6-2018

Understanding the Learning & Advocacy Needs of a Twice-Exceptional Student Through A Strengths-Based Lens: A Case Study in California

Lisa Krausz
Dominican University of California

https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2018.edu.20

Title Page

Understanding the Learning & Advocacy Needs of a Twice-Exceptional Student Through A Strengths-Based Lens: A Case Study in California

Lisa Krausz

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

June 2018

Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Lisa Krausz Candidate	April 9, 2017 Date
Madalienne F. Peters, EdD Thesis Advisor Program Chair Master of Science in Education	April 9, 2017 Date
Robin Gayle, PhD, MDIV, MFT Acting Dean School of Education and Counseling Psychology	April 9, 2017 Date

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr. Madalienne Peters, who made this thesis project a positive and manageable experience. I am grateful to you. Thank you as well to Mr. Ed McManis, who took the time to meet with me to discuss how his very special school approaches a strengths-based learning focus for exceptional learners. A big thank you to Alicia Bell for providing a quiet space for me to interview participants and to Laura Taichman, for reading this behemoth in the midst of a busy, busy life – I am grateful. I also wish to thank my husband for his exceptional support and Super Dad qualities as I worked on and finished this thesis. Finally, thank you to my two super kids whose flexibility with a not-so-present mom enabled me to get this project done: your presence and company always light up my life.

Table of Contents

Abstract

Twice-exceptional students possess both high ability and learning disabilities. The complex interaction of their gifts and disabilities perplexes both educators and parents. Educators often use a deficit approach when working with these learners; new research calls for multi-dimensional, strengths-based approaches to engage these students. Strengths-based approaches draw upon student strengths, interests, and talents to help address their disabilities. Parents and primary caregivers play a critical role in advocating for twice-exceptional children. In this study, information was gathered from a mixed-methods, strengths-based approach to gauge a student's strengths, interests, talents and disabilities to add to the research on traditional assessment and intervention approaches. The researcher also explored how parents' understanding of their child aligned with the child's perception of those variables and their understanding of a strengths-based advocacy approach. Findings from the study provide rich data on the subject's strengths, interests, talents and disabilities, which aligned closely with the parents' understanding and which can be used in future advocacy efforts. The overarching theme of the research was the *achievement* the student attained through his parents' successful advocacy. The parents utilized a strengths-based approach in their advocacy most notably by *prioritizing their son's giftedness* and met his dual educational needs by adopting a *separate spheres approach*, two key component themes. Another key component theme that emerged from the data is the way in which *complexity* engaged the student in learning.

Keywords: twice-exceptional, strengths-based, gifted education, learning disabilities, parent advocacy

Chapter 1 Twice-Exceptional Students

Introduction

Primary and secondary education have become increasingly important public resources to help children grow and develop skills to survive and thrive in our society. Most families count on public schools to adequately educate their children and to prepare them for future employment and/or furthering their education. For parents and primary caregivers who have children with high academic abilities, gifted education services vary within and between states, so depending on the county or state of residency, one family can have a vastly different experience from another family. Personal experience has brought this researcher into contact with many parents whose children possess both high ability and learning deficits, called twice-exceptional students. As with gifted education in general, these children also have had uneven educational experiences depending upon what state or district the family resided in and what private and public school options were available. Witnessing these parents' struggles in getting their children's educational needs met has led to this researcher's growing interest in exploring the learning needs of twice-exceptional students. This study is an attempt document factors that can enhance a twice-exceptional student's learning experiences as well as that can enhance a family's advocacy efforts to improve educational trajectories for their child.

Statement of Problem

Students who possess both exceptional abilities and learning disabilities have unique learning needs. Viewed as "paradoxical learners" with both learning disabilities and high abilities, these students are now commonly referred to as twice-exceptional (or 2e) (Silverman, as cited in Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013). The most salient feature of twice-exceptionality

rests in these learners' paradoxical qualities: they have challenges with fundamental sensory processing skills like writing, calculation and spelling, thus it appears as if they would be unable to perform higher level problem solving or to engage in complex or abstract thinking, and yet they manifest higher intellectual abilities (Kalbfleisch, 2014). They are capable of drawing upon and utilizing their higher intellectual abilities if given the opportunity, in the right setting and with the right tools. Often times, however, they are not given the opportunity as many teachers and intervention efforts remain focused on remediating the disabilities of these students, rather than providing them with opportunities to exercise their higher intelligence. Many teachers also do not accept that these students can have gifts or do not provide accommodations in gifted classes (Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014; Brody & Mills, 1997; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).

Newer research has called for a shift to multi-dimensional, strengths-based approaches to engage twice-exceptional students in more rewarding, positive and productive school experiences, as these approaches have proven beneficial (Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). Despite these calls, most schools remain fixed in deficit approaches for a variety of reasons (Baum et al., 2014; Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013). School personnel often lack the professional knowledge to identify twice-exceptional learners, to identify their strengths and to create appropriate and effective interventions for them. Strengths-based approaches call for collaboration and parent involvement, which can improve educational outcomes for students, yet collaboration with schools for parents of twice-exceptional children has been challenging. Further, researchers have found that parents are key educational advocates for their twice-exceptional children, but that they often lack knowledge themselves about their children's needs and about school processes (Besnoy et al., 2015). Understanding their children's strengths and interests could enhance twice-exceptional students'

learning opportunities and activities, as well as parental advocacy efforts and, ultimately, outcomes for their child.

Purpose Statement

Utilizing a mixed-methods, case study approach, the purpose of this paper is to document a narrative description of a twice-exceptional student's understanding of his own strengths, interests, talents and learning disabilities as well as his parents' perspective and to explore the parents' understanding of their role in advocating on behalf of their child from a strengths-based lens. Gathering both qualitative and quantitative data through in-depth interviews with a student, his parents and tutor, and review of the student's existing assessment records, the researcher documents: (1) areas of student strengths, interests, talents and disabilities for future advocacy efforts, (2) parents' alignment with their child's self-understanding about his strengths, talents, interests and disabilities, and (3) parents' understanding of strengths-based advocacy approaches and implications for their advocacy efforts.

Research Question

How can a combination of in-depth qualitative interviewing coupled with a review of quantitative assessment data be used to better understand a twice-exceptional student's strengths, interests and possible talents? How well do the parents' understanding of their child's strengths, interests and talents align with that of the child? What experiences have the parents had in using a strengths-based approach in their advocacy efforts for their child? What can we learn from a qualitative investigation into the learning needs of a twice-exceptional student from a strengths-based lens, involving both the child and parents and possibly other key stakeholders?

Theoretical Rationale

The key theoretical framework for utilizing a strengths-based approach to understanding and approaching the learning needs of twice-exceptional students is positive psychology. Positive psychology is an outgrowth of Martin Seligman's work on learned optimism, which grew out of his earlier work on learned helplessness (Seligman, 1990). Positive psychology brings attention to the positive attributes, traits, and characteristics people possess which support their growth and development (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It represents a significant shift in focus from attending primarily to negative attributes, traits and characteristics in people, to instead attending to their positive ones in order to help them grow or cope.

Positive psychology's influence has grown over the last two decades in large part due to the pioneering work of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). Prior to that, however, the field of psychology as a whole embraced a pathologizing orientation toward human beings. This orientation was in part fueled by the realities of large numbers of soldiers returning from World War II who had psychological scars that needed attention and from federal funding opportunities for studying the mental health issues of these wounded veterans. These realities provided employment opportunities to many psychologists in the growing field of professional psychology. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi assert that while there were many benefits to treatment approaches and research rooted in a pathologizing perspective, it came to dominate the field and color all psychological inquiry and work. Through the development of positive psychology, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi advocate for researchers to develop frameworks and interventions that investigate the strengths and positive qualities people draw on in order to survive and thrive in a challenging world, qualities like forgiveness, hope, courage, faith and

optimism, among others. They are calling on psychology as a field to develop and cultivate this focus in the new century to help individuals, communities and societies flourish.

Much of special education research and practice also emanates from a deficit model (Anzul, Evans, King & Tellier-Robinson, 2001; Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013). Many researchers and educators have called for a shift in focus rooted in positive psychology's theoretical underpinnings. This shift allows researchers to examine intervention strategies that focus on strengths, interests and talents in order to build student competency. Current research using these new models is revealing benefits for children with learning disabilities and for twice-exceptional children in particular (Baum, Schader & Hebert, 2014; Laija-Rodriguez et al., 2013). Thus, positive psychology's influence has pointed the way for promising new approaches to help unravel complex problems in exceptional children.

Assumptions

This research paper embodies several assumptions important to identify to the reader. They are:

- That it is possible for a student to have both learning deficits and advanced abilities at the same time;
- That qualitative, in-depth interviewing and observation reveals rich information about the learning needs, strengths, interests and talents of the student not revealed through existing testing data;
- That existing testing data can help illuminate the student's strengths and weaknesses, but does not provide a full picture of the student's learning needs, strengths, interests and talents;

- That parents or primary caregivers possess important insight and perspectives into their child's needs, strengths, interests and talents that may both dovetail with and differ from the child's own understanding of himself;
- That parents' understanding of their child plays a key role in their advocacy efforts on behalf of their child;
- That parents' understanding of strengths-based approaches improve their advocacy efforts on behalf of their child as well as enhance their child's educational opportunities and experiences; and that an absence of these understandings undermines parental advocacy efforts and diminishes their child's learning opportunities and experiences;
- That acquiring knowledge about their child's strengths, interests and talents as well as about the value of strengths-base approaches, can help better inform both parents' and educators' practices with the child.

Background and Need

An important study by Baum, Schader, and Hebert (2014) points out the need that twice-exceptional students have for innovative, strengths-based approaches to address their challenging educational needs. The study examined the experiences of a group of twice-exceptional learners who were the first group to experience a new 2e educational program at a private, independent school. The students were followed from sixth to twelfth grade. Findings highlight how strengths-based approaches can provide transformative educational experiences for these struggling learners. Another key research article, by Besnoy et al. (2015), examined the critical role that parents play in advocating for their twice-exceptional children. The study highlights the need for parents to become vigilant and knowledgeable advocates for their 2e children in order to

get their children's complex needs met. A predominant finding throughout the examination of the parents' experience was the universal difficulty parents had in collaborating with the school district. The parents were only able to become effective advocates for their children once they had educated themselves about their child's needs and school protocols and policies affecting their child. This study points out the need for parents to gain an understanding of their child's needs, and the rules and laws that govern their child's experience, as well as the role that a strengths-based approach can play in expanding their child's educational opportunities and experiences.

Summary

Twice-exceptional students' combination of unique needs, both gifts and disabilities, presents many challenges for parents, primary caregivers, educators and the students themselves. Traditional approaches to working with these students focus on deficits, yet growing research rooted in positive psychology highlights the need for a shift to multi-dimensional, strengths-based approaches for identification and appropriate, effective interventions. Strengths-based approaches have improved the educational experiences of 2e students. Parents play a key role shaping and expanding their children's educational opportunities through their advocacy efforts, yet advocacy efforts can be stymied by both schools as well as by parents' lack of knowledge. A mixed-methods approach examining existing assessment data along with qualitative interviews can provide rich data to examine both students' and parents' understanding of a child's learning needs from a strengths-based perspective as well as the role that a strengths-based focus can have in a 2e student's educational successes. A review of the existing research literature on twice-exceptional students is provided in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

In this chapter, a review of the literature is provided on (1) background information on twice-exceptionalism, (2) multi-dimensional, strengths-based approaches to identifying and meeting the needs of twice-exceptional students, and on (3) the critical advocacy role played by parents in meeting the needs of their 2e children. Information was gathered from academic library searches using online resources and through inter-library loan requests. Research information is organized in the following major categories: Historical Context, Review of the Academic Research, and Interview with an Expert.

Within the Review of the Academic Literature there are three main headings: **General Background Information**; **Strengths-Based Approaches**; and **Parental Role as Advocates**. Within each main heading there are multiple subheading as follows below.

In the **General Background Information** section, the following subtopics are addressed: Definition & Categories; Prevalence; Characteristics; Assessment/Identification Issues (within this subtopic are the topics Discrepancy Model, RtI and Profiles of Strengths & Weaknesses); and Multi-Dimensional Assessments.

