2e™ Twice-Exceptional Newsletter

September/October 2009
Issue 36

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

Featured in this Issue

Our focus in this issue – visual processing and twice-exceptional children

Quote

"When you say they won't do their work, it really means that they won't do our work."

– Susan Winebrenner

Also Inside

Welcome!

Welcome to the September, 2009, issue of *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter.* Our main topic this time is vision problems related to learning. You might see these problems referred to as visual processing disorder, vision processing dysfunction, or other similar names. Regardless of the terminology used, the issues concern the brain's difficulty with making sense of information taken in through the eyes.

In this issue, past contributors to *2e Newsletter*, Drs. Fernette and Brock Eide, look at the role of vision in dyslexia and how vision therapy can help. In an interview, developmental optometrist Nancy Torgerson discusses how vision problems can interfere with learning. In another article, educator Leighann Pennington offers tips for helping students who struggle with reading.

Elsewhere in the newsletter, you'll find coverage of a session at the World Gifted Conference in Vancouver; an article on the possibility of mistaking giftedness for AD/HD, and the fifth installment in the Mythology of Learning series, written by members of the Bridges Academy staff. And, of course, there are our regular columns and features.

As we approach a milestone, Mark is reminded of one of his favorite "Peanuts" comics from long ago. In the first panel, Snoopy the dog is calling the moon. He observes, "Dogs have been howling at the moon now for over five thousand years." As he trots back to his dog house, he muses, "The moon hasn't moved, and dogs are still dogs." In the final panel, lying in his familiar pose half in and half out of his dog house, he concludes, "That proves something, but I don't know what."

With this issue, *2e Newsletter* has been howling at the moon for six years. Gifted kids with learning differences are still 2e, and lots of teachers and clinicians still don't know about twice-exceptionalities – but we're making progress, you and we together.

We'll keep going, hoping we never reach the state in which Snoopy found himself in another cartoon, when he said, "When I was young, I used to howl at the moon every night. I was wild and ignorant in those days." Then he observes, "I had a lot of fun, though." Then he rests his head on a rock and thinks, "Now I don't have any fun and I'm still ignorant."

There's still a lot to know. But we're still having fun.

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

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

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In Dyslexia

Vision Processing Dysfunction and Visual Therapy

By Brock L. Eide, M.D., M.A., and Fernette F. Eide, M.D.

Experts have long debated whether visual processing problems contribute to the reading and spelling challenges in dyslexia. After dyslexia was first recognized in the 1890s, visual processing difficulties were long assumed to play a major part in producing these challenges. This continued to be the majority view until as recently as the 1970s. Since that time, however, expert opinion among reading specialists – especially in the United States – has veered strongly in the opposite direction. Currently, the dominant belief among this group is that problems in the brain's language centers – or more specifically in the phonological (word/sound) processing system – are the sole cause of dyslexic reading challenges, while visual processing difficulties play little role.

In contrast, however, a number of researchers and clinicians who specialize in dyslexia take a different view. These dissenters agree that phonological deficits play a central role in producing the reading challenges in most dyslexic children. However, they also believe that the root cause of dyslexic challenges goes beyond deficits in the brain's language and auditory centers.

Tracing the Origins of Dyslexia in the Brain

A growing body of research suggests that the phonological processing difficulties in dyslexia do not stem from primary problems in the brain's language cortex. Instead, these difficulties arise from more fundamental differences in deeper centers of the brain, including:

- The cerebellum, a part of the brain that plays an important role in coordination, motor control, and the integration of sensory information
- White matter tracts, bundles of nerve tissue that connect distant parts of the brain.

The research indicates that variations in these deeper brain centers could give rise to the kinds of visual problems the dissenters have noted in their dyslexic patients.

In spite of this research, the claim that visual dysfunction plays little or no role in the reading challenges that dyslexics face has recently received broad circulation. A statement supporting this claim was issued by medical organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, in the August, 2009, edition of the journal *Pediatrics*. A widely quoted story also promoting this point of view appeared in the *New York Times* on May 26, 2009. Furthermore, several widely read popular books on dyslexia also support this view, including *Overcoming Dyslexia,* by Yale University physician and professor Dr. Sally Shaywitz.

What to Believe?

Should parents of struggling readers simply assume that vision plays no role in their child's reading difficulties? Is this claim really justified by the available scientific evidence? While it's impossible in this short space to review this issue thoroughly, we can provide balance and practical guidance to parents and professionals by addressing three key questions:

1. Are visual problems common or rare in children with dyslexia?
2. Do visual problems often contribute to reading challenges among dyslexic children?
3. Does visual therapy (that is, special eye exercises to address specific types of visual problems) have a role in helping children with dyslexia?

Incidence and Contribution

Let's consider the first two questions together.

Visual problems do appear to be common in children with dyslexia. We base this answer on research findings in available scientific literature and on our own professional experience in working with hundreds of dyslexic children. We find that our own experience agrees quite well with published research findings. A substantial proportion of dyslexic children, we believe between 60 and 80 percent, do show important visual difficulties. In one study of dyslexic children, for example, just one type of visual problem, near-point convergence insufficiency, was found to be present in 30 to 40 percent of the dyslexic children (compared to 20 percent of those in the control group). In another recent report, difficulties with visual crowding was shown to be far more common in dyslexic than non-dyslexic children, and to contribute significantly to slowness in word reading among dyslexic children (www.journalofvision.org/9/4/14/article.aspx). These visual difficulties are on top of the phonological processing difficulties that over 90 percent of these children also face.

Vision Processing Dysfunction, continued

In identifying visual difficulties, we look at children's performance on two types of tasks:

1. Reading tasks. A child's misreadings or word skips can indicate problems with visual functions; however, these errors can also be the result of difficulties with phonological processing.
2. Other kinds of near-work tasks. When a child has difficulties with tasks that do not involve phonological processing, the child's problems can clearly be identified as visual.

The types of visual difficulties we see among dyslexic children are often problems with near focus (convergence), especially for prolonged periods of time, and difficulty coordinating the movements of the two eyes (tracking and teaming). These visual problems often contribute to the reading challenges that dyslexic children face by causing varied symptoms such as:

- Difficulties smoothly tracking along a line of text, which can result in word or line skips
- Difficulties fixing the eyes steadily while looking at text, which can cause blurring or even wobbling or moving of letters
- Sequencing errors
- Difficulties reading small or closely crowded letters or numbers
- Eye strain
- Visual fatigue
- Eye watering, rubbing, or squinting
- Unusually severe or sustained problems with spatial orientation of words or letters
- Irritability
- Slow processing of visual information, work incompletion, or lack of ability to sustain attention for near work.

Can Visual Therapy Help Dyslexic Children?

Now to address the third key question, which has been debated even more fiercely than the first two: Does visual therapy have a role in helping children with dyslexia? Much confusion surrounds the question of whether visual therapy helps children with dyslexia. The confusion often stems from the way in which the question is phrased. Critics who wish to discredit visual therapy might ask: Can visual therapy "cure" all children with dyslexia? Or they may pose the question: Is visual therapy sufficient as the only form of therapy for children with dyslexia? Questions such as these are straw men. Few experts who see a role for visual therapy think that *all* dyslexic children require it, or that it is the *only* therapy needed by those who do.

Confusion arises when visual therapy is thought of as a treatment for "reading problems" in general, rather than as a therapy for certain specific visual challenges that contribute to reading problems. Examples of specific visual challenges that may require visual therapy are convergence, tracking, and other coordinated eye move-

Visual Therapy

The goal of visual therapy is to train the eyes and brain to work together more effectively. Here are some books where you can learn more about what visual therapy can do for individuals who struggle to read.

- *The Mislabeled Child*, by Brock and Fernette Eide (Hyperion, 2006). Our book lists many steps that can be taken to help struggling readers, including those with visual challenges.

