

# THE GIFTED EDUCATION REVIEW



## GIFTED STUDENTS WITH ADHD

What Do We Know and What Should We Do?

by Todd Kettler & Anna M. Payne

Gifted students with co-existing ADHD are the most prevalent group of students with multiple exceptionalities. The causes of ADHD are complex, and as research evidence continues to grow, genetic influences are the most clearly recognized. There is some evidence, though not as strong, for psychosocial and environmental influences as well. Another reason studying co-existing ADHD and high cognitive ability is complicated is that many children and adolescents with ADHD also have additional learning, mood, and behavioral disorders (Brassett-Harknett & Butler, 2007). While ADHD has been widely studied in the past two decades, the number of empirical studies focusing on ADHD and high ability remains small. In other words, we know more about ADHD in

general than we know about ADHD in gifted students/adults.

Students with high cognitive ability (e.g. gifted students) generally have better working memory skills than average- and below-average-ability students. At the same time, cognitive research has demonstrated that working memory is significantly impaired in students diagnosed with ADHD (Castellanos, Barke, Milham, & Tan-nock, 2006). In fact, impaired working memory seems to be noted as a key feature of ADHD. Moreover, working memory skills are a robust predictor of academic attainment, even when controlling for differences in intelligence (Alloway & Alloway, 2010). What about the ADHD impact on working memory for gifted students? That remains an important question. Some evidence

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suggests that GT/ADHD students are less impaired in working memory than ADHD students with average/below average ability (Alloway & Elsworth, 2012). In other words, GT/ADHD students may have slightly lower working memory skills than GT students, but they generally have better working memory than their ADHD counterparts with average or low cognitive ability. These students fall somewhere in between these GT students and ADHD counterparts of average/low cognitive ability.

Importantly, working memory is one part of executive functioning: Parker and Boutelle (2009) defined executive functioning as a set of cognitive capacities to include: working memory, verbal learning skills, sustained attention, ability to solve complex problems, and responsible inhibition. Additionally, the cognitive impact of ADHD extends beyond just working memory and is thought to include the other facets of executive functioning, including inhibitory control. Some studies of college students with ADHD indicate that the students with ADHD have lower grade point averages than similar ability students without ADHD (Weyandt, & DuPaul, 2008). Our own research (Payne, Tipton, & Kettler, 2019) suggests that GT/ADHD students experience more difficulties in college than they previously experienced in their K-12 education. Specifically, as the work in college becomes more demanding and the expectation for independent learning increases, the impact of ADHD impaired executive functioning becomes even more pronounced. Executive functioning can also be considered a personal management system for individuals and includes various inhibitory factors, which can become an issue for many GT/ADHD and ADHD individuals.

Although research has identified practices to academic support students with ADHD, little of those evidence-based practices specifically

address GT/ADHD; it is presumed that the interventions are similarly effective if not more effective with students with high cognitive ability. Following are suggestions for both individuals with GT/ADHD and ADHD as well as teachers/professors with these individuals in their classrooms.

Some suggestions for individuals with GT/ADHD for facilitating academic success include:

- Adopting organizational strategies (using coordinated notebooks and folders; preparing school things the night before; using a planner/organizer; etc.),
- Planning for assignments/projects and being prepared in advance (breaking assignments into manageable chunks, setting timers [i.e., Pomodoro method], etc.),
- Moving during class (small movements of hands/feet, using objects to fiddle with, or walking around as the situation/space warrants-use kinesthetics!),
- Accessing supports (including family, friends, accommodations, and the special education teacher/disability office),
- Finding a consistent place to study and do homework (in a place that is free from distractions; avoid a bed because of implicit association with sleeping), and
- Communicating with teachers regarding useful accommodations and needs before problems can arise.

