

MULTIPLE EXCEPTIONALITIES

Guidelines for Teacher Training

Training outline

Including questions, activities, suggested videos

Supplementary Reading

TEACHER TRAINING OUTLINE

Opening

Key Questions

It is suggested that the session open with some pertinent questions for teachers to consider. Answers may be shared and discussed with the group, or held until later on in the training.

What do you understand Multiple Exceptionalities to mean?

Does having students with multiple exceptionalities in your class affect your teaching?

Do you adapt your teaching to cater for these students or do you deal with them separately?

Section 1

Learning

Watch the EGift videos that cover Multiple Exceptionalities

Go through the Presentation on Multiple Exceptionalities by

Follow up section 1 with an open forum on their reaction to the videos and presentation, noting any questions.

Section 2

Personal Testimonials

Watch the following clips for insight into what it's like to be a child with multiple exceptionalities.

For example:

TWICE EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYVJS5oVae8>

TWICE EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS (2E) | JIM RUSSELL | TEDX

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-THZbFEmWU>

HOW DOES YOUR BRAIN WORK? - EXCERPT FROM "2E2: TEACHING THE TWICE EXCEPTIONAL" (2018)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwiSJhWXWP4>

PROFILE OF A TWICE EXCEPTIONAL KID <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNruMcObQNs> (27 mins)

RAISING A TWICE EXCEPTIONAL LEARNER <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j01tVkkdRM>

Following the testimonials, teachers should reflect on their understand of ME and on the way it effects students who have ME.

Section 3 Role Play

Parents should get into pairs or fours, and role play a meeting of parents with the teacher and the school principal. About 15 minutes should be allotted for this part, and the content should be discussed with the group.

Teachers should then reflect on what they felt they found most difficult about this “meeting” and where they felt they needed more information or assistance, and where that help could come from.

Section 4 Final Discussion

The final discussion should take comments about how ME effects the children with them and how the teachers now better understand what it is like and how best to help them in the classroom.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Profiles of Gifted Children

Authors Betts & Niehart (2010), describe **Twice/Multi Exceptional** in their Profiles of Gifted Children. Also known as dual exceptional, the Twice Exceptional student can be difficult to identify. These students are gifted but with a specific learning difficulty, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Aspergers Syndrome, to name a few. On one hand they appear to be good at problem solving, make linkages with ease and are conceptual thinkers. On the other hand, they can be scattered, appear helpless, discouraged and have a poor self-concept. Their gifted ability is regularly missed by educators and parents as their disability is more obvious. They are perceived as "odd", requiring a lot of structure, and are not thought to be gifted or talented.

Twice Exceptional students are identified by a formal psychological assessment, but there are markers that are important to know. Teachers should pay close attention to classroom assessments showing the unusual combination of deteriorating test scores with signs of superior potential appearing.

Twice exceptional students can achieve highly if the greater focus is on their strength areas. Where viable, they should be accelerated in their strength areas so their self-concept can improve. Obviously, they will require assistance with their disability, but it is important that they do not feel weighed down by their disability, and can experience the benefits of success also. Access to their gifted peer group is imperative too, as well as teaching them self-advocacy and how to set appropriate goals.

Twice Exceptional

Educators may be interested in, and do benefit from understanding what it means to be twice exceptional. According to the National Education Association, there are six types of twice exceptionality (National Education Association, 2006). The first type consists of students that are both **gifted and have physical disabilities**, like theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking. This supports the fact that physical disabilities are not necessarily a reason to think that a student is not able to show an above average potential when it comes to cognitive abilities. The second type are **gifted students with sensory disabilities**, meaning that they have impairments associated with sight and hearing, for example. Consider Hellen Keller who was gifted, but also deaf and blind. The third type are **gifted students on the Autism Spectrum**. These students show some traits of autism, particularly a difficulty socializing. Nevertheless, children on the spectrum show many interests in a wide range of areas and are able to develop impressive knowledge and skills (National Education Association, 2006). The fourth type includes **gifted students with disordered emotions and/or behavior**. These kinds of children face a strong likelihood of having their potential giftedness overlooked; for example, to