In the **Strengths-Based Approaches** section, the following subtopics are addressed: Outcomes of Strengths-Based Approaches; Strengths-Based Models; Strengths-Based Model for 2e; and Realities of Practice.

In the **Parental Role as Advocates** section, the following subtopics are addressed: Lack of Parental Knowledge Undermines Advocacy; Role of Parental Knowledge in Collaboration; Parental Advocacy Models; Parental Advocacy Research.

Historical Context

During the early 20th century, for many educators it was unthinkable that a student could simultaneously possess both high abilities and learning challenges. This limited understanding of intelligence was shaped by the groundbreaking research of Lewis Terman at Stanford University in the early 1900s, which constructed those labeled as "gifted" as manifesting general high ability in all domains. Researchers and educators began questioning these assumptions in the latter half of the century based on observations and the changing understanding of intelligence (Bisland, 2005; Rivera, Murdoch & Sexton, 2005).

In the 1960s, some of the researchers, who worked on issues like attention deficit and autistic disorders as well as learning disabilities, recognized that learners could struggle with these issues and be highly or exceptionally bright as well. Research on gifted students, for instance, by Goertzel (as cited in Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014) revealed that some of their participants did not do well in school and clearly had both strengths and weaknesses. Other researchers like Asperger, who identified what came to be known as Asperger's syndrome, recognized a cluster of limiting behaviors that manifested in kids with exceptional intellectual abilities. Other researchers who worked with children with hyperactivity issues also saw that many of these children had high intellectual abilities (Reis et al., 2014).

With the passage of *The Education of All Handicapped Children Act* in 1975, many educators working in gifted education grew concerned about their students who struggled to learn. As a result, they became interested in identifying effective interventions for them. In the mid-1980s, as the understanding of learning disabilities grew and categories of disabilities were more clearly defined, groups like the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities officially recognized that single learning disabilities could manifest alongside of high

intellectual abilities (i.e., giftedness). Vaughn (as cited in Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014), called for greater empirical research to better identify and understand these students and to develop interventions for them, as up to that point there primarily had been case study data. In 1989, Congress passed the *Jacob K. Javitz Gifted and Talented Student Education Act* which helped to initiate and fund research and educational projects for children with both exceptional abilities and disabilities. In 2004, *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) provided the first national recognition that students could be both gifted and disabled (Baldwin, Omdal, & Pereles, 2015).

In special education, students traditionally have been viewed in terms of their weaknesses. Most of the needs assessment in this area is based on a deficit focus - whether on processing deficits, poor achievement or social-emotional difficulties - to inform interventions. Many empirically validated psychometric tests used by psychologists and educators also support this orientation. Individualized Education Plans (IEP) or 504 Plans have traditionally been reductive and comprised of lists of disabilities.[1] As early as the 1960s, school psychologists affirmed a strengths-based focus for learning disabled children, yet deficit approaches have remained entrenched in school psychology programs (Anzul, Evans, King, & Tellier-Robinson, 2001; Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014; Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004; Rhee, Furlong, Turner, & Harari, 2001).

Recent IEP requirements rooted in the IDEA have called for an examination of both strengths and weaknesses, nevertheless school personnel primarily maintain a deficit focus, which continues to be used in determining student eligibility for special education services (Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013; Rhee, Furlong, Turner, & Harari, 2001). This deficit emphasis in special education leads educators to focus solely on

remediation for bright students with disabilities as well (Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014). This viewpoint is especially detrimental for them, but remains the norm because IEPs are not required to: (1) articulate services based on student's high intellectual abilities, nor (2) focus on talent development. Thus, because of the federal mandate that children with learning disabilities receive services for their disabilities, twice-exceptional kids most often receive only remediation, but not talent development (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). A recent study by Crim, Hawkins, Ruban, & Johnson (as cited in Reis et al., 2014), for example, looked at IEPs for three groups of kids with a single learning disability: (1) 112 high ability kids, (2) 708 average ability kids, and (3) 225 low ability kids. They found that not one of the 112 high ability kids was referred for gifted education or recommended to receive modifications different from the other two groups despite the fact that their records provided evidence of abilities in the gifted range.

A heavy emphasis on deficits, however, often does not serve students with disabilities, nor twice-exceptional students, well. First, it does not increase an educator's understanding of a student's learning process such as why they are failing, and second, it does not lead to improved student success in school (Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013). There are also unintended consequences of a deficit focus for students, including increased feelings of demoralization, lower self-confidence, poorer motivation, poor expectations for success, feeling the weight of stereotypes and a lack of a sense of belonging (Laija-Rodriguez et al., 2013).

Though there have been calls for a shift to a strengths-based approach in assessing and serving special needs and twice-exceptional students, change has been slow for several reasons. First, there has been a traditional focus on psychopathology in psychology in general and as an outgrowth, in school psychology as well. Little research connects strengths-based approaches to

outcomes, though that is changing with more recent research. There also has been minimal emphasis of a strengths-based approach in actual practice. Further, a lack of standardized measures has diminished substantive efforts to effect strengths-based evaluations, though these are also currently being developed. Lastly, the lack of any clearly delineated legislative and professional standards for practice also undermines this shift in focus (Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013).

Review of Academic Research

General Background Information

Some educators deny that children can have both gifts and disabilities; they argue that by definition a child is not gifted if she has disabilities. Many teachers have difficulty accepting this combination of characteristics in kids. Some will not provide accommodations or curricular modifications for these children in their classrooms, even if the needs are identified on a child's IEP or 504 Plan. Recent research, however, has supported that children can have both exceptional gifts and disabilities. Further, this research is helping to unravel the complex learning needs of these students, yet identification and intervention strategies remain challenging (Besnoy et al., 2015; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).

Definition and Categories

The complex nature of twice-exceptional students' learning characteristics and needs, led Reis, Baum, and Burke (2014) to emphasize the necessity for a consistent, yet comprehensive definition that captures both the breadth of students who fall within this category yet also provides enough specificity to help educators, policymakers and others identify and develop effective programs for them.[2]

In 2010, the Joint Commission on Twice-Exceptionality was established to work on developing a definition of twice-exceptionality. The participants of this effort included universities, research institutes and national education and advocacy groups as well as psychologists and graduate students. They met over several years to develop a comprehensive definition that was both inclusive and effective in identifying and meeting the needs of twice-exceptional children. The Commission developed its definition with two main points in mind: (1) it must express that giftedness can co-exist with the 14 disabilities delineated in the IDEA (2004) (except intellectual ability); and, (2) it would also call for improved training and increased knowledge among researchers and educators about the phenomena of comorbidity (i.e., the interaction of the dualities) (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).[3] According to Reis, Baum and Burke, the definition is:

> Twice-exceptional learners are students who demonstrate the potential for high achievement or creative productivity in one or more domains such as math, science, technology, the social arts, the visual, spatial, or performing arts or other areas of human productivity AND who manifest one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria. These disabilities include specific learning disabilities; speech and language disorders; emotional/behavioral disorders; physical disabilities; Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD); or other health impairments, such as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). These disabilities and high abilities combine to produce a unique population of students who may fail to demonstrate either high academic performance or specific disabilities. Their gifts may mask their disabilities and their disabilities may mask their gifts.

> Identification of twice-exceptional students requires comprehensive assessment in both the areas of giftedness and disabilities, as one does not preclude the other. Identification, when possible, should be conducted by professionals from both disciplines and when at all possible, by those with knowledge about twice-exceptionality in order to address the impact of co-incidence/co-morbidity of both areas on diagnostic assessments and eligibility requirements for services.
>
> Educational services must identify and serve both the high achievement potential and the academic and social-emotional deficits of this population of students. Twice-exceptional students require differentiated instruction, curricular and instructional accommodations and/or modifications, direct services, specialized instruction, acceleration options, and opportunities for talent development that incorporate the effects of their dual diagnosis.
>
> Twice-exceptional students require an individual education plan (IEP) or a 504 accommodation plan with goals and strategies that enable them to achieve at a level and rate commensurate with their abilities. This comprehensive education plan must include talent development goals, as well as compensation skills and strategies to address their disabilities and their social and emotional needs. (p. 222)

The foundations for understanding twice-exceptionality are based in the broadening conceptions of giftedness and new understandings of the nature of intelligence as developmental. Researchers and educators have moved away from the position of using intelligence quotient (IQ) tests as the sole measure of intelligence; they now include many elements in the

examination of intelligence, like creativity. These broadened conceptions give more room for both performance and potential as indicators of intelligence and giftedness (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).

According to Baum (as cited in Besnoy et al., 2015), there are three types of twice-exceptional learners:

(1) those identified as gifted with subtle learning disabilities (usually undetected);

(2) those identified as learning disabled with unidentified high abilities; and,

(3) those unidentified as either gifted or learning disabled.

Those identified as gifted demonstrate either high IQ scores or achievement. They may have, for example, exceptional verbal skills, but poor handwriting or spelling, and they are often disorganized. The gap between their performance and their ability grows as they go through the school years if their learning challenges go unrecognized. They have learning deficits that are rarely identified, as most educators view below grade level performance as necessary for a diagnosis of a learning disability. Federal, state and school policies also support and reinforce this notion. Those students identified as learning disabled -- but who remain unrecognized for their high abilities -- are known for what they cannot do, and they typically manifest a more severe learning disability. Inadequate assessment of these children and low IQ scores lead to their abilities being underestimated. These children mostly do not receive services for their gifted abilities (Trail, 2011). Those students who are identified as neither gifted nor learning disabled have gifts and disabilities that mask each other. They typically perform at grade level or slightly below. Most teachers do not notice these students' high abilities or learning challenges. This group also constitutes the most difficult population to identify because their

high ability compensates for their learning disabilities. As coursework difficulty increases over the years, these children can meet with increasing academic challenges (Trail, 2011).

Prevalence

In the last three decades, children with both exceptional abilities and disabilities have been garnering greater attention. Interestingly, their numbers appear to be increasing as well. Current estimates range anywhere between 180,000 to 360,000 nationally (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). According to Baum and Owen (as cited in Nicpon, Allmon, & Sieck, 2011), there are approximately 300,000 twice-exceptional kids in U.S. classrooms, though the exact figure is unknown because identification is inadequate. Estimating prevalence is difficult because currently there is no formal process to track these students, either in schools or within health care systems (Nicpon et al., 2011). Many teachers fail to recognize these students because they lack an understanding of twice-exceptionality and because of the masking effect of students' high abilities (Rivera, Murdoch & Sexton, 2005). As a result, twice-exceptional kids are often referred for services much later then children with only learning disabilities (Kalbfleisch, 2014).

Characteristics

Twice-exceptional children are a diverse group who share many common characteristics. These students are often confusing for their teachers and to themselves. They are usually bright, yet struggle to produce academic output, often written work. They sometimes behave inappropriately in the classroom, act out, or lack interest in class activities or course content; they also may be disorganized (Baldwin, Omdal, & Pereles, 2015). While they have an ability to comprehend complex material, they struggle with fundamental skills, like basic spelling, writing and calculation due to sensory processing deficits that undermine their school success. Yet many also have strengths in visual-spatial realms, pattern recognition, design skill, memory abilities

and facile problem solving (Kalbfleisch, 2014; Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013). Their paradoxical abilities are very frustrating for them, but their experience is worsened by teachers who say their lack of output is due to laziness or a lack of effort (Neumeister et al., 2013).

The impact of possessing both high abilities and significant learning challenges creates difficulties for twice-exceptional children. Because of their inconsistent academic performance, they often view themselves as inadequate. They experience high anxiety and low self-concept as well as poor executive functioning skills, and they may be more intense and manifest anger because of the mismatch between what they can imagine and what they can produce (Baldwin, Omdal, & Pereles, 2015; Besnoy et al., 2015; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). They have increased anxiety about school in general and about the demands of schoolwork in particular, notably in their areas of weakness. Many avoid tasks where they fail (Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013).