- *Fixing My Gaze*, by Susan Barry (Basic Books, 2009). In her recently published book, Dr. Barry provides an eloquent description of her struggles to read as a child, a great explanation of what visual therapy entails, and a description of her own experiences with visual therapy. She is professor of neurophysiology at Mount Holyoke College, specializing, appropriately, in the visual system.

- *See It. Say It. Do It!* by Lynn Hellerstein (HiClear Publishing, 2010). Dr. Hellerstein, an eminent developmental optometrist in Colorado, has written a wonderful book that provides a tremendous amount of helpful information on vision and learning for struggling students. The book will be published in early 2010.

–B.E., F.E.

Interview with Dr. Nancy Torgerson, Developmental Optometrist

Do Vision Problems Interfere with Your Child's Learning?

Dr. Nancy Torgerson is an optometrist in the Seattle area. Her practice, Alderwood Vision Therapy Center, treats the full range of optometric problems but has a special emphasis on testing, diagnosing, and treating vision problems related to learning. 2e Newsletter *asked Dr. Torgerson about these kinds of problems, the effect they have on learning, and ways to address the problems. She shares her answers in this edited interview.*

Q: Why do parents bring their children to see you? What kinds of problems are they having in school and/or at home?

A: The child's performance is below his or her potential. The brighter the children, the more frustrated they typically are. They compare themselves with their classmates and see what they should be able to do and know that they are not able to do it, even when they try their hardest. Many times, children feel stupid. Some give up trying; others may become behavior problems.

Q: Do parents tend to bring their child to you first, or have they been to other medical professionals and received other diagnoses?

Vision Processing Dysfunction, concluded

ments. When we look specifically at the results of studies performed to address specific visual issues, the evidence supporting visual therapy is quite strong. For example, in children with convergence insufficiency, peer-reviewed National Institutes of Health-sponsored research has shown that both home therapy and home exercises with computer training can work. However, the research also indicates that in-office therapy shows the greatest effectiveness.

Other simple interventions, as well, have proven quite effective. For example, increasing the spacing between letters significantly improves the reading of dyslexic children who struggle to read crowded text. Daily practice – at least 15 minutes per day of supervised oral reading – has been shown to improve visual tracking and reading performance in children with poorly coordinated eye movements.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that visual problems are common, though not universal, in children who struggle to read; and visual therapy can help address visual problems. A good visual examination is an important part of the workup of every struggling reader. Visual specialists differ in their expertise about the complex dynamic visual functions needed in reading. In general, the most appropriate specialist to do a thorough exam is a developmental optometrist, an optometrist who is a Fellow of the College of Visual Development, or FCOVD. To find local practitioners, visit the website www.COVD.org.

Brock and Fernette Eide are physicians from Edmonds, Washington, who have a special interest in testing and advocating for dyslexic children who are twice-exceptional. They are members of the Professional Advisory Committee for SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted) and authors of the book, The Mislabeled Child: How Understanding Your Child's Unique Learning Style Can Open the Door to Success. *Visit their website and blog at: http://neurolearning.com*

Interview with Dr. Nancy Torgerson, continued

A: Typically, I see children after they have other diagnoses. I am hoping that this will dramatically change in my lifetime. My dream is that visual information processing issues will be a standard part of a child's learning assessment. Visual skills will be evaluated before a child enters school and will be evaluated throughout the child's academic career. Many schools require a dental evaluation before children start school, but they don't expect students to have their visual skills evaluated. The schools settle for a visual screening.

"If I had a magic wand, I would get rid of all the Snellen Eye Charts used in school vision screenings across the United States."

Q: By visual screening, I assume you mean the school vision test. If the results at school show that a child has "normal" 20/20 eyesight, how confident can parents feel that their child does not have any vision problems?

A: If I had a magic wand, I would get rid of all the Snellen Eye Charts used in school vision screenings across the United States. The test originated in the 1800s and is great for looking at a small, static symbol at 20 feet away; but it's in no way a reliable measurement of the visual needs your child has for learning, life, and sports. The 20/20 does not tell you if your child:

- Can see at near, which is critical to reading, writing, desk work, computer work, and video games
- Has eyes that aim, move, and work as a coordinated team (If not, a child can have double vision and poor depth perception.)
- Has adequate eye movements to allow the eyes to rapidly and accurately shift along a printed page
- Can maintain clear vision at varying distances, or rapidly adjust focus to copy from the board, or watch the ball coming when getting ready to bat in baseball
- Gets headaches from eye strain
- Has poor visual motor integration that impacts printing or cursive writing
- Has properly functioning visual memory and visual integration skills

20/20 gives a false sense of security. Vision is so much more than eyesight!

Q: What are the most common visual processing problems that you find in children?

A: One common problem is oculomotor dysfunction – or tracking problems – in which people are unable to efficiently follow a moving object or quickly shift their eyes from one point to another, as in reading. Another common problem is convergence insufficiency, a type of eye teaming problem in which the eyes have a strong tendency to drift outward when reading or doing close work. It's the leading cause of

Signs that a Child May Have Visual Processing Problems

Nancy Torgerson explained that the frustrating thing about visual processing problems is that children only see through their own eyes and are unaware that others see things differently. "They don't ask for help," she stated, "because they think that this is how everyone sees."

Here, according to Torgerson, are some signs that might indicate visual processing problems in children.

1. With reading or schoolwork: avoiding close work; taking longer to complete homework than they should; becoming quickly fatigued with reading, seeming to be bored with reading, or having a short attention span; omitting or confusing small words when reading; using a finger to keep from losing their place when older than six; whispering to themselves while reading silently
2. With movement or sports: poor balance and coordination; poor eye-hand coordination; awkward and clumsy when throwing or tying; trouble with sports such as baseball and tennis, despite being well coordinated
3. Physical symptoms or characteristics: headaches in the forehead or temple area; closing or covering an eye; turning or tilting their head to use only one eye; moving their head back and forth while reading; having an unnatural posture when reading; confusing left and right directions

Interview with Dr. Nancy Torgerson, concluded

eyestrain, blurred vision, double vision (diplopia), and headaches.

Q: Do problems with processing visual information tend to co-exist with other LDs?

A: Absolutely. It's estimated that up to 25 percent of children have visual problems. Those with learning disabilities would tend to have an even higher percentage of visual problems, be it tracking, eye teaming, focusing, depth perception, and/or visual information processing difficulties.

Q: How do you treat visual processing problems? Are there therapies to correct them or do children need to learn ways to compensate for them?

A: Some visual conditions can be treated adequately with glasses, contact lenses, and/or patching. Others are best resolved through a program of vision therapy (also called visual therapy).

Vision therapy is an individualized, supervised treatment program designed to correct visual-motor and/or visual information processing deficiencies. Our goal is to have the child be rid of the visual problems rather than have to use compensation skills.

We start by evaluating the patient to determine his or her visual, visual information processing, and visual motor skill levels. We then create a vision therapy program to meet the patient's specific needs. Vision therapy sessions include procedures designed to enhance the brain's ability to control:

- Eye alignment
- Eye tracking and eye teaming
- Eye focusing abilities
- Eye movements
- Visual processing

Q: Is there research on the effectiveness of vision therapy?

A: There is a plethora of research on optometric vision therapy that matches or exceeds the quality of research in all therapeutic fields. A good research data base for review is available at: www.visiontherapy.org/vision-therapy/vision-therapy-studies.html.

For example, in October, 2008, Mayo Clinic reported on a National Institutes of Health study comparing the three most common treatment options for convergence insufficiency. They found that vision therapy in the doctor's office, along with home reinforcement, was the best treatment option by far. To see the NIH presentation of this landmark study, visit: www.brighteyesnews.com/2009/07/29/nih-video-on-convergence-insuficiency.

Q: Do all optometrists diagnose and treat visual processing problems?