teachers, their conspicuous behavior overshadows any potential for excellence. The fifth type of exceptionality refers to **gifted students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**. Teachers see them as students that cannot focus for extended periods of time, so very often they are not able to complete a task or the work assigned in class. Children with ADHD are rarely organized, yet still show great potential and performance when their work is related to their own interests, or when a given task is dependent on the completion of a special challenge (National Education Association, 2006). The sixth and last type of exceptionality considers **gifted students with learning disabilities including dyslexia or language disorders**. Of concern, especially to teachers, is the fact that, when it comes to test scores, gifted students of this type are typically unable to show an above average performance level (National Education Association, 2006). For this reason, they are not recognized for specialized gifted programs that would meet their needs.

Being twice exceptional is not only a challenge for the persons themselves, but also for the persons who are interacting with them. Educators may be fascinated by the variety of facets displayed by these persons, like creativity or problem solving. But this fascination can create negative classroom experiences, particularly at the point when teachers realize that these gifted students cannot fulfill expectations and, oftentimes exhibit disturbing behavior (Harder 2009).

In her article about twice exceptionality, Bettina Harder also describes the problem that arises when parents as well as teachers try to create a school environment suited to the disorders or disabilities of the student, placing a focus on the weakness of the student (Harder 2009). She also points out that, unfortunately, many teachers are not trained adequately to recognize giftedness among twice exceptional people. For many, including for the parents and educators, giftedness combined with disabilities or disorders is difficult, and sometimes impossible to grasp despite the fact that there are many renowned persons belonging to this "twice exceptional" group that, through professional successes, prove that giftedness and disability can coexist - Helen Keller, Stephen Hawking, and John Nash ("Beautiful Mind") to name a few.

As a possible way to foster students that are twice exceptional, Harder recommends the creation of special education programs based on four core elements as detailed by Nielsen & Higgins (2005) (Harder 2009). One core element is the embeddedness of the special education program in an overarching educational policy. The second core element employs complex interdisciplinary curricula to ensure that the way of thinking and variety of interests is fully covered. The third core element addresses non-cognitive needs to cover the emotional aspects of twice exceptionality. Finally, the fourth core element involves the use of special support measures (Harder 2009).

Multiple Exceptionalities

Twice exceptional or multiply exceptional students are those “who give evidence of the potential for high achievement capability... and also give evidence of one or more disabilities” (NAGC, 2013).

These disabilities can be physical, cognitive or emotional and interact with the student’s abilities in a variety of ways. In the case of physical disabilities, once reasonable accommodations are made students can usually be identified by standard identification measures. Most conceptions of giftedness allow for and even expect gifted students to have areas of strength and areas of weakness, and identification within these conceptions usually focus on student strengths rather than weaknesses. In the case of multiply exceptional students, the gaps between strengths and weaknesses can be especially profound, meaning that a different approach may be required- but the emphasis on student abilities must be affirmed even while we work to support them in their areas of weakness (Winebrenner, 2003).

For many students, a diagnosis of disability in the form of an educational psychologist’s report comes hand in hand with a recognition of exceptional ability found in other domains during the assessment. This is especially common where a formal diagnosis is necessary for extra support or resources, and all too often the focus afterwards remains on the areas of weakness rather than the student’s strengths. A commitment to identifying multiply exceptional students therefore requires that we continue to advocate as strongly for supporting their talent development as we do for supporting their other special educational needs (Josephson et al., 2018).

The obstacles facing all gifted students - especially the lack of suitably challenging curricula, social exclusion, self-esteem and self-concept issues - are magnified for multiply exceptional students, making identification and suitable provision all the more crucial.