Advice for teachers/professors to support a GT/ADHD or ADHD student include:

- Talking with the GT/ADHD student (What works for them? Are there areas in which you need more support? What are your areas of need? Students may choose not to disclose the nature of their dis-

ability and be sure to respect their right to do this.),

- Encouraging use of student's academic accommodations (some students will not use accommodations such as alternative testing sites so they don't look different from their peers-but this can actually hinder their performance),
- Establish a routine to follow in class,
- Giving the student the ability to move (Not calling attention to the student if they are fiddling/doodling; allowing the student to get up and move to a quiet space in/outside of class to refocus; giving the student the ability to work while standing; incorporating kinesthetics-this will benefit ALL of your students),
- Providing directions — objective, fair, and clear-in multiple formats (Teachers help students who may need assistance with executive functioning, as well as keep all students on track for success. Post verbally/written/electronically),
- Providing assignment modifications/directions in multiple manners (Do all aspects of an assignment have to be written? Could a student answer verbally or provide a performance? By helping to scaffold answers and providing extended deadlines for longer assignments, teachers help students develop skills in executive functioning. Determine learning objectives of assignments and how a student can demonstrate learning, understanding, and success. Send email reminders or use a class website for longer deadlines.),
- Modeling the kinds of thinking you want your students to be doing (i.e., doing a math talk),
- Partnering with another educator (e.g., someone who already knows/successfully worked with the student, or a specialist in spe-

cial education) to see how you can support the learner(s),

- Using graphic organizers (multiple types -- not every kind will work in every situation or for every learner),
- Communicating with families (if the student is under the age of 18),
- Providing opportunities for creative expression,
- Supporting executive functioning throughout your classroom,
- Creating assignments based on content area mastery and less on completing work/compliance type assignments,
- Using areas of skill and strength to support areas of students' areas of weakness, and
- Utilizing various technologies (speech to text, organizers, mind-

mapping software, calendars, electronic readers).

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# STRENGTHS-BASED INSTRUCTION FOR 2E LEARNERS

## Striking a Balance in Teaching Twice-Exceptional Learners

by Emily Kircher-Morris

Twice-exceptional learners are students who are both gifted and have another diagnosis, such as ASD, ADHD, dyslexia, or others. Educators of twice-exceptional (2e) learners in the gifted, general, and special education classrooms have to be uniquely attuned to the fluctuation of the students' varying abilities. 2e students display their giftedness in some areas and have significant struggles in others. When we leverage the strengths of the 2e student, we can facilitate growth faster than merely focusing on remediation in areas of difficulty.

At times, 2e students use their strengths to compensate for their struggles. For example, a student who is identified as gifted and who has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may be

disorganized, but also manages to do well enough on tests that their grades are not impacted. Another example is a student who is identified as gifted and dyslexic who relies on their ability to make inferences and comprehend the text they are reading, even though their fluency and phonetic ability lags substantially. The strengths 2e students develop are frequently not aligned with the general expectations and curriculum of the classroom. Taking the time to understand some of these strengths can give us a way to develop lessons and accommodations that allow our 2e students to be challenged, stay engaged, and improve their areas of weakness.

Historically, schools have used a deficit-model approach to helping struggling students. Educators collect

data about who is struggling with a specific skillset and provide interventions aimed at improving this skill. However, it is a mistake to focus solely on remediating a student's areas of weakness. Not only does doing so cause a child's strengths to atrophy, but it also deteriorates a student's sense of confidence and autonomy. When we meld a child's strengths and weaknesses with a focus on finding ways for the strengths to support the struggles, we help 2e learners improve their areas of struggle without fostering learned helplessness.

Many 2e learners may not have an official diagnosis at the school. Parents may resist seeking a diagnosis due to a stigma associated with it or, if they have received a diagnosis, choose not to disclose the information to the



school. Many 2e students go unidentified because their weaknesses do not meet the criteria set for an educational diagnosis necessary for an IEP. Some 2e students from culturally diverse backgrounds may not have the cultural capital to seek a diagnosis. Meanwhile, economically disadvantaged families may not have the financial resources necessary for a diagnosis. Keeping these factors in mind provide the means to realize a 2e student may need accommodations and modifications, even without having a formal IEP or Section 504 Plan.

### Creating a Strengths-Based Lesson Plan

#### *Step 1: Identify the student's strengths.*

Modifying instruction for a 2e learner requires us to take the time to explore with the student what they perceive as their strengths. Often, their strengths are strongly related to their giftedness and provide a good starting point to build a strengths-based approach for a 2e student. These strengths can include openness to experience, holistic or global thinking, visual-spatial thinking skills, logical thinking, creative and divergent thinking, or comfort with technology.

