

The Mythology Of Learning:

Understanding Common Myths about 2e Learners

*A series of articles from
Bridges Academy*



Part of the **Spotlight on 2e Series**
From the publishers of
2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter

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Spotlight on 2e Series

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Introduction

Twice-exceptional (2e) learners are an often misunderstood group, puzzling those who raise them, teach them, or work with them in other

capacities. These children are exceptional both because of their intellectual giftedness and because of special needs such as learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, or emotional or behavior difficulties — any of which can cause problems both academically and in social or family settings.



The collection of articles presented here, **The Mythology of Learning** series, identifies the learning myths that commonly surround these children. In place of the myths, the articles in this series offer research-based and experienced-based insights, strategies, and methods. **The Mythology of Learning** series was developed for *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter* in 2009 by Bridges Academy, a college preparatory school in Studio City, California, which serves twice-exceptional students in grades 5 through 12. The series reflects the research and experiences of faculty members and school administrators over Bridges Academy's 15-year history. During that time, they have had the opportunity to evaluate educational models and practices for twice-exceptional students suggested by the research of Dr. Susan Baum and other leading scholars. In these articles a team of authors from Bridges shares some of their findings and conclusions.



Carl Sabatino

According to Carl Sabatino, Head Of School at Bridges, “The articles in this series 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 neurotypical, 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. The myths often obstruct the healthy development and the

successful actualization of these students’ gifted potential.”

The six myths discussed in these articles are:

- Myth #1 — Gifts and talents can be put on hold until weaknesses are remediated.
- Myth #2 — 2e children develop the same way “normal” children develop.
- Myth #3 — With appropriate accommodations in place, 2e students will excel.
- Myth #4 — Academic success is independent of social and emotional well-being.
- Myth #5 — The differences we see in the behavior of 2e children are deficits.
- Myth #6 — To achieve success, 2e students must be better organized.

Preceding the articles from **The Mythology of Learning** series, readers of this publication will find a brief overview of twice exceptionality. Following the articles is a listing of resources that includes books, websites, and other resources of interest and use to those who raise, teach, or work with twice-exceptional children. The goal of this booklet is to help readers better understand and meet the needs of children with this unique blend of abilities and challenges.

The publishers of *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter* wish to thank the authors of this series. In addition to Carl Sabatino, they include:

- Susan Baum, Ph.D., Director of Professional Development at Bridges Academy, Professor Emeritus from the College of New Rochelle, and co-author of *To Be Gifted and Learning Disabled*
- Marcy Dann, M.A., BCET, Educational Therapist at Bridges Academy
- Cynthia Novak, Ph.D., Middle School Director at Bridges Academy
- Lesli Preuss, Ph.D., School Psychologist at Bridges Academy.



For more information on Bridges Academy, visit the school's website: www.bridges.edu.

What is Twice Exceptional?

A Unique Profile

There is no single profile of a twice-exceptional child because the nature and causes of twice exceptionality are so varied. As children's gifts can take many forms, so, too, can their deficits. A 2e child may be one who is diagnosed with one or more learning disabilities such as dyslexia, visual or auditory processing disorder, obsessive/compulsive disorder, sensory processing disorder, Asperger Syndrome, or Tourette Syndrome. The child might have a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder, with or without hyperactivity, or a diagnosis of anxiety or depression, to name a few. Some 2e children, on the other hand, have no formal diagnosis, but do have learning differences of other kinds, such as in learning style or preference, that make it hard to function in a traditional classroom.

Teachers may have 2e students in their classes but not recognize them. It's all too common for twice-exceptional children to go unidentified or to be misidentified. Some are obviously gifted. However, despite their intelligence, these students never seem to work up to their potential. They might seem disengaged in the classroom, or they might play the class clown. They might be given labels such as *underachiever* or *lazy*. Their failure to achieve may be seen as deliberate, not the result of conditions beyond their control.

Then there are the 2e students who are easily identified as having learning disabilities or other types of learning difficulties. They often have trouble performing tasks that classroom work requires such as reading, writing, or performing calculations. Or perhaps they are unable

to sit still or pay attention. Whatever the reason, these students are recognized for what they *cannot* do and often have an IEP (individual learning program) or a 504 plan that focuses on the remediation they require. The gifts and talents of these students often go unnoticed.

A third group of 2e students – the hardest to identify – seems to be average. Neither their gifts nor their deficits stand out because each masks the other. While the classroom performance of these students appears to be acceptable, it's actually well below what they are capable of doing. Because the students perform at grade level, no one sees them as needing special attention – neither gifted programming nor special education services or accommodations. What often gives these children away is a decline in performance when academic demands increase to the point where they can no longer rely on their giftedness to compensate for their deficits.

It's easy to think that twice-exceptional children could improve just by “trying harder.” In most cases, however, they can't. Their learning challenges are often the result of the way their brain is “wired.” In many of these individuals, messages traveling from the senses to the brain encounter “interference” of one sort or another along the way, making it hard for the brain to quickly and easily make sense of the signals it receives. As a result, twice-exceptional students can be trying very hard but, despite their intelligence, not getting the same results as their classmates.

Conflicting Traits

Twice-exceptional children have two sets of

conflicting traits, one related to their high capabilities, the other to their limitations. Like other intellectually gifted children, they are likely to think in different ways from average children and to experience the world differently. Twice-exceptional children generally have little difficulty grasping concepts or generating ideas. Where they might falter is in getting their thoughts down on paper, writing legibly, doing calculations accurately, staying organized, or following instructions.

Often, 2e children display many of the characteristics typical of gifted children, such as those in the following list.

Typical Characteristics of Gifted Children

- Intensity and sensitivity
- Greater asynchrony than average children (e.g., a bigger gap between mental and physical age)
- Highly developed curiosity
- Precocious development and use of language
- Active imagination
- A tendency toward divergent (creative and unusual) thinking
- Keen observation skills
- The ability, from an early age, to remember large amounts of information
- An unusual sense of humor
- Advanced moral reasoning about issues related to fairness and justice
- High-level reasoning powers and problem-solving abilities

Some people include leadership ability and motivation in the list of gifted characteristics, while others do not. The same is true for perfectionism.

Unlike other gifted children, those who are twice exceptional find themselves hampered by deficits that interfere with their ability to perform the tasks classroom learning requires. The deficits, often invisible to others, can affect them in various ways, such as those shown below. (Of course, 2e children are a diverse group, and no one child is likely to display all of these characteristics.)

How Deficits Can Affect Twice-exceptional Children

- Interfere with their ability to make sense of visual or auditory information
- Make it hard to correctly interpret social cues, like facial expressions and tone of voice
- Limit the functioning of short-term memory
- Take the form of language-based disorders that make reading, writing, mathematics, or verbal expression difficult
- Appear as a mood disorder, leaving a child anxious or depressed, or an attention deficit that makes it hard to sit still and focus
- Hamper fine or gross motor skills
- Interfere with the brain's ability to organize and interpret information taken in through the sensory experiences of touch, taste, smell, sight, sound, body placement, and movement (With deficits in the ability to process sensory input, a child reacts to the world quite differently from others. Classroom lights, sounds, and smells may seem painfully intense, making concentration on lessons difficult.)

Because of deficits like these, 2e children may display behaviors and characteristics that can baffle, annoy, or even infuriate the adults around them. Some examples follow.

Some Typical Behaviors and Characteristics of Twice-exceptional Children

- Are disorganized and lose track of belongings
- Have an uneven academic pattern with extreme areas of both strength and weakness
- Have trouble remembering to do or follow through with tasks and sticking to a schedule
- Have a poor sense of time and difficulty estimating the time needed to complete tasks
- Have difficulty with multi-step instructions and performing tasks sequentially
- Take longer to process language and respond than might be expected, based on their intelligence
- Find it hard to take a systematic approach to problem solving
- Have difficulty with writing, including organizing thoughts, writing legibly, and spelling
- Fear embarrassment and tend to avoid taking risks in the classroom
- May have narrowly focused interests

A combination of strengths and limitations such as these can lead to a child with a unique, and often quirky, profile. Oftentimes, 2e children have difficulty finding peers and, as a result, may have a small number of friends or no friends at all.

Coping with their deficits can take a toll on their stamina, leaving these children exhausted from the strain after a day at school. Furthermore, having to confront their deficits day in and day out in the classroom can take a toll on a 2e child's self-esteem. As psychologist and author Linda Silverman has stated, "It's emotionally damaging to be unacceptable in the place you spend 6 hours of every day for 13 critical years."

The Need for Understanding

Twice-exceptional children need adult guidance in coming to understand themselves. They must learn about who they are – where they're strong, where they're weak, and how they learn best. 2e children must especially understand that there are other people just like them, many of whom have grown into successful adults. Furthermore, these children and the adults in their lives need to understand that despite the challenges they face, 2e kids – in the words of Susan Baum – are not "broken" and in need of "fixing."

The articles and resources included in this booklet are provided to help adults find the information they need in order to help the 2e children in their lives gain this understanding. ■



The Myths Applied to 2e Learners

Myth #1:

Gifts and talents can be put on hold until weaknesses are remediated.

2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter, January 2009

Abandoning Deficit Models: A Paradigm Shift

By Carl Sabatino, Head of School, Bridges Academy

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.

James' 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.

Twice-exceptional 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 outperform 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 these children begin to carry can seriously impede academic, social, and emotional progress.

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 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 extra 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, con-

tests, 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. ■



Myth #2:

2e children develop the same way “normal” children develop.

2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter, March 2009

In Their Own Stream: Managing Dynamic Asynchrony

By Susan Baum, Ph.D., Marcy Dann, M.A., BCET, Cynthia Novak, Ph.D., and Lesli Preuss, Ph.D.

Steve recently came to class with a book on butterflies. The college extension course he took with his mom prepared him to readily explain the difference between a Monarch and a Blue Morpho — from scientific names and unique coloring to probable locations where they could be found. The science club he started at school draws a wide age range; and on subjects from mollusks to mammals, Steve’s impressive vocabulary sets him apart as an expert. He’s also an artist who takes pride in the detailed animal-kingdom renderings he generates. A few days ago, when Steve was asked to leave the

gym because he was being too rough, he threw himself on the school psychologist’s office floor, crying, pounding pillows, and declaring emphatically that the world was unfit for his existence. Steve is 12.

Sarah talks about math all the time. She loves word problems, math concepts, and proofs. She sees math everywhere around her — from the beauty of a chambered nautilus to the ratio and proportions of classical statuary. Sarah demonstrates her high verbal ability in a voracious appetite for all kinds of books and in class debates. She’s also highly anxious. Before her teachers have com-

pleted giving instructions, Sarah's hand is up. When writing is assigned, Sarah freezes or starts to sob. Often, just before her physical education class, Sarah can be found huddled in the gym foyer, hands over her face, refusing to enter class. Sarah is 15.

Educators who work with students like Steve and Sarah are often perplexed. Should they place these students in a grade where their intellectual gifts are challenged — a higher-than-expected grade level? Or should they place them where the students' social/emotional needs are met, a lower-than-expected grade level? Parents of children like Steve and Sarah are often frustrated, as well, because they don't know from one moment to the next whether the child in front of them will talk and behave like an adult or like a much younger child. If educators and parents persist in believing the myth that 2e children develop the same way neuro-typical ("normal") children develop, they will almost assuredly live with a daily sense of frustration. This article, the second in a series about 2e students in their adolescent years, discusses the importance of understanding that 2e children follow a different, or asynchronous, developmental pattern from neuro-typical children.