For other students, their multiple exceptionalities can mask each other, preventing them from displaying their giftedness in the classroom or on assessments (Brody & Mills, 1997). A dyslexic student’s exceptional verbal reasoning might hide their below average verbal working-memory, and vice versa. Without standing out at either end of the spectrum, this student may never receive the full battery of tests which would show their highly uneven ability profile and be left to go without support for their disability or their talent development.

Standardised assessments are generally not designed to account for multiple exceptionalities and may not allow students to fully express their abilities (Brody & Mills, 1997), meaning that they cannot be viewed as conclusive when it comes to these students (though whether they can ever be viewed as conclusive is questionable).

Teachers and parents are best placed to catch the student's exceptionalities, though without expertise in recognising disabilities their role is better thought of as exploratory rather than diagnostic.

The incidence of multiple exceptionalities among either the gifted population or among those with disabilities remains unknown, as it is unclear whether the prevalence of a second exceptionality is the same as in the general community, more common or less common. Instead we must keep an open mind and remember that multiply exceptional students could be achieving very high grades due to their talents but still need support to achieve their full potential, achieving average grades as their exceptionalities "cancel each other out" in the classroom, or achieving very poor grades as their disability stands in the way of their talents shining through.

Behavioural issues can also prevent students' giftedness being recognised. Despite strides in recent years, the educational system is still designed around a very fixed idea of how a child should behave and interact with others. Those who do not meet this normative standard of behaviour often spend so much time and energy struggling to adapt themselves to the system that they have nothing left to put into their work.

Even those who manage to do quite well in school may be viewed as too troublesome or unruly to be considered gifted. While gifted children with ADHD and ODD need to learn coping strategies to manage their day-to-day life, it is also important to go beyond that and give them a challenging outlet which sparks their interest. Rising to such a challenge can show them just how much they are capable of and encourage their identity as a capable learner rather than a "problem child". Similarly, high-functioning students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders need intellectual challenge just as much as they need support with social skills and self-regulation. Focussing on their strengths, while still addressing areas in which they need support, is as important for their healthy personal development as it is for their intellectual development.

While some of the domains in which multiply exceptional students excel are already central to school curricula, others are largely absent. The education system (and many gifted identification measures) tend to overemphasise verbal and numerical reasoning at the expense of visual-spatial reasoning. Superior visual-spatial ability is more common among multiply exceptional children than the general gifted population (Von Karolyi & Winner, 2004), and some studies have suggested that multiply exceptional children are more creative in certain areas (Chakravarty, 2009, Abraham et al., 2006, Lyons & Fitzgerald, 2013), or at least differently creative. Identifying excellence in visual-spatial ability and creativity in a system which neglects them is a difficult task, one which can only be accomplished by cooperation between teachers, parents and any supporting professionals working with the child. The neglect of these areas within the classroom makes it all the more important that students with high potential in the areas are found and given access to specialised programmes to turn that potential into ability.

Identification

For certain subgroups like twice exceptional students, underachieving students and linguistically, geographically and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, grades may paint a particularly limited picture of student potential. There is a large disconnect between aptitude and achievement, specifically for students with multiple exceptionalities, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students who are "underachieving".

It is important that schools have a system in place that is comprehensive in giving each child an opportunity to be identified (NAGC, 2010). A situation that is ad hoc or teacher dependent is inequitable and students will certainly be overlooked. It is also important that the identification procedures are fit for purpose – do they appropriately identify "exceptionalities" (NAGC, 2010)?

Teachers & Parents Beliefs

Babat, Inbar, & Rosenthal (1982) addressed two main effects related to the fulfilment of teachers' original expectations, i.e. Golem and Galatea effect. Golem effect occurs when teacher's low expectations towards a particular student obstruct the realisation of student's leaning potentials, whereas the Galatea effect occurs when teacher's high expectations positively influence student's learning and academic performance. In the domain of gifted education, the Golem effect can be especially harmful when oriented towards marginalised groups, e.g. twice exceptional, ethnic minority students, students from low socioeconomically backgrounds etc. In the domain of education, the labelling of gifted students, which might produce positive or negative expectations in different social context, is therefore a highly professional issue.