A: No. You want your child to be tested for both "eyesight" and "vision" to determine not only eye health, but how efficiently their visual system is working. Ask if your eye care professional is a developmental optometrist and whether he or she evaluates the following visual skills:

- Eye tracking (eye movement control)
- Focusing near to far
- Sustaining clear focus up close
- Eye teaming ability
- Depth perception
- Visual motor integration
- Visual form perception
- Visual memory.

Also ask if your eye care professional offers vision therapy. If not, does the doctor provide a referral to someone who does? If the answers are no, find a developmental optometrist in your area who does offer these services. You can visit the website of the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) at www.covd.org to locate one. COVD certifies professional competency in vision therapy by granting fellowship to doctors who have gone through rigorous testing. COVD serves as an informational and educational resource to the public.

For More Information

Find a list of resources on visual processing and vision therapy in the subscriber-only area of the *2e Newsletter* website.

It's a Possibility!

Diagnosing AD/HD Instead of Identifying Giftedness

By Jillian C. Gates

Have you ever encountered a child in the classroom who literally bounces off the chair, interrupts you to ask questions, forgets to turn in homework on a daily basis, and yet tends to do just fine academically, achieving at average or better levels? I spent 12 years in the classroom with many of these children. By third grade, they came to me with a label of AD/HD; but, interestingly, some of them seemed to lose their symptoms when they encountered a challenging curriculum or had the chance to work in an area of interest.

A Question to Consider

How can AD/HD just disappear some of the time? This question began to haunt me. Not all my students with AD/HD reacted this way. In fact, one of the brightest students I have ever taught was a gifted boy with AD/HD. He absolutely needed some help to address his AD/HD symptoms, and he needed behavioral supports so that he could work to his potential.

In graduate school I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to step back and do some digging into this phenomenon. I began with two instruments commonly used for identifying gifted students:

- Scales for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (SRBCSS: Renzulli et al.)
- The Overexcitabilities Questionnaire – Two (OEQII: Falk et al., 1999).

I also used the Conners' Rating Scales (CRS: Conners, 1997), an instrument commonly used in schools to aid in the AD/HD diagnostic process.

I began to look at the language used in the items that teachers rate on these different instruments. I was interested in seeing if any similarity of language might exist among the instruments, despite their use for different purposes. My hunch was correct, especially in the area of hyperactivity. For example, 10 of the 18 items on the Conners' Rating Scale overlapped with the SRBCSS – Creativity Subscale and OEQII Psychomotor Overexcitability. For example the CRS item "Argues with adults" was matched with these items from the SRBCSS Creativity Subscale:

- Ability to come up with unusual, unique, or clever responses
- Intellectual playfulness, willingness to fantasize, and manipulate ideas
- Non-conforming attitude, does not fear being different.

Overall, six out of ten SRBCSS Creativity Subscale items matched with the CRS.

I tested my findings with a group of 12 graduate students from various disciplines, asking them focus only on the language when comparing the items. They all agreed with the overlaps that I identified.

New Questions to Consider

The similarity in language describing giftedness, overexciteabilties, and AD/HD gave me pause for thought. I wondered, was there really the possibility that we as educators, psychologists, and physicians had missed the boat? Could it be that some children whom we suspect as having AD/HD are actually gifted and bored, or possibly twice exceptional? This initial investigation provided some evidence in support of similar findings by James Webb, Ed Amend, Brock and Fernette Eide, and others who have gathered information on this issue.

I took my inquiry a step further. I had access to a group of gifted adolescents attending an academic camp at a university. I took a sample of these students who, by parent report, were not diagnosed with AD/HD and gave them two instruments:

- The Adolescent Self-report form of the Conners' Rating Scales (CADS-A)
- The Overexcitabilities Questionnaire (OEQII).

I wanted to see if there was a pattern of overexcitabilities associated with gifted, active, excited children, as well as an overlap of these behaviors with those listed as AD/HD symptoms on the CADS-A. Now, some might ask, why let kids rate their own behaviors? Aren't parents a better gauge of their child's characteristics? Conners would disagree. His work shows that adolescents report their behaviors more precisely than their parents.

AD/HD Instead of Giftedness, continued

Interpreting Research Results

Analysis of the results obtained using the two instruments provided some interesting insights into what might be happening in the identification of giftedness and the process of diagnosing AD/HD. Results on measures of overexcitability and hyperactivity were of greatest interest.

The gifted students in this study scored highest on three overexcitabilities:

- Intellectual
- Psychomotor
- Emotional.

This finding is supported by previous research on the topic, plus by the experience of many teachers in the classroom. Think of how children who exhibit gifted behaviors react when they receive work of interest to them. They often become very emotional about the topic and are passionate in their pursuit of knowledge in the area.

Further analysis of my results showed that 55 percent of my sample of students scored uncharacteristically high on the Hyperactive subscale of the CADS-A. The American Psychological Association notes that AD/HD is prevalent in 3 to 7 percent of the population – occurring much less frequently than in my sample. These same students also scored high on four overexcitabilities: intellectual, psychomotor, emotional, and sensual. Although this profile of OEs is similar to that of the gifted sample as a whole, this sample of students – who achieved a higher-than-expected hyperactivity score – also had higher-than-expected scores on these four OEs than their gifted peers.

More research remains to be done to try to explain these unexpected results. At this point, we cannot say that the results draw a definitive line in the sand as to where the diagnosis of AD/HD begins and giftedness ends. However, they do provide evidence that there may be a co-occurrence of behaviors between giftedness and AD/HD. These higher-than-average scores on the OEs may be an indicator that further investigation is warranted before making an identification of giftedness or a diagnosis of AD/HD.

Conclusion

So, now that we have this information, where do we go from here? I plan to expand this line of inquiry to school and clinical environments in an effort to extend these findings. However, some recommendations based on the findings are warranted.

- It's important that educators look at the source of a child's behavior, not just the behavior itself. Too often, teachers and parents complete the Conners' Rating

Instruments Used in the Research

The Scales for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (SRBCSS)

This instrument is based on a multiple-talent approach to identifying gifted students. The 14 scales help identify student strengths in the areas of learning, motivation, creativity, leadership, art, music, dramatics, planning, and communication.

The Conners' Rating Scales (CRS)

This instrument is a widely used set of scales that various professionals and parents complete regarding the behavioral characteristics of students suspected of having AD/HD. The results are then used as part of the diagnostic process ultimately completed by a medical professional according to the criteria defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

The Overexcitabilities Questionnaire II (OEQII)

This instrument is based on a theory developed by Polish psychiatrist and psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski (1902 -1980). According to his theory of positive disintegration, individuals who exhibit gifted behaviors experience the world in a more intense manner. They display overexcitabilities that fall into five categories:

- Psychomotor
- Intellectual
- Emotional
- Sensual
- Imaginational.

In the classroom overexcitable behaviors may indeed look similar to behaviors associated with AD/HD, especially when the student is passionate about a topic or becomes bored and seeks stimulation. 2e

AD/HD Instead of Giftedness, continued

Scale when they have tried many interventions that have not worked. It may be that the frustration and lack of training in identifying the source of behaviors leads to misdiagnosis of giftedness as AD/HD.

- When pursuing a possible diagnosis of AD/HD in the school setting, teachers should share their knowledge of gifted characteristics with counselors, parents, and physicians so that giftedness is taken into consideration during the diagnostic process.
- Cognitive testing should be a part of the assessment process in order to identify giftedness or twice-exceptionality.

Parents and teachers are the greatest advocates in a student's life when a diagnosis of AD/HD or an identification of giftedness is under consideration. Four parents approached me when I was conducting this research, and all shared the same story – their child was diagnosed with AD/HD, a diagnosis they refused to accept. After much advocacy, their child was placed in a gifted education class where the AD/HD symptoms disappeared. Without this advocacy, these children may have been misdiagnosed and possibly improperly medicated, actions difficult to overcome or reverse.