*Case Study: Jamal is a ninth-grade student who is gifted, has been identified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and struggles with social skills. His IEP has placed him in a daily social skills class. Due to demand avoidance and boredom with the lower-level skills being taught, Jamal is getting minimal benefit from these classes. The focus of the course is primarily on remediating his social skill difficulties.*

*By taking a strengths-based approach, Jamal's parents and case manager try a new strategy to help Jamal build his social skills while removing him from the social skills class.*



*One of Jamal's strengths is his comfort with technology and interest in theatre.*

#### *Step 2: Create opportunities for upward differentiation based on identified strengths.*

After a student's strengths are identified, examine the objective of the lesson or unit. In what ways can the activity be differentiated to capitalize on a student's strengths? Differentiation can occur through changing the content, process, or product of an assignment. Content differentiation is changing the information that the student learns; process differentiation is changing how the student learns the material; and, product differentiation is changing how the student shows what they have learned.

*Jamal's parents and case manager enroll him in the tech theatre class at his school where he can utilize his strengths to assist with the upcoming production. He will naturally find himself in positions where he needs to appropriately use his social skills.*

#### *Step 3: Find accommodations or modifications to support the student's lagging skills.*

Providing modifications and accommodations should not be rationed because a child is gifted. Just like all students, 2e students need the opportunity to have appropriate support

around them to build a skill. Many 2e students have difficulty with executive functioning skills. We can move away from the mindset that providing accommodations is going to “enable” a 2e student and focus on providing the accommodations and gradually removing them as the student becomes more independent with the skill.

There are five primary considerations when looking for ways to accommodate instruction for students. *Behavioral* accommodations look for ways to help a student manage their emotions and behavior. *Environmental* accommodations find ways to change the environment to help them succeed. *Evaluative* modifications are used when we modify how this student shows us what they know during assessments. *Instructional* accommodations involve changing the ways we present material to be learned to a student. And finally, *organizational* accommodations identify the organizational tools and support the student needs to succeed.

Accommodations for Jamal included creating a plan for him to check-in regularly with his case manager to reflect on his daily social interactions in the new theatre class. This new strengths-based approach removed the obstacles faced by placing him in a deficit-model social skills class and capitalized on his cognitive strengths in an environment that also helped to meet the same objectives. ■

## FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the first edition of *Gifted Education Review* for the year 2020. After a hiatus, we have restarted publication of the newsletter. Our team has mapped out an exciting editorial calendar for the next 12 months and we're looking forward to showing you what we have planned.

I have a new co-editor in this endeavor, Dr. Laila Sanguras. Dr. Sanguras is currently a professor of education at Baylor University and is the author of *Grit in the Classroom: Building Perseverance for Excellence in Today's Students*.

The theme of this edition of *Gifted Education Review* is twice-exceptionality. Twice-Exceptionality is a growing concern in the field of gifted and talented education. Some estimates have suggested that there are up to 300,000 twice-exceptional students in the United States, and it is imperative that we identify these gifted learners and provide instruction that accounts for their learning challenges.

Finally, I know it is a scary time in the world right now. The coronavirus has upended the way we instruct our children and challenges parents and

educators alike. In these immediate days it becomes even more important to exercise flexibility and adaptability to address the constantly changing circumstances. We will get through this, and this crucible we are experiencing will make us stronger as human beings and as educators.



**James Bishop, Ph.D.**

Co-Editor

*Gifted Education Review*

# Hayden's Story

## Surviving and Thriving as a Twice-Exceptional Student

### Interview Conducted by Laila Sanguras

I taught Hayden when he was in eighth grade. He immediately stood out, not because he had just transferred to our school or because he was taller than most students; Hayden was incredibly bright with a sense of humor and a creative spark that teachers either loved or didn't. I happened to love him, although he did challenge me regularly. He seemed to view everything we did from a unique perspective, which meant that I had to have a firm handle on the "why" behind every lesson. For example, Hayden would want to know the reason we were reading a particular story or writing a specific essay. I remember he often stood in the back of the room rather than sitting in his seat. He turned much of his work in late and would often take his assignments in a direction that I did not expect. I had to learn to be flexible and patient. I also had to remain focused on the big goal for my gifted language

arts class: I wanted all of my students to be articulate and thoughtful. This meant that I could not get hung up on the small details that did not seem to matter.

Hayden went on to attend a prestigious college in Texas, where he excelled in academics and athletics. He was a competitive swimmer and helped his team win conference and national championships, in addition to swimming in the US Olympic Trials. In the following interview, you will likely pick up on his humility and I hope you find the reflections of his experiences insightful.

