Parent Session

Advocating for Twice-Exceptional Children

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PROJECT2EXCEL

University of St. Thomas
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Links to Pre-readings

Advanced Organizers for the Pre-readings – questions to think about while reading the articles

Discussion Notes-- a graphic organizer for note-taking during discussion

Discussion Questions

Rules for the Road

Food for Thought
Suggested Pre-Readings


- The authors describe a variety of different kinds of gifted programming in this chapter. Do you recognize any of them as being used in your child’s school or classroom?
- Has your advocacy for your own child led to advocating for gifted or twice-exceptional children in your school, district, or state? If so, has this changed the way other perceive you?


- Neumann describes how uncomfortable she has sometimes felt going against conventional though when advocating for her twice-exceptional child. Do you feel this same type of discomfort? How do you handle it?
- Do you feel that you have “come to terms” with your child’s twice-exceptionality?


- How did this article make you feel? Angry? Justified? Guilty?
- Is this a good article to share with teachers and administrators? Why or why not?


- This article is intended for teachers. Do you feel it is useful for you as a parent to know what teachers should do?
- This is one article you might share with your child’s teacher. How might you offer this article without seeming critical or pushy?
# Discussion Notes

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Discussion Questions

1. What do you see as your biggest concern for your child is his current academic placement?
   a. Lack of challenge in areas of strength?
   b. Poor academic performance because no accommodations are made for learning disability?
   c. Difficulty finding friends?
   d. Bullying?
   e. Adults who are unable to understand or help your child?

2. What are your child’s biggest concerns about school?

3. Who have you talked with about your concerns?
   a. Teacher?
   b. Principal?
   c. Counselor?
   d. Other parents?

4. Were your concerns heard, validated, and understood? Has anything changed as a result? If so, what?

5. How open is your child’s teacher to learning more about what might make the difference between boredom and frustration, avoidance and success, or fear and friendship for your child?

6. Do you have time to volunteer in the school? This can give you the opportunity to:
   a. Observe in your child’s classroom
   b. Free up a little time for the teacher to focus more on individuals (your child included)
   c. Get to know teachers in other classrooms (especially those who teach higher grade levels and might have your child in class)
   d. Understand what a school day looks like, and where changes might reasonably be made for your child
   e. Build relationships with administration, teachers, and staff

7. How do you keep track of your conversations with the school? In what ways do you follow up with them about your concerns?

8. What options are you willing to consider for your child’s education?
   a. Changing teachers
   b. Changing schools
   c. Finding a full time gifted program or a program for twice-exceptional students
   d. Private school
   e. Online school
   f. Partial homeschooling
   g. Full time homeschooling
   h. Unschooling

9. What is your “line in the sand” when it comes to making a change for your child? What has to happen before you are willing to make changes?

Advocacy
Being the parent of an unusual child is incredibly rewarding. It is also occasionally extremely challenging, awesomely lonely, utterly perplexing, and downright difficult. Many families buy a home in an area with good schools, and settle in with the idea that their child will ride the bus, attend the neighborhood school, and be friends with the neighborhood kids. It can be quite a wrench when this “American Dream” is ripped up and stomped on by the very child you have worked so hard to give everything to. Have courage! You have a unique and wonderful opportunity to look at all sides of what is “normal”, and then to create your own normal. You, and your child, will be stronger for it.

Below are some guidelines for advocating for your child in the schools. Every situation is unique, so remember to be creative and flexible!

1. **Get to know the system.** Start with the classroom; how many kids, does the teacher have help, what are the limitations of the space? Try to understand what the teacher does all day every day (keeping 30 six-year-olds alive, fed, and reasonable happy all day is no mean feat) and base your requests and suggestions on what is possible within these constraints. Get to know the school, and the district, as well as you can.

2. **Get to know the teachers.** Does one of the 3rd grade teachers seem to have an unshakeable routine that the kids in her class must adhere to? That might be the perfect classroom for a child with Asperger’s Syndrome, if the teacher has an understanding of this child’s unique needs, but it would probably be a poor fit for a gifted child with ADHD.

3. **Get to know the administration.** Is the principal familiar with the needs of gifted children? Does she understand what being twice-exceptional means? Is there time and budgeting for training? Are individualized accommodations and assistive technology available and supported?

4. **Get to know the staff.** A good school counselor can be a very valuable ally when you are advocating for your child. A supportive special education staff that is willing to work with classroom teachers and gifted services staff is a gold mine. This goes back to understanding the school system as a whole—many specialized departments (e.g. special education and gifted education) don’t think of combining efforts, but may if you ask nicely.