Twice-exceptional children generally have very different trajectories in school compared to other students. They typically do not fit in with either gifted students, nor with special education students**.** If identified for gifted programming, their inabilities to produce work at the same rate as their peers can be interpreted as either a lack of motivation or as part of the asynchronous development associated with gifted children who do not have disabilities - where mental age and chronological age are very disparate, so that a child may have a chronological age of 8, but a mental age of 13 years old. In twice-exceptional children, however, their disparate performance is due more to the interaction between their learning disabilities and high intelligence; it is not merely due to the aspects of themselves that are more intellectually advanced, as is the case with gifted kids without disabilities (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). Thus, they are both behind their peers, in terms of their disabilities, and ahead of them, in terms of their gifts (Coleman & Gallagher, 2015). The most commonly identified disabilities that twice-

exceptional children have in public schools are single learning disabilities (SLD) and ADHD (Reis et al., 2014).

Assessment/Identification Issues

Identification of twice-exceptional children is challenging. Despite increased research and understanding of the needs and characteristics of 2e students, as a whole, members of this group are still largely under-identified, nor do they receive appropriate services. Part of the reason for this phenomenon is that teachers and administrators often lack the professional knowledge to help this constituency. Under-identification is also related to the complex picture these students present given the combination of both their gifts and disabilities (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).

Twice-exceptional students are usually overlooked for school-based gifted programming because traditional identification methods do not work for them. Gifted students typically receive services through two primary methods in the United States: (1) programs that build off of or use Renzulli's Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM; a school-based enrichment model), and (2) the national Talent Search programs - which are run by universities and use above grade level tests to screen children for gifted abilities (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006). Many gifted education programs use overall scores on ability or intelligence tests to qualify; these methods are not appropriate for 2e children, as many frequently have low scores on processing speed and working memory measures, which pull their overall score down (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). Conversely, many 2e children qualify for talent search programs instead because talent search programs use aptitude or problem-solving tests, which often favors 2e students' abilities (Assouline et al., 2006).

Debates have ensued as to how best identify both learning disabled and twice-exceptional students. There have been different methods used over time, and they have shifted based on changes in the laws governing special needs education (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). In 2004, the IDEA provided the criteria for states to use in identifying a child with a learning disability. Specifically, Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, and Goldman (2013) reported IDEA mandates that states:

> (1) must not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement;
>
> (2) must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; and,
>
> (3) may permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability. (p. 81)

These new mandates have fueled some of the controversy about the best identification methods (Laija-Rodriguez et al., 2013).

In practice, researchers and educators use three primary identification methods for learning disabled and twice-exceptional children: the discrepancy model, Response to Intervention (RtI), and establishing a profile/pattern of psychological strengths and weaknesses processing. Some of these methods are better able to identify twice-exceptional students than others (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006**).** Each method has been subject to debate. While the debates continue, earlier researchers in gifted education established clear guidelines for identifying 2e students, to which many contemporary educators still adhere. Specifically, Mills and Brody (as cited in Morrison & Rizza, 2007, p. 58) identify three necessary factors for 2e

identification: (1) evidence of giftedness; (2) evidence of an ability and achievement discrepancy; and, (3) evidence of processing deficits**.**

Discrepancy Model

The discrepancy model examines the gap between achievement and ability, and can help identify specific weaknesses or gifted abilities in cognitive and psychological processes. It involves the administration of an ability or intelligence test (or sometimes both; like the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-IV, Stanford-Binet-5, Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test or the Cognitive Abilities Test) and compares that data to performance on achievement tests (like the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills or the Woodcock-Johnson Individual Achievement Test; existing classroom assessment data is sometimes used for evidence of achievement as well). Within this approach, practitioners can also closely examine the subtest scatter contained in an ability or intelligence test to identify specific strengths or weaknesses (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; Kablefliesch, 2014). In the discrepancy model approach, the tests are administered by highly trained psychologists or school psychologists; however, clinical psychologists are often better able to discern nuanced diagnostic data, particularly in regard to separating out the complex cognitive processing of twice-exceptional students. The testing data is used to reveal the discrepancies between achievement (output) and intelligence (ability) (Assouline et al., 2006).

In the years before the renewal of the IDEA, many researchers criticized the use of this model as the sole and primary method of identification of learning disabled children. Many saw the discrepancy model as a "wait-to-fail" approach because children were not identified early enough (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006, p. 16; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). Other researchers warned against the IQ subtest scatter method and profile analysis claiming it was too unevenly administered and interpreted and that it relied too heavily on clinical perception and

observation. Instead, they called for greater reliance on expanded empirical studies to inform more uniform identification practices. Thus, the new IDEA regulations were designed to address these criticisms (Reis, et al., 2014).

Despite these critiques, many practitioners and researchers advocate for the continued use of the discrepancy model (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; Morrison & Rizza, 2007). Morrison and Rizza (2007), for instance, advocate for the use of subtest scatter analysis because it can examine a student's performance on specific subsets of ability tests and avoids the use of overall ability test scores, which for many twice-exceptional students results in average full scale scores or index scores (i.e., FSIQ). Though debates continue, the criticism of the discrepancy model has led to greater efforts to develop a comprehensive definition of twice-exceptionalism to undergird more effective assessment and intervention strategies (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).

RtI Model

Another model for identifying struggling learners is the Multi-Tiered Supports and Services Model (MTSS) embodied by the Response to Intervention model (RtI). RtI provides supports and services within a tiered system of response, which increases in intensity and customization as one moves to a higher tier (Coleman & Gallagher, 2015).[4] The framework enables a team of educators to evaluate which strategies are working for a student and whether greater intervention is needed. Some educators advocate that RtI provides a way to intervene earlier and for a greater number of students at risk for school failure. The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) recommends expanding RtI to include gifted and twice-exceptional students (Trail, 2011). The model encourages a holistic approach and it can include parents, however, its success is highly dependent on an effective, collaborative team of educators (Coleman & Gallagher, 2015; Trail, 2011).

The team approach utilized in RtI can help improve learning outcomes for struggling learners (Trail, 2011). Trail asserts that it is the collective knowledge of the RtI team that increases the chances of student success. Yet as Coleman and Gallagher (2015) point out, business researchers have found that about 60% of teams fail. In order to succeed, teams need: time for planning in order to cohere and to engender a common commitment; proper material resources and professional development; and positive group dynamics. Teams require an investment of effort and funding from schools. Coleman and Gallagher assert that it is not clear how much schools will invest in models like RtI. Thus, other approaches like comprehensive assessment are still necessary to make up for this gap, they claim.

Another key criticism of RtI, according to Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman (2013), is that its primary focus is on student weaknesses, without clearly delineating what the underlying causes are for these learning struggles. According to this criticism, RtI does not provide information about why a child is having difficulty. These educators advocate for continued comprehensive assessments of learning disabled children, as they assert that RtI cannot fully unravel these complexities. They also purport that the discrepancy model cannot fully unravel these complexities either. Thus, neither RtI, nor the discrepancy model, they claim, is sufficient to adequately diagnose a child's disabilities (Hale et al., 2010; Laija-Rodriguez et al., 2013). Hale et al. also report that most practitioners believe that the discrepancy model is a necessary part of identifying SLD, but not sufficient alone; further, these practitioners also view the RtI model as helpful in the prevention and early intervention of learning disabilities, but they believe RtI lacks the specialized knowledge to identify SLD.

Others point out that RtI does a particularly poor job at identifying twice-exceptional students because of the new language embodied in the IDEA which requires only that a child be

falling below grade-level in order to qualify for federally mandated special education services. The IDEA no longer requires a large discrepancy between ability and performance as a qualifying characteristic for special education services. Most twice-exceptional children, because of their high abilities, are not failing in class, but are usually performing at grade-level or just slightly below. Their high abilities mask or compensate for their disabilities, hence, they often go unnoticed. According to these educators, RtI does not adequately capture these students (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; Hale et al., 2010; Morrison & Rizza, 2007; Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).

Profiles of Strengths and Weaknesses

Many educators say the best identification approach for both learning disabled and 2e children is comprehensive assessment that gathers student data to identify a pattern of psychological strengths and weaknesses that are consistent with the child's learning disabilities. Many advocate for, or have developed, specific frameworks or models in which this data can be collected and examined (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; Hale et al., 2010; Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013). One model, the Leveraging Strengths Assessment and Intervention Model (LeStAIM), while not developed specifically for 2e children, is nonetheless instructive. LeStAIM requires practitioners to develop hypotheses targeting the underlying reasons for a child's learning disability. In developing hypotheses about root psychological processing skills, educators can more effectively guide school assessment and interventions. In utilizing this framework, instead of arriving at a diagnosis, educators describe a student in terms of profiles of strengths, assets and weaknesses, which link to their social and academic functioning. The problems that children develop, according to this framework, derive from a mismatch between the students profile and the school's expectations. They recommend

utilizing strengths to address weaknesses, which they call a "strength-to-strategy report," in the classroom (Laija-Rodriguez et al., 2013),

Multi-Dimensional Assessments

A growing number of educators endorse the use of a comprehensive, multi-dimensional framework to identify twice-exceptional students. Morrison and Rizza (2007) assert the best framework utilizes multiple sources of data, gathered through multiple methods, over multiple time periods. While there are many different proposed frameworks in the learning disabilities literature, one commonality embraced by all is a collaborative approach. In their nationwide survey of states regarding policies governing twice-exceptionalism, Roberts, Pereira, and Knotts (2015**)** called for increased cooperation among educators to assist these students - including gifted, special needs and general education teachers. Multi-dimensional frameworks also call for observations of and information from the students themselves as well as from parents. Teams can collect student data that includes test score analyses, profile analyses, behavior observations, product evaluations, and behavior checklists to inform identification and intervention. Professional knowledge about both gifted and special needs student characteristics is important, too, in any team approach. Because of school challenges, for instance, many twice-exceptional kids manifest their gifts and talents in negative ways.[5] Thus, teams must be familiar with the issues that affect twice-exceptional students and must undertake a more holistic view of students (Coleman & Gallagher, 2015; Morrison & Rizza, 2007; Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).

Strengths-Based Approaches

As an outgrowth of positive psychology, professionals in many fields have called for strengths-based approaches to helping individuals and communities. Strengths-based approaches

have been used in therapeutic contexts, but are now being extended to educational settings as well. As a result, educators have aimed for assessment practices that move away from a deficit focus. Instead, practitioners strive to include individual character assets, skills or abilities in their understanding of students to help cultivate strengths to nurture positive outcomes (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004; Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013; Rhee, Furlong, Turner, & Harari, 2001). Epstein & Sharma (as cited in Jimerson et al., 2004) provide a definition of strengths-based assessment:

> The measurement of those emotional and behavioral skills, competencies, and characteristics that create a sense of personal accomplishment; contribute to satisfying relationships with family members, peers, and adults; enhance one's ability to deal with adversity and stress; and promote one's personal, social, and academic development (p. 13).

Typically, a focus on strengths comprises one facet of a multi-dimensional assessment; thus, strengths-based approaches do not just focus on positives at the expense of weaknesses, rather the approach signifies a paradigm shift which engenders a more holistic view of kids that goes beyond examining just problems. Thus, strengths-based assessments include an examination of both weaknesses and the counterbalance of a student's assets, skills and abilities (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004).

Epstein (as cited in Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013) delineates the assumptions which undergird strengths-based approaches and elucidates the advantages of using them: (1) all students possess strengths that when addressed well, enhance learning motivation, (2) all students can learn and manifest their strengths when provided with a proper environment to do so, and (3) a focus on positive skills and resources leads students to

develop more of these traits and skills. Of paramount importance in these assumptions is the understanding that practitioners can use strengths-based approaches to positively engage students in their learning (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004).

Researchers and practitioners in gifted education have applied these same recommendations for a strengths-based focus to twice-exceptional students. As in general and special education, a focus on strengths does not eclipse continued attention on deficits (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014**).** Rather, increasing numbers of educators view a strengths-based or talent-development focus as the essential ingredient in engaging 2e students in both more engaging *and* more arduous work. Neihart (as cited in Reis et al., 2014) succinctly sums up the approach:

> Effective interventions are always those that are tailored to the unique strengths and needs of the individual. There is wide agreement in the literature on gifted children with learning problems that, as a general strategy, interventions should focus on developing the talent while attending to the disability. Keeping the focus on the talent appears to yield more positive outcomes and to minimize problems of social and emotional adjustment (p. 226).