Developmental Asynchrony and 2e Children

Gifted children like Steve and Sarah are cognitively advanced, with interests and knowledge more sophisticated than those of their age-mates. At the same time, their behaviors are often immature and not commensurate with their intellectual level. In other words, the emotional and cognitive development of these two students is asynchronous. *Developmental asynchrony*, a term used to describe uneven development across cognitive and psychological domains, is a striking characteristic of many gifted students. Although these youngsters may have high cognitive ability, they tend to experience marked unevenness or delays in the development of their social/emotional and motor skills. Socially and emotionally their development is usually more akin to that of younger students, and their bright young minds far outpace their motor abilities. Because the

differences between and among these domains (social/emotional and psychomotor) are more extreme in twice-exceptional students, parents and teachers find it hard to effectively anticipate and respond to these "out-of-sync" children.

In 2e students, we can see evidence of asynchronous development in the following:

- Frustration tolerance
- Anxious avoidance
- Motor development/Work production
- Social maturity.

It's natural to expect students to become easily frustrated while working on tasks beyond their developmental readiness. They would experience frustration with their inability to produce on a level that matches their understanding. On the other hand, if instruction is not well matched to the student's intellectual development, frustration may build due to boredom as well as a feeling on the part of the student that the teacher lacks respect for the student's level of knowledge.

Asynchrony and the 2e Middle School Years

The middle school years tend to be challenging for even the most typical of children, so imagine the challenge for a child who has two exceptionalities. Middle school — commonly the time when students make the transition from childhood to adolescence — involves maturing socially, emotionally, physically, and academically. For a child whose maturation is significantly asynchronous, these transitions often lead to poor or inappropriate responses.

Take, for example, a child at this stage of development who's asked to complete a report on meteors. Her teacher knows that she's passionate about meteors and has a terrific fund of knowledge in this area. Yet, the student refuses to complete the paper, making up excuse after excuse about why the paper remains incomplete. Moreover, the teacher begins to hear the student saying things like, "This is such a stupid assignment." Most likely, these responses are not due to outright defiance. Rather,

we might see them as an indicator that the child has encountered an area of asynchrony. Yes, she has college-level knowledge of the topic; however, she struggles with the writing, planning, and organizing that the assignment requires. Her reaction, then, is to refuse to do the assignment.

This example draws attention to another area of asynchrony, emotional development. We might expect the student to be able to communicate her difficulties to her teacher. Yet, the child doesn't have the social readiness or awareness to do this. Instead, she cries when confronted by the teacher and her parents, and stomps off to her room screaming that "no one understands." In many cases, they don't. Behavior of this sort is not usually stubbornness or defiance, as it might appear; rather, it's a sign of the asynchrony in the 2e child.

Middle school often presents significant social challenges for the 2e child. Other students rarely understand why the child who always seems to know the answer in class doesn't join in playground games and ignores or refuses social invitations. Moreover, when children respond in a "know-it-all

way" or don't seem to know when to quit talking about a topic, despite the listeners' obvious boredom, they tend to drive other children away. These difficulties can lead to the child being teased or labeled as a "nerd." Unfortunately, the anxious avoidance of and inappropriate response to social situations is often another reflection of the developmental asynchronies that 2e children face on a daily basis.

Asynchrony and the 2e High School Years

How does asynchrony look in high school? Outside of knowing a great deal of information in certain content areas, 2e students are often immature in both familiar and unexpected situations. Most obviously, they tend to avoid tasks they fear will be difficult. They may shut down or withdraw from class activities when frustrated. They may resist starting tasks and procrastinate in completing them so that they miss deadlines. Avoidance may also be a sign of anxiety when a student is fearful that the product is less than perfect or that excellence will lead to heightened expectations on the part of parents or teachers.

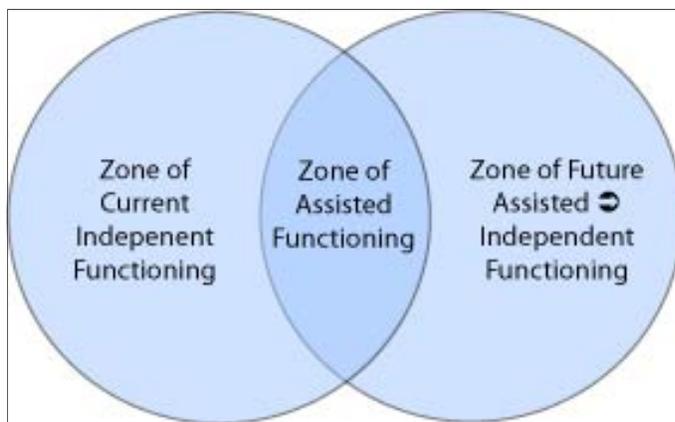
Asynchronous Behaviors in Middle and High School

	Middle School	High School
<i>Frustration Tolerance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defiance • Refusal to complete tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shutting down • Withdrawal
<i>Anxious Avoidance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgetting about the assignment • Declaring assignment as "stupid" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procrastination • Inconsistency • Perfectionism
<i>Motor Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refusal to elaborate on written assignments • Dislike of/refusal to participate in PE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow rate of processing • Minimal written response • Lack of automaticity
<i>Social Maturation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crying at the slightest offense • Inability to read nonverbal cues • Drawn to computer-based games rather than other social events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of internal regulation • Verbal excuses • Dependence on external factors

Asynchronous behavior might account for 2e students who blame others rather than taking responsibility for their actions or who fail to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and actions. Writing may also be an area where asynchronous behavior appears. 2e students whose motor development lags behind their chronological age may write less than what they know for many different reasons, but it's likely that they're overloaded with the simultaneous demands of the writing task. For these students, the process of writing is slow, halting, and effortful because they lack *automaticity*, the ability to process information and complete a task effortlessly, accurately, and fluently.

2e Students and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky argued that growth occurs when instruction aligns to a student's *zone of proximal development* or "ZPD." The ZPD identifies the difference between what children have already mastered and what they can achieve with adult guidance.



The ZPD

It is absolutely necessary for parents and educators to identify 2e students' ZPD in all three domains: cognitive, social/emotional, and psychomotor. After all, we cannot expect a 12-year old 2e student to have the motor skills or the social skills of a neuro-typical 12-year old. Conversely, we need to expect that the 2e 12-year old will have significantly higher cognitive ability than an age peer.

Therefore, to a greater extent than their age peers, 2e students need academic challenge, while receiving *scaffolding*, or support to help learners through the ZPD. This support builds on what the learners already know and helps them accomplish what they would otherwise be unable to do. Scaffolding is best provided by adults who have a keen understanding of asynchronous development

Conclusion

Understanding the developmental asynchrony of 2e students means discarding two related myths:

- 2e students can be educated as though they have the same developmental patterns as neuro-typical children.
- Using an "appropriate" teaching approach will correct for the asynchrony.

Abandoning these myths in favor of a deeper understanding of developmental asynchrony of 2e students reframes the discussion between teachers and parents about the education of these children.

The pivotal issue no longer revolves around the timeline for "mainstreaming" this population. These children are in their own unique stream which is legitimate and life affirming. The 2e educational model rejects the "deficit paradigm," in which there is a focus on remediating areas of weakness before gifts and talents are recognized and nurtured. Rather, the team at Bridges Academy provides twice-exceptional learners with realistic social/emotional and psychomotor developmental timelines. At the same time, we recognize and provide for the often outsized intellectual demands of these students.

Steve and Sarah, introduced at the beginning of the article, are flourishing in the talent-centered environment at Bridges Academy. A team composed of the student, parents, teachers, specialists, and administrators used the approach described in this article to assess the individual progress of each of these students and to discover

talent development opportunities (TDO) for them.

Steve, the middle school butterfly expert, has been invited by the high school art teacher to join the Talent Development Art Class that meets after school in the art studio. There, he is appropriately challenged in an area of interest with students who are three or four years older. Steve's science teachers encourage a higher level of work on differentiated projects. In response to his social immaturity, Steve meets with peers in small groups to work on interpreting social cues in various situations. When Steve experiences frustration during the school day, his teachers are thoughtful and responsive. If Steve needs further attention, he's given the opportunity to meet with the school psychologist to learn more about his triggers.

Steve's parents, who are integral to the process, report that a year ago, when Steve was in his previous school setting, he was depressed; but now Steve is ready for school each morning, often with a new science or art project that he wants to share with his friends. Steve's parents are so encouraged by his progress that they are considering sending Steve to a summer microbiology camp.

Likewise, Sarah, the anxious math expert, has been placed in an advanced algebra course where she is now appropriately challenged. Her participation in a physical education class was waived due to

her extreme anxiety about it. Sarah is now a teaching assistant in a middle school math class and gets her physical activity after school from a private martial arts instructor.

Sarah's reduced anxiety has led to some positive outcomes, like trying out for a part in a recent drama performance. Her drama teacher was understanding and supportive of Sarah's social/emotional needs by allowing her some extra time to develop trust in a new area of interest. On familiar ground, Sarah participates in a drama writer's workshop where she generates ideas which her peers write down. The willingness of her parents to commit to the after-school martial arts class was integral to improving things for Sarah. Now, at home, they see a marked change in her readiness to try new activities with a greater sense of ease and well-being.

When 2e students like Steve and Sarah are engaged in an academic program that taps into their talents and scaffolds other areas of learning, the results are satisfying, if not amazing. As 2e students feel that their needs are supported, their ability to tolerate frustration grows, and their anxiety levels decrease over time. It's likely that issues of asynchronous development will follow them to college and the workplace, but we'll leave that topic for a future article on life after Bridges Academy. ■



Myth #3:

With appropriate accommodations in place, 2e students will excel.

2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter, May 2009

Differentiate or Accommodate? Exposing the Myth

By Susan Baum, Ph.D., Marcy Dann, M.A., BCET, Cynthia Novak, Ph.D., and Lesli Preuss, Ph.D.

Elizabeth is a curious young girl whose intensity and adult-like interests often set her apart from age-mates. Her natural curiosity and passion for particular topics feed her desire for knowledge and inquiry. Indeed, her parents report, “Elizabeth is never bored.” She reads above grade level and has a love for poetry. Her writing and math skills far outweigh those of her peers. However, due to her advanced ability, Elizabeth often feels socially isolated and has difficulty getting along. She has some auditory processing problems, as well, and often needs help with note taking plus more time to complete work.

Christian can build anything with Lego™ bricks, excelling in tasks that require engineering and design. Although his skills in science and math are also superior, Christian experiences great difficulty reading and putting his ideas in writing. He tends to be easily frustrated and lashes out at others angrily when he is having difficulty with his schoolwork.

George has a passion for political science. After reading the *Communist Manifesto* several times, he is becoming curious about how communism influenced Russian literature and vice versa. George has AD/HD and never seems able to concentrate or complete his assigned class work.

Each of these youngsters presents a learning profile recognized as twice exceptional. Traditionally, teachers have attempted to meet learning needs like these by initiating accommodations to help the compensate for their academic and behavioral challenges.