5. **Offer to help.** Even if you don’t have teaching experience, you can help in the school. In fact, it is often the tasks that really don’t require training that are so appreciated when the teacher doesn’t have to spend time doing them. Let the teacher know that you are happy to cut out shapes, hang students’ artwork, or stuff weekly take-home envelopes because that gives him more time to do what he was trained to do—teach your child!
6. **Keep track of everything.** If your child’s teacher offers to send home a different spelling list, send an email of thanks and copy the principal and anyone else involved in your child’s educational plan (whether this is a formal plan or an informal one.) By repeating the conversation in a shared email, you are reinforcing the offer and holding that teacher accountable for following through. Using an appreciative tone in that email gives the teacher some support for going above and beyond, and shows that you appreciate it. This is very important—no one wants to feel bullied or pushed into doing more work—*anticipatory praise* works just as well with adults (or better) as it does with kids. Once you’ve sent that email, keep a copy in a file on your desktop, and in a file in your email. Use this same method with every communication you have with your child’s school, from tiny, unimportant-seeming “I’ll see what I can do” conversations, to meetings about a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). That way, if and when you need to follow up, you have a record of what was said, offered, or discussed. If the person in question doesn’t agree with your take on things, they should reply to your initial email. This will signal you to follow up with them and make sure you all know and agree on what the agreement is.

7. **Be your child’s safe haven.** If school isn’t a happy place for your child, it is even more important that home is. Remember that school is not always a friendly environment for a gifted child—it can be even less so for a gifted child with an additional exceptionality. Don’t use home time to push, cajole, or force your child to do things the way school wants him to. Use a well-established homework time to get through as much homework as possible, and perhaps find new ways to accomplish hated tasks, and do your best to keep the rest of your child’s time at home school-free. This can be tough to do, especially when you know how bright your child is and see how poorly he may be doing at school, but the lessons learned in non-school-related activities are important and enriching, too. Even more important is letting your child know that home is a safe place, even when school isn’t.

8. **Don’t be afraid to make a change.** It does seem scary to go against “The System”! This is because the school system, like any large, unwieldy mechanism, frowns upon cogs that won’t spin, bolts that come loose, and belts that squeal. Remember the square peg in a round hole metaphor? How much pounding into place can your child take before underachievement, low motivation, and depression set in? The more extreme your child’s pattern of ability/disability is, the greater the asynchrony she experiences, and the more intensely she needs an educational environment that recognizes, accepts, and accommodates for individual needs. You are not wrong to make this happen. Your first responsibility is to your child.

9. **Have courage.** Good for you! You are your child’s most important advocate until he has learned, from your example, how to **advocate for himself**.
Many books and articles have been written and are being written about gifted and twice-exceptional children. These can be great resources for you to share with your child’s teachers, the school administration and staff, and even the district people in charge of determining where teacher-training funds should be spent. Keep in mind that, although folks who work in education respect and make use of research findings, you may be hard-pressed to get a middle school teacher with 200 students to read a scholarly dissertation on specific research about teaching a specific topic to twice-exceptional kids. Brevity is a very valuable thing to remember when choosing literature to share with the people responsible for teaching your child.

Take heart! You are not alone in your quest for the best information available! The articles linked to in the pre-reading section of this module are wonderful first steps to help teachers understand what you are asking for and why. The Paquette article is short and sweet and very, very clear. The Neumann article really explains your point of view as a parent, and the Winebrenner article is an excellent first how-to piece for teachers. These are by no means the only resources available! Please check out all of the article links we have included in the pre-reading sections of the 20 parent modules on http://www.stthomas.edu/project2excel/OurResources/default.html, and check out the websites listed below for access to many, many more great articles, blogs, etc.

Read on for book and website recommendations. The book titles are followed by reviews, blurbs from the back, or summaries from Amazon.com. Remember, these are only a start! One thing leads to another...

Books for kids:


This revised and updated edition retains the best of the original edition: the warmth, affirmation, and solid information kids need to know they’re smart and can learn, they just learn differently. It answers the many questions they have, like “Why is it hard for kids with LD to learn?” and “What happens when you grow up?” It explains what LD means (and doesn’t mean); defines different kinds of LD; describes what happens in LD programs; helps kids deal with sad, hurt, and angry feelings; suggests ways to get along better in school and at home; and inspires young people to set goals and plan for the future. Includes resources for parents and teachers.


"Written with help from hundreds of gifted teenagers, The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide is the ultimate guide to surviving and thriving in a world that doesn't always value, support, or understand high ability. Full of surprising facts, step-by-step strategies, and practical how-tos, and inspiring quotations, featuring insightful essays contributed by gifted young people and adults, The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide gives the gifted young reader the tools needed to understand their giftedness, accept it as an asset, and use it to make the most of who and what they are. Of special value is the section on dealing with a troubled gifted youngster contemplating..."
suicide, how to be "net smart" and have safe, fun online relations, and how to handle teen angst. Incidentally, The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide is also very valuable reading for the parents, teachers, and counselors of gifted kids as well!" -- Midwest Book Review


"Being excluded from peers can be confusing, even for the brightest young minds. Now in a revised, updated, and expanded third edition, The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide: For Ages 10 & Under is a guide for young gifted and talented children who may not think their talents are a gift. With much advice for young people about understanding their gifts and learning that being brainy is not a detriment, The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide is the perfect gift for the under-confident and over-skilled young reader." --The Midwest Book Review, Reviewer's Choice

Books for Parents:


“...provides a humorous, engaging, and encouraging look at raising gifted children today. Dr. James R. Delisle offers practical, down-to-earth advice that will cause parents to reexamine the ways they perceive and relate to their children. Delisle puts forward 10 tips to parents of gifted children—ideas that reflect attitude more than action and allow for introspection and change, rather than quick, do-it-tonight solutions.”