Outcomes of Strengths-Based Approaches

In broad terms, the research literature supports that strengths-based approaches benefit youth. Cox (as cited in Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013), for instance, found that therapists who assessed participants using a strengths-based assessment tool, the Behavior and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS-2), resulted in better outcomes for their subjects than therapists who did not use the BERS-2 and who did not use a strengths-based treatment approach. Barton, Macking and Fields (as cited in Laija-Rodriguez et al., 2013), also

found better outcomes for youth in a residential correction home using strengths-based approaches. Moreover, strengths-based interventions provide broader benefit than just alleviating stress, they help create deeper well-being and sense of accomplishment in youth (Laija-Rodriguez et al., 2013).

For twice-exceptional students in particular, the research literature also supports that strengths-based programs increase academic achievement and self-concept when teachers integrate compensatory strategy instruction into an enriched learning environment (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). One study (Olenchak, 2009 as cited in Reis et al., 2014, p. 226), used a counseling approach to assist twice-exceptional learners, which increased the students' metacognitive skills, critical thinking skills and academic self-concept. Further, Nicpon, Allmon, Sieck, and Stinson (as cited in Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013, p. 264) found in their review of the literature that when twice-exceptional students (usually with SLD) were given the opportunity to use their creativity and higher thinking skills, learning improved. Twice-exceptional students also benefitted from working with other 2e students and in classes where their strengths were tapped (Neumeister et al., 2013). Baum and Owen (as cited in Reis et al., 2014) found that when twice-exceptional students' strengths and talents receive attention in educational programs, they behave more like gifted students, socially, emotionally and academically. Other researchers have found that strengths-based interventions increase motivation and a sense of empowerment for kids (Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013). Thus, a greater focus on strengths for this population provides important benefits.

When twice-exceptional students lack this type of strengths-based focus, the outcomes are not as good. In fact, regular interventions, including review, basic assignments and

remediation, with a reductive focus on the child's learning deficits, may undermine his or her success in the classroom. Such foci can result in bored, under-challenged kids, many of whom later succeed in college with the proper support, Reis, Neu, and McGuire report (as cited in Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).[6]

Strengths-Based Models

A review of the literature reveals that there are many strengths-based assessment models and approaches. Some models focus more intensely on social and behavioral challenges like the Additive Model, which examines risk and protective factors, and the Challenge Model, which views some challenge as good for kids as it develops resiliency (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004).[7] Other models address the cognitive, academic and social-emotional needs of the student within a strengths-based frame. The LeStAIM model, mentioned above, provides a comprehensive assessment model, rooted in ecological theory. The goals of the model are to understand the full range of educational and social-emotional needs of the student and to assist the parents and the student understand these needs as well. The model assists parents and educators in utilizing strengths to improve outcomes for the student. While not developed specifically with 2e kids in mind, the LeStAIM utilizes strengths to compensate for weaknesses in all of its intervention levels. The LeStAIM model includes practices similar to traditional assessment: practitioners review records, observe students, and conduct formal and informal testing.[8] However, the focus of LeStAIM is not just on assessing children, it is on producing positive outcomes for them (Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013).

Strengths-Based Models for 2e

While the concepts and ideas contained in different strengths-based models have relevancy and applicability for all children, Coleman & Gallagher (2015) call for new research

and creative models to specifically address the needs of 2e students. They discuss two models in particular: the Multiple Perspectives Process Model (MPPM), and a team model proposed by Baldwin, Omdal and Pereles (2015). The MPPM model draws on cooperation from a team of professionals and the family to flesh out the complex needs of 2e students. The Baldwin et al. (2015) model is a solutions-focused framework that also draws on a range of people, including the parents and student, as well as teachers, administrators, counselors, regular teachers, specialty teachers and others (Coleman & Gallagher, 2015).

Baldwin, Omdal, and Pereles' (2015) problem-solving approach to identifying and responding to the needs of 2e students stresses that there is no one set of interventions that will work for every 2e child, as each child is a unique combination of characteristics. The problem-solving method involves defining the student's needs, collecting and analyzing student data, executing a plan and evaluating the progress of the plan. It requires a holistic lens that involves many members of the child's team. The team gathers information and develops a customized plan attuned to the student's strengths, learning needs and personality. Inevitably, a variety of strategies are needed to meet the student's needs because of the combination of strengths and disabilities. Strategies that can be used to address gifts include acceleration, content-extension (which provides greater immersion and complexity in content) as well as the integration of activities that involve higher thinking abilities, such as analysis, evaluation and synthesis. Instructional planning is rooted in the student's strengths and interests. Because of the increased anxiety, lower self-concepts and frequent frustration or anger 2e kids experience, social and emotional needs must be addressed as well in this model.

According to Baldwin, Omdal, and Pereles (2015), student strengths can be assessed in different ways. Student interest forms can be filled out that detail favorite books, beloved

extracurricular activities, or keen interests. There are also more formalized methods such as Renzulli's Interest-A-Lyzer Family of Instruments (as cited in Baldwin et al., 2015). These types of assessments can help educators understand what areas the student is already involved in, in order to further cultivate strengths-building opportunities. A one-on-one interview is very important as well, as it can fill in gaps left by testing data.

A similar, but far more comprehensive approach is the Multiple Perspectives Process Model (MPPM), studied by Baum, Schader, and Hebert (2014) in a private school setting. Baum et al. (2014) used a collaborative, multi-dimensional decision-making framework to study the outcomes of a strengths-based, talent-focused program in an independent, private school for 10 twice-exceptional students from sixth to twelfth grade. The initiative drew upon three key elements. First, it utilized a multi-perspectives process to draw upon student strength and talent (the MPPM model). MPPM is a student-centered model which calls for collaboration and coordination among team members to create a more comprehensive approach to instruction, curriculum and enrichment for the student based upon how the student's strengths and weaknesses interact. Second, the program utilized an enrichment model developed by Renzulli, the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM; Renzulli & Reis, 1997, as cited by Baum et al., 2014). Lastly, the program utilized a unique pedagogical approach which embedded student skill-development into a strengths-based, differentiated curricular and instructional approach.

The MPPM model draws upon five key variables to ascertain a student's needs: (1) the student's learning differences; (2) the student's family context; (3) the student's disabilities; (4) the student's gifts, talents and interests; and (5) the student's social and emotional readiness for learning (Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014, p. 315-316). The student's learning difference refers to the way in which the student best learns and adapts to her environment; it can include an

examination of cognitive, learning, personality and intelligence profiles and styles. The student's family context refers to the experiences and history a family has had with educational institutions in attempting to receive services; it includes an extended and intentional effort to collaborate with the student's family. The student's disabilities are the diagnoses a student has, which includes an understanding of the psychological, neurobiological and physiological aspects of the diagnosis and how the family has worked to meet the child's needs outside of school. The student's gifts, talents and interests refers to the understanding of what the student loves and excels at; this focus is the primary element considered within the MPPM model, as the team understands that this focus will help to draw the student into learning. The student's social and emotional readiness refers to how well the student functions in these areas and how this impacts her ability or readiness for learning.

Enrichment opportunities in this program were a central part of the curriculum, not optional. The school also provided monthly professional development for educators on issues related to twice-exceptionalism. The program embedded disability skills-development throughout its curriculum. For instance, students were required to take drama in middle school to help them explore possible areas of talent, but also to help them develop social skills, thus the social skills development was embedded in the curriculum. Students also were exposed to contests, competitions and performance opportunities in areas of their choosing to help them develop new skills necessary to successfully participate in these beloved activities, such as meeting deadlines, manifesting appropriate public and social behavior, and working collaboratively with other students. These programmatic emphases also drew on the intrinsic motivation of the student to help him persevere in the face of learning challenges (Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014).

Based on their qualitative analysis of the data, Baum, Schader, & Hebert (2014) identified three themes from their study: student growth, variables that added to that growth, and the accrued benefits of utilizing a talent focus. The program allowed for the positive development of the students, but each differed markedly in her cognitive, social and emotional and behavioral growth. Students differed in the amount of time it took to finish the program, in the level of support they needed, in their maturity levels, in their talent development and in the compensatory strategies they adopted.

In terms of their cognitive growth, before coming to their new school the students had low motivation, unilateral negative school experiences and had been understood by educators and peers through their deficits. When they first arrived, all of the participants manifested rigid thinking patterns, but over time, in the new setting, students increased their productivity in all their classes, but especially in their areas of interest. In terms of their social growth, before they came to the new school, the children had no friends and experienced social isolation; they also did not follow social conventions. Over the years, the students became a cohesive social group.[9] In terms of their emotional growth, when the students entered the program, they had high anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, and some had experienced depression. Others were oppositional and defiant. The students did not like each other, and they did not cooperate with one another either. Teachers, therapists and staff spent a great deal of time and energy on behavioral issues at the beginning of the program at the expense of content. However, as one teacher pointed out, it was an investment that paid off later for the students and the program. By graduation, all of these behaviors had changed for the better.

Important to note is that while the strengths-based focus was key to the success of these students, another key ingredient was the effective integration of this emphasis into the

curriculum. Effective curriculum integration required that teachers continuously evaluate how this information (about strengths) could be related to and inform the student's schoolwork, self-growth and successful experiences. The program used multiple ways to integrate this emphasis that was individually tailored to each student. Talent development comprised a separate element of the program that was different than the strengths-based curriculum integration. Talent development focused on a gift or talent that the student possessed outright that could be further developed should the student choose to do so. It was not contextualized into the learning per se as were the strengths-based foci. For some kids, this area was essential to their mastering an emotional block, which then opened up their growth. This emphasis also allowed mentoring relationships to flourish for some students (Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014).

In summary, all the students in this study experienced growth, but the growth was not uniform. Instead, it was inconsistent and uneven in timing and pace. When the student had a talent or interest in an area that did not coincide with their disability, their growth was more smooth. When there was greater asynchrony in the students, they needed more time for the self-regulation and executive functioning to develop. Students entered the program with low cognitive skills and feelings of disconnection - negative experiences that can contribute to high school drop-out and lower performance.[10] Yet, all of the students in this study graduated with a positive school experience. One parent expressed: "It was very clear that they were looking for the strengths of the kids…. I fell apart and started to cry because nobody [else] had. Everybody had pathologized Jacob and said what was wrong with him. We needed a place that would say what is right with him (Focus group, March 1, 2011)" (Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014, p. 321). Through the MPPM approach, staff first viewed kids as gifted, then as challenged. In this study,

their efforts paid off, and the students had positive and fruitful school experiences (Baum et al., 2014).

Realities of Practice

Though attention to strengths is called for in student IEPs and 504 Plans, this emphasis is rarely a central piece of the assessment process. Unfortunately, school psychologists and other educators do not give adequate attention to this focus, either for assessment purposes or for intervention practices. Thus, despite these calls, much of real-world assessment remains entrenched in a deficit orientation. Most school psychologists continue to focus on deficits because school districts are required to assess deficits, and there is no equivalent requirement to assess strengths as a qualification for special education services. While the emphasis on deficits can aid in the diagnosis of a disability, many educators assert that it does not effectively guide interventions and treatment. Instead, there is a growing belief among practitioners that by focusing on strengths, educators can better address a student's underlying learning problems, and that teachers can use a child's strengths to motivate them to persist with less engaging, more challenging work (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004; Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).

There has also been a growing trend for greater participation from a range of stakeholders in the assessment process. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), for instance, in tandem with the federal IDEA guidelines, provide direction to practitioners to incorporate not only students in their assessments, but parents as well, and school and community members, too (Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013). One commonality in all the strengths-based approaches is a team approach, which dovetails with this growing trend. In order to be successful, however, collaborative teams require sustained

effort and attention. They also require a supportive infrastructure, which includes: policies which support and guide the creation and sustainability of the project, professional development and technical assistance for staff and administration, research and evaluation of the program, and resources (i.e., funding). Some educators question the ability of school districts to effectively undertake and sustain these commitments (Coleman & Gallagher, 2015).

