptional children?

MC: A typical situation is that the kids need accelerated instruction in some areas, with accommodation or remedial instruction in others. Sometimes we're able to persuade the schools to do that; and other times the schools aren't willing, and we haven't been successful. Then the family may need to find a program that's a better fit for the child.

2e: If the family finds that private school would be a better fit for the child, does the school district have to pay for it?

Interview with Matt Cohen, concluded

MC: It may have to if the child is already in special education and if the public school can't meet the child's needs due to disability (not giftedness per se). But this is always difficult to accomplish, particularly for kids who are also gifted – and with current school budgets, it's getting harder. Only a small percentage of kids in special education are candidates for this – no more than one to two percent. In some instances, it's more likely for 2e kids to be candidates and, in others, it's more difficult. They need to be failing. The school doesn't look at it in terms of the child's potential, but in terms of how the child's performance compares to others'. One of the huge problems for 2e kids is that schools may not see them as entitled to special services at all.

2e: What advice would you give parents before they seek the services of a special education lawyer?

MC: Try to resolve the dispute in a cooperative way whenever possible. Be careful to pick battles that are truly critical to your child's progress. Be watchful and don't make assumptions about what the school will do or if they know what to do.

Also, use the Internet. I send parents to websites where they can find information such as the US Department of Education website, the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities [also referred to as NICHCY], CHADD [Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder], and COPAA [the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates].

2e: Can you talk about the organization COPAA – about its goals and membership?

MC: I'm on the board of COPAA. It has about 1,000 members, and its goal is to secure services and support for kids with disabilities in the schools. The website [www.copaa.net] has information for parents on special education law, rights, and services; and it provides a search engine for locating advocates and attorneys. The organization also offers training in advocacy and how special education works.

2e: What changes do you think RTI [Response to Intervention] has brought for 2e kids? Do you see it as beneficial? [*For an explanation of RTI, see the September, 2007, issue of* 2e Newsletter.*]*

MC: Schools no longer have to use the discrepancy formula [to identify children who may need special education services]. The law doesn't rule it out, but it offers RTI as an alternative. With RTI, schools can try interventions in the regular education classroom based on scientifically proven methods and see how the child responds before determining if a learning disability is present. It gets things started sooner in regular education, but it slows down the process of identifying LDs and getting special education services.

RTI is a double-edged sword. It's great if kids can get help and avoid special education, but there are shortcomings in how it's delivered. A problem with a lot of schools is a lack of qualified teachers for conducting these interventions. Also, if a child doesn't make progress, time's been lost; and there's confusion over what testing should be done.

2e: The ADA [Americans with Disabilities] Amendments Act was recently signed into law. What impact, if any, do you think this will have on 2e children?

MC: It relates to interpretation of Section 504 of the ADA, and it applies to public schools in theory. It's significant in terms of the definition of who has a disability. For example, if a person uses glasses or takes medication, that doesn't disqualify the person as having a disability.

It applies to 2e in one way – the disability doesn't have to manifest itself in all circumstances in relation to a particular skill set. In other words, if you can't keyboard but you can brush your teeth, you're still disabled. The reference point has been changed in determining if a disability is sufficiently severe. Congress says it doesn't have to be debilitating in every way in regard to a particular function, such as fine motor skill.

For more information on special education law, see the articles on Matt Cohen's website: www.monahan-cohen.com/publications_articles and sign up for the electronic newsletter Special Education News *at http://visitor.constantcontact.com/email.jsp?m=1101316448426&id=preview.* 2e

Special Education Process: IEP vs. 504 Plan

By Andrea Bennett, M.Ed., and Lisa Frank, M.Ed.

Do you suspect that your child needs special education? Do you think your child will benefit from an IEP or a 504 Plan? How do you know which one would best meet your child's unique needs?

Two types of written plans – an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan – can be developed and implemented by local school agencies regarding students with identified disabilities. Both are federally mandated but fall under two separate laws. They each provide for the student to receive a free and appropriate education within the least restrictive environment. However, these two plans serve different purposes, according to the needs of the child. Following are the answers to some of the most frequently asked questions regarding IEPs and 504 Plans.

What is an IEP and Who Qualifies?

IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) provides federal funds to state and local agencies to guarantee special education and related services to children with disabilities. To be eligible for an IEP under this law, your child must meet these criteria:

- Be between the ages of 3 and 21
- Have an identified disability that impedes learning to the point that the child needs specialized instruction in order to close the gap between the child's own academic achievement and that of his/her age peers.

Whether your child has a qualifying disability is determined at an IEP meeting, using the results of standardized assessments as well as other informal and formal data collection. It requires unanimous agreement from the members of a multidisciplinary team that includes one or more of the following: special educator, psychologist, parent, related service provider, and general education teacher. Additional members of the team include other individuals with knowledge or expertise regarding the child, and a representative of the local school agency who is qualified to provide or supervise specially designed instruction for children with disabilities. This person is usually an administrator familiar with the general education curriculum and the resources of the local school agency. The team must agree that your child's disability falls under one of the 13 federally mandated categories and that it interferes with the child's education and performance.

What is a 504 Plan and Who Qualifies?

As part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Congress passed Section 504. This civil rights law protects people with disabilities by eliminating barriers and allowing full participation in areas of life such as education and the workplace. Section 504 is intended to prohibit disability discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance and by public entities.

A 504 Plan is for students who have a disability, have a record of a disability, or are treated as having a disability but do not qualify for special education services under IDEA. For example, let's say that a child has cerebral palsy. While it does not interfere with the student's progress in the general curriculum, it does require the child to use special equipment to access his/her education. Therefore, this child would qualify for a 504 Plan.

It's important to realize that eligibility under Section 504 isn't a consolation prize for students who do not qualify for special education services under IDEA. Before deciding whether a student is eligible for this type of plan, the child must be assessed and the school team must agree that the child has a substantial and pervasive impairment in order to be eligible under this federal law. The purpose of a 504 Plan is to level the playing field and allow a child to get the accommodations and modifications needed to access the curriculum at the same level as his or her peers.

How Does an IEP Compare with a 504 Plan?

