Parent Session

Implications of Being Twice-Exceptional

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PROJECT2EXCEL

University of St. Thomas
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Suggested Pre-Readings


- Gifted children question traditions, challenge customs, and occasionally flout social norms because they themselves are outside of the “norm”. Twice-exceptional children have had to find creative new ways to deal with tasks others find simple—do you think this makes them more or less likely to challenge society?
- Twice-exceptional kids may leave school with a deep-seated abhorrence for large, unyielding systems (like the schools). How can you counteract this anger? Do you need to try?


- The author talks about the damage done to her son because of his late diagnosis with ADD. What unusual strengths do you think he has as a result of his earlier struggles?
- Guilt seems to be a natural component of parenting. How difficult is it to take the author’s advice and “move on from where you are”?


- Kearney includes a quote from an article by Stephanie Tolan about parents who are twice-intense as advocates, not just because they want what’s best for their children, but also because they remember how difficult things were for them when they were young. Do you remember having similar struggles when you were a child? Do those memories give extra intensity to your advocacy efforts?
- How can you use your role as “multi-level mediator” to teach your child self-advocacy skills? Are these two ideas compatible?


- This author emphasizes the importance of finding a community, whether in your geographical area or online, to learn from and share with other parents with twice-exceptional children. Have you found support of this type? If not, see the Resources module [http://www.stthomas.edu/project2excel/OurResources/default.html] for ideas.
- How do you convince a school to make an “attempt at being fair that takes into account individual needs and differences”?


- Postma describes what is also called “shadow syndrome”, in which a parent understands himself and his own childhood struggles more clearly through advocating for a child with similar struggles. Do you see yourself in your child? In what ways?

Implications
## Discussion Notes

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**Implications**
Discussion Questions

1. How has your awareness of your child’s giftedness changed your parenting? Are you:
   a. More tolerant of your child’s gifted characteristics?
   b. More willing to make exceptions to school and other societal rules for your child?
   c. Relieved that some of your child’s quirkiness is “normal” for gifted kids?

2. How has your awareness of your child’s second exceptionality changed your parenting?
   Are you:
   a. Feeling guilty about having expectations that were unreasonable?
   b. Relieved to know what caused your child’s issues in school?
   c. Angry about the loss of a dream of academic success for your child?
   d. Grieving for the paths that are not open to your child because of his disability?

3. How difficult is it for you to find a group of “like-minded peers” for your child?

4. Have you been able to find such a group for yourself?

5. How do you cope with other parents’ comments that you are:
   a. A pushy parent?
   b. An overly lenient parent?
   c. A helicopter parent?

6. What has changed about your interactions with your immediate and extended families
   since you have been advocating for your child?
   a. Educating family members about twice-exceptionality?
   b. Explaining why your child has unique needs?
   c. Putting an end to “killer statements”?

7. What have you shared with your child about his giftedness and his learning disability?

8. How did you make the decision to share or not share details with your child? Do you
   think that your choice has made an impact on:
   a. Her self-image?
   b. His feelings of failure and frustration?
   c. Her choices about academic interests and pursuits?

9. In your reading, you have learned a great deal about your child’s giftedness and second
   exceptionality, whatever that may be. In your reading have you:
   a. Found descriptions of what you, yourself, went through as a child?
   b. Formed a new understanding of a spouse, sibling, or parent?
   c. Seen similarities in unique learning characteristics between your children that
      may lead to a similar diagnosis for another child?

10. Thinking of the Postma article, what strengths do you see your child developing as a
    result of her struggles? Are these similar to, or different from, the strengths you have
    developed?

11. Going back to the Riggle article, what impact do you think this journey will have on your
    child as an adult? How can you help your child optimize the positive effects of being
    twice-exceptional?

Implications
Implications

Rules for the Road

1. **Learn everything you can**, and then parcel that knowledge out to the people in your child’s life as they need it in working (or living) with your child. A wonderful resource for parents is a parent group (see below), in addition to websites, conferences, and gifted organizations.