*What are you up to these days? What are your interests? How would you describe your social life?*

I live in Austin. It's where I went to college and now it's where I go to work. I have a few hobbies: hiking, go-karts,

jogging. I've always been a fan of live music and theater, so I frequent performances as well. My social life is varying. I have seven close people that I'm very good friends with, and see at least one almost every day.

*In what ways do you feel like you are gifted?*

It's difficult to answer a question like that without sounding conceited. I suppose I don't really think of myself as gifted, until I remember an accomplishment and do get that little feeling of pride. When I'm interested in a task, topic, or project, I obsess about it, researching and working thoroughly, sometimes for weeks at a time. Then get bored and move on to the next one. A good way to explain it is: I'm very good at what I want to be good at, but have no way of controlling what that is.

*Describe how you did or didn't fit in with your peers (gifted and nongifted) during school.*

Oh, where to begin. I definitely lacked perspective of how other people perceived me, and how much that mattered. Other students were definitely a lot more interested in (and better at) the social aspect of school than I was. I imagine I came off as distracted and distant, and probably had a much bigger ego than I could carry. Empathy was later to the game than it should have been. At times that certainly expressed as pride and being a jerk, but more often, it was more awkward, I would base my actions around how I intended it, not how it would be perceived, and probably looked pretty stupid a lot because of this.

*Can you describe the teachers who were most effective in supporting you? What did they do or not do?*

I need to tell you about my 4th grade teacher named Buffy Taylor. Below about 5th or 6th grade, I was way ahead most of the curriculum (a pattern that did not last), and was not able to give it the interest needed to get through class. Usually when this occurred, I would get so antsy and fidgety and stressed that acting out became inevitable. Being disruptive was rarely my goal, and I feel like my educators were able to tell the difference between intentional disruption and incidental.

Mrs. Taylor mitigated that almost entirely. Her methods were pragmatic. Chewing on your eraser? Have some gum. Sharpening your pencil every 10 minutes? Here's a mechanical. The theme here is distracting me from myself. It was not about approaching or reaching a specific, single environment for me to learn in. It was about finding ways to optimize the present environment to best fit what I needed, or cre-

ate a situation where I could thrive in without disrupting other students.

*What about the teachers who weren't that great? Did you have any bad experiences with teachers not understanding you? What was that like?*

To contrast, the worst teachers I had were the very my-way-or-the-highway, cemented in their method. That's not to say that some (most) of them weren't great teachers in their own right, just that they were not great teachers for me. Just as too little structure isn't a good learning environment, too much can be just as bad, especially for me.

I know I particularly struggled when given a task that was mandatory and unexpected. In the worst situations, teachers took this as insult to their authority, and became adversarial. An example that comes to mind was in 2nd grade; the class was going to be dipping our palms in paint and leaving our handprints on a large mural-like sheet of paper. Of course, from an adult's perspective, this is harmless and adorable child stuff, but at the time, I was absolutely adamant that I did not want any part of it. I'm not making the claim that you should never put your foot down with a student, but in this situation it was unnecessary. Just as harmless as it was to do, it would have been equally harmless to opt-out, but this teacher insisted, which led to a true masterpiece of a meltdown. Avoid that, if possible.

*We also have a large group of parents who read our newsletter. What did your parents do that helped you be successful and happy?*

My mother is my champion. No child realizes it at the time, but she did so much. Early reading to/with me caused a very high reading level, even at an early age, and lasting to today. It was only after the fact that I

realize how much research she put into my needs, how close she worked with other educators as my advocate. There were times she pulled me from a teacher's class because it was not working, and there were times she was tougher on me than the teachers themselves. Especially when trouble came up, she would work with the teachers, not against them, and toward the goal of making an environment I could thrive in, not just making me happy.

*Think back to your years in school. What were your best years and what made them the best?*

Fourth and fifth grade were fantastic. I had that whole elementary school thing figured out. Especially in 5th grade, subjects like science and math were finally outpacing me, and I was learning in tandem with curriculum in those subjects. Social studies was finally more closely resembling history than civics, and my teacher in that class was fantastic too. He would honestly just sit there and tell us the 'story' of history, by 2005 curriculum standards, and keep it engaging and fun enough that it was never boring. This definitely included this old man sitting up on a stool in front of the class and singing a slightly censored version of "The Battle of New Orleans" by Johnny Horton. I'd just ended the cry-when-things-don't-go-your-way phase, and felt newly socially equipped.