Exposing the Accommodation Myth

Professionals and parents alike have been led to believe that with appropriate accommodations in place, 2e students will excel. Unfortunately, that is a myth – perhaps the biggest of all the myths we are addressing in this series of articles on twice-exceptional students. Although most of the energy in school meetings centers on providing accommodations, practice reveals that accommodations focus mainly on meeting grade-level objectives while ignoring gifted potential. Furthermore, the manner in which accommodations are carried out is often insensitive to the fragility of 2e students, causing social and emotional consequences.

Over the years at Bridges Academy, we have recognized that the emotional overlay of being gifted while encountering academic challenge prevents many of these middle school and high school students from seeking out or using the accommodations recommended for them. Our 2e students reveal that, before coming to Bridges, they often refused accommodations, explaining their dislike of being treated differently. They tended to view their accommodations as unjust, and they questioned why they should be given learning “privileges” that were not afforded to all students.

Some students even demanded an explanation as to why accommodations would not be considered a form of intellectual cheating. Likewise, their insecurity about what they were unable to do led to feelings of inferiority, especially when their areas of weakness were publicly noted.

With these students, when the spotlight is on the weakness or achieving at grade-level competency, then high-level potential fades into the background. It may become invisible altogether.

An Integrated Differentiated Approach

Bridges teachers understand the emotional fragility of 2e students brought about by having to deal with both ends of the spectrum simultaneously. We take their learning needs seriously. Rather than providing specific accommodations for individual students, we prefer to address learning needs through the use of an integrated differentiated approach. In this model, all students are exposed to research-based practices while being offered choices to reach academic, social, and behavioral goals.

Differentiation, as explained by educator Carol Ann Tomlinson, provides options for *all* children in the following dimensions:

- Content: what they learn
- Process: how they learn it
- Product: how they demonstrate their learning
- Environment: where they learn best.

In other work, Tomlinson further explains that students' learning profiles, readiness levels, and interests inform the choices offered to them in a differentiated classroom. Because our students' learning needs reflect *both* gifts and weaknesses, we provide a learning curriculum that is *dually differentiated*, as we modify content, process, product, and environment accordingly.

An Introduction to Differentiated Instruction

(The following was adapted from "Differentiation of Instruction in the Elementary Grades," by Carol Ann Tomlinson, ERIC Digest, August 2000, EDO-PS-00-7.)

What Is Differentiated Instruction?

At its most basic, differentiation is responding to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction.

What Makes Differentiation Successful?

There is no recipe for differentiation. Rather, it is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that values the individual and can be translated into classroom practice in many ways. Still, the following broad principles and characteristics are useful in establishing a differentiated classroom:

- Assessment is ongoing and tightly linked to instruction. Whatever the teachers can glean about student readiness, interest, and learning helps the teachers plan next steps in instruction.
- Teachers work hard to ensure "respectful activities" for all students. Each student's work should be equally interesting, equally appealing, and equally focused on essential understandings and skills.
- Flexible grouping is a hallmark of the class. Teachers plan extended periods of instruction so that all students work with a variety of peers over a period of days. Sometimes students work with like-readiness peers, sometimes with mixed-readiness groups, sometimes with students who have similar interests, sometimes with students who have different interests, sometimes with peers who learn as they do, sometimes randomly, and often with the class as a whole. In addition, teachers can assign students to work groups, and sometimes students will select their own work groups.

Content Differentiation

At Bridges, content differentiation is based both on readiness (instructional level) and on student interest. All classes offer challenging curriculum that encourages higher-level thinking to assure that these bright young minds are intellectually engaged. However, not all students in a particular grade are at the same readiness level in particular subject areas, nor do they have the same levels of interest in any given content area.

To address these differences, we offer content differentiation. It includes, but is not limited to, providing students with:

- Multi-level resources to access information
- Placement into advanced classes
- Special talent-development classes.

In addition, we often provide options for inquiry within the curricular unit to allow for student interests.

Process Differentiation

Process differentiation refers to the strategies we use to support student learning. These strategies are purposely designed to align with a student's:

- Learning style
- Gender
- Cognitive and expressive styles
- Multiple intelligences.

Teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to provide instructional support to students. Among these strategies are lecture and discussion, multi-media approaches, simulations, role playing, small group work, use of manipulatives, and experiential learning. In addition, teachers make technology, visual organizers, and untimed testing opportunities available to all students as needed.

Product Differentiation

At Bridges, we see product differentiation as an opportunity to develop the talents of our students. By giving students options to express what they know in a way that aligns to their talent areas, we

get to see our students engaged, thoughtful, and productive.

For example, in the middle school, teachers offer project choices that appeal to the musician, the artist, the writer, and the engineer, to name a few. In the high school, students often design multi-media presentations that integrate their talents and interests. These projects provide one form of assessment among many in an integrated differentiated approach.

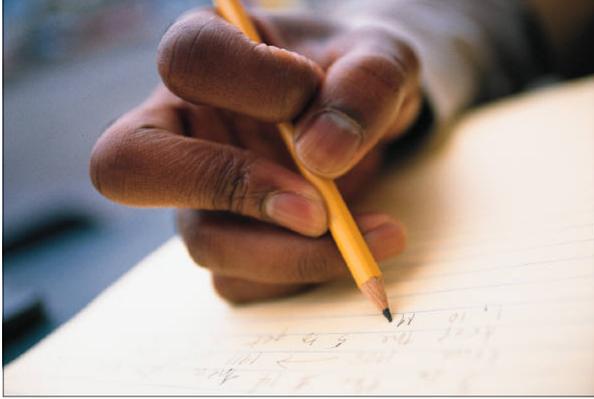
Environment Differentiation

Finally, we offer modifications in the learning environment. Because we have the luxury of small class size at Bridges, we can arrange the physical space and the furniture of the classroom to support varied attention levels and learning styles. We encourage students to seek a spot (a soft chair, desk, or floor space) in the classroom where they are best able to pay attention. If they need to pace back and forth in order to stay engaged, they are allowed to do so, whether they are working independently or in a group. Fidgets (something to keep their hands busy) are readily available to all students to help them stay focused. Any student can put on headphones, use other technology, or even leave the class to work in a quiet setting if necessary.

In short, at Bridges we have replaced the traditional delivery system of accommodations with a dually differentiated approach. We gain a thorough understanding of the needs of our 2e students so that we can reduce our focus on individual accommodations. In fact, this approach readily allows teachers to offer options to *all* of their students in terms of content, process, product, and environment.

Comparing the two models

Consider the fate of the three students introduced at the start of this article. Depending upon the philosophy of the educational setting in which they find themselves, these students will spend their days in very different ways. Let's look at how they would fare with both the accommodations approach and the integrated differentiated approach.



Elizabeth

- *Accommodations Approach:* Due to her learning difficulties, Elizabeth would be removed from honors classes to relieve the pressure on her to excel. She would be asked to record lectures and discussions that take place in class, and she would receive extra time to complete tests and assignments, continuing unfinished work in the resource room.
- *Integrated Differentiated Approach:* At Bridges, teachers offered class notes to Elizabeth and to all of her classmates. The notes were also posted on the teachers' websites. Note taking during lectures became less of an issue because teachers reduced the length of lectures and varied the presentation of content for all students. In addition, Elizabeth was accelerated in math and invited to participate in the talent development writers' group, with the goal of having her poems published. Because she has found peers who share her interests, Elizabeth has made friends, especially with other writers. She is thriving both emotionally and academically.

Christian

- *Accommodations Approach:* Christian would have been allowed to use the computer keyboard instead of having to write by hand, and he would have been asked to leave the room to go to the computer lab to complete assignments. Likewise, during reading, he would have gone to the library to use audio books to complete assignments. Because he excels in math and science, Christian would be excused from those

classes once a week to attend social skills classes and remedial reading.

- *Integrated Differentiated Approach:* Christian, along with all of the other students in his class, was allowed to use a keyboard to complete his assignments and given access to videos, audio books, and other resources in the classroom library. His teachers developed a menu of options from which all students chose a culminating project. Aware of Christian's talents and interests, his teachers made sure to include the option of constructing three-dimensional models.

Christian's social skills issues were addressed during class meetings and advisory where all students focused on developing emotional intelligence and social awareness. Because Christian was spending more time in his areas of strength, his levels of frustration dropped and he gained the respect of his peers as someone who excels in math and science.

George

- *Accommodations Approach:* George would be placed on a behavioral contract to address inattention and incomplete assignments. He would be required to sit near the teacher to help eliminate distractions. His on-task behaviors would be tallied; and when he completed the required amount of work, George would be allowed time to pursue his interest in communism.
- *Integrated Differentiated Approach:* Because the teachers at Bridges know that all students engage most fully in learning when they can work in an area of interest, the teachers made it a priority to find George a mentor to help him pursue his passion for the complexities of political systems. They encouraged George as well as all of his classmates to integrate their in-depth interests into whatever topics they are studying. In addition, the teachers encouraged students like George to work independently, at their own pace and level of complexity. As a result, George was no longer seen as a behavioral problem, despite his diagnosis of AD/HD. On the contrary, his intellectual energy and level of engagement inspired both faculty and peers.

Conclusion

Differentiation, as we've redefined it, works because the learning needs of 2e students are met in a proactive way. When *all* students are afforded options in content, process, product, and environment, the need to be singled out with an accommo-

ation becomes obsolete. Students in the strength-based model have the best chance to develop to their highest potential with a vision of what they can be. Such students have been shown to be resilient and goal directed when making decisions both in school and in life. ■

Dual Differentiation for 2e Students

Students who are twice exceptional have the need for *dual differentiation*. The National Association for Gifted Children explains the term this way in its position paper *Students with Concomitant Gifts and Learning Disabilities*:

Students who have both gifts and learning disabilities require a dually differentiated program: one that nurtures their gifts and talents while accommodating for learning weaknesses.

According to Susan Baum, the dual-differentiated approach applies to curriculum and instruction, and includes modifications as well as accommodations. In the book *To Be Gifted and Learning Disabled* (2004), Baum and co-author Steven Owen present the fundamentals of a dually-differentiated curriculum this way:

Characteristics of Gifted Students	Problems Associated with Special Needs Students	Offer Curricular Accommodations by Providing Students with...
Propensity for advanced-level content to accommodate the gift or talent	Limited skills in reading and math (LD, AD/HD)	Alternate means to access information
Producers of new knowledge through authentic products	Difficulty with spelling and handwriting (LD)	Alternate ways to express ideas and create products
Facility with and enjoyment of abstract concepts	Language deficits in verbal communication and conceptualization (Asperger's, nonverbal LD)	Visual and kinesthetic experiences to convey abstract ideas concretely
Non-linear learning styles	Poor organization (all)	Visual organization schemes (e.g., timelines, flow charts, webbing)
Intellectual challenge based on individual talents and interests	Problems with sustaining attention and focus (all)	Interest-based authentic curriculum
Need to identify with others of similar talents and interests	Inappropriate social interaction (all)	Group identity based on talent or ability
Heightened sensitivity to failure	Low self-efficacy and esteem (all)	Recognition for accomplishment

Myth #4:

Academic success is independent of social and emotional well-being.