Parental Role as Advocates

Research has supported that parents are a child's most significant advocate (Besnoy et al., 2015). Indeed, the important role of parents in special education is widely researched and acknowledged. Parent groups were vital in attaining rights and services for their children with disabilities. The landmark *Education of All Handicapped Children Act* of 1975 grew out of lawsuits that parents initiated in the early 1970s on behalf of their children (Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013). Other researchers highlight the essential role parents play in advocating for their twice-exceptional children (Morrison & Rizza, 2007). Assouline, Nicpon, and Huber (2006), for instance, review two case studies where mothers of twice-exceptional children played a primary role in getting their children's educational needs both recognized and met.

Lack of Parent Knowledge Undermines Advocacy

When parents realize they have a special needs child, they face inordinate challenges in integrating and mastering vast amounts of information relating to their child's issues. In getting their child's educational needs met, parents must learn about school protocols and the processes and interventions outlined in IDEA. Under IDEA, parents are entitled to participate in the IEP process and to appeal any decisions they do not feel are right or working for their child. The goal of IDEA is to help protect students from lack of services or from inappropriate ones and to help create collaborative teams; however, IDEA assumes that parents already have knowledge

about their child's disability and the advocacy process; it also assumes that children will qualify for a disability category, which is often not the case with many 2e children. When parents lack understandings about the nature of the disability and about possible school outcomes, their ability to collaborate with the school is undermined, and thus, they are less capable of effectively advocating for their child. When parents have this knowledge and information, they are much more effective advocates for their children (Besnoy et al., 2015).

Role of Professional Knowledge in Collaboration

Moreover, parents assume that school staff are knowledgeable about twice-exceptional issues (including the traits of 2e kids), about effective interventions, and about the laws that govern these issues and parents' rights. The reality, however, is that there is very little training for school staff about these issues. Because of the nature of 2e -- the paradoxical nature of the child's abilities and disabilities -- many teachers don't believe that being gifted is possible in conjunction with being learning disabled. As a result, parental advocacy efforts are often undermined by these stereotypes regarding the nature of giftedness. This lack of professional knowledge also undermines the establishment of collaborative partnerships between school staff and parents. These realities create many challenges for parents. Conversely, in some school districts, school professionals may receive training in issues that affect twice-exceptional children, while parents do not. This discrepancy in knowledge between school personnel and parents also can undermine parental advocacy efforts (Besnoy et al., 2015).

Parental Advocacy Models

Researchers have delineated various advocacy models for better understanding the ways in which advocacy can unfold, which is beyond the scope of this paper, however, researchers have agreed on two primary factors that play a significant role in parents' advocacy success: (1)

knowledge about school policies, and (2) parent's ability to clearly delineate their child's needs. Parents who lack these skills experience a gap between their desire to advocate for their children and their ability to do so. When parents are provided information by the school (like information on the specific disability, the language and terminology used in relation to the disability and the special education process, their legal rights and the educational options for their child), their confidence in the school is boosted (Hess, Molina, & Kozleski, 2006, as cited in Besnoy et al., 2015).

Based on the research of Duquette, Fullerton, Orders, and Robertson-Grewal (cited in Besnoy et al., 2015), parent advocacy efforts can be well understood through the 4-Dimensions Advocacy Model, which importantly, makes it clear that successful advocacy is a constant parental duty that requires ongoing parental feedback and involvement in the educational setting. The four dimensions of the model are: awareness, knowledge seeking, presenting the case and monitoring progress. The researchers found that the dimensions are not sequential steps, and that at times, critical incidences in the child's and family's experience spur additional and more intense advocacy efforts by the parents.

Parental Advocacy Research

In a retrospective, qualitative research study, Neumeister, Yssel, and Burney (2013**)** examined the influence that primary caretakers, all of whom were mothers, played in orchestrating and supporting the academic success of their 2e children. They found that parents became successful in their advocacy efforts on behalf of their children only after they embraced two key responsibilities: (1) that they were the ones responsible for recognizing and comprehending the facets of their child's 2e manifestation; and (2) that the primary caregiver assumed the bulk of responsibility for the child's learning growth. They also found that the core

theme that arose from their research was the "sense of primary responsibility" that mothers felt for "developing their children's potential" (pp. 265-266). The inter-related themes that arose from the core theme included: the mother's early recognition of their child's gifts as well as disabilities, despite reassurances from others that no disabilities existed; mothers actions to access support and information despite the challenges and additional burdens, even monetary, that these efforts created; normalizing the disability within themselves and cultivating and shaping their children's attitudes in the same way; upholding high performance expectations for their kids despite their disabilities; and shifting responsibility for the advocacy in scaffolded steps to their children over time.

In another qualitative research study, Besnoy et al. (2015) examined the experiences of eight parents of six elementary aged 2e students. The researchers found that the primary theme that surfaced with parents was their overriding concern for their children. The subcategories were their recognition of their child's gifts as well as disability; their loss of confidence in the school, and their knowledge about the issues that impacted their child's well-being. One consistent finding was parents' experience of schools deflecting their efforts to have their children's disabilities assessed. Many parents felt that the schools even mislead them in terms of their rights, or that they were not candid with them about their legal entitlements. Some parents relayed positive experiences as well, but these happened only after parents had educated themselves and when a particular teacher respected the parents' expertise and understood the child's needs. Parents' concern for their children is not unusual, especially in special needs populations. However, in the Besnoy et al. study what was different is that parent's had an overwhelming concern that the disability would completely undermine their child's gifted

potential. Parents saw themselves as significant advocates for their children. They had to turn to outside supports to educate themselves and to help get their kids' needs met.

Collaboration

In general educational settings, collaboration between school and parents is very important. Collaboration increases overall positive student outcomes, including improving academic performance, raising graduation rates, and increasing attendance rates. It also can boost parent volunteerism within the school setting. Though the research supports the benefits of collaboration, the same research also reveals that such collaboration is not easy to carry out (Besnoy et al., 2015). In their study, Besnoy et al. found that parents were highly persevering in their advocacy for their child, but that the schools were not especially collaborative**.** One of the goals of strengths-based approaches to working with twice-exceptional students is to increase collaboration and cooperation among educators, students and families (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004).

Personal Communication/Interview with an Expert

Ed McManis is head of school at a small, private, independent school in San Francisco that serves students with learning disabilities, sixth to twelfth grade. When the school was founded 40 years ago in San Francisco, it was driven by the desire of one woman to provide educational services for children who were of average or above average intelligence who were not getting their needs met in the regular public education classroom. Since then the school has grown and now has two campuses in San Francisco.

The school utilizes a strengths-based approach to educate its diverse student body. Most of the students have either SLD, ADHD, or dyslexia; they also work with some children with

ASD. Small classroom sizes coupled with a safe learning environment help students develop confidence and become part of a supportive community. The school uses a "strengths-and-strategies" approach to identify student strengths and then works to cultivate those strengths in order to build new ones.

Mr. McManis conveyed that upon arrival, the students at their school universally have sequential ordering issues. Students are required to have comprehensive assessments as part of the admissions process. One of the challenges staff face is to "activate" that assessment information for application in the classroom. Mr. McManis reported that the school uses what they refer to as a "hot sheet" to translate the assessment data into classroom intervention strategies. Through individualized interventions, remediation, compensation strategies instruction and accommodations, the school works hard to bring about positive learning experiences for the children, and it also draws upon student strengths to make this possible. Mr. McManis also emphasized the importance of "flipping the culture" for the kids. Because children with learning disabilities often have negative experiences at school, the school emphasizes providing a culture of positive experience for them, both academically and socially. In regard to twice-exceptional students, Mr. McManis relayed that "we go as fast as we can go and as slow as we must." He also relayed that when it comes to gifted abilities, "each teacher figures it out as we go."

The school appears to be doing a very good job working with learning disabled students. It would be interesting to ascertain how many twice-exceptional students the school actually has, and it was not readily apparent if the school fully embraces an emphasis on gifted education. More research would be important here.

Summary

Twice-exceptional learners present complex challenges to parents and educators. Identifying and meeting the needs of twice-exceptional children is not easy for a variety of reasons, including: accepting the truth of the dual abilities, controversy regarding identification methods, deficit-oriented identification and intervention methods, lack of knowledge on parents' part as key advocates for their children, and lack of professional knowledge and support from schools. Strengths-based models have shown great promise and success in identifying and addressing the needs of 2e kids. Key to strengths-based models effectiveness, however, is collaboration. While parents are key advocates for their special needs children, many have encountered great difficulty in attempting to collaborate with schools. These challenges present fruitful possibilities for research.

Chapter 3 Method

Research Approach

Baum, Schader, and Hebert (2014) assert that part of what reinforces a narrow focus on deficits are the tools that educators use to address the needs of 2e students. Educators and teachers need to develop a greater understanding of how to perceive, identify and support the strengths of their twice-exceptional students. In this way, educational interventions can better support the development of competency in these students. Baldwin, Omdal, and Pereles (2015) assert that one-on-one interviews can provide important information because they help fill in the gaps of knowledge and understanding about the student. In the late 1990s, researchers spoke of the benefits of qualitative research in order to bring a focus to student strengths (Anzul, Evans, King, & Tellier-Robinson, 2001). Anzul et al. reported that each of their qualitative research case studies led to a greater understanding of their subject's strengths. Quantitative research usually examines a single variable, but qualitative unearths multi-faceted data. When observed in real life settings, participants may manifest unknown characteristics, gifts, skills and abilities, or unexpected perspectives. Qualitative research often ends up going beyond the original research intent or question, and it also can provide incremental steps to a wider applicability of the research findings (Anzul et al., 2001).

This study utilized a mixed-methods case study approach through in-depth semi-structured interviews with a twice-exceptional student as well as his parent and tutor. Further, a

review of existing quantitative assessment data on the child was undertaken to help triangulate any of the data gleaned from the interviews and observations.

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to the ethical standards for protection of human subjects of the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally a research proposal was submitted and reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved and assigned number 10542.

Sample and Site

The sample was comprised of three research subjects, a child who had been identified as twice-exceptional, that is possessing both gifted abilities and learning disabilities, and the child's mother and the child's tutor. The subject was also observed in his school setting during a school presentation. The sites where data collection took place included the subject's home, a private, empty classroom, an office in a local library and the subjects' school.

Access and Permissions

The researcher gained permission from the subject as well as the subject's parents to conduct the interviews as well as to review the student's existing psychoeducational records. Permission was also obtained from the parents to interview the child's tutor and granted by the tutor herself as well. Consent forms were obtained from the parents and an assent form was signed by the child before research commenced. Participation in the study was voluntary.

Data Gathering Procedures

The case record data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the child in a private office. Each of the two interviews with the child took no more than one and a half hours. Interviews with the subject's parent, the mother, took place in an office setting and in the researcher's car; each of three interviews took no longer than one and a half hours. Observation of the student took place at the school during the student's final presentation of a project. An interview with the subject's tutor took place in a quiet, empty classroom and took no longer than one and a half hour. Detailed notes were taken during the interviews to capture what the subject, parents and teacher had to say. The subject's existing psychoeducational assessment data were acquired with permission from the parents.

Data Analysis Approach

Data were collected using a convergent design where the qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time. Interview notes were transcribed following each interview and were reviewed prior to the next interview to help inform interview questions and guide research queries. Data were analyzed using a constant-comparative method and axial coding in order to sort through data units and identify key themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Chapter 4 Findings

The Case Report & Background

Steve (a pseudonym) is a bright, amicable 10 year old Caucasian boy who attends a school for gifted children in California. During two research interviews, Steve exuded a warm, calm presence. Steve's parents are both professionals, with graduate degrees. Dad works full-time in a professional field, while mom freelances part-time and runs the household. Steve has three siblings; all four children currently attend private school. Steve's mom, Tina (a pseudonym), exuded a centered and warm personality during three interviews for this research paper.[11] She also exhibited a high commitment to unraveling the mysteries of her son's learning struggles as well as to cultivating his full potential, qualities she extends to all of the couple's four children.