The contents of an IEP are specified by law. This type of plan must contain:

- A statement of the student's present level of performance
- A statement to address how the child's disability affects participation in the general education curriculum
- Measurable annual goals and objectives related to the child's needs resulting from the child's disability
- A statement of special education-related services, supplementary aids, and other services to be provided
- Descriptions of program modifications and supports for school personnel
- Explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with non-disabled children

Special Education Process, continued

- Explanation as to how the parents of the child will regularly be informed of the child's progress toward the annual goals
- A statement of whether the child will take district or state-wide achievement tests and if those tests will be taken with or without accommodations or modifications
- Explanation of why the child will not participate in such assessments if the IEP team makes that decision
- A statement of how the student will be tested if the district or state-wide tests are not used
- Projected date for initiating services and modifications and the frequency, duration, and location of those services and modifications
- The need for an extended school year
- Transition requirements for students aged 14 and older.

Unlike the IEP for special education, there are no legal requirements for what should be included in the 504 Plan. Providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) under Section 504 often means identifying reasonable accommodations to help the student succeed in the classroom. An accommodation plan usually addresses the following:

- Nature of the disability and major life activity it limits
- Basis for determining the disability
- Educational impact of the disability
- Necessary accommodations
- Placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

Conclusion

In summary, both documents (an IEP and a 504 Plan) are federally mandated and require the school system to implement them and adhere to their provisions. However, the federal guidelines are oftentimes vague at best. To complicate matters even more, each state and local school agency has its own interpretations regarding the implementation of these federal laws. The decision as to which, if either, of the documents discussed here would best fit with the needs of your child is one that requires research. Take the time to learn about your parental rights and to fully understand the process of qualifying for either an IEP or a 504 Plan. If you are still unsure if the school system is best meeting the needs of your child, seek the services of a professional skilled in this area.

Andrea Bennett and Lisa Coleman Frank are educational and behavioral consultants and co-founders of The Special Kids Company, Inc. (http://specialkidscompany.com), which provides comprehensive diagnostic, intervention, and consultative services for GT/LD and other at-risk children and their families in the Baltimore/Washington, DC, area. Andrea is a certified elementary education and special education teacher with experience in teaching students with disabilities in both inclusive and self-contained learning environments. Lisa is a certified special education teacher and behavior specialist experienced in teaching students with behavioral and academic disabilities.

For More Information

For additional information on IEPs and 504 Plans, *2e Newsletter* recommends these resources:

Articles in *2e Newsletter*

- "Answering Some Questions on Goals and Objectives," October, 2004
- "Federal Laws and the AD/HD Child," April, 2004
- "The IEP," October, 2004

Websites

- ED.gov: Individualized Education Program (IEP), http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CTopicalBrief%2C10%2C
- Family Village School: IEPs & 504 Plans - Sample Plans, Goals and Objectives, www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/Education/Iepsamples.html
- greatschools: A Parent's Guide to Section 504, www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/2777
- Wrightslaw: Discrimination: Section 504 and ADA, www.wrightslaw.com/info/sec504.index.htm
- Wrightslaw: Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), www.wrightslaw.com/info/iep.index.htm

Why 2e Does Not Fit Well in the Traditional Classroom and What to Do About It

Homeschooling the Twice-exceptional Child

By Corin Barsily Goodwin, Executive Director, Gifted Homeschoolers Forum, and Mika Gustavson, LMFT

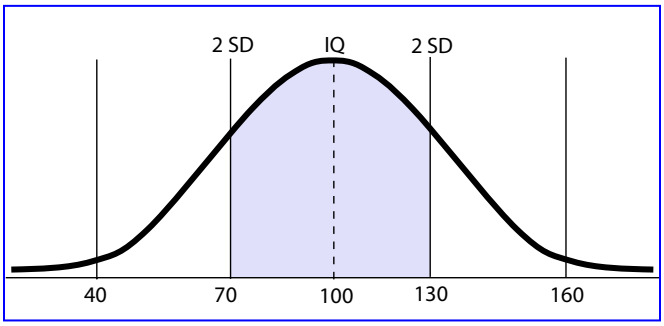
> "Children with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, or other types of school problems who are also gifted in one or more areas must be allowed to be gifted in their areas of strength while they receive assistance in their areas of need. The discrepancy between their superior abilities and their dramatic weaknesses results in feelings of inadequacy, frustration and hopelessness. Many of these students are at high risk of becoming school dropouts. To bring sanctions against any child[ren] which prevent them from experiencing differentiation whenever or wherever it's needed is simply not effective or fair." (Winebrenner, Susan; The Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children, Fall 1998, XII)

Being twice-exceptional (2e) poses major challenges for children and the significant adults in their lives, particularly when the children's major asynchronies (areas of uneven development) are not identified or understood. Learning differences (LDs) are often called *invisible disabilitie*s because they are not obvious at first glance, leading adults to assume that children are being intentionally lazy or stubborn. Once identified, some LDs may be overcome or compensated for through sheer effort and the passage of time. However, adults involved need to consider whether a child's learning differences are something the child should struggle through, or whether some kind of accommodation would be more useful and appropriate. It also seems quite unfair to limit children's opportunities to learn more complex concepts simply because their development of fine motor skills, or sequencing, or memorization has not kept pace with the development of their intellectual abilities.

Even for 2e children who are recognized as such, gifted education programs are unlikely to fully accommodate their needs. These programs tend to be rather limited in scope, as if there is just one type of gifted learner and one type of program that will fit the needs of all gifted children. Some education professionals will tell you that in-classroom differentiation (either at the "normal" level or in a gifted program) is a sufficient method for meeting the needs of even the most extreme asynchronies. However, there is simply no one-size-fits-all solution to educating 2e children; and the goal of meeting their needs with the reduced resources and oversized classrooms of today's public school systems is rarely achievable.

2e Kids in the Classroom and Bow-Tie Theory

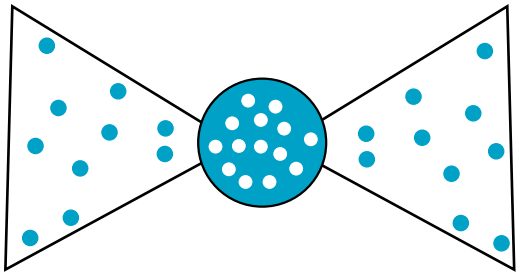
For those who prefer a visual image of why 2e kids may not get their needs met in the traditional classroom, picture an IQ line with 100 at the center and a standard deviation (SD) of approximately 15. Draw lines representing two standard deviations (SDs) on either side of the "100." In that blue area, you have most children in the typical classroom. Their intellectual potential is close enough to all of the other 20 to 30 children, and their learning styles are similar enough to one another that a single teacher with a predetermined curriculum can likely give them the education that they are meant by their local school district to obtain.