*Which were your worst years? If you could go back in time to give advice to yourself back then, what would you tell yourself?*

Seventh through ninth grades were awful, as they are for everyone. Recess gets replaced by passing periods and lunch. Social interactions become more mature and toxic, which I was not ready for. My peers were caring so much more about their circle of friends



and the exclusion game, while I still wanted to play tag.

On top of that, more independence is required of you to deal with the greater coursework, and the possibility of finishing your homework at school dwindled away. As someone who never had to deal with that before, I was painfully unable to adapt. Of course, I know now why this painful growing period was necessary, but at the time I struggled.

*Is there anything else you want to*

*share?*

I want to talk just once more about the sliding scale between allowing your students freedom and taking a more authoritarian approach. To rule your classroom with an iron fist, while it might work with many, even most of your students, can simply be intolerable to the black-and-white thinking, socially inflexible kids like I was. You will have to deal with meltdowns and defiance, and to respond to that by treating it as a challenge to your

authority will only make it worse. The flip-side to this is to leave your students the room to do their own thing. Of course, eventually they'll need to learn that skill, but instead of being Darwinistic about it, work with the ones not picking up on the idea of worktime/playtime. I'm not talking about hand-holding, but just making sure they know what's expected of them and how you expect work done. There's no easy answers and every child is different, but I know there are others like me. ■

# RESOURCES

Compiled by Yasmin Laird

*Twice-exceptional (2e) children can find the school environment difficult, especially with course rigor, volume, and demands for organization, participation, and long-term planning. These challenges can result in inconsistent academic performance and frustration; though they can be highly creative, verbal, imaginative, curious, and possess strong problem-solving abilities. The adversities that 2e students face may hinder their enthusiasm for school and be detrimental to their self-efficacy, self-confidence, and motivation. The challenge for twice-exceptional children is that their giftedness can mask their special needs and vice versa. Parents, families, and teachers also face challenges when trying to meet the needs of 2e children. This section provides an overview of additional readings and support for readers.*

## Recent Research

[Coaching Parents to Use Higher Level Questioning with Their Twice-Exceptional Children](#) by Jennifer Ritchotte and Hasan Zaghlawan  
[How Teachers Can Support Students Who Are Gifted and Talented with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities through Effective Programming and Planning](#) by Bryan Allen

[Beyond the Neuropsychological Evaluation: Finding the Right Professionals to Support](#)

[Your 2e Child's Needs](#) by Austina De Bonte.

[Cognitive and Achievement Characteristics of Students from a National Sample Identified as Potentially Twice Exceptional \(Gifted with a Learning Disability\)](#) by Danika L. S. Maddocks  
[Twice-Exceptional Gifted Students: Needs, Challenges, and Questions to Ponder](#) by Khlood K. Alshareef

## Online Articles

[The Challenge of the Highly Gifted/Special Needs Child](#) - Outlines the special issues associated with twice-exceptional children  
[Top 10 Pieces of Advice for Parents of Uniquely Gifted Children](#) - Lists the 10 most crucial pieces of advice for 2E parents  
[Special Education or Gifted? It May Be Hard to Tell](#) - Discusses the difficulties schools may have with addressing the strengths and weaknesses of 2E students  
[Motivation Problem or Hidden Disability?](#) - To the student who seems lazy, combative, and/or unmotivated  
[Siblings of Twice-Exceptional Children](#) - Suggestions for parents of 2e children with siblings who might not understand the special needs of their sibling

## Books for Parents

[Uniquely Gifted: Identifying and Meeting the](#)

[Needs of the Twice-Exceptional Student](#), edited by Keisa Kay

[Crossover Children: A Sourcebook for Helping Children Who Are Gifted and Learning Disabled](#) by Marlene Bireley  
[Different Minds: Gifted Children With AD/HD, Asperger Syndrome, and Other Learning Deficits](#) by Deirdre Lovecky  
[The Pretenders: Gifted People Who Have Difficulty Learning](#) by Barbara Guyer

## Books for Children

[Many Ways to Learn: Young People's Guide to Learning Disabilities](#) by Judith Stern & Uzi Ben-Ami  
[The Survival Guide for Kids With LD: Learning Differences](#) by Gary L. Fisher & Rhoda Woods Cumming  
[Views from Our Shoes: Growing Up With a Brother or Sister With Special Needs](#), edited by Donald Meyer

## Accounts to Follow on Twitter

2eNews @2enewsdotcom  
Mind Matters Podcast @MindMattersPod  
Belin-Blank Center @belinblank  
Bridges Academy @BRIDGESdotEDU  
2e Minds @2eMinds  
Twice Exceptional Children's Advocacy @Teca2e

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- support for parents of gifted and talented students.