Prior to coming to California, Steve and his siblings attended a private school in a Northeastern state. Steve attended this school from preschool through third grade. Toward the end of first grade, Steve was flagged by his school, through universal screening, for reading difficulties. The school initiated pull-out services for Steve at that time: he worked with a learning specialist three times per week to help bolster his reading ability. As Steve entered second grade, the private school remained supportive and active in attempting to address Steve's learning struggles. Tina reported that Steve began to feel increasingly self-conscious about being pulled out of class and began to utter that he felt stupid and dumb. The school also asked that the parents practice writing at home with Steve. Tina reported that these episodes became increasingly tear-filled events. He was also required to read twenty minutes a night, which was a difficult and laborious task for him. Tina relayed, "He would read a page and a half, and then, it

was just trying to check the box, like 'okay, I read.' There was no joy in it, it was a struggle." Meanwhile he remained strong in science and was able to complete more complicated math computations, and he also demonstrated an advanced social-emotional intelligence, so much so that the teacher relied on Steve to help keep the classroom peace. Despite these abilities, Steve grappled with basic skills, like math facts, reading and writing, which complicated his classroom learning. The school initiated regular meetings with his parents to try to better support his academic work. Despite attempts to help, the school was perplexed by the seemingly contradictory abilities that Steve possessed, a very bright boy who had difficulty with fundamental skills. He also was often very fatigued, which both his parents and teachers noticed. Steve had also had chronic ear infections since he was a toddler, and he had had five sets of tubes placed into his ears by the time he was six years old. He noted during his interview that "I'd get scolded for not listening, but really, I couldn't really hear." By the end of second grade, his teachers at the Montessori school recommended that he undergo educational testing to more clearly delineate his learning struggles.

In the summer before entering third grade, the local, public school system -- of the county in which the family resided -- initiated preliminary testing for Steve. Specifically, Steve, his father and his second grade teacher filled out a version of the Behavior Assessment System for Children-Second Edition (BASC-2); the data was analyzed and shared with key stakeholders at a planning and placement meeting (PPT) in January of his third grade year. During third grade, Steve continued to struggle academically, and the couple watched their son sink into lower self-esteem and deeper school resistance. These behaviors were highly contrary to what Tina had known about Steve - he had always been an intelligent, imaginative, engaged and content child. She felt that his mind was frustrated and under-challenged at school, yet she and her husband

struggled to understand his learning difficulties. She relayed, "So for them [his private school teachers], I think there was a lack of experience in seeing he's complicated, right, because he is struggling with these simple things, yet capable of doing these extraordinary things…. They would not allow him to move on to extra amazing things because they were focusing on these small things that were tripping him up. So he just disengaged from school, and got, I think, bored."

Steve's parents decided to hire a private neuropsychologist to have Steve assessed.[12] Their intentions were to have an independent party evaluate him, who in Tina's words "was strictly looking after his best interest and not how to fit into the services they [the school] have and what they can do for him." The neuropsychologist indicated to the parents that Steve was a profoundly gifted child, who had "masked" or "stealth" dyslexia: the phenomena where a person's high abilities compensate for weaknesses in language fluency, particularly phonological and orthographic awareness, to the point that it is hard to discern the problem.[13] Utilizing the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Fourth Edition (WISC-4), the neuropsychologist found that Steve had a full scale intelligence quotient (FSIQ) of 146, two full standard deviations above average intelligence. Steve scored in the 98th percentile on the Verbal Comprehension Index, in the 99th percentile on the Perceptual Reasoning Index, in the 99th percentile on the Working Memory Index and in the 94th percentile in the Visuo-Motor Processing Speed Index.

While Steve remained at his private school, the public school initiated its comprehensive, multi-team-member evaluation of him in January of third grade. The school used a range of tests to evaluate Steve's cognitive strengths and weaknesses, auditory processing, listening comprehension, verbal expression, and attention, memory and executive functioning skills. Tests included the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test-Third Edition (WIAT-3), the Wide

Range Assessment for Memory and Learning-Second Edition (WRAML-2), the Developmental Neuropsychological Assessment (NEPSY-2), the BASC-2, the Conners Behavior Rating Scales-Third Edition (Connors-3), the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-Fifth Edition (CELF-5), the Test of Auditory Processing-Third Edition (TAP-3) in addition to a hearing test and observation.[14] The testing took place over multiple days. Tina reported that testing was a difficult and arduous process for Steve, which was also reflected in the school psychologist's report:

> After a short period of time, he was observed to slump down in his chair or rest his head on the table. [Steve] was given the option of getting up and moving around in between tasks, but often declined. This examiner provided additional prompts and encouragement to [Steve] when his energy or motivation seemed low, but this had only a minimal impact on his output. Based on [Steve's] reluctance to participate and reduced stamina during testing, test results are likely to be an underestimate of his functioning at this time. (p.2)

Meanwhile, Tina reported that Steve was becoming increasingly disengaged from school, resisting schoolwork and having increased feelings of low self-esteem.

At the PPT meeting where the school disclosed the conclusion of its evaluative process, the school psychologist noted in her report that the parents' presenting concerns were Steve's low energy, difficulties with reading/decoding, poor motivation and reversing letters and numbers. Overall, the public school concluded that Steve's abilities fell within the average range for his grade. Specifically, he had demonstrated above average abilities in some areas, including oral expression skills as demonstrated by the WIAT-3's Sentence Repetition subtest and expressive language skills as demonstrated by the CELF-5's Expressive Language Index. On the TAP-3, he had scored in the above average range on tests of memory (the Memory Index) and

auditory comprehension and reasoning (the Cohesion Index), while he scored in the average range on the Phonological Index and particularly low in the phonological segmentation and word discrimination subtests of this index. The speech pathologist who administered the TAP-3 noted in her report that, "His performance in this area [Phonological Index], although within the average range, was relatively low compared to the Memory and Cohesion Indices." In her summary, she emphasized that Steve "demonstrated average performances related to auditory processing of language related to phonologic, memory, and cohesion (auditory comprehension and reasoning) skills, with a relatively lower score in the phonologic area." Thus Steve's evaluations showed a particular weakness in phonological awareness, a hallmark of dyslexia, even though his performance remained within the average range. The special education teacher who administered the WIAT-3 noted in her report that during the Sentence Composition test - which requires students to write out increasingly difficult sentences - Steve "worked with his head down and demonstrated decreased stamina as the sentences increased in length, requiring prompting from the evaluator to complete the task." In addition, Steve scored particularly low on the Pseudoword Decoding subtest of the WAIT-3, which assesses a student's ability to decode fabricated words, another index of dyslexia. In her report, the school psychologist noted:

> [Steve's] low score on Auditory Attention [on the NEPSY-2] signal difficulties maintaining attention over time to verbal stimuli. Poor scores on Auditory Attention when performance on Response Set is adequate may suggest that Steve has poor vigilance on a simple lengthy, and monotonous task, whereas a more challenging task improves vigilance. Motivation, effort, and interest in the task may also play a role in improved performance as the task gets more challenging. (p. 4)

The school psychologist's statement can also be indicative of Steve's need for more challenging material, which can nourish his higher abilities. Finally, the school psychologist noted that the

BASC-2 showed "At-Risk concerns" on the negative emotionality construct that was filled out by Steve himself, an indication of his increasingly poor self-esteem. The school psychologist also had included the WISC-4 results from the independent testing the family had undertaken for Steve. Tina reported that the public school's testing process was thorough and overall very good. Nonetheless, the family was told that he would not be eligible for special education services because he did not qualify due to his average ability scores. The school did not address the discrepancy between Steve's superior scores on the WISC-4 and his average scores on other tests given by the school. Even though the speech pathologist had drawn attention to his particularly low performance on the TAP-3's phonological skills subtests compared to his strong performance on the TAP-3's tests of memory and auditory comprehension and reasoning skills, the school did not give meaningful consideration to the wide discrepancies in his performance. Tina commented, "They don't take into account that his intelligence was 99.9% - they take it from the middle of the bell curve. They wouldn't make an exception for Steve, or take the other data and incorporate it - in that someone's really grossly lagging in an area and that that discrepancy is enormous and something is wrong."

Diminishing Little Boy

Both the public school district in which the family resided and the private school Steve attended had worked collaboratively to try to unravel Steve's learning challenges, yet neither had answers, nor help to offer the family. Tina gave both school systems credit for having brought their son's learning issues to their attention, and she recognized their diligence in the assessment process. In the end, Steve did not qualify for special education services despite his challenging learning struggles. Moreover, neither school system offered any enrichment or gifted education despite Steve's observable intellectual strengths and abilities as well as his high IQ scores. Tina

commented, "He was upset about it…. It was like they were trying, they were doing their best to fix it, but he just got so annoyed because all his gifts were being held back and his disabilities weren't being helped, so… I give him credit. He stood up and was like 'I am not going, because this isn't working.' He was right." After having cooperatively worked within the two school systems, and after watching their son devolve into outright school refusal by the spring of third grade, they realized they were not going to get the kind of help they needed from either educational system. They decided that they would need to find a better solution. Tina commented, "It was just a waste of time trying to convince the public school to help versus putting that money and time towards going and getting him private tutors." It also became clear to the family around this time that they would be moving to California in the summer, thus Tina began an in-depth search for possible schools for Steve in California for fourth grade. "We were just going to cut ties and start over in California," she said.

For the final few months of third grade, Tina described a scenario in which she attempted to salvage what she felt had become a damaging school experience for Steve. She came to believe that the school's efforts to help him through pull-out time and attempts to remediate his lack of basic skills were exacerbating his problems, further lowering his self-esteem and causing him harm. She devised a curriculum for Steve which eliminated any goals for his reading, writing and spelling growth for the remainder of the school year. She named it Steve's Daily Design, and it outlined his daily activities. Its primary goal was to alleviate the hardship of his classroom experiences, to cease his growing alienation from school and to manage his self-confidence. He was also excused from Spanish as the neuropsychologist relayed that studying a foreign language could be particularly difficult for Steve and even further compound his phonological issues. Tina commented that the school supported the Daily Design: "They gave us

space because they saw this diminishing little boy, and they loved him, and what was most important was that he didn't feel terrible about himself." Further, she described that the school "realized that they weren't able to offer this child a healthy education. They knew it was not working." The parents also decided to find a therapist to work with Steve to address his decreasing self-esteem and negative school experiences. Over the summer, the therapy began to mend Steve's tattered self-perception. The therapist also helped Steve to cultivate an optimistic outlook for a better experience in a new school in California.

Tina began reading as much as she could about her son's condition, stealth dyslexia, and she came across the term "twice-exceptional." The description struck a chord with her, though she still didn't fully understand all of its implications. In her search for a new school for her son, she considered several private schools that were oriented toward addressing learning disabilities, including one that worked with dyslexic children. She began to realize that none of these schools were equipped to address her son's high abilities. She was even told by the school for dyslexic children that Steve was not a good fit for their school because his abilities were too high. Tina also recognized that the schools that focused on learning disabilities would not enable her son to explore his gifts and higher order thinking skills. Then she came across schools for gifted children, and she considered those possibilities. She remembered that she and her husband made a conscious choice to focus on Steve's gifts in a school setting and to independently address his learning disabilities in a private setting. She commented, "for us, for him, it was give him a gifted school where his brain can go to wherever it wants to go…, and then we made the decision that we will independently help him with this other part [the learning struggles]." They decided to keep the two spheres separate, as she could not find a school that would address both. She commented, "This is the thing about being twice-exceptional, is that I couldn't find one

[school] that met both [needs]." They learned about a couple of schools that seemed like they might be a good fit for Steve, both of which worked with gifted children. They applied, and Steve was accepted at both. They chose the school they felt would be a better fit for him, and Steve was set to begin in the fall.