Note that we could be measuring other traits other than full-scale IQ. In this scenario, it's possible for some of a 2e child's subtest scores to be out of the blue area to the right... and some out of the blue area to the left!

Homeschooling the Twice-exceptional Child, continued

The children outside the blue area – gifted, LD, or 2e – do not fall into the area of relative educational comfort. Some of these children may be capable of successfully participating in the classroom, given sufficient differentiation or accommodation; but none of them has the same needs as the children in the center and, at least as much to the point, the same needs as one another. We can use the bow-tie graphic below to illustrate these differences in needs.



Imagine that the blue center area is that "comfort zone" closely centered around the norm. The kids in the wings of the bow tie are the gifted, LD, and 2e kids who are more than a couple standard deviations away from the norm. The further children are from the norm, the more differences they have from *each other* in addition to differences from "average" kids. Therefore, not only is it difficult to satisfy their educational needs with curricula designed for "average" students; but the further away students are from the norm, the more difficult it is to come up with *any* curriculum that is appropriate to an aggregate of these gifted/2e kids.

To further complicate matters, 2e children – especially those with abilities measurable at both ends – have asynchronies, in terms of learning styles and academic potential, that are significantly different from the "pleasantly gifted" child – the one whose IQ ranges from about 130 to 145 (using the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, third edition, or WISC-III). The "pleasantly gifted" child has the competitive advantage of high intelligence without the disadvantage of being "too" different. The individual learning styles of 2e children, however, are virtually guaranteed to be such that they will need major deviations from the educational norm.

As a result, despite efforts to steer all students towards a quantifiable level of academic attainment each year, this goal is not often achieved for 2e children in spite of their high levels of intelligence. Perhaps educational success ought to be determined on a case-by-case basis for each child grounded in an understanding of his/her needs, abilities, and potential. The ideal situation for 2e children would be a program allowing them to learn at their own pace and in their own manner. Unfortunately, few traditional classroom situations have the resources to accommodate these children to their fullest extent, even when their needs are recognized. Consequently, many families feel frustrated by the educational experiences of their 2e children and find themselves seeking more flexible alternatives.

An Educational Alternative: Homeschooling

Homeschooling was once an arena dominated by political and religious extremes, and was not seriously considered as an option by the majority of middle-of-the-road parents. However, families of children for whom the traditional educational options are not working well are seeking alternatives, either out of sheer desperation or the desire to find what they believe is the best situation for their children. The increase in positive media coverage and the relative ease of access to free or low-cost resources and community via the internet have increased the viability of this option for many families.

While few will claim that educating any child outside of the traditional school system is a simple all-purpose solution, there are signs that homeschooling is becoming far more accepted than it was previously. The number of homeschoolers has been increasing steadily over the last 10 to 20 years – up from approximately 300,000 in 1992 to more than a million in 2003; and many of these children are identified as twice exceptional.

Twice-exceptional children, like any other children, deserve an educational environment tailored to their unique learning styles without forcing them into conformity with "all the other kids." 2e children may learn differently from their classmates; and their increased emotional and sensory sensitivities leave them vulnerable in some classrooms, making learning an ever-greater challenge. Instead of soaring toward their potential, these children often hunker down and get lost in the crowd.

For 2e families, homeschooling can provide:

- The freedom to help their 2e children thrive, allowing the families to adjust the pace and location of learning in a way that is optimal for their particular child

Homeschooling the Twice-exceptional Child, continued

- The flexibility for children to pursue their own interests, leaving room to address weaknesses without loss of dignity and, thereby, reinforcing their self-confidence as competent individuals
- Greater access to others who are like-minded, greatly reducing the pressure on children to join a clique and their risk of being bullied.

Homeschooling Options

Homeschooling can take many forms. Some parents appreciate the support and supervision that school districts and charter programs offer (and some states require). They like being able to enroll their children in traditional classes for some subjects and to work on their own for others. Homeschoolers participating in these independent study programs may be able to take advantage of resources such as a science lab or orchestra that might not be available to them otherwise. Parents can benefit by having access to trained teachers who will assist with curriculum and other content issues. These resources can be very helpful for families, especially for those new to homeschooling or who are pursuing a "school-at-home" model, which replicates the predetermined structure and curriculum of the traditional classroom.

Families of 2e children, however, often prefer a less structured approach to education in order to create a more optimal fit for their child's learning style. Homeschooling allows for the development over time of an environment tailored to meet the needs of the 2e child. Such a program eliminates unnecessary repetition and arbitrary sequencing, as well as the focus on standards that do not support individual potential.

The flexibility inherent in homeschooling allows gifted children to learn in the way that best suits *their* needs. For example, children with auditory or visual processing difficulties may use up all of their mental energy merely by trying to sit still and pay attention in the classroom while surrounded by the distraction of whispering, coughing children and flickering fluorescent lighting. These same children are more likely to retain information if they can sit in a comfortable chair, alone in their room at home.

The brains of kinesthetic learners, on the other hand, work best when they are in motion. These children may opt to sit on the living room floor and build Lego™ starships during a discussion of whatever subject is at hand, or they might listen to their lessons via an audio book and headphones while hanging upside down at the park. Homeschooled children who learn well in interactive groups can seek out similar children, while others who prefer solitary or small-group studying for some subjects are allowed those opportunities, as well.