2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter, July 2009

Academic and Emotional Readiness: Understanding the Connection for Twice-exceptional Students

By Susan Baum, Ph.D., Lesli Preuss, Ph.D., and Carl Sabatino, Head of School

Nelson is a 13-year-old boy who is striking in many ways. He stands at least a head above his peers and can communicate about electronics with sophistication. He's also a master at building and architecture, and he has planned an ecologically friendly city that he hopes to get approved for construction one day. He has a heart of gold and can often be found volunteering at Habitat for Humanity or the ASPCA. Yet, Nelson has recently been asked to leave his school for fighting and "extreme anxiety." He vomits daily when he arrives at school and is incapable of getting along with his classmates. He argues or physically fights with them on a regular basis.

Despite these emotional issues, when Nelson's parents attended a school conference to discuss their son's difficulties, they persisted in talking about his academic work and his need to be challenged. That theme dominated the meeting at school rather than why he was emotionally upset in an arena that should play to his natural gifts.

Maggie is a young girl of ten, scheduled to begin the fifth grade this fall. Maggie tests at the 99.9th percentile on all standardized intelligence and achievement tests, with commensurate grades in school. Over the past year, however, she has begun to refuse to attend school and cries every Sunday night because she can't face the thought of going to school for another week. Her teachers have noticed a precipitous decline in her participation in class and report that Maggie is heading to the school

nurse's office about three to four times per day. She has been missing assignments and her grades are dropping in spite of her clear intellectual prowess.

Maggie's parents are puzzled. There have been no obvious social issues — Maggie doesn't report being teased or bullied — yet it's clear that she's very unhappy at school.

Exposing a Myth

It's a common myth that academic success is independent of social and emotional well-being. Believing that social/emotional issues can be separated from academic concerns is problematic and can lead to faulty solutions. Nelson's and Maggie's scenarios represent some of the challenges facing twice-exceptional students every day. These students present us with a dual challenge — to help them achieve academic success *and* to help alleviate their apparent social/emotional pain.

Many well-meaning parents ask schools to focus on the academics without understanding the role that emotional well-being plays. Some parents, sometimes parents of twice-exceptional children dealing with persistent social/emotional issues, want to set aside those concerns for later discussion. They believe that focusing on the academic concern — either greater challenge or perhaps remediation — will improve performance. Still other parents grasp the connection between academic success and social/emotional concerns but believe that more challenging work will mitigate their child's

social/emotional problems.

What's needed is a deeper, and ultimately more useful, understanding of the relationship among these variables: academic success, social/emotional state, and more challenging work. Looking at the unique intersection of two theories from the fields of psychology and education can shed some light on the relationship among the three variables. In the rest of this article we'll look at the significance to 2e education of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Talent Development Theory.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

One of the most common grievances of the students at Bridges Academy is that they feel they did not "fit in" at their previous schools. Children's sense of being understood and feeling accepted is an integral part of their success in an environment of higher-level learning. A careful examination of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs diagram, shown below, effectively demonstrates the importance of meeting certain emotional needs so that a child will be "available to learn."

The idea that a sense of belonging forms the foundation of self-esteem, achievement, and higher-level thinking is not novel. Maslow posited his theory of five hierarchical levels of human needs in 1970. Notice in the diagram that there are five levels of

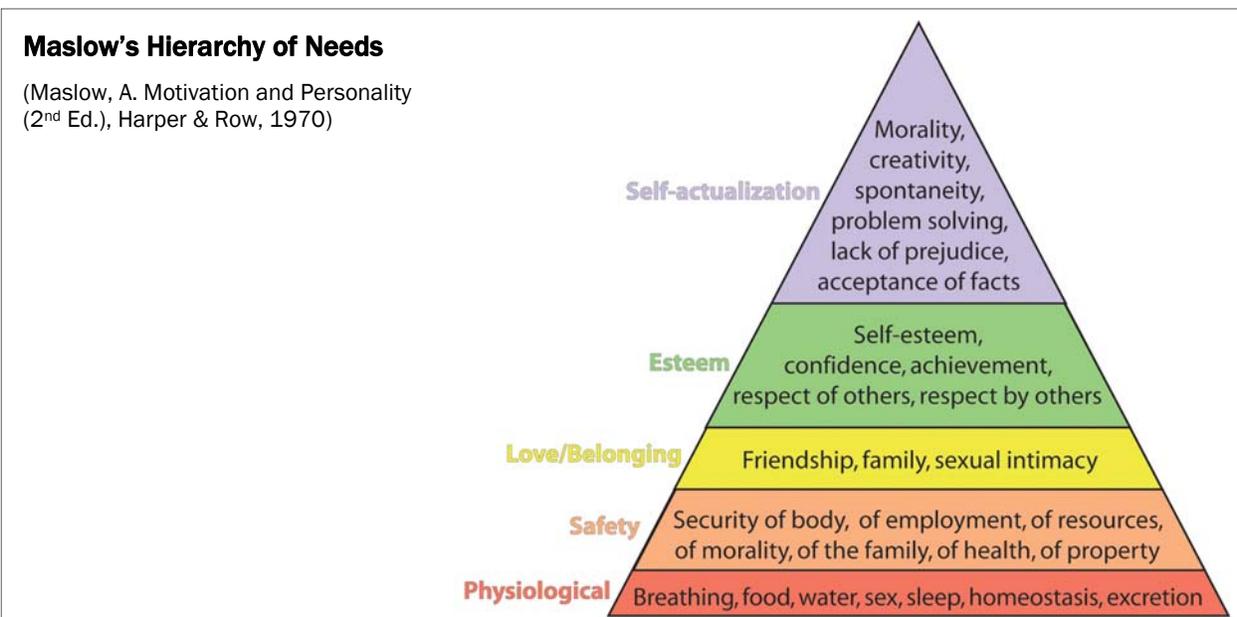
needs. Moving from the bottom of the pyramid to the top, each grouping of needs must be met before a person can progress to the next higher level.

According to Maslow, our physiological needs must be met before we can develop a sense of love and belonging, which requires a sense of trust in others. The higher needs on the pyramid will never be reached if an individual has not developed a sense of belonging and trust in others. Therefore, we cannot expect a child who lacks a sense of confidence, self-worth, and self-actualization to demonstrate problem-solving abilities, creativity, and academic achievement.

When it comes to meeting the needs of under-achieving students, many educational settings have ignored the middle levels of Maslow's pyramid. Concerns about a child's fitting into an environment and feeling like a valued member of the learning community are rarely considered in seeking solutions to academic difficulties, especially for gifted and 2e students. However, this kind of environment is essential in order for a child to learn.

Talent Development Theory

Now let's see what role Talent Development Theory plays in meeting the needs of twice-exceptional students. This theory recognizes the importance of aligning curriculum and instruction to





students' strengths, interests, readiness levels, and talents.

Subtle and not-so-subtle factors can influence feelings of belonging. For instance, a curriculum that fails to consider student strengths, interests, readiness levels, and talents can make students feel invisible and undervalued, without an invitation to learn. When Bridges Academy applies Talent Development Theory to 2e students, we look at a student's need to belong by assessing the classroom to see if the child's social/emotional distress stems from an academic cause.

Specifically, the factors we look at are the amount of stimulation, appropriateness of the instructional strategies, and grade level. Sometimes, altering the environment to address these elements of learning may be all that's needed. The changes have a positive psychological impact, and we see students become excited about the material, feel comfortable with their performance, and see themselves as accepted and respected by their peers for their academic ability. The academic changes fulfill fundamental needs in Maslow's pyramid.

Nevertheless, when a child performs poorly

and/or has a bad day at school, it's more often than not due to peer conflict and/or isolation rather than whether the right educational material was presented. The 2e child is particularly affected because of asynchrony (uneven development across cognitive and psychological domains).

In many schools, a typical day for a 2e student includes moving between grade levels and classrooms so that he or she does not belong to any particular group. Many of these students have experienced a painful, frustrating journey in their search for a good match. Some have attended multiple schools by the time they reach high school. They don't experience the consistency and sense of belonging that most neuro-typical students enjoy. In fact, they often feel alienated by their differences. Such feelings of isolation negatively influence self-esteem and positive identity formation

By virtue of their classification, 2e students have no place in most school systems. They do not fit comfortably in either the gifted program or the special education program. These students may obtain services from multiple school departments throughout the day. The traditional educational system creates a dilemma for 2e students like Nelson or Maggie, introduced earlier in this article. They never master the essential stage of belonging, which creates enormous emotional distress and prevents them from performing at their expected levels.

How to Develop a Sense of Belonging

The student body at Bridges Academy, more than 110 and growing, is comprised of gifted students with AD/HD, dyslexia, nonverbal learning disabilities, and other learning disabilities. It is well documented that the brains of these students work differently than neuro-typical brains. Many of these students have extraordinary social skills, while others do not. How do we help our students feel as if they have found a place to belong? There are several key characteristics of the program that promote the development of this feeling:

- The entire student population is 2e. Students are

socializing with others like themselves, often for the first time.

- Every student is bright and has an awareness and understanding of his or her own disabilities and the disabilities of other students. The program is geared toward assisting children with multiple exceptionalities.
- The talent-development model that the program employs makes use of differentiated instruction, which has been found to lead to less isolation and feelings of being different than an accommodation model (Tomlinson, 1999). The faculty enriches the content, creates alternative processes and products, and carefully controls the learning environment. Several accommodations are built into the structure of the classroom.

In addition, the attitude of the administration, faculty, and students toward cognitive and emotional diversity also encourages a student's sense of belonging. While there are many diversity programs implemented in schools across the country, few focus on cognitive, psychological, and emotional exceptionalities. At Bridges Academy, these exceptionalities form a critical element of the curriculum. On any given day, a student may say or do something that arises out of this form of diversity. It's not uncommon to hear a child say something like "I'm sorry, I just had a 'Bridges moment.'" This assertion is not an excuse for behavior, but rather a statement of that child's awareness of his or her neurological difference that helps the other students understand an awkward social moment. There is a school-wide acceptance of individual differences, which leads to understanding and compassion. In this kind of environment, a student is more likely to feel acceptance, love, and belonging.

Bridges' philosophy in regard to 2e students is not like other schools', where many programs are based on a deficit model, and teachers strive for students to learn and function in a more neurotypical way. For example, if a student is struggling with writing and/or note taking, the traditional program helps the student find a process that leads to greater production. At Bridges, skills are taught with an emphasis on helping the student identify his or

her preferred learning style and mode of expression. A student who communicates well using video essays or PowerPoint presentations will learn to hone these skills while also learning the basics of writing.

We recognize that our students are not "typical"; they are unique. There is no blueprint for success that they can follow. Each will find his or her own path to success guided by personal interests and talent development. The faculty facilitates this process by guiding emerging talent and providing opportunities for it to flourish.

Example Students

Let's get back to Nelson and Maggie. How would Bridges Academy help these students?

The faculty support team would conduct a careful observation and analysis of Nelson's academic/social/emotional environment. Most of his talent development occurs outside of school. He uses the Sims™ game at home to create sophisticated city infrastructures, and he takes part in multiple community organizations. A thoughtful strategy for helping Nelson would use his interests to mend his difficulty with his peers and build relationships with them. If Nelson forms the Bridges Academy Architecture Club or conducts fundraisers at school



for the prevention of animal cruelty, then he will find other students who share these interests and he will develop the sense of belonging he craves.