360 Turnaround

When fourth grade started in September, Steve refused to go to school the first couple of weeks. Tina panicked, and went to discuss Steve's complicated learning profile with the head of school. The head of school was very understanding and indicated it was important to give Steve some time and space to see how he settled in, though the school was not open to special accommodations - like the use of an iPad for auditory supported reading that Tina had suggested. As the school year proceeded, however, and students began exploring their unit of study, Steve became absorbed in the curriculum. Tina commented, "So I kind of knew that they weren't going to be giving him a specialized education for dyslexia. I knew it wasn't that, and we don't want that because I'd rather he get that outside and just get the gifted part at this school. And that was enough to snap him out of it, knowing that school was interesting, and it was fun, and this is not such a horrible environment after all." The school was also very flexible in its approach to Steve and sensitive to Steve's lack of confidence. For instance, he was allowed to complete his math work in the school lobby on a comforting couch away from other kids in his math class until he had developed enough confidence to join his math group. Little by little, as Steve immersed himself in more complex material, his motivation and his love of learning returned. Tina reflected, "Oh my god, it's a 360 turnaround – when we first came to [the school], he refused, and I was like, 'oh my goodness, we're back here again.'" With continued flexibility from the school, however, Steve continued to grow and thrive in his new setting. She

commented, "In the morning, he gets up, he gets ready; there is just no trying to get him out the door. He's motivated; he has a love of learning; he's seeing himself progress." Both she and her husband were thrilled and relieved to have found the right educational fit for their son, yet they also recognized that there were still missing pieces regarding his struggles with reading, writing and spelling.

In the middle of Steve's fourth grade year, Tina was fortunate to meet a learning specialist, Tanya (a pseudonym), who privately tutored children with dyslexia, and who, in particular, understood the unique interaction of the high abilities and the learning disabilities of twice-exceptional children with dyslexia. Tanya began to work with Steve one to two times per week on a range of skills including phonological awareness.

Finally Making Sense In a New Way

A serious, kind and knowledgeable woman, Tanya, has a master's degree in special education with a teaching credential and additional coursework and training in dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia. Her expertise in language development, fluency and disability instruction and dyslexia were essential to getting Steve the kind of support he needed. Despite her busy schedule, Tanya has worked regularly with Steve over the last year and a half, and they continue to work together. Regarding Steve's growing abilities, she commented, "There is a real truth to the fact that it's finally making sense in a new way…."

The Nature of Dyslexia & Steve's Struggles

According to Tanya, dyslexia affects one in five people, or 20% of the population. It is a condition that affects the many layers of language fluency, most prominently the auditory and visual layers of language.[15] Phonological awareness issues reside in the auditory layers of

language (which affect reading ability and comprehension), while orthographic processing resides in the visual layers of language fluency (and affect spelling), according to Tanya. She commented, "phonological awareness is the ability to blend sounds in words, the ability to isolate sounds in words, and it's the ability to identify or manipulate the sound structure of words – and those were tricky tasks for [Steve], which is the hallmark characteristic of a dyslexic profile." Tanya explained that dyslexia runs on a spectrum from mild to severe, with some people having just the "flavor" of dyslexia, which is even less pronounced than the mild category. Tanya said that Steve had mild dyslexia and that what he had been lacking was explicit instruction in language.

For most average and above average students, understanding the rules and patterns of language arises naturally, and so their reading comes easily, but for children with dyslexic profiles "that natural instruction is lost," Tanya explained. Children with dyslexia require explicit instruction about how language works. Tanya emphasized how important it is that dyslexic children work with individuals with extensive training in this area. She stated:

> What's essential for teachers who are working with students with dyslexia, gifted or not, is that they must have a deeper understanding of the linguistic structure of words in English, and that takes training, it takes experience, it takes a whole sort of subset, to whatever degree you have, you have to understand language because you're teaching it to an audience who needs explicit understanding of how language works.

She relayed that most teachers and learning specialists do not have that level of expertise.

Tanya explained that children with dyslexia memorize words as a way to make sense of language, but they end up not being able to break words down because of this strategy. Eventually, this approach fails them as words become more complex and as they transition from

"learning how to read, to "reading to learn" in school. She pointed out that Steve was using his keen memory abilities to help him get by in reading. In order to continue developing his language skills, he would need to learn new approaches through explicit instruction. To that end, she and Steve worked on a range of tasks together, starting with basic phonological abilities and advancing to more complex skills:

> He needed a little bit of support, just at the letter identification level and the sounds that go along with them; short vowels were particularly hard, which we would expect with that kind of a profile with poor phonological awareness and chronic ear infections as a young child. So we worked a lot just on sounds, and separating sounds and blending sounds, and how do we decode specific words. I taught him strategies that are systematic - for the first thing is identifying the vowel grapheme. A grapheme is the smallest unit of print that it takes to express a sound in English, and the key to reading, and to spelling for that matter, is knowing how to break words down into syllables. So we worked on syllabication. There are six main vowel patterns in English, so I introduced those to him one at a time, and we worked at a visual level, and we worked at an auditory level, and some days were spelling days, some days were reading days, and I had him put those pieces together, and because he's so bright, he caught on super quickly.

She further explained that with gifted children, the remediation moves at a quicker pace because they absorb information faster. Despite the arduous nature of the work, Tanya was able to keep Steve engaged during their tutoring lessons. She explained:

> I can't say he never rolled his eyes when I had something to tell him, but I think he knew intrinsically that what I was doing was helpful for him, and in that way, I had his buy in. He could see the improvement, and in that way, I had his buy in. The third piece of that is that English is fascinating. It's such an interesting

> language, and there are all kinds of fun conventions and twists and historical layers.

As the months passed, Steve began to get more enjoyment out of the work, especially as he saw his own progress. Tanya relayed:

> He also loved playing around with bigger words. He had some sessions where he was pretty joyful about seeing that he could take on a highly complex word and spell it as well. And he would say 'give me another one of those,' and so it brought out his own little competitive spirit into wanting to get better and improve. And that's the fun stuff in learning, right there.

Tanya also used strategies to keep the work more interesting; she explained, "So I tell kids right from the outset that they are going to become language detectives, and that they are going to be acquiring a toolkit by which they can solve language problems." In that way, she arms the kids with strategies they can turn to again and again, while imbuing a curiosity for making sense of language.

Though they have made solid progress, one area Steve continues to struggle with is his writing. It is the one area where Tanya meets the most resistance from him. To help him increase his ability in this area, Tanya focuses on sentence development exercises. She explained:

> What I am doing with him is lots of work at a sentence development level: how you write compound sentences, how you write complex sentences, how do we extend our sentences, what's a prepositional phrase, can we add some more adjectives there. Those are the kinds of pieces that we are continuously working on because it builds his stamina for writing. He is writing six or seven excellent sentences. He spends an hour writing them and then suddenly his brain says, "huh, I can spend this much time writing, even though my focus is on sentences!"

By working with Steve on developing interesting sentences, she also simultaneously cultivates Steve's capacity to endure difficulty in writing.

Tanya also highlighted the importance of using (assessment) discrepancy data to better understand the needs of gifted learners with dyslexia, including Steve. She explained, "So with Steve, he is not profoundly impacted - he was reading sort of at an average level; the big issue was that it was really discrepant from his potential." She also remarked that many gifted children with dyslexia are denied special education services:

> When you put these [gifted kids with dyslexia] in accelerated environments at the level of their academic potential, then the breakdowns really start to happen, and it may still look like they're getting all As and Bs, and performing at adequate levels, but you have to make room for those pieces that include discrepancy from intellectual potential within your model of how you understand an individual's learning profile. This is why at an assessment level, gifted kids get dinged often, because schools will use the fact that they are so bright to deny them services.

Tanya drew a bell curve on a nearby whiteboard to illustrate her point. When one sees the discrepancy between performance (actual reading level) and ability (as measured by an intelligence test - IQ test) among a student with an average IQ and a student with a gifted or profoundly gifted IQ, the discrepancy itself may be the same, but only the student who falls below average performance receives educational support services in most schools, even though the student with a gifted IQ may be a struggling learner, too.

Tanya also pointed out that one outcome of the effort required to master language - that plagues children with dyslexia - is fatigue, a phenomena that was repeatedly witnessed in Steve. Tanya explained that a child with dyslexia will likely always have to work a little harder at these

skills by bringing a deliberateness to their efforts. Because of this difference, she said, many people with dyslexia tend to gravitate to fields that come more naturally to them. Tanya believes that Steve's future is very bright, and she won't be surprised if he ends up working in a science and math related field. For the short term, she indicated that classes with high reading and writing demands will be trickier for Steve, especially in high school and college. Nonetheless, Steve's abilities have grown significantly under her tutelage. Tanya also commended Tina for understanding her son's needs, for recognizing his gifted abilities, and for working to get all of his needs met.

Case Analysis

Steve fits the profile of a twice-exceptional child, who manifests paradoxical qualities - both gifted abilities and learning disabilities. Further, his gifted abilities have compensated for his learning disabilities resulting in average performance in school and on testing data. The purpose of this study was primarily to: (1) to get a clearer picture of both Steve's and his parent's understanding of his strengths, interests, talents and learning disabilities and the convergence of these understandings, in order to build on these areas through a strengths-based lens; and (2) to explore the parent's understanding of their role in advocating for Steve through a strengths-based approach.

Strengths, Interests and Talents & Learning Disabilities

Steve demonstrates a great propensity and ease in math and science related subjects, yet he is willing to push himself in reading when it is of a more complex nature and he sees his own progress. His self-perceived strengths align closely with his more natural abilities. Steve sees himself as good at science, math, chess, and soccer. He stated, "[In math] you get to do a lot of

problem solving. And I also like science…. I like science because it is complicated, and I like learning about that." Now that he is at a school for gifted children, Steve has come to see that many of the kids around him are very good at math, so much so, that he feels he is not as strong. He has tended to compare himself to other students. Tina has attempted to soothe his comparisons, by telling him that he is doing advanced math. Indeed, since he has been at the gifted school, Steve's math performance has steadily progressed, and he has now set a goal for himself to get into seventh grade math by the end of fifth grade; he is on track to do that. In science, he has a current passion for learning about atoms, as well as for learning more about electricity and batteries, and he conducts home-experiments with batteries. At his new school, he also delved deeply into studying rocks and minerals, a topic he especially loved, as well as soil science, and was reading college level textbooks on the subject. He also is very aware of his struggles with reading, spelling and handwriting. Regarding writing he stated, "It's just, it wasn't, it's not easy for me. It's really hard for me to do a bunch of writing. It hurts my hand when I do a lot, and yeah, I don't like repeating stuff over and over." He also demonstrated an understanding that his previous strategy of using memorization to read was not effective. He stated, "I am a slow reader because I actually haven't learned how to read the right way. So that's really the reason." Later, he stated, "I learned how to spell a different way. I memorized the words, and I never got to actually figure out how to put them together. That's the same thing for reading, I memorize the words, I don't actually spell them out." Steve reported that his tutoring really helps him because he has gone beyond his memorization strategies for tackling words: "It really helps with my reading because of memorizing the words, I actually start spelling them out." Steve also is developing a keen interest in chess, and his chess teachers noticed his unusual ability with the game. In a very short period of time, Steve has been invited

to participate in higher level games with more skilled competitors. He is taking to the game with a passion.

Tina's understandings of her son's strengths, abilities, talents and disabilities also largely converge with Steve's self-perception. She highlighted his love for science, especially atoms and rocks, and also his math abilities. She stated, "…he quickly gets the [math] concepts and then [he has] this ability to apply them. Then with science, it's a hunger, it's insatiable, the desire to just want to know everything about atoms. It's his ability to read very scientific … articles, which are inappropriate for his age - but he loves it - that he can really understand and repeat back." She also spoke about his self-perception that he is behind in math as distorted because he surrounded by high ability math kids. She stated, "Coming to [the gifted school], it was like 'Whoa'; these kids were academically motivated and ahead, and that was really hard for him, like in the math area, even though he is great at math…." Regarding his disabilities, Tina's views also dovetail with her son's: she understands his struggle with reading, spelling and writing as manifestations of his masked dyslexia.

Though the couple have yet to use the term "dyslexia" with Steve as an explanation for his difficulties, Tina thinks they will introduce that label in the coming year. Tina is also keen to frame her son's unique abilities as an advantage for him, based on the ideas discussed in the book, The Dyslexic Advantage. As her son grows, she intends to help him see his paradoxical learning abilities less as a disability and rather as a unique way to interpret and make sense of the world; she states, "I think when you have a label, you can just think negatively of it, and what I would like him eventually to do is to read The Dyslexic Advantage, so that he can really understand this is a super power, and only an advantage, especially for him, because he's kind of sorting out this learning disability, but he still will have that advantage, that he'll have for life."