Some Homeschooling Resources from Corin Goodwin and Mika Gustavson

Websites

- Gifted Homeschoolers Forum (GHF): support, advocacy, and community for families homeschooling gifted and 2e children around the world (http://giftedhomeschoolers.org)
  - Links, books, and online resources (http://giftedhomeschoolers.org/2eresources.html)
  - Articles (http://giftedhomeschoolers.org/articles.html)
- Hoagies' Gifted Education Page (www.hoagiesgifted.org)
  - Homeschooling gifted children (www.hoagiesgifted.org/home_school.htm)
  - Twice exceptional (www.hoagiesgifted.org/2e_exceptional.htm)
- Uniquely Gifted: resources for gifted children with special needs (http://uniquelygifted.org)

E-mail Discussion Groups (Listservs)

- Gifted Homeschooling: associated with Gifted Homeschoolers Forum (http://giftedhomeschoolers.org/mailinglist.html)
- GT-Spec-Home: discusses gifted children with learning disabilities and/or other neurological problems and who may be homeschooled (www.gtworld.org/gtspechome.htm) 2e

Homeschooling the Twice-exceptional Child, concluded

Homeschooling Benefits

A major benefit to homeschooling 2e children is that these highly intelligent learners tend to have more time to pursue interests not covered in the traditional classroom. They can seek out mentors and experts willing to share specialized knowledge in a manner and at a level that satisfies their hunger for learning. Homeschoolers in these situations have the opportunity to be exposed to a broad variety of individuals and potential role models who can have a positive impact on both the children's academic and emotional growth. Homeschooled children are not limited to a particular teacher nor a predetermined lesson plan or unit length; and if the depth and speed of their neural connections take them someplace other than where they have been directed to go, they have the freedom to follow their thoughts and exercise their creativity. The abilities to seek knowledge, think analytically, and consider a variety of perspectives are critical life skills that are frequently overlooked by the standardized education policies and rigidity of most modern curricula.

For 2e children with Asperger Syndrome or other social/emotional challenges, there is also great value in separating social and academic environments. These children can feel successful by reaching academic goals on their own, without the distraction of potentially debilitating social distress. They can have opportunities to learn interpersonal skills concurrently (and at their own developmental pace) in settings such as park day groups; scouting events; and other, more structured activities. In addition, homeschooling parents can be more available to help their children navigate difficult social situations as they occur, giving their children the benefit of receiving direct guidance from a caring adult rather than from age peers whose own social skills are still developing.

Available research shows that the long-term outcome for homeschooled children is generally very positive. These children tend do well on standardized tests; they are readily admitted to colleges and universities; they move on to successful, often entrepreneurial, careers. Furthermore, they are more likely than their traditionally educated counterparts to be involved in a positive manner within their communities.

Concluding Thoughts

These "difficult children" have the potential to be world leaders, just as they have the potential to fall through the cracks if mishandled. They have unique learning styles, and their innate ability to think "outside the box" needs to be nurtured in a way that is just not easy to do in a traditional classroom setting. While homeschooling the 2e child can be challenging and is not a solution for everyone, there are many transferrable concepts. The paradigm of how we educate our gifted and twice-exceptional children deserves reconsideration and reflection on a national scale.

Corin Barsily Goodwin is the Director of Gifted Homeschoolers Forum (http://giftedhomeschoolers.org). She homeschools her two 2e children while commuting between the San Francisco Bay Area in California and rural southern Oregon. Corin co-chaired the Legislative Committee for the Home School Association of California (HSC) and served as their Gifted/Special Needs Advisor. Before having children, Ms. Goodwin was a policy and economic analyst. She is hard at work on her new book on gifted educational alternatives with co-author Mika Gustavson.

Mika Gustavson, LMFT, is in private practice, specializing in gifted and twice-exceptional children and families, transitions into parenthood, childhood trauma, and domestic violence. A "pet project" is raising the awareness of mental-health professionals about the impact of sensory processing disorders on children, their families, and their schooling. Mika has taught adults in a wide variety of settings on related topics and is currently co-authoring a book with Corin Barsily Goodwin. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband, son, two cats, and a dog, all gifted and some 2e.

First in a Series

Abandoning Deficit Models: A Paradigm Shift

By Carl Sabatino

When James walked into the Bridges Academy admissions office, he told us he disliked school, his classmates, and himself. Although his records showed that James possessed a superior intelligence, he was often in trouble at school. He did not complete his homework, his handwriting was illegible, he blurted out comments in class, and he failed to read social cues with peers and teachers. His parents were perplexed that their son was unable to function in his sixth-grade class, despite his ability to recite every battle in World War II, read voraciously, and talk intelligently about the most arcane animals. When we met him, James had begun refusing to attend his current school where, at a recent IEP meeting, his program was modified to include classes designed to remediate his writing and teach social skills.

Many of the features of this student's profile may resonate with the *2e Newsletter* readership. This profile is certainly familiar to the faculty at Bridges Academy. What led James to refuse to go to school? It was the common myth that addressing gifts and talents must wait until weaknesses are remediated. Those who view 2e students from this perspective believe that remediation should be the top priority of programs for these students; and they believe that the primary goal in educating these students is to have them demonstrate grade-level proficiencies by passing standardized tests. Those who embrace this myth would have us believe that we need to "fix" 2e students' problems *before* focusing on the individual strengths, talents, and interests of these children.

The reality, however, is that approaches that prioritize and focus on remediating weaknesses are likely to block development. Furthermore, these approaches may take a toll on 2e students' feelings of esteem and self-worth, as we saw with James. These children learn quickly that they are different as soon as they start formal schooling. Their sensitivity and acute awareness inform them early on that their peers often out-perform them on simple tasks. Doubts of their abilities begin to creep in, resulting in deteriorating feelings of self-efficacy (students' belief in their own ability to successfully organize and carry out a particular behavior). Parents and teachers who focus on remediation further reinforce negative feelings. The baggage the child begins to carry can seriously impede academic, social, and emotional progress.

This article is the first of a series of articles contributed to 2e Newsletter *by Bridges Academy, a school for twice-exceptional students in Studio City, California. Over the school's 15-year history, its faculty and administrators have had the opportunity to evaluate models and practices suggested by the research of Dr. Susan Baum and other leading scholars, and they will be sharing some of what they have learned in this series.*

According to Carl Sabatino, Head of School at Bridges, "These articles will focus on commonly held views or practices related to teaching and learning. These views, while understandable, constitute part of the "mythology of learning" that the 2e community of parents and educators must address. These myths may make sense in the context of certain student populations: the neuro-typical, the learning disabled, or the gifted. However, in regard to twice-exceptional students, we have found that strict adherence to these myths can be detrimental, given the uniqueness of many 2e students. They often obstruct the healthy development and the successful actualization of these students' gifted potential."

This article addresses what Susan Baum refers to as "the first of these learning myths, and one that deserves immediate attention" – that gifts and talents can be put on hold until weaknesses are remediated.