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- Fall GT Conference
- Spring GT Parent Conference
- University for Young People (June)



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# SUBJECT ACCELERATION EXPERIENCES OF TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS

by Emily Villamar-Robbins



Current recommendations for teaching twice-exceptional students include an emphasis on strengths-based, talent-focused instruction. In addition to support for their disabilities, twice-exceptional students need challenge in their areas of strength. Certain, necessary questions may arise when evaluating solutions recommended for gifted learners. After a student's disabilities and above-level abilities are both identified, can strategies for gifted learners provide an appropriate and accessible level of challenge for a twice-exceptional student? If an above-grade course or classroom would be needed to provide this challenge, do experts recommend acceleration for students with disabilities? When parents of twice-exceptional students look back at acceleration decisions, how would they describe

their students' experiences with these placements?

Although full-grade acceleration may not be in the best interest of some twice-exceptional students, experts have identified several types of acceleration, including single-subject acceleration. Multiple experts have cited acceleration in areas of strength as an option for twice-exceptional students (Assouline, et al., 2009; Baum, et al., 2017; Foley-Nicpon & Cederberg, 2015). Educators should consider current research guidance, student data and needs, and possible placement options when evaluating whether subject acceleration is appropriate. To study the well-being of the whole child, parents may also wish to consider how twice-exceptional students may experience acceleration placements. Parents can be a source of insight on

student motivation, stress levels, and emotions shared at home. Without parent perspectives, arguably, educators cannot fully appreciate the impact of academic interventions.

To explore how twice-exceptional students may experience subject acceleration, and to shine a light on the importance of parent perspectives, eighteen parents of twice-exceptional students shared their stories. Their feedback, celebrations, and concerns are discussed below, along with references to current subject acceleration guidelines.

### **Subject Acceleration Basics: Guidance and Requirements**

Laws and regulations addressing acceleration vary between states. The Belin-Blank Center at the University

of Iowa maintains a list of state laws, including state subject acceleration requirements, if they exist (Belin-Blank Center, 2020). In Texas public schools, for example, any student can request assessment for full grade acceleration in grades K-12 or for subject acceleration in grades 6-12, but for grades K-5, current state law only requires districts to offer subject acceleration (acceleration “in areas of student strengths”) to GT-identified students (State Plan, 2019).

Research and recommendations for subject acceleration can be found in recent guidance on developing acceleration policies (Lupkowski-Shoplik, et al., 2018) and in research published by the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa (Assouline, et al., 2015).

If local or state policy only provides for full-grade acceleration, and if a student who needs acceleration cannot skip a full grade due to the student’s disability, districts may wish to consider whether subject acceleration might be necessary for disability access.

### **Parent Voices: Background and Exceptionalities**

Parents who shared their feedback have twice-exceptional students who began single-subject acceleration before age 12. Most live in states or districts with subject acceleration policies. One parent noted different acceleration requirements in her past and present states of residence, and shared, “this was a motivating factor in our relocation.” Student exceptionalities described by parents included ADHD, anxiety disorder, auditory processing disorder, autism spectrum disorder, depression, disruptive mood dysregulation disorder, dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyspraxia, hearing loss, obsessive-compulsive disorder, sensory processing disorder, or significant allergies. The majority of parents noted more than one disability.

All parents had students who ac-

celerated in math, and half accelerated in additional core subjects or a foreign language. The majority accelerated in public school, but parents also had children in private, homeschool, or charter settings. Most parents described subject acceleration placements in higher-grade classes with older students, either offsite or onsite. Other arrangements included same-age cohort subject acceleration, individual pullout or push-in acceleration, or online courses taken at school or home. Five parents noted acceleration two or more grades above-age in a single subject, and one described how subject acceleration led to successful full-grade acceleration that “ultimately turned my child 360 from being low self-esteem with emotional turmoil into a well-adjusted, confident, happy child.”