2. **Find or form a community of parents** who have gifted and/or twice-exceptional children. If you are participating in a group workshop using this module, you have found a great resource in the other parents! Make connections, share your experiences, and ask lots of questions.

3. **Find like-minded peers for your child.** This isn’t as easy as it sounds, as you probably know by now. If your child’s additional exceptionality excludes him from attending a full-time gifted program, find opportunities outside of school for him to mingle with other gifted kids. This may be chess club, fencing classes, or science camp. Get phone numbers for kids your child connects with and make the effort to get them together for play-dates as often as schedules allow. Having friends who understand his quirkiness will go a long way toward preventing feelings of isolation and depression.

4. **Advocate for your child in the school.** Your child’s teachers may or may not know a thing about giftedness, and it is even less likely that they will have an understanding of twice-exceptionality. This is where you can share (in moderation, so just the real gems!), some of the knowledge you have acquired about your child’s dual exceptionalities. If you find a teacher who really isn’t interested in learning how to maximize your child’s learning potential, make a change. Switch classrooms, schools, districts, or give home schooling a shot if you think your child’s educational placement is doing more harm than good. You are the only person who is qualified and prepared to ensure that your child is not in an educational setting that is harmful to her self-esteem, motivation, and emotional well-being.

5. **Advocate for your child in the family.** Well-meaning relatives can come up with some pretty major “killer statements” (Webb, et. al.), when they don’t understand the cause of academic underachievement or behavioral issues. Educate your family, and stick up for your child. He’s got not just one, but two or more layers of asynchrony to deal with—it’s okay to give him the extra help he needs to carry that heavy load.

6. **Think long-term.** Maybe your child won’t be able to use her amazing gifts in traditional ways because of her learning disability, but with some creative thinking and a thorough investigation into possible college majors and careers that incorporate gifts and strengths in unique ways, she will see that she has many great opportunities. Chances are, she’ll create her very own path, once she sees what is possible.

7. **Embrace the self-knowledge** that comes along with learning about twice-exceptionality and advocating for your child. This may be an opportunity to let go of some long-held anger, frustration, or guilt, or it might be an opportunity to channel that energy into advocating for all twice-exceptional children.
Reading about other people who have lived through similar struggles, or possessed similar characteristics is a great way to gain a broader perspective of the long-term implications of being twice-exceptional. Below we have listed a number of good books written by gifted people who also have a variety of learning disabilities. We’ve included the blurbs from the backs of the books, so you have a better idea of what they are about. Buy or borrow them, read them and share them.


*Kenneth Hall was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome at the age of eight. His early school years had been difficult, as although he is bright and articulate, his behavior could be challenging and easily misread. After his diagnosis, the Local Education Board intervened and provided him with a laptop computer, to encourage him to express himself. This book is the result. Kenneth is in a unique position to describe some of the inner experiences and perceptions of autism in childhood. He has a warm and positive attitude to Asperger’s Syndrome which other children will find inspiring. Insights, struggles and joys are recounted vividly in a frank and humorous way. His book is for anyone interested in understanding more about autism, including parents, siblings, teachers and professionals.*


*Have you ever been called a freak or a geek? Have you ever felt like one? Luke Jackson is 13 years old and has Asperger Syndrome. Over the years Luke has learned to laugh at such names but there are other aspects of life which are more difficult. Adolescence and the teenage years are a minefield of emotions, transitions and decisions and when a child has Asperger Syndrome, the result is often explosive. Luke has three sisters and one brother in various stages of their adolescent and teenage years but he is acutely aware of just how different he is and how little information is available for adolescents like himself. Drawing from his own experiences and gaining information from his teenage brother and sisters, he wrote this enlightening, honest and witty book in an attempt to address difficult topics such as bullying, friendships, when and how to tell others about AS, school problems, dating, relationships and morality. Luke writes briefly about his younger autistic and AD/HD brothers, providing amusing insights into the antics of his younger years and advice for parents, carers and teachers of younger AS children. However, his main reason for writing was because ‘so many books are written about us, but none are written directly to adolescents with Asperger Syndrome. I thought I would write one in the hope that we could all learn together.’*

In this beautiful and chilling memoir, twenty-five-year-old Samantha Abeel describes her struggles with a math-related learning disability, and how it forced her to find inner strength and courage.