Attention to the gifts, talents, and interests of 2e students, on the other hand, results in resiliency and self-actualization. When teachers and parents focus on assets, the youngsters experience success and begin to find their "island of competence" (a term coined by author and lecturer Robert Brooks, Ph.D., to describe areas of interest/talent that have been or have the potential to be sources of pride and accomplishment). These children also tend to find peers with similar interests and expertise. By providing opportunities to develop talents, 2e youngsters develop a positive image of who they are and a vision of what they might become.

Working in the area of the gift is motivational for students. Some of the skills students lack show dramatic development when practiced within the context of assignments and projects within the gift

Abandoning Deficit Models, concluded

area. Furthermore, students are more likely to accept instruction and feedback on their deficits, and to push themselves through the practice of a difficult skill when the effort is related to a project they want to finish. For those who lack social skills and understanding, we have found that working with others in the same interest/talent area greatly expands opportunities for positive and productive interaction. Many deficits can and must be addressed; but they should be addressed creatively, and preferably in the context of the strength, not at the expense of the development of the gift.

Talent development has become central to the educational philosophy at Bridges Academy, where we offer diverse talent development opportunities. First and foremost, we develop curriculum units and create experiences that are worthy of our students' bright minds and curiosity. Within the daily curriculum, we do the following:

- Differentiate along the lines of individual gifts and provide choices of products that align to gifts, talents, and interests. For example, we might give children who are gifted architecturally the option of building a city and presenting on how the city's design reflects the socio-economic, religious, and/or political realities of the time.
- Allow qualified students to take specific classes in the areas of their gifts at higher grade levels
- Develop talent development classes in particular areas for students who show a readiness for serious work in their domains of strength such as art, writing, and music
- Create special talent development opportunities, such as mentorships or independent investigations, for students who need curricula that motivate and challenge their minds and circumvent other stressors in their lives. For instance, we encourage our students with passions in computer networks and security to pursue professional-level certification. For those advanced in animation, we encourage an internship in an animation studio. Our students' academic school schedules are adjusted to accommodate these real-life professional experiences.

Our student James benefitted from this flexible approach. He was fascinated with history and was allowed to turn some of his projects, reading assignments, and written assignments across the disciplines into work related to this passion. In addition, James was able to take an additional history class. We also modified James' homework and reduced his written work. He was required to take oral examinations and to present to classmates more often, following a presentation rubric that included image management. We found that after James went through the presentation process, he was able to put the content into written form a little more easily. Because faculty and peers recognized him for his advanced knowledge in history, James became more confident and began to make social connections with others who shared his interests. Ultimately, a stimulating dual-differentiated modified curriculum; a respectful encouraging environment; a little TLC; and, of course, time have helped to turn James around, making him available for learning and wanting to get up each day and come to school. We, and he, can build on that!

2e students are well served when they are guided to develop their interests and talents outside of school as well as within. Mini-courses, advanced classes, online courses, museum experiences, contests, technology camps, drama clubs, and sports are all ways to engage 2e students in talent development. Sometimes considered "extra" curricular, these opportunities, wherever appropriate and possible, are a good start and central to effectively engaging the 2e student. We also suggest that summer programs be primarily strength-based experiences in which 2e students can thrive and feel exhilarated rather than focus solely on remediation.

Twice-exceptional students are complex. While there are commonalities that make it possible to define them as a class, there are as many traits unique to each that necessitate focusing on the individual. Creative and flexible programming in the context of a talent-based philosophy makes this possible.

In future articles, we will discuss other myths, always keeping talent development at the center of our discussions. Topics will include homework, writing, handwriting, social and emotional aspects of learning, differentiation, and accommodations.

Carl Sabatino is the Head of School at Bridges Academy, Studio City, California. Bridges is a college preparatory school dedicated to educating 2e students in grades 6 through 12. 2e

The **University of Southern California** Rossier School of Education's Professional Development Department and **Bridges Academy** partner to bring you the

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In this four-course program, participants will become skilled at providing the necessary academic, social and emotional supports for 2E students.

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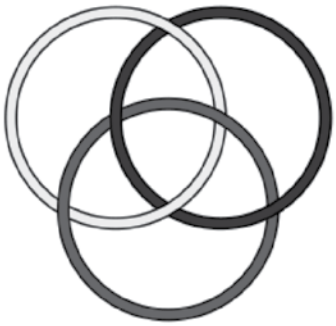

Congratulations to
Dr. Joseph Renzulli

Recipient of the
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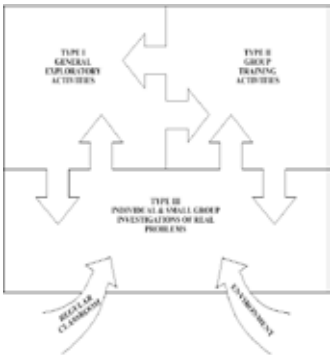

Renaissance Hotel at Hollywood and Highland

For more information about attending please contact
Anna Schaerf anna@bridges.edu, co-chair

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* Robotics & Engineering Instructor

Please send cover and resume to Carl@bridges.edu

Lots of Worry, Some Hope, for our Twice-exceptional Kids

2e Experts Look Ahead at 2009

With the changing of the year, we asked experts in the field of twice-exceptional children to offer their concerns and predictions about the New Year and the immediate future. Be forewarned. Our experts were not optimistic in their responses, but their pessimism also points out areas where we all can work hard for change. Perhaps in a year or two, when 2e Newsletter *again asks experts to look ahead, the responses won't be as gloomy. So read... consider... and act if you can. Remember the byword for the new administration in Washington, DC – change!*

Susan Baum: Usually Smiling, But Not Now

Sue Baum, a pioneer in the area of 2e education and a member of our editorial advisory board, says that one critical issue is whether schools will choose to provide 2e students with comprehensive programs or merely meager services.

Recently I attended a meeting at the Office of Overseas Schools at the US Department of State. We had a lively discussion about IDEA and which students could be served under its provisions. Several of the professionals steeped in IDEA law noted that underachievement in terms of potential is not the criterion by which students can receive services. Their rather strict interpretation centered on grade-level performance as the major factor in allocating services. Some felt accommodations could be provided under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, but the development of an IEP that considers the whole child and provides remediation, counseling, or talent development was highly unlikely.