Note: The author would like to thank Marcia Gentry, Ph.D. for her mentorship and guidance through this research process.

Jillian Gates is a Frederick N. Andrews Fellow and doctoral candidate pursuing a Ph.D. in gifted and talented development. She has a background in elementary education, special education, and quantitative research methods and measurement. In addition, Jillian is the chair-elect of the Counseling and Guidance Network of NAGC and is the winner of the 2007 and second-place winner of the 2008 NAGC Graduate Student Research Symposium. She has also presented at gifted conferences and is the author of Children with gifts and talents: Looking beyond traditional labels. *Correspondence can be addressed to jcgates@purdue.edu.*

Jillian Gates on The Intensity of Gifted Children

Students who exhibit gifted behaviors may show intensity in an area of passion or talent. Take Jane, for example. She was a third grader when the Olympics were coming to a city near her. Her teacher took the opportunity to teach students about the origins of the Olympic Games and the Greek mythology surrounding them. The students became very involved in the unit, especially Jane. She was fascinated with Achilles and was given the chance to pursue her own investigation into his life and the stories surrounding him. Jane became single-minded about this project, so much so that she was given class time to work on it while her peers were learning other information. Her intense pursuit of this topic resulted in a much deeper knowledge of both Achilles' life as well as the information her teacher wanted her to learn about the Olympics.

Jane's story is typical for students who exhibit gifted behaviors. These students may well react negatively when they are not allowed to pursue knowledge in this manner; and a teacher might interpret their actions as disruptive behaviors rather than as a way of communicating intense feelings.

Curing the Boy Who Caught OCD

Saving Sammy

Book by Beth Alison Maloney
Crown Publishers (2009)
Review by Linda C. Neumann

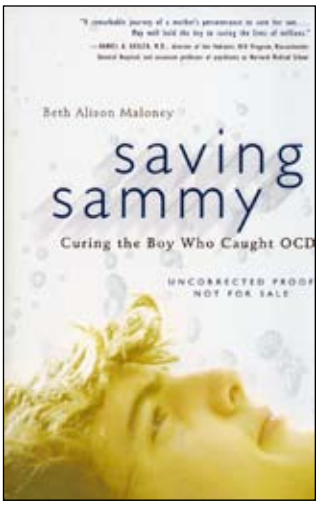
Have you ever found yourself in this situation? Something is not right with your child and you go to a professional for help. The person you consult tells you things that just don't seem to fit the child you know and the problems you've observed. Then you're left wondering who's right – this person with the credentials or you, who's just a parent?

Perhaps all parents have had this experience, but the parents of twice-exceptional children have probably had it more often. We often have professionals like teachers, counselors, psychologists, and doctors telling us things that just don't sit right with us. Sometimes we go from professional to professional trying to find someone whose assessment of what's going on with our child both makes sense to us and feels right.

This was the situation Beth Maloney faced when her 12-year-old son Sammy, the second of three boys, underwent a frightening transformation. He ended the school year as a bright, happy math whiz who had worked hard in fifth grade to overcome a reading disability. Before summer ended, he had stopped eating, sleeping, and bathing; developed numerous rituals and tics; and had frequent bouts of hysterical crying. Maloney eloquently recounts these events in the newly published book *Saving Sammy: Curing the Boy Who Caught OCD*. In this excerpt from the book, she describes her son as they wait to see a doctor:

> I watched Sammy...as he held his ears shut, huffed and puffed, and rubbed his feet back and forth on the rug. His clothes were rumpled and filthy. His eyes were like slits. He hopped. He pounded. He did everything but shriek. He bore no resemblance whatsoever to the award-winning, kindhearted, brilliant son who had been mine just six weeks before. I did not recognize this child.

Mother and son leave the doctor's office with a diagnosis of obsessive/compulsive disorder (OCD), a prescription for medication, and the doctor's parting words, "Sometimes the children get better, and sometimes they don't."



Maloney refused to accept that her son would remain this way, ruled by compulsions that dominated his life and which he could not control. She set out on a quest to find the right diagnosis, the right care, and the right educational environment for Sammy.

Many parents of 2e children will appreciate Maloney's account of Sammy's experience with special education. As she describes it, the school social worker stopped in the classroom to see how Sammy was doing. The students were involved with a cooking lesson, and Sammy was charged with cutting up squash. As he worked, Sammy told the social worker about his ideas for an economic recovery plan for the country, and his thoughts on hydrogen-powered cars and their potential impact on the environment. Sammy's teacher later reported indignantly that "It's fine and good to talk about economic recovery plans and hydrogen-powered cars, but we have a curriculum..." (The concept of twice exceptional, it seems, had not reached this school.)

After nearly a year, just as Maloney feels that she is reaching her breaking point in dealing with her son's illness, she learns from another mother about the role that a strep infection can play in triggering OCD and Tourette syndrome, which by this time Sammy also has. The problem then becomes figuring out how to proceed. Scant information is available on the treatment of the rare condition that Sammy has, called PANDAS, an abbreviation for Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections.

From this point on, the book chronicles the dramatic ups and downs in the progression and treatment of Sammy's illness. It also describes Maloney's relentless efforts to educate herself about PANDAS. Of her research,

Saving Sammy, concluded

conducted with the help of a friend, she writes:

> We would eventually know as much about PANDAS as perhaps anyone else in the country except, maybe, the researchers at the NIMH. Our lack of medical degrees was a good part of the reason why neither of us felt constrained. We were not bound by traditional medical theories or reasoning. We had everything to gain and nothing to lose.

Fortunately, Maloney eventually finds two knowledgeable and progressive-thinking physicians who know how to treat PANDAS. Over time, they are able to guide Sammy to recovery.

As for Beth Maloney, she made a vow that if her son recovered, she would work to spread the word about the role that infection can play in causing mental illness. For that reason, she has written this book. It's well written, with the feel of a novel, and it reminds parents of the crucial role they can be called upon to play in safeguarding their child's well being. Near the end of the book, Maloney delivers an important message for parents. She states:

> We must not rely on anyone else to ask...questions for us, and we must keep asking them until we are satisfied with the answers. If we are told that the questions are not appropriate, if we feel embarrassed or uncomfortable for asking, or if we're summarily dismissed with "No, that's not it," then we must find another doctor.

The parents of 2e children are likely to find inspiration in this book. It addresses a number of the challenges that are often part of raising a twice-exceptional child; and, most importantly, it shows that a parent's faith, hope, trust, and persistence can pay off in the end.

For more information on PANDAS, see this website: http://intramural.nimh.nih.gov/pdn/web.htm. For more information on OCD, see the May, 2008, issue of 2e Newsletter. *For more information on Tourette Syndrome, see the March, 2007, issue.*

The 2e Profile: Multiple Perspectives

By Susan Baum, Cynthia Novak, Lesli Preuss, and Marcy Dann

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

Jane, at 11, is a creative dreamer. Rarely are things completed 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

Multiple Perspectives, continued

Concrete Sequential	Abstract Sequential
These learners like: • Order • Logical sequence • Following directions, predictability • Getting facts They learn best when they: • Have a structured environment • Can rely on others to complete a task • Are faced with predictable situations • Can apply ideas in pragmatic ways What can be hard for them is: • 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	These learners like: • For their point to be heard • Analyzing situations before making a decision or acting • Applying logic in solving or finding solutions to problems They learn best when they: • Have access to experts or references • Are placed in stimulating environments • Are able to work alone What can be hard for them is: • 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**
These learners like to: • Experiment to find answers • Take risks • Use their intuition • Solve problems independently They learn best when they: • Can use trial-and-error approaches • Can compete with others • Are given the opportunity to work by themselves. What can be hard for them is: • 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	These learners like: • Listening to others • Bringing harmony to group situations • Establishing healthy relationships with others • Focusing on the issues at hand They learn best when they: • Are in a personalized environment • Are given broad or general guidelines • Are able to maintain friendly relationships • Can participate in group activities What can be hard for them is: • 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).

