

What is Twice Exceptional?

Twice-exceptional (2e) learners are students who are identified as gifted in one or more areas of exceptionality and are also identified with a disability defined by Federal/State eligibility criteria. These students may have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a Section 504 plan, but may not have an Advanced Learning Plan.

Gifted students with disabilities are at-risk because their instructional and social-emotional needs often are not addressed effectively by the general classroom teacher, the special education team, or the 504 case manager. It is easy for their strengths to go unnoticed, either because teachers and parents are concentrating so hard on what they cannot do, or their strengths go undetected because the deficits mask their strengths, or the giftedness of a student with diagnosed learning disabilities is not detected.

The characteristics of twice-exceptional students are often seen as contradictory because of the dichotomy of the strengths and the challenges that these learners possess. The following list should be viewed as characteristics that are *typical* of many twice-exceptional learners, rather than characteristics of all twice-exceptional learners.

| Strengths | Challenges |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Superior vocabulary | Easily frustrated |
| Highly creative | Stubborn |
| Resourceful | Manipulative |
| Curious | Opinionated |
| Imaginative | Argumentative |
| Questioning | Written Expression |
| Problem-solving ability | Highly sensitive to criticism |
| Sophisticated sense of humor | Inconsistent academic performance |
| Wide range of interests | Lack of organizational study skills |
| Advanced ideas and opinions | Difficulty with social interactions |
| Special talent or consuming interest | Unable to maintain attention for long periods of time |

(Trail, 2011, p. 3)

It is important for educators to know the educational and affective needs of these students. This will empower teachers to implement strategies to develop students' strengths and compensatory strategies so that they can achieve their full potential. What is important to remember is that we must focus on the strengths of these students rather than their deficiencies.

Unfortunately, there is no simple formula for meeting the learning needs of 2e students. These students differ in both their giftedness and in the types of learning problems they might have. It takes creativity and flexibility to meet their learning needs and it is often a situation of trial and error. However, successful strategies play to the learner's strengths and interests while providing support in the areas where the student has limitations. Maker and Udall (1985) provide some excellent strategies in their ERIC document. Franklin-Rohr and Gifford (2011) note three essential components in providing appropriate differentiation for these students:

- Conducting pre-assessment to determine what students already know;
- Providing opportunities for enrichment and extension;
- Taking into consideration multiple leaning styles.

Twice exceptional learners are definitely at risk. Delays in identification and intervention can result in debilitating social and emotional consequences. Success with these students depends upon creating a supporting environment, appropriate strategies for learning, flexible curriculum, and caring teachers who are sensitive to their needs and who are informed of the complexities of teaching these special and promising students.

References and related resources

- Colorado Department of Education. (2012). *Twice-exceptional students: Gifted students with disabilities. Level 1: An introductory resource book*. Denver, CO.
- Franklin-Rohr, C.& Gifford, C. (2011). The twice-exceptional student in the regular classroom in *Understanding your twice-exceptional student: The Spotlight on 2e Series*. Winfield, IL: Glen Ellyn Media.
- Maker, C.& Udall, J. & A. J. (1985) *Giftedness and learning disabilities*. ERIC Clearing House on Disabilities and Gifted Education (ERIC EC Digest #E427).
- Trail, B. A. (2011). *Twice-exception gifted children: Understanding, teaching and counseling gifted students*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press, Inc.
- Understanding your twice-exceptional student (2011). *The Spotlight on 2e Series*. Winfield, IL: Glen Ellyn Media.