A nation that focuses primarily on average performance will create a nation of mediocrity.

IDEA states that the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach may be used to identify students with special needs. This approach has not yet proven itself to be helpful to gifted students and gifted students with academic and behavioral challenges. Even though some states like Colorado and Idaho are using these provisions to help provide appropriate education and resources to both gifted and 2e students, their efforts have not been empirically evaluated.

Further complicating this issue is the fact that IDEA and RTI may become a part of the No Child Left Behind Law. Clearly this legislation focuses on closing the achievement gap between advantaged and poor students, with the majority of resources being directed to helping the nation's poorly performing students read and calculate competently – at grade level.

In summary, attention to the needs of 2e students who may be achieving at grade level will not be a priority. Indeed, a nation that focuses primarily on average performance will create a nation of mediocrity. The children for whom we share concern will be at great risk for developing their gifted potential. As Malcolm Gladwell argues in his new book, *Outliers*, having talent potential is not sufficient to guarantee success. Rather, the key to achievement is recognizing the gift and providing opportunities early on for its development. Current thinking in schools is a menacing reality, especially for 2e students.

Deirdre Lovecky: NCLB and the Missing Rocket Scientists

Deirdre Lovecky, author, psychologist for highly gifted children, and member of 2e Newsletter's *editorial advisory board, is disturbed by the neglect of gifted learners in recent years. However, she takes the long view and sees hope for the next decade.*

Recently, I wrote a letter to the search committee for our new Rhode Island State Commissioner of Education, and I entitled it, "Where Are All of Rhode Island's Rocket Scientists?" The sad truth is that many fewer than expected students achieved advanced proficiency in math and science on the NECAP tests (four New England states' assessment for No Child Left Behind). In fact, less than 1 percent of 11th graders achieved advanced proficiency in math. The results for science were just as bad. And Rhode Island isn't the only state to show poor results on the NCLB tests.

These results are very disturbing. The achievement of advanced learners shows the effects of years of neglect. *All* of these gifted students have been left behind; to *achieve* at advanced levels, bright children need to be *taught* at advanced levels. Some can invent math for themselves, but the majority of bright students need teaching at both their own level and their own pace.

The focus in education swings back and forth. When my father was a child in the 1920s in

2e Experts Look Ahead, continued

New York City, he skipped two grades. If you've read Leta Hollingworth's books, you know that grade skipping was common then. Another era of advancement came in the 1960s with the focus on providing America with scientists to fight the Cold War. It's time for another advance, and I predict that the 2010s will be that time.

I predict that in the next few years, more attention will be paid to advanced learners who do score high on NCLB tests. They will be provided with advanced courses in math and science; and, over time, achievement levels will rise again. As this happens, more students will become eligible for advanced courses as those bright students who currently underachieve due to lack of opportunity get a chance to receive the education they deserve.

Patricia Schuler: Worry Mixed with Hope

Pat Schuler, a counselor, conference presenter, and educational consultant working with high-ability and 2e children, wants more awareness and understanding from educators about twice-exceptional students, and offers ideas for helping these kids in 2009.

I am both worried and hopeful about the education of 2e kids. There continues to be a lack of awareness and understanding about these kids, particularly in the special education community and even within the gifted education community. Too often, these kids are perceived as too bright to receive special education services or not "gifted" enough (read: without good enough behavior, without good enough writing skills, or too anxious) for acceptance into enrichment or gifted programs. While worried that this trend may continue for some time, I am hopeful that there is starting to be greater receptivity to learning more about 2e kids, especially from those in the autism/Asperger's community.

> Advocate at the state and local levels...

The biggest issue for 2e kids is their emotional response to not being recognized as smart and/or creative at the same time they struggle with their other exceptionalities. Their anxiety, frustration, and anger lead some to shut down and not even try. Some rebel and avoid appropriate, challenging work.

What can we do as a community to help these kids at the school level? Advocate at the state and local levels for training about twice-exceptional kids for the gatekeepers of special education services, especially school psychologists. At the same time, we should be advocating for similar training for staff who provide enrichment or gifted services in our schools. What an incredible difference this would make for 2e kids in 2009!

Meredith Warshaw: The Economy Won't Help Us

Meredith Warshaw, special needs educational advisor, co-founder of the listserv GT-Special, and a member of our editorial advisory board, sees another reason to worry about our 2e kids: the economy.

I'm feeling pessimistic about services for our 2e kids in the coming year. With the state of the economy, school budgets are going to be facing cutbacks, including in special education. Unfortunately, I think that 2e kids are likely to feel the cutbacks very hard because they aren't perceived as needing the help as much as other special education students.

Paul Beljan: We *Can* Take Action

Paul Beljan is a pediatric neuropsychologist, frequent conference presenter, author, and occasional contributor to 2e Newsletter*. He offers a mix of (1) what he worries about...*

I worry about too much *misunderstanding*, about people considering AD/HD an *emotional* disorder, and about 2e kids being placed into ED (emotionally disturbed) class settings.

(2) What he thinks we as a community can do in 2009 to benefit our twice-exceptional children...

I think education is always the key. But it needs to be taken *beyond* school, into the offices of physicians and psychiatrists. They are among the greatest offenders of 2e misdiagnosis.

And (3) why he is hopeful...

I'm hopeful, in part, because organizations such as SENG [Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted], NAGC [National Association for Gifted Children], and the state gifted associations are always working to teach about gifted and 2e.