### **Initiating Acceleration**

Several parents encountered initial resistance to acceleration, and some described their advocacy as necessary for their students’ placement. One parent had “to tell the school [acceleration] was possible and how to do it” while another taught coursework at home to provide evidence of mastery to the district. Some parents described campuses resistance to acceleration, and some faced objections that appeared to relate to a student’s disability (i.e., focusing exclusively on the disability or failing to acknowledge a need for challenge).

Three parents involved outside consultants and two parents shared that favorable acceleration policies were created following their advocacy. Of parents who did not face initial obstacles, most described existing acceleration policies or cohorts of accelerated students.

### **Positive Impact: Success Stories**

When parents described the effects

of acceleration, many shared glowing stories. All but one parent shared at least one positive outcome, and several noted a significant or “life-changing” positive impact. One mother shared, “when my daughter finally got access to subject material that challenged her, she really began to bloom.”

Positive effects described by parents included: increased focus, self-esteem, happiness, confidence, maturity, motivation, learning engagement, and/or enjoyment of school; improved grades in the accelerated subject or all subjects; improved behavior; reduction of boredom; improved willingness to do schoolwork; improved social connections and/or perception; less anger; improved study habits; new opportunities in areas of strength; able to “maintain... sanity” during other challenges; and high recognition on College Board exams (PSAT 8/9, SAT and AP). Parents shared improvement in teacher understanding of above-level needs, as well; according to one parent, acceleration “helps his teachers understand that he’s bright, even if he struggles with other things.” Another parent described how an understanding teacher made her child feel “heard, understood and most importantly, challenged.”

No parents shared adverse social effects, and several parents described improvement. One parent explained that despite their child’s social immaturity, older students simply perceived their child “as young, not just immature.” Another noted that their child “grew socially and behaviorally by being with older children in a classroom where there were higher behavioral expectations.”

Parents attributed successful acceleration to several factors, including scheduling flexibility and support from the campus; campus handling of disability accommodations; teacher support for acceleration and for the student; campus gifted training and/or acceleration policies; the student’s

desire for acceleration and/or involvement in decisions; parent and/or student advocacy; consideration of all data in making placements; creativity; strong communication between parents and educators; and educators' understanding of twice-exceptional differences. One parent credited teachers who understood that the child's "executive function and social skills are those of a younger child." Another shared, "the school knew about our son's anxieties and made sure he had a place he could go to calm down if he was getting overwhelmed/melting down. They were extremely accepting... and went above and beyond to accommodate him."

## Challenges

While all parents viewed acceleration as needed, implementation sometimes involved challenges. Problems included: missing extracurricular activities, recess, or lunch with peers due to scheduling of acceleration; failure to provide disability accommodations during acceleration or testing; teacher negativity toward acceleration; need for more or less acceleration; campus discontinuing successful acceleration; campus requiring repetition of already-mastered work alongside accelerated work; and a lack of campus structure for self-paced work during the school day. One parent explained that an online class was an "awful fit" for the student's "weak EF [executive function] and impulse control skills" when the student had "free reign on a school [computer] and no direct supervision." Multiple parents mentioned the impact of schedule conflicts on student motivation. As one parent explained, missing activities can "make acceleration feel like a punishment, rather than a response to a need."

When problems occurred, several parents described a decline in motivation, school satisfaction, or grades. Most difficulties were resolved through changes in level, disability support, in-

structor, or schedule. Three families ultimately withdrew their students to home-school.

## Practice Tips

Formal research could evaluate outcomes for specific diagnoses, but in the meantime, it is clear from existing acceleration research recommendations that some twice-exceptional students need and can succeed in subject acceleration placements. The celebrations and struggles experienced by parents highlight the unique needs and potential of these students.

Reviewing existing research and advice from parents, educators may wish to consider:

- The impact of local policies and training on teacher understanding
- The impact of scheduling and flexibility on student motivation
- Requirements for disability accommodations and scaffolding during acceleration (must "incorporate the effects of their dual diagnosis") (Baum et al., 2017)
- If formal subject acceleration is not recommended, the importance of exploring other strengths-based strategies, such as curriculum compacting (Winebrenner, 2018)
- Ensuring equity of access to acceleration, including avoiding dependence on parent initiation or assistance in studying

The needs of twice-exceptional students are complex and require individualized solutions. Considering these students through the eyes of parents can shed light on details that allow acceleration to help twice-exceptional students thrive. To be fully prepared to educate these multi-faceted and exceptional students, educators will want to keep single-subject acceleration – with parent communication – in their toolbox of strategies to consider. ■