Multiple Perspectives, continued

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:

- 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 interact 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." 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.

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

Practical Managers

Gifts	Needs	Possible Problems
• Pay attention to details (love deadlines, timelines, punctuality) • Create to improve products or ideas • Have finely tuned senses • Keep others on task	• Orderly, predictable environment • Structure, clear expectations, and detailed directions • Opportunities to elaborate and add detail	• Perfectionism • Rigidity • Seeing the world in black and white

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

Multiple Perspectives, continued

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 to 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. 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.

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. People Persons live in a world

Learned Experts

Gifts	Needs	Possible Problems
• Very knowledgeable • Can synthesize ideas and create theories and models • Outstanding vocabulary • Excellent debaters	• Intellectually stimulating environment • Games and activities that require strategizing • Opportunities to research, discuss, and hypothesize	• Intolerance of others perceived as less smart • Using sarcasm • Being opinionated • Being argumentative

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

Multiple Perspectives, continued

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. Students with strengths in this style 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 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. 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 the happiest when given choices and when working on multiple projects at once. They prefer open-ended assignments and opportu-

People Persons

Gifts	Needs	Possible Problems
• Creating harmony • Colorful, dramatic • Social skills • Attuned to feelings	• Colorful, social environment • Opportunities to interact with others • Opportunities for creative expression	• 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 (Baum & Nicols, 2004)

Creative Problem Solvers

Gifts	Needs	Possible Problems
• Divergent thinker who can generate many ideas • Flair for adventure and spontaneity • Empathetic • Life of the party, fun	• Creative environment • Options • Opportunities for multiple projects	• Disorganization, lack of attention to details • Difficulty following directions • Stubbornness, having own agenda

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

Multiple Perspectives, concluded

nities 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 next column 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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Would you like to learn more about the Baum & Nicols Personality Prototype Profiler and how to administer it to students? You will find a link at this website: http://internationalcenterfortalentdevelopment.com. The website also provides a link to additional information on Anthony Gregorc's model, Mind Styles™.

All of the authors of this article work at Bridges Academy in the following capacities: Susan Baum is Director of Professional Development, Marcy Dann is an Educational Therapist, Cynthia Novak is the Middle School Director, and Lesli Preuss is the School Psychologist. 2e

Events

November 5-8, 2009, *Annual Convention of the National Association for Gifted Children*, St. Louis, Missouri. For educators, parents, clinicians. More information at www.nagc.org.

March 11-13, 2010, *Diamonds in the Rough: Smart Kids Who Learn Differently*, Rockville, Maryland. By Weinfeld Education Group and AEGUS. For educators, parents, students. More information at www.richweinfeld.com/diamonds.html.

April 21-24, 2010, *CEC Convention and Expo*, Nashville, Tennessee. For special and gifted educators. More information at www.cec.sped.org.

Please note: For state association conferences relating to giftedness, see Hoagies' website. For additional conferences on learning differences, see the website of the Council for Exceptional Children.

A Guide for Students with Dyslexia, their Parents, and their Teachers

Making Friends with Reading and Writing

By Leighann Pennington

> "Meggie took her books whenever they went away. They were her home when she was somewhere strange. They were familiar voices, friends that never quarreled with her, clever, powerful friends — daring and knowledgeable, tried and tested adventurers who had traveled far and wide."
>
> – from *Inkheart,* by Cornelia Funke

Everyone deserves a chance to dive into a good book, to fully inhabit an imaginary world. Gifted children gain the most from reading when they can work with the complexity in stories, such as characterization and how theme and setting are developed. Children with reading disabilities should not be deprived of that experience or the feeling of kinship with books that other gifted children experience.

In this article I'll offer tips that have worked well in my language arts classroom; and I'll share with you practical insights and quotes from Claire, a student I interviewed about what it's like to have dyslexia, what she would like teachers to know, and how she manages her coursework.

What are the Goals of Creating Readers?

In *Our Labeled* Children, Sternberg and Grigorenko explain that individuals who are proficient adult readers go beyond these basics:

- Employing word-recognition and basic comprehension skills
- Analyzing and evaluating arguments, pointing out strengths and weaknesses
- Recognizing emotional appeals for what they are and not being swayed by them
- Applying what they know to what they are reading
- Transferring what they learn by reading to other situations.

As a teacher, I not only want students to be able to read for analysis, but to have the reading skills needed to sort through the vast amounts of data available to us today to find the most important and credible information. More than analytical and evaluation skills, I want students to have an emotional connection to reading, to find it an engaging and welcoming experience, not something to dread or trudge through. I hope the following suggestions, from both a student's and a teacher's perspectives, will help produce more positive reading and writing experiences for students.

Advice from the Source: Claire

Last year, Claire was my student in sixth-grade English and history. Anyone who meets her will notice her sunny disposition, smile, and exuberance right away. She's also calm, patient, and a ceaselessly hard worker.

Claire's academic self-concept was not always high. It received a boost when she moved up several grade levels in reading through the Learning Rx program, which she enthusiastically supports. Math, however, can still be a struggle and is her least favorite subject.

Claire has learned to manage her dyslexia and increasing reading and writing demands as she moves from elementary to middle school. With a heavy academic load of eight subjects in seventh grade, she requires more time for homework but still finds time for creativity, her specialty. She is a devoted Girl Scout and acts in local plays such as Little Women and The Wizard of Oz. She has even appeared in a feature film!

As a growing number of students with dyslexia began entering my class, I wanted to learn more about this topic; and I knew that Claire was the first person I should ask. I interviewed her, hoping that she could offer advice to other students and reveal the learning and self-advocacy skills she employs as well as the insight she's gained about how her brain processes information.

Here are Claire's "Top Tips" for teachers, parents, and students.

Tip 1. Teachers and Parents: Identify Strengths and Build Confidence.

I knew that Claire loved writing. Last year, she was writing a magical novel at home, which she was excited to share with me. In the interview, I asked her what she viewed as one of her strengths. She responded, "When we have free writing on any subject that we get to choose, that is my big strength. You get to let your creativity fly...."

As a teacher, give students many chances to "let their creativity fly." This will benefit all students and appeal to their multiple intelligences (linguistic, artistic, etc.). In addition, try to connect what you do in class to real

Making Friends with Reading and Writing, continued

life. Remember that school skills aren't the only skills in life. According to Sternberg and Grigorenko (1999, p. 52), "U.S. society...is more likely to label as disabilities the absence of skills valued in school than the absence of skills valued in life beyond school, even though the latter may be more important to real world adaptation."

As a parent, help your child identify strengths in both academic and non-academic areas. When your child is feeling down or overwhelmed, you can remind your child of these strengths. When the homework load is heavy, encourage your child to take time out for creative hobbies or sports – something your child excels in that can serve as a stress-buster and confidence-builder.

Remember that there are benefits to your child's brain structure as well as to the experience of dealing with dyslexia. Consider: "...(L)earning disabilities may force children to develop strengths that children who are not identified as having learning disabilities may have no incentive to develop" (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 1999, p.6).

Tip 2. Students: Self-advocate.

Claire gave this advice to students on how to advocate for themselves. "Go to your teachers after class and say, 'For my learning disability, I need this stuff, but I would also like this.' If they don't know what dyslexia means, try to explain it to them."

Parents, help your child prepare a short speech to explain dyslexia and your child's needs to new teachers. Help your child practice delivering the speech by role playing at home. If you have a younger student, accompany him or her to speak with teachers at pre-planned times.