There You Have It

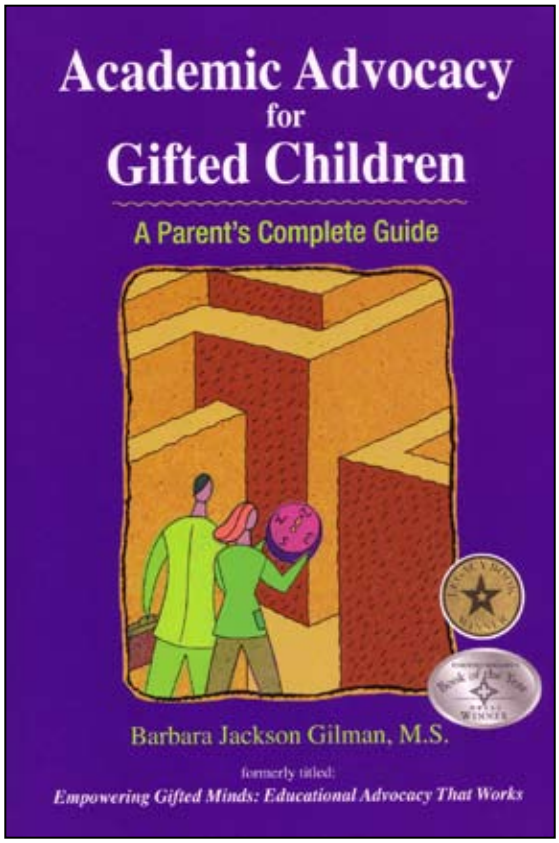
Do you have your own concerns, worries, hopes, and action items for 2009? Feel free to let us know about them. E-mail us: mark@2eNewsletter.com.

A Parent's Complete Guide

Academic Advocacy for Gifted Children

Book by Barbara Jackson Gilman, M.S.
Great Potential Press (Revised edition, 2008)
Reviewed by Linda C. Neumann

In *Academic Advocacy for Gifted Children* author Barbara Gilman provides several books in one. There's the primer on giftedness, then the basics of testing, and finally the guide to advocacy for the gifted student. The choice of content for this book stems from the author's belief that "parents must be extremely knowledgeable advocates if they are going to prevent damage to their children." She also states that "the broader questions about educating and parenting the gifted are vast, the decisions that arise will be difficult, and parents need excellent preparation for this most important job as advocates." These beliefs stem from her experiences both as the parent of a gifted but frustrated son who left high school in his senior year and as Associate Director, counselor, and examiner at the Gifted Development Center in Colorado.



In educating readers on giftedness, Gilman defines the term, describes the experience of being gifted, and discusses the needs of gifted students and how they differ from those of the non-gifted. She also devotes a chapter to successful programs for gifted students, addressing a variety of options that include charter and magnet schools, virtual schools, acceleration, and homeschooling. Educators should find the chapter "Teachers of the Gifted" filled with useful tips and insights. In this chapter, three teachers offer advice based on their experiences teaching gifted students at three different levels: elementary school, middle school, and high school.

Also included in the primer on giftedness are two chapters on gifted underachievers – one devoted to children who underachieve because they are too advanced for the educational program and one devoted to those who underachieve because they are gifted and have learning deficits – twice exceptional children. In the latter chapter, Gilman explains that "Changes in IDEA 2004 [the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] have robbed many twice-exceptional children of needed services in the public schools, most turned down because their performance is 'average' and they are viewed as having no problems." She stresses that "Finding and treating gifted children with learning difficulties can make an enormous difference to the child…" and "[w]ith help, their gifts will become increasingly apparent as their deficits prove to be smaller obstacles."

An important way of identifying learning difficulties as well as gifts is through testing. For this reason, Gilman includes a chapter on the topic of testing. She explains that in writing the chapter, she drew heavily on her experience testing gifted children at the Gifted Development Center since 1991. Gilman discusses how to choose a tester and describes the types of tests that might be given, including IQ, achievement, and personality tests. In discussing 2e children, Gilman explains that they tend to have "a characteristic pattern of abilities on Wechsler [IQ] tests." Commonly, she states, the pattern is one of scoring best on subtests that correlate most highly with abstract verbal and spatial reasoning ability, provided that visual or auditory disabilities

Academic Advocacy, concluded

don't interfere with a child's performance. The subtests in which they tend to do best include:

- Vocabulary
- Information
- Similarities
- Arithmetic
- Word reasoning
- Comprehension
- Matrix reasoning
- Block design.

Gilman adds that most 2e children show the largest discrepancies between strengths in reasoning and weaknesses in processing skills, specifically in memory and, especially, in processing speed on paper-and-pencil tests.

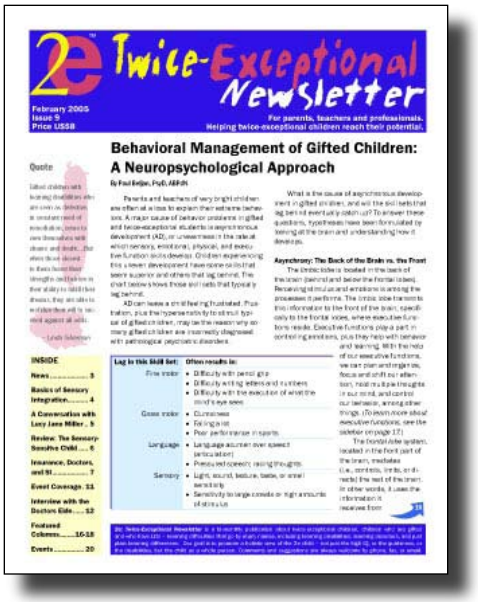
After giving readers the basics of giftedness and testing, Gilman addresses advocacy. She advises parents to demonstrate a documented need for change in their child's program and to follow the chain of command when attempting to bring about change at school, starting with the teacher. In addition, she discusses the need to create an IEP (Individualized Education Program) and the value of bringing in an expert to discuss a child's needs with school personnel.

Late in the book is a chapter on planning a child's program year by year. Here Gilman offers recommendations for accommodations and adjustments that parents can request to help ensure that their children are challenged in school. She provides sample scenarios of gifted children's learning needs and IEPs developed to meet those needs. These examples range from elementary to high school and address twice-exceptional issues as well.

Gilman acknowledges that sometimes, despite a parent's best attempts to advocate for a child, it just doesn't work. She states that at this point "we must set aside our personal need to fight injustice" and act instead to protect the child by removing him or her from the situation and seeking an alternative. "Why?" Gilman asks, and then answers: because "sensitive gifted children are easily damaged." She explains, "Parents should trust themselves to assess the level and urgency of their child's needs, and they can wisely consider various alternatives. Sometimes the best choice is to work with the school and the current teacher to provide accommodations; sometimes it is to move to another classroom, grade, or an entirely different school; and sometimes it is best to remove a child from school altogether."

Chapters in the book end with recommendations of books, articles, and websites for further reading. In addition, each chapter concludes with the writings of a young man, Quinn O'Leary, who recalls the frustrations and traumas he experienced as a gifted student.