The school psychologist will work closely with Nelson's parents to help them understand and accept that a focus on their son's emotional well-being in the short run will lead to greater academic successes in the long run. It also will strengthen the parent/school partnership every 2e student needs for success. If Maslow's theory holds true, Nelson's academic performance will also improve.

Maggie's story presents a slightly different scenario. There is no sense of peer rejection, nor is there peer acceptance. Her asynchronous development has created a sense of isolation. Maggie attends a fifth-grade English class and sixth-grade math and science classes, and she participates in a homework support class that pulls her out of an advisory period. Maggie would thrive in a class that mixed fifth and sixth graders who participated at their own academic level, while remaining within the same group of students throughout the day. The differentiated model used at Bridges Academy allows this to happen, ensuring that the enrichment

and support Maggie requires to succeed are available in the same classroom. This model also allows Maggie to complete assignments in a variety of equally valued formats. Viewing Maggie's situation through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, her sense of belonging would increase, her self-esteem would be enhanced, and she would develop a general sense of well-being. With these needs met, Maggie could quickly return to her outstanding academic performance.

Conclusion

In Bridges Academy's inclusive, strength-based educational model, students are at the center of the program and they are given a place to belong. Students are on a path to achievement, self-esteem, and creative production. It's essential for parents and professionals to understand and accept that the ideal 2e educational environment strongly emphasizes meeting the social/emotional needs of students so that they are available for learning and able to focus their attention on developing their gifts. Bridges Academy offers a working model of this approach, which it adapts and refines to meet the complex needs of its students. ■



Myth #5:

The differences we see in the behavior of 2e children are deficits.

2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter, September 2009

The 2e profile: Multiple Perspectives

By Susan Baum, Ph.D., Marcy Dann, M.A., BCET, Cynthia Novak, Ph.D., and Lesli Preuss, Ph.D.

Jane, at 11, is a creative dreamer. Rarely does she complete things in a timely manner. According to her mother, Jane can't focus on the task at hand. Her mother, a highly organized professional who prides herself on running her home and family with precision, is frustrated by her daughter.

For instance, Jane's job is to clear the dinner table and load the dishwasher — a task her Mom estimates should take 10 minutes. For Jane, it usually takes three times that long. Why?

Highly verbal Jane has turned this boring, predictable task into a creative opportunity by inventing a novel way to clear the table. She carefully varies the sequence according to innovative categories. One night she may first remove all the dishes that contain vegetables and then those that are perfectly clean. She may decide to collect the silverware by taking one spoon, two forks, three knives, and then reverse the pattern. She carries on a lively discussion during this process as if she were teaching young children to categorize.

Placing the dishes in the dishwasher offers more creative opportunities. Jane often pretends that she is acting in a commercial trying to sell the detergent, the dishes, or the dishwasher. This commercial may include jingles, dance, or rhyme. Jane's mom, who does not find this amusing, fails to enjoy her daughter's creative talents. After all, there's homework to be done and bedtime routines to be followed.

Jane's mother wonders if her daughter may have AD/HD; and, if so, would medication help her

to focus? We can see that it matters to Jane's mother how a task is accomplished, perhaps more than if it is accomplished.

Is Jane 2e?

Are the creative traits that Jane displays indicative of AD/HD? Perhaps, but the dynamics revealed in Jane's scenario might be better understood from a "style" perspective. Jane and her mother have two distinct personal styles, or ways of interacting with the world.

We are conditioned to look at the behaviors of 2e youngsters as deficits. For instance, as soon as we hear of a highly verbal child like Jane, who is also an energetic, risk taking, multi-tasker, we think AD/HD. Likewise, Asperger Syndrome comes to mind when we hear descriptions of youngsters who get upset by the lack of predictability in their environment and have a need for structure and detailed instructions. What we need to keep in mind is that students with learning and behavioral issues often do manifest these traits. However, these same traits are also found in the general population and are used to describe personal styles.

Differences in Personal Style

We all possess different degrees of personality traits that make us unique. Some of us prefer order and predictability. We feel comfortable when we work on a schedule, and a good day is when we can check everything off our "to do list." Others of us are more spontaneous. We become bored when things are too predictable.

These distinctions help to explain the differences between Jane and her Mom. Is one better than the other? That, of course, depends on the situation. In an ideal world, we could spend the majority of our time in environments that allow us to produce in ways that align to our personal style. However, in the real world there are times when we need to be flexible and to accomplish tasks and adapt to the demands of the environment.

The secret is balance. If Jane spends most of her time in an environment that requires a rigid schedule and strict adherence to rules and specific directions, she may act out or shut down. On the other hand, if she continues to disregard the times when she needs to be more focused and act in a timely manner, she may keep herself from accomplishing important goals.

Mind Styles Model

At Bridges Academy, we have found the work of Anthony Gregorc (1987) to be useful in helping teachers and parents understand youngsters like Jane and in suggesting strategies for helping these children be successful and productive academically, socially, and emotionally. Dr. Gregorc's model, Mind Styles™, is based on the work of Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist who introduced the idea of personality archetypes or styles.

Gregorc's research led him to develop a style model based on two dimensions: perception and organization. These two dimensions combine to form the four styles shown in Figure 1 on the following page:

- Concrete sequential. People with this style deal with the here and now – those things that humans experience through their five senses.
- Abstract sequential. People who have this style tend to prefer ideas and feelings as they inter-

act with their world.

- Concrete random. You can identify people with this style by their tendency to be sequential and to prefer linear approaches that follow a logical train of thought.
- Abstract random. People with this style organize ideas and information in chunks, with no observable pattern. They tend to prefer spontaneity over predictability.

While we all possess all four styles, we are unique in our preferences and abilities across these dimensions

Personality Prototype Model

Gregorc's model has been instrumental in stimulating research that connects personal style to 2e students and their issues. For example, a model called the Personality Prototype Model (Nicols & Baum 2003) discusses possible connections between style theory and 2e traits. In addition, the model offers an assessment tool appropriate for middle and secondary students. Combining elements of both of the Mind Styles Model and the Personality Prototype Model provides us with insights into four types of students. Following is a description of each.

Practical Managers: The Concrete Sequential Student

Students with strengths in the concrete sequential style, including those who are twice exceptional, function as "Practical Managers." (See Figure 2.) They have a gift for organizing people and things. Their rooms or desks are neat, their clothes are usually hung up, and their possessions are put away in an organized fashion. These students appreciate and follow rules, and they make sure others do the same. Socially, they are happier with one or two friends who share their interests and talents.

Concrete Sequential	Abstract Sequential
<p>These learners like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order • Logical sequence • Following directions, predictability • Getting facts <p>They learn best when they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a structured environment • Can rely on others to complete a task • Are faced with predictable situations • Can apply ideas in pragmatic ways <p>What can be hard for them is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in groups • Discussions that seem to have no specific point • Working in an unorganized environment • Following incomplete or unclear directions • Working with unpredictable people • Dealing with abstract ideas • Demands to "use your imagination" • Questions with no right or wrong answers 	<p>These learners like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For their point to be heard • Analyzing situations before making a decision or acting • Applying logic in solving or finding solutions to problems <p>They learn best when they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have access to experts or references • Are placed in stimulating environments • Are able to work alone <p>What can be hard for them is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being forced to work with those who have differing views • Having too little time to deal with a subject thoroughly • Repeating the same tasks over and over • Many specific rules and regulations • "Sentimental" thinking • Expressing their emotions • Being diplomatic when convincing others • Not monopolizing a conversation
Concrete Random	Abstract Random
<p>These learners like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiment to find answers • Take risks • Use their intuition • Solve problems independently <p>They learn best when they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can use trial-and-error approaches • Can compete with others • Are given the opportunity to work by themselves. <p>What can be hard for them is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrictions and limitations • Formal reports • Routines • Re-doing anything once it's done • Keeping detailed records • Showing how they got an answer • Choosing only one answer • Having no options 	<p>These learners like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to others • Bringing harmony to group situations • Establishing healthy relationships with others • Focusing on the issues at hand <p>They learn best when they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are in a personalized environment • Are given broad or general guidelines • Are able to maintain friendly relationships • Can participate in group activities <p>What can be hard for them is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having to explain or justify feelings • Competition • Working with dictatorial/authoritarian personalities • Working in a restrictive environment • Working with people who don't seem friendly • Concentrating on one thing at a time • Giving exact details • Accepting even positive criticism

Figure 1: Gregorc's Mind Styles Model (web.cortland.edu/andersmd, 2009, August 24)

Life works well for Practical Managers when they know what is expected and how they will be evaluated. The more events unfold as planned, the happier Practical Managers are. Quiet, orderly environments help them learn, and these students enjoy having a plan and checking off tasks as they complete them.

Difficulties may occur when Practical Managers have minimum abilities in other styles to keep them balanced. For instance, although they are excellent with details, Practical Managers may become over-focused on details at times. These students can appear obsessive/compulsive and exhibit perfectionistic characteristics. Practical Managers can be over-stimulated and overwhelmed. With their finely honed senses, they may be over-sensitive to light, sound, and textures. They can become upset when things are out of place or when their routine changes. Practical Managers can become stressed when uncertain of the requirements of a task or situation, when there is too much chaos, or when no one seems in charge!

Many gifted students with Asperger Syndrome share a majority of the characteristics associated with the Practical Manager/Concrete Sequential style. Their preference for the concrete world appears in their proclivity to become experts on the facts and details of topics. Although these students like to manage others according to how they perceive things should be done, their lack of social skills can get in the way. Practical Manager/

Concrete Sequential students are often frustrated by open-ended activities. Their strength, however, is in adding details to others' ideas. Learning environments that are loosely structured and overly stimulating cause these youngsters much stress and can disengage them from learning.

**The Learned Experts:
Abstract Sequential Students**

Some highly gifted students show strengths in the Abstract Sequential style. Indeed, they are “Learned Experts,” with a talent for scholarly pursuits. (See *Figure 3*.) Students with these strengths often become class experts on complex and abstract topics. They love to hypothesize and synthesize. Such students crave knowledge and satiate this hunger by reading, watching documentaries, and listening to interesting and informed people. In fact, Learned Experts often would rather read or hear about the adventure than experience it. These students possess advanced vocabularies and can express themselves eloquently. They usually earn good grades, and they enjoy discussions and writing papers. They are very logical and enjoy verbal debate — often arguing for the sake of the debate.

Learned Experts are happiest when engaged in some sort of intellectual pursuit or interacting with others whose abilities they admire. They engage fully when allowed to give their opinion and make their points of view known. Learned Experts tend to need little sleep and may be found with book and flashlight in hand as they prepare for bed.

Practical Managers		
Gifts	Needs	Possible Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to details (love deadlines, timelines, punctuality) • Create to improve products or ideas • Have finely tuned senses • Keep others on task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orderly, predictable environment • Structure, clear expectations, and detailed directions • Opportunities to elaborate and add detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfectionism • Rigidity • Seeing the world in black and white

Figure 2: Traits of Practical Managers (Nicols & Baum, 2003)

Learned Experts		
Gifts	Needs	Possible Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very knowledgeable • Can synthesize ideas and create theories and models • Outstanding vocabulary • Excellent debaters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectually stimulating environment • Games and activities that require strategizing • Opportunities to research, discuss, and hypothesize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intolerance of others perceived as less smart • Using sarcasm • Being opinionated • Being argumentative

Figure 3: Traits of Learned Experts (Nicols & Baum, 2003)

These students are often stressed when the curriculum is not complex or the lessons move along too slowly. They can be sarcastic and unaware of the image they project, unable to understand why people might not like them.