Be aware that not all teachers are knowledgeable about this topic or even know the best way to modify their content or delivery for your child. Be ready with gentle suggestions or resources to help teachers to learn more. Share specific modifications that have helped in the past, such as extra time for tests, reduced vocabulary or spelling words, or graphic organizers. Share articles from publications.

Tip 3. Teachers: Be Good Listeners and Assume the Best of your Students.

Claire expressed her frustration about teachers who "don't understand and won't give me a chance because they think I'm lazy." She urged teachers to try to figure out why a student is turning work in late rather than scolding. She urged parents to support their child in advocating, before late work becomes a problem.

Tip 4. Teachers: Be Supportive and Flexible.

Claire offered the following advice on how to be flexible with your students' work habits and how to reduce their anxiety.

- Use audio books.
- Reduce distractions in class. Watch out for students whose behavior may be distracting struggling readers.
- Give students more time for homework and assigned reading. For example, she suggested:
  - "Give the weekend for a packet."
  - "Reading books might take longer, so give [the assignment] two weeks in advance or on tape."

As a teacher, reflect on your practices. Consider these questions: Why are due dates important? What will lead to more learning? A teacher who is flexible can create a more engaging and welcoming learning environment.

Tip 4. Students: Be Open, Honest, and Ask Questions.

In dealing with their dyslexia, Claire recommended that students "be open and honest to everyone [teachers and parents]" and "ask many questions." She also urged students to "go see a teacher or person that you trust the most to help you."

Tip 6. Students: Plan Ahead and Break Down Reading Assignments into Smaller Pieces.

When reading chapter books, Claire offered students this advice: "If you get tired, take turns. Have a parent read a chapter so your eyes calm down a bit, then read again, so your eyes get back in the mood again. Hearing the books on tape also helps."

On reading textbooks, Claire had this to offer students: "You have to start really early. Read three paragraphs a night until the due date."

Some Additional Tips from My Own Classroom

Raise self-awareness. Give students interest and learning style surveys so that they can understand how they learn. Ask them to share time management, organization, and study tips, and discuss how to improve. Explicitly teach students study habits, organizational skills, and information about how the brain works and remembers information. Emphasize that students

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should use "what works best for you."

Provide visual structure and essential questions. Graphic organizers often benefit all of your students, helping them identify relevant information. You can also incorporate KUDs [what you want students to *know*, *understand*, and *do*] into the structure so that you keep the big ideas of the unit front and center. These tools help both teacher and students organize ideas within individual readings and throughout a unit.

Use multiple approaches. Approach the same idea in several ways, from multiple angles or intelligences. It will be more fun and add challenge. An easy way to differentiate for dyslexic students is to use audio books. Your local library may have some newer forms of audio books that make the reluctant readers in my class excited about reading. There are online books that students can download to a computer from the Internet and then transfer to a portable audio player. There are also Playaway books that come already loaded onto a small playback unit that uses headphones and runs on batteries.

Encourage deeper reading. It can be difficult to ensure that gifted students who struggle with reading are challenged at an appropriate level and have the opportunity to grasp the themes of what we are reading in class. Here are some tips to encourage deeper reading.

- Allow students to refresh their memories by reading summaries of the chapters in novels or writing bullet point summaries of textbooks. Review these together as a class or provide resources for outside reading. Remember that there is a time and place for SparkNotes. Discuss the possibility with fellow teachers of using this type of summary guide as a complementary resource, not as a replacement for the reading.
- Consider creating your own reading guides that draw attention to specific, meaningful quotes from the book. That way, after reading, students can spend time reflecting on the quotes instead of scrambling to figure out which information is relevant and wondering what they should be considering. Also, when it comes time for discussion or in-depth journal writing about a topic, students have the most important quotes to consider right in front of them instead of having to sift through all of the material they have read.
- Use classroom discussions and debates to draw out the "big ideas." Talking can be a more approachable method of sharing ideas for students than just reading and writing; plus, it allows

Questions for Students

I encourage parents and teachers to use questions like these to survey your child or students in your classroom. They can serve as a springboard to discuss what students are already doing well and how they might improve.

1. What is your favorite subject and why?
2. What are your strengths as a student and learner?
3. What effect has dyslexia had on you? How do you think it might be an advantage? How do you see it as a problem?
4. In what ways do you think your brain might work differently because of dyslexia?
5. Do you like reading aloud in class? At home? Silently?
6. Do you use technology to help you read, like audio books or an iPod?
7. How do you manage your reading loads in different subjects? (English, history, science, math.)
8. How does dyslexia affect your writing and/or your creativity?
9. What can teachers do to help you be successful? Changes to the curriculum? How can they help support you?
10. How do you advocate for yourself to get the support you need?
11. What kinds of rewards do you give yourself for success?
12. Please tell about any programs that helped improve your reading and why they worked so well for you.
13. List your top five practical tips to help other students who are dyslexic:
14. What other advice do you have for other children who have dyslexia?

–LP

Making Friends with Reading and Writing, concluded

the dynamic social interactions that many students love. You might also have students write and deliver speeches or discuss in small groups.

- Discuss not just plot, but themes. Share with students the themes of the novel and select quotes that express the themes. Represent themes visually by writing on the board or, perhaps, through colorful collages or illustrations.

Conclusion

I hope this article will help you find ways to celebrate reading and writing. I hope that parents, teachers, and students will see these activities not as a hurdle to a child's academic career, but as an avenue to deeper thought and creativity.

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Books to Help Kids Understand Dyslexia

Here are some fictional books about dyslexia that can offer great opportunities to empathize with children or can serve as a jumping-off point for discussion.

Picture Book

Lily and the Mixed-Up Letters by Deborah Hodge. Lily loves painting, but by second grade the increasing reading demands make school feel not so fun. Nervous about reading aloud, Lily bonds with her mom over the experience.

Juvenile Fiction

My Name is Brain Brian, by Jeanne Betancourt. His sixth-grade teacher helps Brian understand his dyslexia, but some kids still make fun of him.

Holy Enchilada! by Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver. While trying to impress a visiting student from Japan, Hank attempts to hide his dyslexia as he and his friends make enchiladas for a Multi-Cultural Day lunch. Uh-oh! Hank is afraid he was very wrong about the amount of chili powder called for in the recipe. (*Part of the Hank Zipzer series. See reviews of other books in this series in the October, 2003, issue of* 2e Newsletter.)

Two-minute Drill, by Mike Lupica. Scott is good at school, but not so good at football. He and star quarterback Chris, who has dyslexia, decide to work together to help each other succeed at both football and school.

Dolphin Sky, by Virginia Rorby Oesterle. Buddy is 12 and her dyslexia makes things difficult for her both at home and at school. She finds a hopeful mission by trying to rescue dolphins being held captive and mistreated at a swamp farm in the Everglades.

Young Adult Fiction

The Worst Speller in Junior High, by Caroline Janover. Katie is in seventh grade, learning to deal with her dyslexia and making new friends in junior high.

Double Dutch, by Sharon M. Draper. Three eighth-grade friends, preparing for the International Double Dutch Championship jump rope competition in their home town of Cincinnati, Ohio, cope with Randy's missing father, Delia's inability to read, and Yo Yo's encounter with the class bullies.

–LP

World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children

In early August, the Canadian city of Vancouver, British Columbia, welcomed attendees to the 18th World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children. According to the conference host, the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, the biennial conference is the largest international gathering of teachers, administrators, faculty, researchers, and parents in the field of gifted and talented learners. Here is coverage of one of the sessions presented at this five-day event. 2e Newsletter *thanks Elizabeth Nielsen and Dennis Higgins for their contribution to this coverage.*

Waterfront living on False Creek, Vancouver

Session: Gifted Children on the Edge: At Risk and At Promise

Presenters: Dan Peters, Ph.D., and Susan Daniels, Ph.D., Summit Center for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative, Napa and Walnut Creek, CA

In this session, presenters Dan Peters and Susan Daniels, partners in a practice that focuses on the needs of gifted children, teamed up to examine the factors that place gifted children at risk for academic underachievement and emotional difficulties. Peters is a clinical psychologist with a special emphasis on the needs of gifted and twice-exceptional children and families. Daniels is an associate professor of educational psychology and counseling, and the program director of a grant aimed at identifying and addressing the needs of at-risk gifted students in California.