Academic Advocacy for Gifted Children is a well written book filled with useful information for both parents and educators. It can serve as a handy reference guide on giftedness, and it does a good job of justifying the need for advocacy for gifted and twice-exceptional children. 2e



What does neuroscience have to tell us about 2e kids? You can find out by exploring the *2e Newsletter* archives. In the February, 2005, issue psychologist Paul Beljian discusses a neuropsychological approach to managing the behavior of gifted children, and Drs. Fernette and Brock Eide look at learning difficulties through a "neurolearning" lens. Find this issue in the subscriber-only area of the *2e Newsletter* website.

Giftedness Does *Not* Cause Sloppiness

Q *Is it possible that an all-around gifted student might not have additional capacity to become organized and neat? We've tried everything to get our daughter to keep a clean room and to get organized in her life, and she just cannot seem to do it. She seems oblivious to mess and disorganization. Does this go hand in hand with giftedness or is it a separate issue?*

Our daughter's sloppiness has become a huge bone of contention in our house despite all of our efforts. We've tried lists; she's spent the day in her room cleaning it (only to have it look virtually the same as when she started); we've tried cleaning the room with her; and we've provided good household examples. Thank you for your thoughts.

A While some gifted children are very well organized, others are very disorganized. What we know is that rigid organization can get in the way of creativity, but that habitual disorganization can destroy healthy achievement. It's hard for me to know if you're expecting too much organization, but she's surely battling you on the issue. She should be capable of keeping her room reasonably neat. Adolescents often struggle a bit with neatness because a perfectly neat room just isn't high on their list of priorities. Your daughter's probably wondering what you're so worried about. She's undoubtedly thinking something like, "I get good grades, I'm not drinking alcohol or doing drugs, and I have nice friends. My disorganization isn't interfering with my life. Why would my mom worry about my room being messy?" And, of course, there is some logic to that argument.

I do have one question for you to think about. You've mentioned "we," so I assume your daughter's father is there with you. Sometimes children are messy to fight one parent who's a perfectionist, and sometimes a messy adolescent is messy because one parent doesn't hold organization to be the priority the other parent considers it to be. Consider those possibilities and become united and reasonable if either of these play a part.

In general, I usually recommend a specific checklist of what should be accomplished for basic room cleanliness and an inspection once a week on Friday. Friday's socialization doesn't begin until the cleanup has been completed. In that way, your daughter won't get more than a week behind; and perhaps you can live with that. If you enforce that checklist, your daughter might prefer making less mess so that she has less to clean up. You'll also want to look at my article entitled "Which Part of Organization Needs Attention?" in my newsletter *Sylvia Rimm On Raising Kids* (2005).

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 organization, parenting gifted children, kids who march to the beat of different drummers, or a parenting united front, send a large self-addressed, stamped envelope to P.O. Box 32, Watertown, WI, 53094, or read other parenting articles at www.sylviarimm.com.

Coming in the March/April Issue of 2e Newsletter

The focus of our next issue is gaining a better understanding of 2e. We'll look at past and current research projects in the field, see what the State of Colorado is doing to spread the word about 2e, and find out about a new perspective on 2e from one of our editorial advisory board members, Marlo Payne Thurman.

Events

January 22-24, 2009, *TRLD Conference* (integrating technology interventions with expert literacy strategies). San Francisco, California. For educators, specialists, and parents concerned with reading, speech, and language. By Technology, Reading, and Learning Diversity. More information at www.trld.com.

February 13-15, 2009, *California Association for the Gifted Conference,* Anaheim, California. More information at www.cagifted.org.

March 27, 2009, *Second Annual Symposium on Assessing Gifted Learners*, Van Nuys, California. CEUs available. By Science Destinations and the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development. Additional information posted as it becomes available.

April 1-4, 2009, *CEC Convention and Expo*, Seattle, Washington. By the Council for Exceptional Children. For educators and others who work with exceptional children and their families. More information at www.cec.sped.org.

July 2-6, 2009, *PG Retreat,* Colorado Springs, Colorado. For the families of profoundly gifted children. More information at http://pgretreat.com.

July 17-19, 2009 , *SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted) Annual Conference,* Orlando, Florida. For parents, educators, families. More information at www.sengifted.org.

July 26-31, 2009, *Edufest*, Boise, Idaho. About gifted and talented education. For educators, but also with a Parent's Day, Kid's Day, and an Institute for counselors. See http://sites.google.com/site/edufestprogram/.

August 3-7, 2009, *18th Biennial World Conference for Gifted and Talented Children*, Vancouver, Canada. For educators, researchers, parents. More information at www.worldgifted2009.com.

For state association conferences relating to giftedness, see Hoagies' website, www.hoagiesgifted.org. For additional conferences on learning differences, see the website of the Council for Exceptional Children, www.cec.sped.org. 2e

Back Issues Available

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December 2003 (#2): **Public policy and 2e kids**

February 2004 (#3): **Homework and 2e kids**

April 2004 (#4): **AD/HD in gifted children**

June 2004 (#5): **2e Advocacy and the Montgomery County Public School System**

August 2004 (#6): **Assessment and evaluation**

October 2004 (#7): **Supporting students**

December 2004 (#8): **A look at output, the work that twice-exceptional students produce – or fail to produce**

February 2005 (#9): **Viewing learning and behavior problems through the lens of neuroscience**

April 2005 (#10): **Parenting 2e children**

June 2005 (#11): **Autism spectrum disorders**

August 2005 (#12): **Teaching 2e students**

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May 2006 (#16): **Identifying 2e kids**

July 2006 (#17): **Older 2e kids**

September 2006 (#18): **Writing and organization**

November 2006 (#19): **CAPD**

January 2007 (#20): **The emotional side of 2e children**

March 2007 (#21): **"Other" exceptionalities – TS, CP**

May (#22): **2e Down Under – Australia, New Zealand**

July 2007 (#23): **Sensory integration issues**

September 2007 (#24): **Response to Intervention**

November 2007 (#25): **Helping gifted kids with ASD**

January 2008 (#26): **Learning about 2e**

March 2008 (#27): **Focus on attention**

May 2008 (#28): **OCD plus more!**

July 2008 (#29): **Anxiety and mood disorders**

September 2008 (#30): **Language disorders**

November 2008 (#31): **Using the arts with 2e children**

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