Highly gifted students (especially verbal students) and some students with Asperger Syndrome exhibit many of these talents and problems. They may enjoy the pursuit of knowledge to such an extent that they are unwilling to end the research part of a task. Learning environments that don't offer advanced explorations of topics and issues or that limit the opportunities for these kinds of students to be with one another inadvertently obstruct the development of their bright minds, often causing behavioral problems.

**People Person:
The Abstract Random Student**

The Abstract Random student, the consummate "People Person," has a talent for human relations

and creating harmony. (See Figure 4.) People Persons live in a world of feelings and can identify the emotional climate of the room as soon as they enter. These youngsters have many friends and enjoy social interaction. Because they operate from a feeling level, they are often talented in the visual or performing arts.

People Persons are happiest when allowed to connect meaningfully with others inside and outside of school. They perform well in group activities and can contribute to the process by helping others get along. Because they are eager to please, they like special jobs. These students perform best when they feel appreciated and special.

People Persons can be disorganized and lost in the emotions of the moment. They tend to become stressed when there is conflict; and they can be overly sensitive, experience melt downs, and over dramatize and exaggerate events. Personal relationships take priority over academic tasks for these

People Persons		
Gifts	Needs	Possible Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating harmony • Colorful, dramatic • Social skills • Attuned to feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorful, social environment • Opportunities to interact with others • Opportunities for creative expression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disorganization, lack of attention to details • Repressing own needs to keep the peace and avoid conflict • Being overly sensitive or dramatic

Figure 4: Traits of People Persons (Nicols & Baum, 2004)

Creative Problem Solvers		
Gifts	Needs	Possible Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divergent thinker who can generate many ideas • Flair for adventure and spontaneity • Empathetic • Life of the party, fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative environment • Options • Opportunities for multiple projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disorganization, lack of attention to details • Difficulty following directions • Stubbornness, having own agenda

Figure 5: Traits of Creative Problem Solvers (Nicols & Baum, 2004)

students. Because they want to belong, some People Persons may keep their needs to themselves and defer to the group to maintain their connection with peers.

Because they have been subjected to criticism and have had difficulty meeting the demands of particular kinds of learning, many 2e students are often focused on how to fit in and be accepted. They are emotionally sensitive to the reactions of others when they perceive that they are not included or accepted. If the learning environment is overly critical, and the students do not feel as though they belong, twice-exceptional students who have the People Person style will shut down and be emotionally unavailable to learn.

Creative Problem Solvers: The Concrete Random Student

Students like Jane, introduced in the initial scenario, have strengths in the Concrete Random area and are best identified by their talent for innovation. They are the “Creative Problem Solvers” of the world, energetically leaping from one idea to another. (See Figure 5.) Never satisfied with the status quo, they can always find a better way to do anything and, in fact, would much prefer to do it their way.

Unlike the more sequential students, Creative Problem Solvers understand that rules can be bent and exceptions made for the good of the cause. They may appear impulsive as they leap first and then look. They tend to see the end result first, and then identify the steps they need to get there. This

group is always taking risks if there is a chance for fun and adventure

Creative Problem Solvers are happiest when given choices and when working on multiple projects at once. They prefer open-ended assignments and opportunities to be creative. They do best when allowed to pursue the assignments or tasks their own way with a few general guidelines.

Creative Problem Solvers can be disorganized. Often, they fail to listen to directions and can be confused about what is expected of them. They test rules and have a dislike for routine. These youngsters are often stressed by having to focus on the sequential details required in many learning environments. They also have difficulty making commitments in and out of school.

Creative Problem Solvers share the same characteristics as many students with AD/HD. Learning environments that match these students’ needs include discovery learning; use of teachable moments; mild competition; use of learning games; and options in terms of topics, products, and schedule. Inflexible learning environments with many rules can cause these youngsters to become oppositional and defiant.

Final Thoughts

When 2e students, their parents, and their teachers learn about personal styles, they can relate better to one other and cope more easily with the demands of the school and home environments. If Jane’s mother better understood Jane as a Creative

Problem Solver, her mother could then better appreciate and nurture Jane's rich imagination. Supporting Jane's need for choice, her mother could help Jane develop her own schedule for completing tasks.

When we accept that we all have different personality styles, we can begin to appreciate the unique contributions that each brings to family, school, and personal relationships. Life works better for us if we can spend the majority of time in environments that align to our strengths; but, of course, there will be times when a task or a situation will require the ability to use the skills from our less-preferred styles.

Parents and teachers who understand the personality profiles described here and use them to

plan are better able to arrange appropriate environments for 2e youngsters and to provide necessary support when needed. In the final article in this series, we will explore how knowledge of personality styles can be useful in helping 2e students to organize, study, socialize, and resolve conflict.

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- Mind Styles: Anthony Gregorc*. Retrieved August 24, 2009, from <http://web.cortland.edu/andersmd/learning/gregorc.htm>.

To learn more about the Baum & Nicols Personality Prototype Profiler and how to administer it to students, visit this website: <http://internationalcenterfortalentdevelopment.com>. There you can also find a link to additional information on Anthony Gregorc's model, Mind Styles™.



Myth #6:

To achieve success, 2e students must be better organized.

2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter, January 2010

Debunking the Organization Myth: A Matter of Style

By Susan Baum, Ph.D., Marcy Dann, M.A., BCET, Cynthia Novak, Ph.D., and Lesli Preuss, Ph.D.

Opening Scene

Heard at a parent discussion group on organizing twice-exceptional (2e) kids:

“Her desk is a mess, and I can’t see how she knows where anything is,” Alexa’s mom complains. “I bought her a notebook with sections and pockets, but she lost it. Instead, she stuffs papers for different subjects in her textbooks. Why can’t she be organized like me? As an attorney, I know that life works best when there is predictability and order.”

“I wish Charles were more like Alexa,” interrupts Charles’ dad. “He has a compartment for everything. If one paper’s out of place, he practically has a meltdown. Charles’ attention to details and his precision drive me to distraction! He can’t even start his homework unless all his pencils are sharpened and lined up neatly on his desk. There’s no time for all of that. Our social schedules are so hectic that I have a hard time setting up a homework routine for him.”

“I’m even more frustrated than both of you,” responds Craig’s mother. “My son and I are kindred spirits – both out-of-the-box thinkers. We love spontaneity, but people are always telling us to get organized and get into a predictable routine. Believe me, I try; but it lasts

about a week before we both feel stressed and incompetent. How can I be a successful engineer and still enjoy the mess?”

“I know what you’re saying,” Brooke’s Dad replies. “Teachers say to give kids a quiet place to do their homework, so we bought Brooke a new desk for her room, with a special lamp, and even in-and-out trays for her work. But the only use she has for her desk is to pile her clutter. When we insist that she clear off the desk, she just cries because she says she won’t be able to find anything. Her favorite place to work is the kitchen table with all her stuff spread out. My wife and I can’t understand it – we both crave solitude and quiet when we do our work. Brooke does get good grades, but we worry that she’ll never learn to be organized or independent.”

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar? Are we being asked to subscribe to the myth that to achieve success we must be better organized? Is there only one best way to be organized?

In the previous article in this series, we discussed the importance of understanding who we are in terms of our personality style preferences. We described the four personality types shown below – two of which are more linear and the other two more spontaneous.

Linear	Spontaneous
Concrete Sequential/Practical Manager	Concrete Random/Creative Problem Solvers
Abstract Sequential/Learned Expert	Abstract Random/People Person

(Gregorc, Baum & Nicols, 2004)

Scenario	Parent's Personality Type	Child's Personality Type
Alexa and her mom	Abstract Sequential/ Learned Expert Manager	Concrete Random/ Creative Problem Solvers
Charles and his dad	Abstract Random/ People Person	Concrete Sequential/ Practical Manager
Craig and his mom	Concrete Random/ Creative Problem Solver	Concrete Random/ Creative Problem Solver
Brooke and her dad	Concrete Sequential/ Practical Manager	Abstract Random/ People Person

Let's return to the scenarios from the parents' discussion group and use these four personality types to better understand the parents' and the children's feelings and attitudes toward organization.

A Conflict of Style

The table at the top of the page shows how the parents and children differ in their personality style preferences. Alexa's mom is clearly an abstract sequential/learned expert. Her duties as an attorney require her to be logical and to create a predictable routine to be successful at her job. However, her daughter is a spontaneous organizer who prides herself on a more contextual approach. Alexa can find things better when she places them where she is likely to use them. Her mom, equating an organizational style with life success, thinks it would be better for her daughter to function as her mother does.

Charles' dad is an abstract random/people person who has a more spontaneous style of organization than his son. The dad can neither understand nor relate to Charles' need for routine and structure. Instead, the dad's focus is on interpersonal relationships and his social agenda. In that realm, emotions and how people are relating to each other matter more than predictability and details.

In the case of Craig and his mom, conflict results from a stereotypical perception of how it looks to be organized. Indeed, both Craig and his mom share a random, spontaneous perspective of organization. Attempts to box them in do more harm

than good.

Likewise, Brooke's dad is following advice about what organization should look like, even though Brooke is doing fine in school. Brooke has her unique way of organizing, which seems to be working well for her. Trying to make her adopt an organizational style that is not natural for her is causing Brooke much stress.

While one of these parents' approaches to organization is likely most familiar and comfortable for you, does that mean it's better than the others? Think about your preconceptions about organizational patterns by considering these questions:

- Do you personally know successful people who organize themselves differently from the way you do?
- Can a person be successful but not be a "neatnik"?
- Do you believe that successful people can have messy desks, or do you ascribe to the perception that any clutter is a sign of incompetence?

What is Organization?

Thinking that there is only one way to be organized may cause stress at home or in the workplace. Gaining a clearer understanding of diversity in organizational systems, on the other hand, can lead to greater appreciation of the different paths to success. The rest of this article will help you match organizational strategies to your child's organizational preferences by doing the following:

- Exploring the notion of what it means to be organized
- Reinforcing the idea that we need some form of organization in our lives
- Debunking the idea that there is only one way to be organized
- Providing guidance in choosing organizational strategies that can enhance the quality of our lives.

According to the website Self-Improvement-Advice.org (www.self-improvement-advice.org/getting-organized.html), being organized is:

Being able to easily locate your possessions – material or information – without putting in a lot of mental effort; and being able to set them back as needed, just as easily... In other words...being organized is a state of being in control; in control of your space and mind.

We can add to this definition that being organized is also a matter of being in control of the events in your life so that you *can* be productive.

Enhancing Productivity

As we discussed earlier, each of us has our preferred ways of relating to the world and ordering our lives. If we really understand our personality style preferences and if we identify the organization strategies most closely aligned with our preferences, we can make choices that enhance our personal productivity.