“No parent thinks “I wonder what I can do today to undermine my children, subvert their effort, turn them off learning, and limit their achievement.” Of course not. They think “I would do anything, give anything, to make my children successful.” Yet many of the things they do boomerang. Their helpful judgments, their lessons, their motivating techniques often send the wrong message.

In fact, every word and action sends a message. It tells children – or students or athletes – how to think about themselves. It can be a fixed mindset message that says: “You have permanent traits and I’m judging them.” Or it can be a growth mindset message that says: “You are a developing person and I am interested in your development”...


“To meet the learning needs of gifted children, a school should match the program to the child’s specific traits and abilities. Dr. Rogers shows us how. From her analysis of research that spans a full century, Dr. Rogers describes various types of gifted children, as well as options for school enrichment and acceleration. She reports the effectiveness for each option according to the research. From her years of experience consulting with schools, she shows parents and teachers practical ways to design ongoing programs that best meet the needs of bright children.”

Raising a gifted child is both a joy and a challenge, yet parents of gifted children have few resources for reliable parenting information. The four authors, who have decades of professional experience with gifted children and their families, provide practical guidance in areas such as: Characteristics of gifted children; Peer relations; Sibling issues; Motivation & underachievement; Discipline issues; Intensity & stress; Depression & unhappiness; Educational planning; Parenting concerns; Finding professional help; and much, much more!

Books for Teachers: (These make great gifts!)


For education courses in Educational Psychology, Advanced Educational Psychology, Differentiated Instruction, Inclusion/Mainstreaming, Mild/Moderate Disabilities Methods, or General Methods (K-12). This brief Merrill/ASCD text provides guidance, principles, and strategies for teachers who are interested in creating learning environments that address the diversity typical of mixed-ability classrooms. The text will help educators understand what differentiated instruction is, why it is appropriate for all learners, how to begin to plan for it, and how to become comfortable enough with student differences to make school comfortable for each learner in the classroom.


Since the first edition was published, author Susan Winebrenner has spent eight years using it with school districts, teachers, parents, and kids across the U.S. and the U.K. this revised, expanded edition reflects her personal experiences and the changes that have taken place in education over the years. Her basic philosophy hasn’t changed, and all of the proven, practical, classroom-tested strategies teachers love are still here. But there’s now an entire chapter on identifying gifted students. The step-by-step how-tos for using the strategies are more detailed and user-friendly. There’s a new chapter especially for parents. And all of the forms in the book are also on CD-ROM (sold separately) so you can print them out and customize them for your classroom.


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Advocacy
Websites:

www.hoagiesgifted.org/twice_exceptional.htm
Hoagies Gifted - Twice Exceptional. Hoagies has long been a source for parents of gifted children. Now, parents of children with dual exceptionalities will find resources of use to them, as well.

www.2eNewsletter.com/
For anyone with a twice-exceptional child, the 2E Newsletter is a resource that will provide information on a variety of topics. As the website declares: "There's only one publication directed squarely at the intersection of giftedness and learning difficulties."

www.twicegifted.net/
This site is a friendly port in a storm for parents trying to understand the needs of a twice-exceptional child. You will find clear overviews of traits associated with various exceptionalities and information about mental and emotional issues your child may face.

www.wrightslaw.com/
This is a great place to start if this is all new to you. You will receive information about special education law and advocacy for your child. There is a section with listings of advocates, clinics, associations, and other resources state by state.

www.aegis1.org
The Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students (AEGUS) "serves as an advocacy group on behalf of gifted underachieving students. AEGUS recognizes these students can be found in populations regardless of racial, ethnic, religious or socioeconomic backgrounds; and areas of special learning, physical or emotional needs. The major purpose of this organization is to focus attention and research efforts on able learners whose potential may be unrecognized, undeveloped or not nurtured."

www.uniquelygifted.org
Uniquely Gifted is a resource for parents of gifted children with special needs (ADD/ADHD, Learning Disabilities, Asperger Syndrome, etc.), compiled by Meredith G. Warshaw, M.S.S., M.A., Special Needs Educational Advisor and Contributing Editor to 2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter.

www.sengifted.org
Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) is a website devoted to supporting the emotional needs of gifted children.