



What is Twice Exceptionality?

The term “twice-exceptional” (2e), is used to describe gifted children who also give evidence of one or more disabilities.

Identifying 2e Learners

Twice-exceptional learners can be difficult to identify, in large part due to the education system’s need to “track” learners. For some students, their giftedness is visible and easily identified. These students get tracked accordingly, but it goes unidentified that they are struggling with a disability and not receiving support. These students may struggle emotionally or even act out and be labeled a behavioral problem. The opposite is also true, with a student’s disability often being the more visible and more easily identified. In this case, these students are tracked accordingly and provided support, but they may be held back or frustrated due to masked giftedness.

Category of 2e	Characteristics of Category
<p>giftedness masks disability</p> <p><i>Formally identified as gifted but not having an identified disability</i></p>	<p>A student who is formally identified as gifted but not having an identified disability may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Go unnoticed for possible special education evaluation. - Be considered an underachiever, often attributed to perceived laziness, poor motivation, or a low self-concept. - Maintain grade-level expectations until the difficulty level of the curriculum increases, often during middle and high school years.
<p>disability masks giftedness</p> <p><i>Formally identified as having a disability, but not gifted</i></p>	<p>A student who is formally identified as having a disability but not as gifted may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be involved in programs, services, and instruction that are focused solely on remediation and/or compensation for the disability. - Have significantly underestimated intellectual abilities due to an inadequate assessment that yielded depressed IQ scores. - Become bored in special programs if the services do not match their required level of challenge. - Be misdiagnosed as having an emotional disability.
<p>giftedness and disability mask one another; neither are easily identified</p> <p><i>Not formally identified as gifted or with disability</i></p>	<p>A student who is not identified disabled or gifted may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be achieving at grade level and assumed to have average ability. - Show areas of difficulty as curriculum becomes more challenging. - Be viewed as performing within expectations and, therefore, never referred for a special education evaluation. - Have deflated achievement and standardized test scores due to the disability and may not qualify for gifted education services

Credit to National Education Association



WHO CAN BE TWICE EXCEPTIONAL?

The disabilities that overlap with 2e may include specific learning disabilities (SpLD), speech and language disorders, emotional/behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, autism spectrum, or other impairments such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Types of 2e	What does it look like?	2e Example
Gifted Students with Physical Disabilities	In most cases, physical disability and cognitive ability are unrelated. Students with even the most extreme of physical disability may be classified as gifted and in need of appropriate education services (Willard-Holt, 1994)	Stephen Hawking, a Nobel prize-winning physicist who has ALS, is an example of a person with a physical disability who is also gifted.
Gifted Students with Sensory Disabilities	Traditional education settings are increasingly becoming more inclusive resulting in the likelihood of gifted students with sensory disabilities (i.e., hearing impaired, blind) attending regular education schools and requiring provisions that accommodate both their giftedness and their disability.	Helen Keller, who was deaf and blind, is an example of a person who had sensory disabilities and was gifted.
Gifted Students with Autism	Autism Spectrum Disorder is characterized by language and social impairments and 2e can be present within individuals diagnosed with this disorder. Aside from their deficits in social functioning, these students are marked by a greater passion for acquiring knowledge and advanced skills in a variety of areas.	Dr. Temple Grandin, Assistant Professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University and accomplished author and designer of animal facilities, has written of her experiences as an individual with autism. Dr. Gandin gained notoriety as a popular TED speaker.
Gifted Students with Emotional and/or Behavioral Disorders	Reviews of the literature on the social-emotional aspects of giftedness indicate that gifted students are no more or less likely than their non-identified peers to experience emotional or psychosocial difficulties (Fiedler, 1999; Neihart, 1998; Robinson, Reis, Neihart, & Moon, 2002). However, in many cases, their possible giftedness goes unrecognized as attention is focused only on their disruptive behaviors.	Princeton University professor and Nobel prize-winning mathematician John Nash Jr., whose struggle with schizophrenia was the subject of the movie "A Beautiful Mind," is an example of a gifted individual who has an emotional disorder.
Gifted Students with ADHD	Gifted students with ADHD have difficulty focusing their attention, completing their work, following directions, and organizing their school materials. At the same time, they mirror their gifted peers by being advanced in ability and capable of high levels of performance, particularly when their interest is high, and tasks are challenging.	Nikola Tesla, a foremost inventor who helped usher in the age of electrical power in 1887 with his patent on alternating current motors, would be characterized as having ADHD today.
Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities	The <u>largest subgroup</u> of twice-exceptional students is those who are gifted and have a specific learning disability. Many students with this type of profile are unidentified because their areas of strength and weakness move them toward average performance, and they appear to need neither gifted nor special education services.	An example of an individual who was gifted and had a learning disability was Albert Einstein who gave the world the theory of relativity even though he struggled to learn how to read.