For many twice-exceptional learners, productivity is problematic for different reasons. For example, gifted students with Asperger Syndrome may become bogged down by their organizational needs and fall prey to perfectionistic tendencies. In contrast, gifted students with attention issues often find themselves with no particular strategy for organization due to their need for spontaneity and creative stimulation. They may start new tasks as soon as they become bored, leaving unfinished piles littered throughout their space (or yours).

Differing Organizational Needs

For many talented students with learning or reading challenges, linear forms of organization actually minimize their effectiveness. What these children need are spatial and holistic kinds of organizational strategies. For students whose emotions govern their lives, on the other hand, mood may dictate what they do rather than any predetermined schedule or organizational strategy. What's necessary then, given these variations in approach to organization, is to align organizational strategies to personal style preferences. Following are information and tips to help you do that for each of the four personality types.

Organization Profile of the Concrete Sequential/ Practical Manger (CS/PM)

Characteristics that May Affect Organization

- Excel in linear kinds of organization strategies, those we typically associate with time management and anti-clutter “experts”
- Are easily distracted by clutter and other kinds of environmental noise
- May be more dependent on adult support than students of other style preferences because they tend to be somewhat perfectionistic and may have a fear of failure

What They Need to Function Effectively

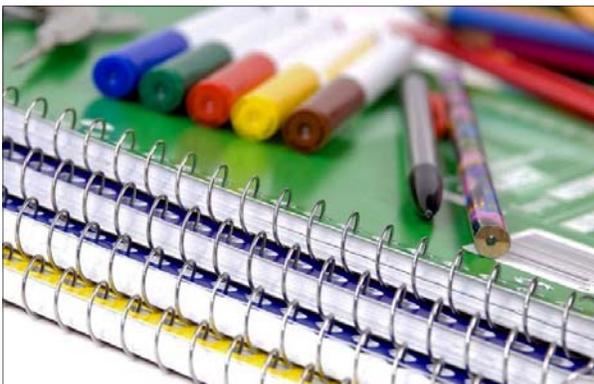
- Both detailed directions and set routines
- A time and place to keep their things and a quiet place to work, both of which allow them to better focus on the tasks at hand

Strategies for helping CS/PM students to be productive are:

- Allocate a quiet place for homework. A desk away from noise and activity is best.
- Help them organize a school binder with tabs for each subject, assignment sheets, and a monthly calendar listing due dates.
- Make assignments, with parameters specified,

readily available in written form or online.

- Provide a wall calendar, a timer, supplies in drawers with organizers, and file holders with multi-colored file folders. Use file folders to store the different drafts, the papers they wish to save, and the ideas they must put on hold for awhile.
- Establish a specific routine for homework that the family respects and can live with. Consistency is essential.
- Strategize to avoid over-dependence. For example, provide a daily checklist of tasks arranged in the order to be completed. Establish a rule that youngsters can ask for help or show their work only after the assignment is completed and before starting the next task.
- Help CS/PMs with their perfectionistic tendencies:
 - On the daily checklist of tasks, include an estimated time for each assignment. Set the timer to that estimated time to limit how long the youngster works on a task or assignment. (Parents should check with the teacher to understand expectations for time spent on each assignment. The teacher should share these expectations with the student and both should agree that, for the time being, the work finished within that time segment is sufficient.)
 - Explain that work submitted for the first time is a draft and need not be perfect. There will be time later to correct anything the teacher feels needs changing.



- If children feel frustrated or overwhelmed by their perceived expectations for a task, help them break the task down into manageable parts with the mantra “We’re only concerned with part 1 now.”

Organization Profile of the Abstract Sequential/ Learned Expert (AS/LE)

Characteristics that May Affect Organization

- Prefer a predictable, linear approach to organization
- Crave in-depth information and pay little attention to isolated details
- Seek out opportunities to discuss ideas
- Can be forgetful about time and details, getting lost in thought and compromising their productivity
- Organize ideas by sketching them out conceptually and understand concepts through the use of visual models that show cause-and-effect relationships
- Make notes to themselves using word phrase summaries rather than a list with detailed, specific information

What They Need to Function Effectively

- A quiet place, free from distractions and clutter, to study and think
- To see the big picture and understand how ideas are related to one another
- Outlines rather than lists
- Long periods of time to focus on intellectual challenges
- To be surrounded with resources and have access to expert opinions and knowledge
- Help with keeping track of appointments and papers, and with remembering to do mundane tasks

Strategies for helping AS/LE students to be productive are:

- Provide a quiet place to do homework, such as a desk in their room away from noise and activity or a table in the library where they can spread their books about. Access to the Internet, where they can satiate their intellectual curiosity while studying about a topic, also enhances their learning.
- Provide a binder with tabs for each subject, assignment sheets, and a monthly calendar for listing due dates. Include blank pages for sketching out concepts and Post-it notes for jotting down ideas. Pocket pages also help AS/LE students organize extra information that they find on their own about a topic.
- Make available pads and pens where AS/LE learners can sketch and fiddle with ideas.
- Post a monthly calendar on the wall to help these children see the bigger picture and plan accordingly.
- Hang up a bulletin board and use brightly colored Post-it notes to serve as reminders for those mundane tasks like brushing teeth, coming to dinner, and getting a good night's sleep. Providing an electronic calendar with appointment reminders is another option.
- Restrict time spent on homework. AS/LE learners might get sidetracked by exploring ideas or going beyond the assignment. To help them stay on task, have them begin their study time by creating an outline of what needs to be completed. Under each main topic, have them sketch out the specifics that will be required.
- Set aside an ample but reasonable time period for work. Keep their intellectual appetite in check by having AS/LE students estimate completion times on their outlines. Allow time for them to talk out some of their ideas with an adult either before they begin their homework or a during a mid-session discussion break.
- Allow music while working. It often helps them to keep their minds from wandering into more interesting realms, especially if the assignment is not challenging enough.

Organization Profile of the Concrete Random/ Creative Problem Solver (CR/CPS)

Characteristics that May Affect Organization

- Take a nonlinear, spontaneous, and holistic approach to organization
- Tend to be energetic kinesthetic learners who think and plan better while moving
- Appear disorganized and messy, with piles on desks, over-stuffed drawers, and neglected file cabinets
- Are able to locate what they need among their many stacks and piles
- Are often argumentative, think they have the answers, and resist suggestions
- Tend to have a lot going on at the same time
- Are at great risk for disaster in school, where success requires sequential approaches often underdeveloped in these children during childhood

What They Need to Function Effectively

- Choices
- Simple ways that work for them to keep track of their stuff (Research seems to show that creative people organize their desks intuitively to correspond with the way their minds organize information. According to a January, 2006, study of hundreds of CEO's, the highest scorers in innovation and risk-taking scored lowest on organizational and neatness skills. (<http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=JenniferWilliamson>.)

Strategies for helping CR/CPS students to be productive are:

- Allow space to spread out and move about. While the CR/CPC individual can work anywhere, a desk is probably the least appropriate choice. For some, the floor works well. (In fact, some have been known to talk through an assignment by lying on the floor while tossing a ball in the air.)

- Make a laptop computer available for research and written work, allowing them the flexibility of sitting in a rocking chair, standing at a counter, or walking about.
- Create a work station with shelves and compartments. Give each project or subject area its own shelf or container to house the stack. Pencils, pens, and other materials should be in a single container — not one for each different utensil.
- Provide a variety of containers to organize piles. The mind of a CR/CPS organizes by making multiple web-like connections that are spontaneous and not planned sequentially. Because ideas pop into their heads as they search through their “stuff,” it’s important for these individuals to have the materials they need scattered around them as they work. Searching among piles helps them make connections between and among projects. Encourage them to create webs to track ideas as they occur.
- Giving these students a different binder for each subject might make organization easier for them. Binders are tricky for this group, so use pockets instead of tabbed sections within each binder. The different color pockets can signify homework assignments, handouts, notes, etc.
- Encourage frequent breaks and ensure that movement is part of the routine. Having nerf balls, bouncing chairs, or fidgets available will help them sustain attention to the tasks at hand.
- Allow music, if appropriate. Having music or the television on in the background helps some of these children sustain attention. For others, such background noise is seductively distracting and should be eliminated.
- Use a monthly calendar placed in easy view to help them see the bigger picture and plan accordingly. Have them create to-do lists on the calendar made up of Post-it® notes. Allow them to arrange the Post-its in the order in which they wish to complete chores, assignments, and other tasks, and to rearrange the order if necessary. They can also use the Post-its to keep track of the many activities in which CR/CPS children tend to be involved. This strategy develops a kin-



esthetic understanding of flexible sequencing, showing youngsters that plans are not etched in stone and can be changed as needed. When children complete a task, crumpling up the Post-it note and tossing it in a waste basket is rewarding in and of itself. They can even make a target game out of the process and keep points for accuracy. (Remember, the CR/CPS is motivated by fun and adventure.)

- Respect their need for change of routine and for choice. Accept skipping around among assignments and tasks as long as children have a way to get everything done. Support their time management by asking them what tasks must be done and when they are due. Help them to articulate a commitment by asking when they plan to do a particular task and how much time they think they will need will. Then ask if they need you to remind them. For household chores, follow the same routine. Tell them what you need to have them do and have them tell you when they plan to do it. Again, say that you would be happy to remind them of the time.
- Limit the number of rules you have for these children and adhere to them consistently. Also, give detailed directions. Instead of saying “Clean your room,” say “Hang up your clothes and put

away your games.”

- Set broad parameters for time. Encourage CR/CPS children to set the timer and work for 15-minute intervals. (The length of time will vary according to age and development). Then encourage them to reward themselves with an exercise or protein break. Sitting with these youngsters to get them started often helps them to get their mind focused on the task.
- Provide CR/CPS students with a “traveling office,” a large backpack, preferably on wheels, in which they can carry with them everything they need at all times. Getting organized to go to and from school is problematic for these students, and they do best when they don’t have to think about it. Within the pack can be a zipper compartment for utensils, another for lunch, and so forth. While everything may just be thrown in together in the backpack, at least what they need is all in one place.

Organization Profile of the Abstract Random/People Person (AR/PP)

Characteristics that May Affect Organization

- Care little about organization and have little regard for details
- Think holistically and prefer piles to files, but their piles are usually neat
- Follow the spirit of the rule rather than adhere to details
- See deadlines and curfews as flexible
- Crave connections to others and see all events as social opportunities
- Dislike being alone and shut off from all distractions
- Tend to be friendly, sensitive, and at times overly sensitive

What They Need to Function Effectively

- To be around others so that they can pay attention to many conversations simultaneously

- To be recognized and made to feel special
- To have the focus more on relationships than on order

Strategies for helping AR/PP students to be productive are:

- Allow them to work at a table within earshot of the family. They tend to get lonely when sent to a quiet isolated place. Not knowing what else is going on in the house is a distraction for them.
- Create an area in their rooms where they can organize their piles. Shelves and bins work well for AR/PPs.
- Because their minds organize holistically, encourage them to use webs when planning research papers and writing assignments. From webs can grow outlines if needed. Software programs like *Kidspiration* and *Inspiration* provide templates for holistic planning.
- Provide colorful markers, scratch-and-sniff stickers, rainbow stickers, and other materials that they can use for decorations, calendar reminders, and rewards for completing tasks in a timely order.
- Encourage study buddies and homework pals. Because these youngsters are social, having study dates makes focusing easier. Remember that they will need to schedule off-task breaks to just socialize during their time together. The breaks can act as self-rewards.
- Provide or have AR/PP youngsters design a monthly calendar for the wall. Let them decorate deadlines and create an original set of friendly reminders to themselves for key points throughout an assignment. Send them an e-mail as a reminder of due dates and appointments; make sure it’s personal and lets them know how proud you are that they are on track.
- Make a habit of showing that you appreciate their efforts by using stickers, hugs, compliments, and other symbols of appreciation. You will be supplying the emotional reinforcement they need plus reinforcing task completion and adherence to structure.