Samantha Abeel couldn’t tell time, remember her locker combination, or count out change at a checkout counter -- and she was in seventh grade. For a straight-A student like Samantha, problems like these made no sense. She dreaded school, and began having anxiety attacks. In her thirteenth winter, she found the courage to confront her problems -- and was diagnosed with a learning disability. Slowly, Samantha’s life began to change again. She discovered that she was stronger than she’d ever thought possible -- and that sometimes, when things look bleakest, hope is closer than you think.


In this innovative book, Dr. Temple Grandin gets down to the REAL issues of autism, the ones parents, teachers, and individuals on the spectrum face every day. Temple offers helpful do’s and don'ts, practical strategies, and try-it-now tips, all based on her “insider” perspective and a great deal of research. These are just some of the specific topics Temple delves into:

- How and Why People with Autism Think Differently
- Economical Early Intervention Programs that Work
- How Sensory Sensitivities Affect Learning
- Behaviors Caused by a Disability vs. Just Bad Behaviors
- Teaching People with Autism to Live in an Unpredictable World
- Alternative Medicine vs. Conventional Medicine
- Employment Ideas for Adults with Autism


Ever since he was young, John Robison longed to connect with other people, but by the time he was a teenager, his odd habits—an inclination to blurt out non sequiturs, avoid eye contact, dismantle radios, and dig five-foot holes (and stick his younger brother, Augusten Burroughs, in them)—had earned him the label “social deviant.” It was not until he was forty that he was diagnosed with a form of autism called Asperger’s syndrome. That understanding transformed the way he saw himself—and the world. A born storyteller, Robison has written a moving, darkly funny memoir about a life that has taken him from developing exploding guitars for KISS to building a family of his own. It’s a strange, sly, indelible account—sometimes alien yet always deeply human.

Implications
Blake Taylor's mother first suspected he had ADHD when he, at only three years of age, tried to push his infant sister in her carrier off the kitchen table. As time went by, Blake developed a reputation for being hyperactive and impulsive. He launched rockets (accidentally) into neighbor's swimming pools and set off alarms in museums. Blake was diagnosed formally with ADHD when he was five years old. In ADHD and Me, he tells about the next twelve years as he learns to live with both the good and bad sides of life with ADHD.

Blake's memoir offers, for the first time, a young person's account of what it's like to live and grow up with this common condition. Join Blake as he foils bullies, confronts unfair teachers, struggles with distraction and disorganization on exams, and goes sailing out-of-bounds and ends up with a boatload of spiders. It will be an inspiration and companion to the thousands of others like him who must find a way to thrive with a different perspective than many of us. The book features an introduction by psychologist Lara Honos-Webb, author of The Gift of ADHD, and a leading advocate for kids with ADHD.


First-person stories by 20 talented, successful people with LD promote confidence, awareness, resiliency, and self-esteem.


Amazon review by Carolyn K. -- Uniquely Gifted is a collection of over 40 articles by parents, teachers, and twice exceptional children themselves. There is something for everyone dealing with twice exceptional kids, from gifted / ADHD, to gifted / Aspergers syndrome, to gifted / dyslexic, and many, many more combinations of giftedness and ... after reading this book, I can't even call them disabilities. Different abilities, that's better.

These are good stories of success, in many different forms: accommodations in public school, private or special school, or home schooling. Sometimes, it's a combination of these different environments that serves a twice exceptional child best. So many different stories, each with a unique solution emphasizing the child's giftedness in addition to any other part of the child, so that these kids can grow up to be their best.

This is a book that should be read by guidance counselors, psychologists, and parents of twice exceptional children.