To begin, the presenters looked at factors that put gifted children at risk. Through her grant research, Daniels found that five main factors, often found in combination, put gifted children in California at risk:

- Coming from a low-income family
- Being culturally disadvantaged
- Possessing limited English proficiency
- Having physical, emotional, or learning disabilities that mask their potential
- Coming from a dysfunctional family.

Both presenters pointed out that gifted children from middle or upper-income families can be at risk as well as those from low-income families. Two of the five factors, disabilities and dysfunctional families, can take a toll on gifted children from all economic levels.

The way to counteract risk factors in gifted children – and all children – is to boost their resiliency. Resiliency, the presenters explained, is "developed by identifying and building upon students' *developmental assets*." The rest of the presentation, aimed at identifying different types of developmental assets and ways to strengthen them, addressed the following:

- **Family support**. Peters called family support a "key ingredient" of building resiliency in a child. "These kids really need a connection with a caring adult – someone who listens to the child, someone who understands the child," he said.
- **Neighborhood involvement**. The presenters commented that non-Caucasian cultures often do a better job of providing this type of environment for their children. Providing children with a sense of community, the presenters noted, can have "a huge positive impact."
- **Parent involvement with the school**. This factor, as well, can make a big difference in a child's academic success. However, Peters pointed out, it's important to remember that "when parents are struggling, they're overwhelmed with survival. It may not be that they're uninterested in what's happening at school, they just might not be able to participate due to circumstances in their lives."

Daniels shared an effective way of getting parents to participate in school programs or events – by offering food at school. She described successful school events in which parents bring their children, share a meal with them, and then separate, with children going to take part in a supervised activity while parents take part in the scheduled program.

World Conference, concluded

- **School learning environment.** Are a child's talents and strengths being supported in the school? The answer to this question, they explained, can mean the difference between "saving a kid or losing a kid."
- **High expectations.** It's important to set the bar high for our gifted children – "right above their fingertips," as the presenters stated. However, when dealing with 2e children, it's important to remember that "all too often these kids have only heard about their deficits." To counteract that negative message and to help these children continue to love learning, the presenters recommended using an approach they described as "two strengths and a stretch." It involves helping a child work on developing two areas of strength for every one area of challenge.

What these supports all have in common, Peters and Daniels pointed out, is that they address relationships. "It's the social/emotional piece of the puzzle that's crucial," they noted.

The presenters went on to address additional issues concerning gifted and especially twice-exceptional students, including:

- **Achievement and motivation.** Homework should be meaningful, they explained, and projects should be of interest to the students. These children need to be able to make choices and have options. For example, 2e students who struggle with reading or writing should be allowed to show what they have learned in photo/documentary form, which can serve "as a bridge to other literacy development." Given such flexibility, these students will be more willing to do the "less fun" things required of them.
- **Social competence.** The presenters suggested ways to help kids build their social competence. One is to teach peaceful conflict resolution. Another is to use simulations that reflect the real world, such as mock job interviews.
- **Anxiety and depression.** Peters commented on what he believes to be the predisposition of gifted children toward anxiety and depression. Contrary to the articles that he says he has been seeing in professional journals, he thinks these kids are *more* likely to experience anxiety and depression, not *less*. One way to help them with their emotional issues, according to Peters, is to give them an outlet for social concerns by putting them in situations where they can work together with others toward a common goal. When kids see that they can have a positive impact, they can internalize that success.
- **Positive identity.** Peters stated, "We have to work much harder with our 2e and socially disadvantaged gifted kids to help them build a positive identity." We can do that, he explained, in any situation: school, home, camp, etc. Our goal should be to teach them that they have control in their lives. We want these kids to not see themselves as victims, even though they may be in a victimizing situation. Peters explained that we can use the great arguing abilities that gifted children often display to get them to articulate their thoughts and hear the fallacies in their own arguments. For example, when a child makes negative comments about his or her abilities, we can say, "I hear what you say, but I don't believe it. Prove it to me that you're not...."

The presenters reminded the audience that small things can make a difference – things that can be done in a very short time, such as families having dinner together, a caring adult reading to children, or a mentor showing interest in a child's strengths. These can all help to buffer children from the negative aspects of their life and to get them focused on their strengths. 2e

If you missed the conference, you also missed a vibrant Vancouver downtown, cricket in Stanley Park, the UBC Museum of Anthropology, Gastown tourism, Yaletown restaurants, the amazing Granville Island Public Market, fireworks over English Bay, the magnificent Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Chinese Garden, dim sum lunch in Chinatown, the Vancouver Art Gallery, 10,000 competitors in the World Police and Fire Games, and lots of First Nation art by artists such as Susan Point.

Dyslexia Can Be Frustrating

Q I'm a mother of a very intelligent 15-year-old boy. He learned his colors and shapes by age 2 and also spoke very well, but he despised my reading to him and wouldn't sit still. When writing, he got his letters wrong or wrote them backwards. In school he had problems with reading, writing, and spelling.

I believed my son had dyslexia because my father, mother, and brother were dyslexic. When I asked to have my son tested, the school wouldn't do it, telling me that all kids have some difficulty with writing letters backwards. Finally, in the third grade my son was tested, but no problems showed up. It was not until the fifth grade that a psychiatrist tested him and diagnosed a reading disability. The school then put my son in special classes.

My son is now a sophomore in high school and reads at a fifth-grade level. At least his current school gives him more help than in any of the other schools he attended earlier. He attends two classes for his reading disability.

I would like to help my son at home, but he hates to read. He's interested in auto mechanics, hunting, guns, and knives; but he refuses to get any books or magazines on these subjects.

I'm afraid my son may end up like his dyslexic uncle who dropped out of high school, although currently he goes to school with no problems because he enjoys his auto-mechanics class. I know he's a smart boy, but he has no interest in trying to read better. Please help me to help him.

A I can understand that your family history of dyslexia and your brother's dropping out of high school will cause some intense feelings about wanting your son to realize the potential opportunities that could be his if he put forth more effort toward reading. An attorney whom I interviewed for my research on successful women (*How Jane Won*, 2001) shared that because of her dyslexia, she had to work three times harder than other students to feel intelligent. She said that her struggles with dyslexia paid off because learning to work harder resulted in her graduating at the top of her law school class and led to a successful career.

One of the best ways you can help your son is to believe in him. In addition, you'll find it helpful to arrange for him to get recorded textbooks. Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic can make those available, or perhaps your school may be able to help with that. Listening to a recording of his textbooks while reading along will make assignments seem more approachable and undoubtedly improve his reading as well. Also, encourage him to find other subjects that are areas of strength and interest for him. If he becomes engaged in a subject, he'll be more motivated to read the assigned material.

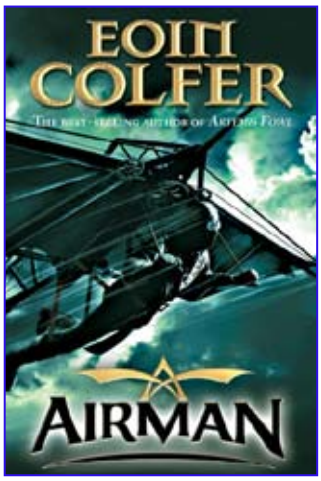
Be careful about pressing your son too much to read. Your efforts may backfire and cause him to rebel. Of course, if he's interested, that would be great, but reading shouldn't be a battle. Your persistence has already paid off in that your son attends school regularly. I know you won't give up on him, and your support will surely help him to find his way.