- Because these students tend to misplace things, keep duplicates of important items like keys, books, and completed assignments. Have the children decide where to place the spares so that they can be returned to that place when the original item is rediscovered. Following this type of procedure will help them develop the habit of putting things that are important to them in the same place.
- Like, CR/CPSs, AR/PPs are also candidates for the “traveling office.” But do require them to clean out their “office” once a week. Lo and behold, you will probably find any item that went missing during the week.

Conclusion

We must remember that each of us is a combination of all styles, that we have profiles of strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, we must recognize that we cannot force our youngsters to be like us if it’s not their natural way of being.

What’s essential to understand is that each

organizational style has merit and can offer a unique pathway to success. However, we must also be able to recognize when a preferred style is not working for a child. In those cases, by encouraging the child to be flexible and to borrow strategies from other styles, we can help the youngster to jump start his or her productivity. ■

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Resources

About.com: Homework/Study Tips, Time Management, http://homeworktips.about.com/od/timemanagement/Find_Time_to_Study.htm

Kutscher, M.L. & Moran, M. (2009). *Organizing the disorganized child: Strategies to succeed in school*. NY: Harper Rowe.



Books

- *Academic Advocacy for Gifted Children: A Parent's Complete Guide*, by Barbara Jackson Gilman (Great Potential Press, revised edition, 2008)
- *Creative Home Schooling: A Resource Guide for Smart Families*, by Lisa Rivero (Great Potential Press, 2002)
- *Crossover Children: A Sourcebook for Helping Children Who Are Gifted and Learning Disabled*, by Marlene Bireley (Council for Exceptional Children, 1995)
- *Different Minds: Gifted Children With AD/HD, Asperger Syndrome, and other Learning Deficits*, by Deirdre Lovecky (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004)
- *From Emotions to Advocacy: The Special Education Survival Guide*, by Pam and Pete Wright (Harbor House Law Press, 2006)
- *The Highly Sensitive Person and The Highly Sensitive Child*, by Elaine Aron, (Broadway, 1997 and Broadway, 2002)
- "Mellow Out," *They Say. If I Only Could: Intensities and Sensitivities of the Young and Bright*, by Michael M. Piechowski (Yunasa Books, 2006)
- *The Mislabeled Child*, by Brock and Fernette Eide (Hyperion, 2006)
- *The Myth of Laziness*, by Mel Levine (Simon & Schuster, 2002)
- *The Organized Student*, by Donna Goldberg with Jennifer Zwiebel (Fireside, 2005)
- *Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level*, by Sally Shaywitz (Knopf/Random House, 2003)
- *Sensational Kids*, by Lucy Jane Miller (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2006)
- *Smart Kids with Learning Difficulties*, by Richard Weinfeld, Sue Jeweler, Linda Barnes-Robinson, Betty Shevitz (Prufrock Press, 2006)
- *Smart Kids with School Problems*, by Priscilla Vail (Plume, 1989)
- *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom and Teaching Kids with Learning Difficulties in the Regular Classroom*, by Susan Winebrenner (Free Spirit Publishing, 2000 and 1996)
- *Teaching Teens with ADD and AD/HD: A Quick Reference Guide for Teachers and Parents*, by Chris A. Zeigler Dendy (Woodbine House, 2000)
- *To Be Gifted & Learning Disabled: Strategies for Helping Bright Students with LD, AD/HD, and More*, by Susan Baum and Steven Owen (Creative Learning Press, 2004)

- *Understanding Your Child's Puzzling Behavior: A Guide for Parents of Children with Behavioral, Social, and Learning Challenges*, by Steven E. Curtis (Lifespan Press, 2008)
- *Upside-Down Brilliance*, by Linda Silverman (DeLeon Publishing, Inc., 2002)
- *When the Brain Can't Hear: Unraveling the Mystery of Auditory Processing Disorder*, by Teri James Bellis (Atria, 2002)
- *When the Labels Don't Fit: A New Approach to Raising a Challenging Child*, by Barbara Probst (Three Rivers Press, 2008)

Publications

- *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter*, www.2eNewsletter.com
- *Gifted Education Communicator*, www.cagifted.org/Pages/Publications/communicator.html
- *Teaching Exceptional Children*, www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Publications2/TEACHINGExceptionalChildren (See Vol. 38, No.1, Sept/Oct 2005: issue on twice-exceptional topics.)
- *Understanding our Gifted*, www.our-gifted.com/welcome.htm (See Vol. 14-2 on 2e children.)

Articles

- "An Anomaly: Parenting a Twice Exceptional Girl," by Kiesa Kay, www.hoagiesgifted.org/anomaly.htm
- "Asperger's Syndrome Guide For Teachers," by the parents of OASIS Asperger Syndrome Forum, compiled and edited by Elly Tucker, www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/teachers_guide.html
- "Building the Bond between Fathers and Kids with Learning Difficulties," by Melinda Sacks, www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/2734
- "Dual Exceptionality: Gifted and Learning Disabled," by Linda Silverman, <http://psas.bctf.ca/AEGTCCBC/conferences/Reports/GE96/GE%2096.html>
- "Enabling Our Children," by Deborah Thorpe, www.hoagiesgifted.org/enabling.htm
- "Fighting Guilt," by Charlotte Riggle, <http://uniquelygifted.org/guilt.htm>
- "Gifted and Learning Disabled: Twice Exceptional Students," by Dawn Beckley, www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/newsletter/spring98/sprng984.html
- "Gifted Children with Asperger's Syndrome," by Maureen Neihart, www.gt-cybersource.org/Record.aspx?NavID=2_0&rid=11381
- "If Gifted = Asynchronous Development, then Gifted/Special Needs = Asynchrony Squared," by Lee Singer, www.hoagiesgifted.org/asynchrony_squared.htm
- "Imagine Teaching Robin Williams – Twice-Exceptional Children in Your School," by Carolyn Cosmos, www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=5823
- "No One Said It was Easy – Challenges of Parenting Twice-Exceptional Children," by Linda C. Neumann, *Gifted Education Communicator* (Fall/Winter 2006)

- “The Process of Discovery: Finding Out Why Your Child is Struggling,” by Karen J. Foli, www.idonline.org/article/5728
- “Strategies for Teaching Twice-Exceptional Students,” by Susan Winebrenner, *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter* (October, 2003)
- “The Ten Commandments I Teach By: Optimizing Success for 2e Learners,” by Susan Baum, *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter* (August, 2005)
- “Which Is It? Asperger's Syndrome or Giftedness? Defining the Difference,” by Cindy Little, *Gifted Child Today Magazine* (Winter, 2002)

Organizations

- AEGUS (Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students), www.AEGUS1.org
- CEC (Council for Exceptional Children), www.cec.sped.org
- Individual Differences in Learning Association (IDL), www.gifteddifferentlearners.org
- NAGC (National Association for Gifted Children), www.nagc.org
- SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted), www.sengifted.org

E-mail Discussion Lists

- The Davidson Institute’s Educators Guild: a forum where gifted and talented teachers and administrators can share ideas and experiences and seek information and advice, www.educatorsguild.org
- Gifted but Learning Disabled: e-mail discussion list for families with twice-exceptional children, http://groups.yahoo.com/group/gifted_but_learning_disabled
- Gifted-Teachers: for teachers of the gifted, administrators, counselors, parents. Subscribe at: gifted-teachers-request@list.uiowa.edu
- GT-Spec-Home: an e-mail discussion list for families homeschooling gifted/special needs children, <http://gtworld.org/gtspechome.htm>
- GT-Special: an e-mail discussion list for families with twice-exceptional children, www.gtworld.org/gtspeclist.html
- Hoagies Gifted: listing of e-mail discussion lists, www.hoagiesgifted.org/on-line_support.htm
- LD Online's discussion boards: multiple parent and teacher forums on learning disabilities, AD/HD, sensory integration, social skills, and other issues, www.idonline.org/xarbb/?catid=769

Websites

- A Nation Deceived (where the 2004 Templeton National Report on Acceleration is available for download), www.nationdeceived.org (See Vol. 2, Chapter 11 on twice-exceptional children.)
- All Kinds of Minds, www.allkindsofminds.org
- ASPEN (Asperger Syndrome Education Network), www.aspennj.org/index.asp
- The Davidson Institute’s GT-CyberSource, www.gt-cybersource.org; and Library, www.gt-cybersource.org/ReadArticleNew.aspx?NavID=13_0

- Gifted Homeschoolers Forum, <http://giftedhomeschoolers.org>
- Hoagies Gifted, www.hoagiesgifted.org
- LD Online's articles on gifted/LD, www.ldonline.org/article/c670
- Learning Disabilities and Assistive Technologies, www.gatfl.org/ldguide/funding.htm
- The Mislabeled Child, <http://mislabeledchild.com>, and the Eide Neurolearning Blog, <http://eideneurolearningblog.blogspot.com/>
- Our Gifted Online Conferences, <http://giftedonlineconferences.ning.com>
- The Out-of-Sync Child, www.out-of-sync-child.com
- The SPD (Sensory Processing Disorder) Foundation, www.spdfoundation.net
- Twice Exceptional from Susan Winebrenner, www.susanwinebrenner.com/twiceExecpt.htm
- Uniquely Gifted, www.uniquelygifted.org
- Wrightslaw, twice-exceptional, www.wrightslaw.com/info/2e.index.htm

Free Downloads

- *A Guidebook for Twice-Exceptional Students: Supporting the Achievement of Gifted Students with Special Needs*, www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/enriched/gtld/docs/20Exceptional.pdf
- *The Twice-Exceptional Dilemma*, www.nea.org/specialed/images/twiceexceptional.pdf
- *Twice-Exceptional Students, Gifted Students with Disabilities: An Introductory Resource Book*, www.cde.state.co.us/gt/download/pdf/20ExceptionalResourceHandbook.pdf

Spotlight on 2e Series

This series of publications is intended to help parents, educators, advocates, and other professionals better meet the needs of gifted children with learning difficulties. Each provides easy-to-understand information on how to recognize and address the combination of giftedness and learning deficits or disorders in children. Included are articles, checklists, charts, and resource listings.

Other booklets in this series include:

- *Parenting Your Twice-exceptional Child*
- *Understanding Your Twice-exceptional Student*
- *The Twice-exceptional Child with Asperger Syndrome*
- *The 2e Reading Guide: Essential Books for Understanding the Twice-exceptional Child*
- *Guiding the Twice-exceptional Child: A Collection of Columns Meredith Warshaw*
- *The Twice-exceptional Child with Attention Difficulties (coming soon)*
- *The Twice-exceptional Child with Dyslexia (coming soon)*



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For more information, visit us on the Web at: www.2eNewsletter.com.