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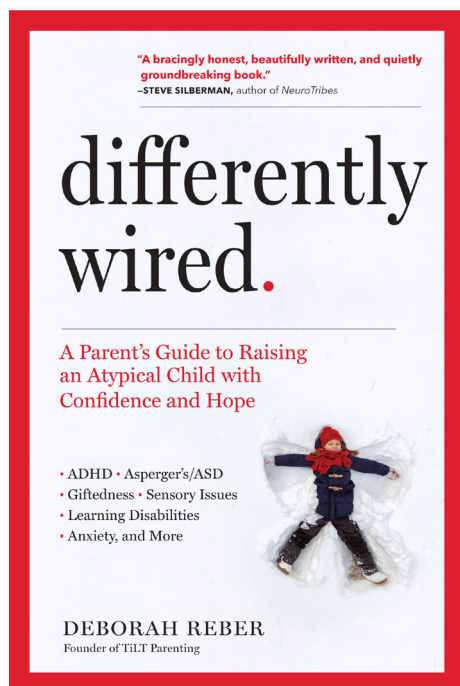
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# Book Finds

by

Demedia D. Edwards and Tearany N. Mitchell



***Differently Wired: A Parent's Guide to Raising an Atypical Child with Confidence and Hope* (Reprint edition). New York: Workman Publishing Company.**

With *Differently Wired: A Parent's Guide To Raising An Atypical Child With Confidence And Hope*, New York Time's bestselling author and speaker, Deborah Reber, has written a captivating read that is a combination of memoir, parenting guide, and appeal to society to better understand and support exceptional children. Speaking with a deep sense of purpose, the author compels the reader to shift from viewing neurological differences as deficits and to begin seeing them as essential to our thriving society.

Through deeply emotional accounts and discovery, Reber chron-

icles her experiences through the process of acknowledgment, grief, profound sadness, and doubt as she navigated diagnosis and labels. This cycle continues until Reber begins the life-giving process of discovering that normal is relative. By using 'tilts' or outside the box ideas, parents of atypical children can transition from a place of frustration and shame to acceptance and celebration. The author implores parents to celebrate small victories and to be brave in the face of adversity through advocacy.

*Differently Wired* is not a melancholy read; it is a story of discovery and awakening. It is a resounding call to action for parents, educators, and society to redefine normal and consider how these commonly conceived norms are detrimental to our children. Incredibly personal at times and convicting at others, *Differently Wired* engages the reader from chapter to chapter by calling out differences and providing evidence of how various atypical behaviors and unique traits should be seen as assets.

Neurodiversity is a topic that has received a tremendous amount of attention as of late with an abundance of books on the topic being likely purchases for parents of atypical children. Acceptance and celebration of differently wired children have to become the new normal in our world. *Differently Wired* is a must-read for parents searching to better understand their unique children, while quietly realizing that all children have a

place in our world.



## When Your Child Learns *Differently*

A Family Approach for Navigating  
Special Education Services  
With Love and High Expectations

Kathryn Fishman-Weaver, Ph.D.

***When Your Child Learns Differently: A Family Approach For Navigating Special Education Services With Love And High Expectations.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press Inc.**

If you love a child who learns differently or if you are interested in how special education services help those who do learn differently, then *When Your Child Learns Differently: A Family Approach For Navigating Special Education Services With Love And High Expectations* is a must read. This work takes a fresh approach to how children learn differently and provides families with a powerful toolbox for navigating the world of special education services. Fishman-Weaver uses her professional experience as a teacher in special education serv-

es combined with her personal experience of being a mother of a child in special education services to navigate the challenges these students and their families may face.

Loving children who learn differently coupled with setting high expectations is the foundation for this work and the constant theme. Caregivers and families of children in need of special education services should no longer fear the unknown waters of navigating this compli-

cated system. The author discusses policies, procedures, and strategies throughout the text, including tables and charts to illustrate the many obstacles. With all of the challenges these families face, the author hones in on the parent giving themselves grace through this process. The theme of love and self-care are demonstrated as necessary so that both caregiver and child can healthily go about this process.

Using personal and professional

examples throughout the text, the author does not hide the challenges that come with some of the approaches or procedures discussed. Both the strengths and weaknesses are exposed connecting the reader to real world examples. Comforting and thought-provoking are the words that come to mind when reading this text. It would not be too brash to call this a companion guide for those with children who learn differently. ■

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