Dr. Sylvia Rimm is a child psychologist and clinical professor at Case University School of Medicine, author, newspaper and magazine columnist, and radio/TV personality. For free newsletters about learning disabilities or How Jane Won*, send a large self-addressed, stamped envelope to P.O. Box 32, Watertown, WI, 53094, or visit www.sylviarimm.com for more parenting information.*

Another Hit from the Author of Artemis Fowl

This summer a medical situation kept me from my planned hiking jaunts on the mountain trails in my part of beautiful Colorado, but it did create an opportunity for a veritable "reading bonanza!" I had the opportunity to real lots of great books; many I will share in my session, *What's New in Young Adult Literature: 2009 Edition* at NAGC this fall in St. Louis. I have chosen to review one that may very well end up on my list of "Top Favorite Reads of 2009."

Author Eoin Colfer is well known for his best-selling



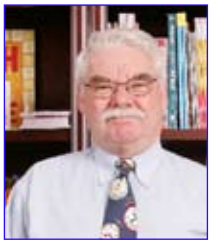
Artemis Fowl series, which may be an extra bonus in the eyes of readers who have already consumed those books. But even fans of that series may not be familiar with some of Colfer's other, just-as-engaging works. While I especially like his humorous, *Half Moon Investigations*, it's *Airman* (2008, Hyperion Books) that I believe has successfully pushed Colfer into a whole new arena.

Airman is set in the Victorian era; and we learn that its main character Conor Broekhart "was born to fly; or more accurately, he was born flying." His adventurous parents were flying in a hot air balloon when he was born. Was it this propitious beginning that caused Conor to have an intense desire to design and build a flying machine? At any rate, he has a series of adventures with his childhood playmate, Princess Isabella of the Saltee Island Kingdom, off the coast of Ireland; and these adventures usually involve flight in some way.

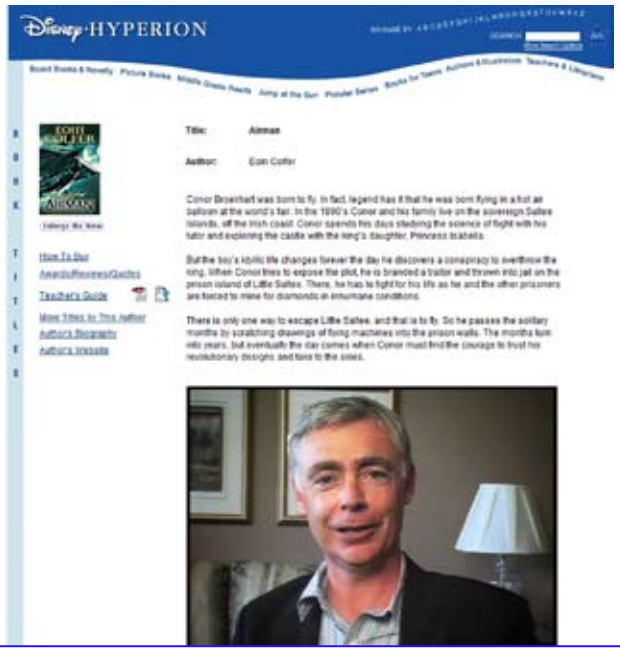
Over the course of the story we meet one of the really great villains in young-adult literature, Sir Hugo Bonvillian, the Marshall of Saltee. When Conor discovers a plot against the King of Saltee by Bonvillian, our hero ends up accused of being the traitor and the instigator of the King's assassination. The boy's life is changed forever, and he is imprisoned in a jail from which no one has ever escaped. In the next few years, through several exciting events, Conor proves his prowess, his leadership, and his cunning. He develops an escape plan that involves his dream to fly, and he slowly plots his exciting escape. As adventure follows adventure, we meet several great characters and the plot truly "thickens."

Although *Airman* is a great read, the chapters are a bit long and the vocabulary is somewhat sophisticated; so it may prove to be a challenge for some to read on their own. On the other hand, the humor, the fast pace, the "guts and glory," and the interest of the story line may help to spur on challenged readers. This one comes highly recommended. Happy Reading!

Professor Emeritus Bob Seney is retired from teaching in the Masters of Gifted Studies Program at Mississippi University for Women. At conferences, he often presents a session titled "What's New in Young Adult Literature." Reach him at bseney@muw.edu. 2e



To find out more about Airman *and hear its author talk about it, visit www.hyperionbooksforchildren.com/board/displayBook.asp?id=1946.*



Jumping into 2e Trenches

By Karyn Morgen

My relationship with our local school district is just developing. I'm coming in with a positive mindset, yet I have many concerns. After two years in a very sound private school, followed by two years in a rigorous public charter school, my fourth grader is worn to a frazzle. He is chockfull of anxiety and emotionally compromised to the point that a huge allotment of his energy (and mine) is required for basic functioning, for the simple act of attending school. Is there even anything left to devote to learning?

For me, as a mother, there had better be. I have to learn all about something called *twice exceptional*. I hope there's a *thrice exceptional,* and a *quad exceptional*, because I think we might be that. I have to learn about learning disorders and ways to work around them; education law; and 504's and IEP's. I have to learn politically correct ways of saying things so that I can communicate effectively with educators, doctors, and psychologists and advocate for my son like a mother possessed, while offending no one. Nobody wants to help "one of *those* mothers."

I have to learn to navigate the school system, how to contact people who are so busy helping other people's kids they can't answer the phone. I have to learn not to look with envy, like a parched sojourner in a desert, at families whose children go to school and come home with seeming effortlessness. The emotional pain renders me ineffective, and I must keep myself focused on finding a way for my son. I have to learn new ways of responding to my child so that we can try to untangle this morass of jungle vines surrounding him, choking him.

Funny, my dream for my son was to be *average*. Now we learn he's *exceptional*. I knew life for the gifted often meant feeling like an outsider, seeing an overwhelming number of possibilities in any given situation, and trying to balance huge potential for success with an equally huge fear of failure. (After all, gifted children have a long way to fall.) Yet, here we are, not simply gifted or exceptional, but twice exceptional. *Twice????*

My dream for my son now is to feel safe. How will he learn if he doesn't feel safe? Is he safe on the playground, or simply an easy mark because he's so sensitive about not fitting in that he won't report offenses? Then there's his enormous sense of justice versus injustice – something his giftedness affords him – screaming and dying inside. He's caught in a conundrum, with his gifted intellect and his immature fourth-grade self putting a stranglehold on his emotions.

Is he safe in the classroom where he – and everyone else – knows his pencil-to-paper output matches that of the weakest students? I dream that he'll have a teacher vigilant in defending the individual, and in protecting the privacy of test scores and daily Mad Minute Math accomplishments. Actually, I dream of a teacher who isn't all that invested in the Mad Minute, but who really wants to come alongside me to figure out why my son can't retain math facts, why he freezes up on simple addition problems when he's able to understand algebraic concepts.

These are the things that make me worry, but what gives me hope is that we might find help and support in the public schools that wasn't available in the smaller venues from which we came. And maybe we'll find a teacher and a system willing to work at ferreting out what makes my son tick, willing to recognize the effort he makes to get what's in his mind onto paper, unwilling to assume he's getting by because he's a wheel that would rather not come to school than be the wheel that squeaks – that would be life changing.

Can this school district help? Can they find a way to build on my son's strengths, to support his struggles, to nourish his withered self-esteem, and to invest in making him truly safe so that learning can happen? That's all I want. That's what my son needs.

Karyn Morgan has a degree in English and held a teaching credential until motherhood became her true profession. She and her husband are parents to two school-age children whose personalities go in opposite directions and whose various exceptionalities have afforded the couple an education not available to them in college. The teacher lives on in Karyn's heart, profoundly enriched by what she and her husband jokingly refer to as "Extreme Parenting."