Psychological adjustment of gifted students in school

Protective and risk factors in mental health of gifted students

Gifted children show exceptionalities that can constitute a risk but they may also experience other risk factors such as the presence of a learning disability, poverty, domestic violence or prolonged stress.

Special attention must be paid to supporting resilience in twice-exceptional children and adolescents (Gardynik & McDonald, 2005). In the literature on twice exceptionality protective factors are often discussed in relation to compensation. Protective factors related to high ability among twice exceptional students moderate the effects of cognitive risk factors related to their disability (Foley Nicpon, Allmon, Sieck, & Stinson, 2011).

Social & Emotional Distress & Asynchronous Development

In extreme asynchronism, authors speak about children with double exceptionalities when the child is extremely talented in individual areas and at the same time has specific learning difficulties (Kreger Silverman, 2005). Gifted children often receive false diagnosis of behavioural and/or emotional disorders because their advantages are understood as

defects or it can also happen that they actually develop secondary emotional and/or behavioural disorders due to the incompatibility of their development with the requirements and expectations of the environment. Gifted children often show behaviours that due to the ignorance of the environment are not perceived as their characteristics but rather as deficiencies and pathologies. Such behaviours are for example similar to some characteristics of children with hyperkinetic disorders, children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, characteristics of obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, opposing behaviour and depression disorder (Baumgartner, 2015; Webb et al., 2005). Misdiagnoses are problematic because they may lead to unnecessary treatment that could even harm the gifted student, and at the same time because of the deprivation of the actual suitable opportunities and options that they need.

Vulnerability & Sensitivity

Twice-exceptional students, whose gifts and disabilities often mask each other, can also experience specific social and emotional challenges arising from their diversity, often as a result of their disability, e.g. physical disability, deafness, etc. Some disabilities are often accompanied by social challenges, in which case it is necessary that the teacher is aware of the student's strengths, promotes the development of social skills, and recognises the need for professional counselling.

Programme Design Principles

Acceleration is especially effective for twice exceptional gifted students living with disabilities (Moon and Reis, 2004).

- Programme designers must also account for the perspective of students. What does it feel like for a gifted student to be accelerated? Furthermore, what must it feel like to be accelerated as a twice exceptional student? Moon and Reis (2004) summarise the processes which must be put in place to ensure the comprehensive support (including mental and emotional wellbeing) of such students, among them "developing emotional support systems" like mentoring and supportive peer groups. Following is an excellent personal account of such a support system: having overcome his school diagnosis as "retarded" for living with dyslexia and dyspraxia, Andrew started Cambridge University at age 15, and is now a respected Vicar of the Church of England:

"At 15 I left to go to Cambridge to study Theology and History of Art. Going up to University young was an unusual experience but a good one. That was largely due to Cambridge's collegiate system: the college assigns each student to a pastoral Tutor who cares for the student's emotional wellbeing, and a Director of Studies who oversees Academic progress. The collegiate system really worked for me. Being three years younger than everyone else, and struggling with a disability, I was potentially quite vulnerable but careful measures were put in place to ensure my welfare: I had to sign a book in the Porter's lodge (College Reception) twice each day to prove I was alive and well and to sign an elaborate contract with the college in which I promised not to become the Treasurer or Secretary of a University Society or the Captain of a University sports Team, not to consume Alcohol (except Communion wine) before my 18th birthday or to have sex before

my sixteenth on pain of being expelled! For my first two years I had to live in a house where a resident housekeeper could check on my wellbeing. Those precautions were both sensible and helpful, however it was the tight-knit nature of the student community which really made the difference. They really closed ranks around me and protected me. I was very lucky in being comprehensively mothered by a crowd of late-adolescent girls. They used to do my washing up and sew my academic gown back together when I ripped it which, me being clumsy, was quite often. The friendships I made during that period remain of vital importance in my life. It has been a particular joy in the last few years to conduct the weddings of my College friends and to baptise their children." (personal conversation).

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