Credit to National Education Association



WHAT DOES 2e LOOK LIKE?

Like other gifted learners, 2e students are highly knowledgeable and talented in at least one domain. However, their giftedness is often overshadowed by their disabilities, or these students may be able to mask or hide their learning deficits by using their talents to compensate. Sometimes a twice-exceptional child's special education needs are overlooked until adolescence or later, or in many cases never identified.

Twice-exceptional children often find difficulty in the school environment, where organization, participation, and long-term planning play a role. They can be highly creative, verbal, imaginative, and curious, often possessing strong problem-solving abilities. Some have a wide range of interests, while others have a single, all-consuming expertise. At school, they may have difficulty keeping up with course rigor, volume, and demands, resulting in inconsistent academic performance, frustration, difficulties with written expression, and labels such as lazy, unmotivated, and underachiever. All this may hinder their excitement for school and be detrimental to their self-efficacy, self-confidence, and motivation.

2e at home	2e in the classroom
"I've been receiving complaints from the teacher about my son, who is concerned he is distracting and annoying his classmates. She described him as interruptive and rude, often not paying attention. He has a high IQ but is viewed as a "behavior problem." He has deep interests outside of school and can engage for hours in topics he cares about. Normally outgoing with a great sense of humor, he is becoming withdrawn and hates school."	"Jim" is a bright, highly motivated 10-year-old who enjoys the STEM problems we cover in class. He's a walking encyclopedia on the planet Mars and recent missions; he's even designed his own plans for a new Mars rover. Despite this, Jim is extremely quiet and withdrawn, does not seem to have any friends, and rarely looks me in the eye when I try to talk with him about Mars or other subjects.

Table Credit to National Association for Gifted Children



MYTHS ABOUT 2e

Being gifted makes up for having a learning or attention issue.	Twice-exceptional students can be confusing to teachers and to parents as it can be hard to recognize or understand the signs. Sometimes giftedness may mask learning and attention issues or vice versa. In either case, 2E students can look as if they have average abilities. But when you look more closely at where they shine and where they struggle, it becomes clear that they really are 2E. No matter how well they can use their strengths, they still have learning and attention issues for which they need support.
Students can't be gifted and lack basic skills, so they're just not trying hard enough.	It can be hard to realize that a child who understands some things on such a profound level can have trouble with basic skills. But 2E students often have uneven skills. They may do well in one area, like math, but have trouble with processing speed, social skills or following directions. Without explicit instruction in those areas, it doesn't matter how hard 2E kids try—they're still going to have trouble.
2E students aren't eligible for IEPs or 504 plans.	When a student is mostly doing well, the school can sometimes be hesitant to evaluate him for special education services. But academics aren't the only thing to consider. There are other challenges that can point to learning and attention issues, too. These can include things like trouble making friends or managing emotions. The U.S. Department of Education made it clear that 2E students and behavior supports are covered by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Schools must evaluate a child if a disability is suspected. If a student is found eligible, he should have an IEP or a 504 plan.
Addressing weaknesses should be the top priority when helping 2E students.	The National Education Association stresses that programs for 2E learners should be individualized to meet both special education and gifted needs. One isn't more important than the other. Some school districts even have individualized learning plans to address specialized instruction for gifted students. Others have special programs to address the unique needs of 2E students. No matter how your school handles it, playing to your child's strengths is best practice.
2E students should be more mature than other kids their age.	2E kids often have what's known as <i>asynchronous development</i> . That means they're far ahead intellectually, but far behind socially and emotionally. This gap can cause kids a lot of anxiety and make it hard for them to get along with other kids their age. They may come across as argumentative when they really just want to have in-depth discussions. And they can have trouble reading social cues the way other kids do.

Credit to Understood for Learning and Attention Issues



COGx and 2e

COGx programs can be a uniquely good fit for students with 2e because of the level of individualization that programs allow. Goals are designed with the student in mind, and exercises can be customized in myriad ways to meet the uniqueness of the learner--both by modifying for a weakness or to leverage a strength. COGx programs being delivered in person is typically identified by COGx clients as an advantage, with the relationship formed between student and COGx Professional playing a significant role in program outcomes for these learners.

References

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