Tina and Steve had few areas where their views either diverged or did not overlap. Tina spoke about Steve's social emotional intelligence and its presence from a very early age. Teachers have often relied on Steve, she relayed, to mediate disputes between children in class. He also has an intensely creative and imaginative side, and has needed alone time throughout his life to self-regulate through play and to express his deeper imagination. These quiet times are very private for Steve, and his parents have always honored them. Steve himself didn't comment on these behaviors even though the researcher attempted to inquire about these propensities. His lack of noticing or speaking to this side of himself, however, seems developmentally appropriate.

Another area of divergence concerns Steve's reluctance to speak in front of the class and to give presentations in front of the school, which he is required to do. While Tina primarily attributed this reluctance to shyness and self-consciousness, Steve himself attributed it to stuttering. When speaking about his reasons for disliking his school presentations, he stated, "Because I stutter on my words when I talk in front of people." Later, he added, "It's sometimes annoying because I can't really control myself with it." When inquiring with his mom about this self-perception of stuttering, Tina was surprised and not aware that he had issues with speech in this way. She relayed that Steve's older brother, however, does. When observing Steve during a school presentation, this researcher also did not notice any stuttering. Steve, however, seems to believe that this is a problem for him. There may be some deeper struggles of which neither his parents, nor tutor are aware, or it may be a distorted self-perception. Further exploration is warranted here.

Overall, there is a great deal of shared understanding between Steve's view of himself and his parent's view of his strengths, interests, talents and disabilities, with few areas of divergence. Utilizing a strengths-based lens, these shared understandings bode well for

improving Steve's educational outcomes; indeed, they already have. Building on his interests and abilities to help him endure his learning struggles, helps Steve feel good about his progress and accomplishments, and makes him more academically engaged and successful overall. In the vein of positive psychology, utilizing strengths in this way has helped to spur Steve into greater achievement, reversing a quickly devolving school trajectory. These understandings about his strengths, interests, talents and disabilities can serve as a confirmation for his parents as well as a platform for future advocacy efforts.

Parental Role in Advocacy from a Strength-Based Lens

When asked whether she had ever heard of a strengths-based approach to working with twice-exceptional children, Tina responded, "I think I read an article about that." When pressed further about her understanding, she relayed, "I read that probably two years ago, when we were in the throes of it: that you try to keep them positive, so doing something where they are succeeding, so that you keep the confidence up. So that was the decision of not-doing a dyslexic type school, but a gifted school. You know, so let's play to the strengths of his intellectual part instead of his disability." Tina's relentless work in finding a school where her son could explore his interests at a deeper level and cultivate his natural abilities to think abstractly and ascertain complicated ideas more quickly, was an outgrowth of her having come into contact with information about strengths-based approaches to working with twice-exceptional students. Although she was unable to find a school that met both needs, she and her husband have come very close to achieving this end by tackling each piece separately. One concern Tina mentioned in her last interview was the need to find an appropriate high school for Steve one day; she relayed, "The high school, I know that's going to be tricky. I don't know what we'll do for him in that regard." Her experience and knowledge, however, about wanting to emphasize Steve's

higher abilities, while still addressing his disabilities, will serve her and her husband well in advocating for their child and in meeting his future educational needs. Specifically, their initiating the switch to the school for gifted children, coupled with their finding expert tutoring lessons, provided Steve with the right balance of addressing his strengths, interests, talents *and* disabilities. Though making sense of Steve's educational gifts and challenges proved to be a difficult and tumultuous journey for them, the shared understandings and knowledge they gained, as well as their knowledge about strengths-based approaches, will serve as a springboard for continuing to engage Steve in successful educational pursuits and the life-long love of learning and work.

Themes

Overarching Theme: Achievement

The overarching theme that emerged from this research is the achievement that Steve has experienced. Through the approaches that his parents took, coupled with the right kinds of support from his tutor, along with the flexibility and complex offerings the school provided, Steve is now a thriving student, whose sense of self and love of learning has dramatically improved. In order to help Steve begin achieving at school, several pieces needed to fall into place, which also emerged in the research as component themes. Through the engaged advocacy of his parents and their good fortune in meeting a tutor with expert knowledge, as well as their economic means, many elements coalesced to turn the tide for this bright, kind and uniquely gifted child to help him achieve in a school setting and beyond.

In reviewing the data from a strengths-based lens, there are several component themes that emerge, all of which were necessary for Steve's achievement. The component themes emerged from each of the separate interviews with the three key stakeholders involved in this research and are accordingly grouped: Steve's themes, his mom's themes, and his tutor's themes.

Steve's Themes

There were four major themes that emerged from an analysis of Steve's interviews and the other data collected: (1) complexity; (2) seeing progress; (3) sense of accomplishment; and (4) keeping up with others.

Complexity

The first theme is best expressed by the word complexity. What became clear in the interviews with Steve is that part of what drives his motivation to learn as well as his love of learning is complex material. Simple problems were not only difficult for Steve to perform, they were also boring and unengaging. Often, the more complex the material, the greater Steve's interest and drive to learn. His mom, Tina, commented, "That's why I think he is drawn to science because it's figuring out there are no right or wrong answers, it's with ideas and concepts; it's big picture thinking; it's observation; it's less concrete stuff for him." One specific example of his love of complexity was his use of college level books about soil science. Though difficult to read, Steve enjoyed delving into this material. In fact, he relayed, "Yeah, it's more interesting when it's college grade books." Then he added, "It makes you think a lot harder, which I like. Even though it's harder to read, it's better than an easy book." Further, his love of complex material also spurred his interest in tackling more difficult phonetic spellings, as noted

by Tanya: "He also loved playing around with bigger words. He had some sessions where he was pretty joyful about seeing that he could take on a highly complex word and spell it as well." Complex math problems also fostered a love of learning; he stated, "I used to avoid math, when I was in a lower book,… not anymore. I think it's fun now." When asked what made it fun, he responded, "That I am actually challenging myself." His love of complexity also likely relates to his growing love of chess. This finding was supported by reports from Steve's mother as well as from his tutor. Tina stated, "He's discovered that he is very skilled at it, more so than the average kid. I don't know if that's something to do with his dyslexia, but his chess coaches… had seen all three of our boys, and they particularly saw something different and interesting with Steve, and so it always just makes me think there is." Understanding Steve's great need for and love of complexity will help aid his parents and teachers in meeting his future educational needs.

Seeing Progress

Another major theme that emerged from analyzing Steve's data was the significant role that seeing his own progress played in his learning. Steve frequently commented on his improvements in math, reading, spelling, and writing in the interviews. He said of his writing, "I can write a lot faster and a lot neater, and grammar, I used to have particularly bad grammar, and now my grammar is understandable." Regarding reading, he said, "I can, if I take the time, I can read bigger words. I used to be really bad at reading and really slow. It's not that I was super bad, it's just that, yeah, I was too slow, and now I can do it much quicker." One of the factors that helped fuel his interest in learning was seeing his progress; he stated, "If I don't realize it [his progress], it just sort of drags along, the activities just drag along, and I hope they end, but when I realize I actually am making progress, it's exciting because, yeah, I am actually getting good at something." Tanya, his tutor, also confirmed this phenomenon: "He could see the

improvement, and in that way, I had his buy in." Future approaches to supporting Steve's growth and learning, from a strengths-based perspective, should take into account the benefits of Steve being cognizant of and witnessing his own improvements.

Sense of Accomplishment

Another important theme that emerged from the interviews was the role that a sense of accomplishment played in Steve's improved learning and self-image. Steve's self-esteem took a battering at his old school and threatened his engagement with school altogether. In his new school, his learning flourished, and Steve's sense of accomplishment at having achieved hard tasks was evident throughout the interviews. In one example, when asked what helped him get through difficult reading, he stated, "The first thing would probably be, to get through really hard things, when I am done I can tell myself I read a college level book." When asked about this again later, he responded, "The only reason why it's really nice is because I realize that I read a really hard book that wasn't for my grade." When asked how that made him feel, he replied, "Proud, or something like that." Though humble and sensitive to other's feelings, Steve took quiet joy from his own accomplishments and his sense of self-esteem was much improved as a result.

Keeping Up With Others

Another theme that emerged from the interviews is Steve's wish to keep up with others or to not fall behind others in his performance. Steve especially expressed this wish in regard to his peers in math. When asked what helped him get through an easier math book, he responded, "All I did is keep thinking about when I would get into a higher book, and being in a higher class with my friends. That's all." When prompted about this same issue later, he added new

information: “My younger brother was shown the school; I wanted to be in a higher book because I knew he’s smart, and that he’s going to catch up.” His mother, Tina, also concurs with this finding. She told the story that Tanya, his tutor, had just given Steve a big spelling test the following weekend, where he did very well, performing at an eighth grade level (though he is currently in fifth grade); in regard to the spelling test, she commented, “You know the Sunday [of the test], that was a big pivoting point for him. It was like okay, I am somewhere, I am not behind. It’s very important for him not to feel that he is behind.” This sentiment in Steve could both help and harm his learning, and so is important for his teachers and parents to be aware of as they continue to support his growth and learning.

Mom’s Themes

In analyzing the interviews conducted with Tina, Steve’s mom, four key themes emerged: (1) engaged parent advocacy; (2) prioritizing giftedness; (3) a separate spheres approach with a subtheme of appropriate tutor support; and (4) flexibility from the school environment.

Engaged Parent Advocacy

One element that became very clear throughout the interviews with Tina, was that both Tina and her husband were fully engaged in advocating for their son. Time and again, they worked to find solutions for him as he struggled at school; they spent money and time trying to unravel his complex learning needs; and they never stopped in their efforts to get his needs met, especially once they got a sense of what was troubling him. They were fully engaged parent advocates, a primary theme of this research, and a cornerstone of a strengths-based approach to helping twice-exceptional learners.

Prioritizing Giftedness

Another key theme that emerged in the interviews with Tina was the parents' decision to prioritize Steve's giftedness over his disabilities. A key feature of utilizing a strengths-based approach to learning - using strengths to help students address weaknesses - Tina had, in fact, become aware of this approach by reading an article about it in her research. Though she and her husband were unable to find a school that fully addressed their son's gifts and disabilities, they nonetheless found a workable solution by placing him in a school for gifted children and supplemented with independent tutoring.

Separate Spheres Approach with the Subcategory - Appropriate Tutoring Support

Another key theme that emerged from the data was the separate spheres approach that the parents undertook, whereby they opted to put Steve in a gifted school and remediate his learning disabilities separately. Though the parents adopted this approach partly out of necessity, and partly out of preference, it nonetheless served both Steve and them well. Further, the parents did not forgo addressing either area of Steve's needs (his gifts or disabilities); they persisted in addressing both. Key to making this separate spheres approach work was finding the right kind of remediation, and the family was very fortunate to find Tanya, an expert in addressing the learning needs of gifted children with dyslexia, who made much of the work interesting for Steve. Thus, a subcategory of this theme was appropriate tutoring support, a key variable in the family's success in meeting Steve's educational needs.

Flexibility from School Environment

Also instrumental to making the parents' separate spheres strategy work was flexibility from the school. Again and again, the willingness of the school to work with Steve, especially as

he transitioned to his new setting, made a crucial difference for his success. The school remained fluid and responsive to Steve's unique needs as a learner, while also maintaining its own limits regarding the use of things like assistive technology.

Tutor Themes

In reviewing the interview data with the tutor, two key themes emerged as instrumental to meeting Steve's needs: (1) prodigious professional knowledge and skill about dyslexia and gifted individuals; and (2) explicit instruction.

Prodigious Professional Knowledge & Skill about Dyslexia and Gifted Individuals

Tanya, Steve's tutor, spoke about the need for teachers and tutors who work with children with dyslexia to have a high level of training and understanding about the disability. She delineated the specific skills that these teachers need, and she also remarked that it is hard to find teachers with this level of training and skill. To work with twice-exceptional children with dyslexia requires yet another layer of understanding about the role that high abilities play in masking dyslexic patterns. Thus a key theme of this research, in meeting both Steve's needs, and the needs of other gifted children with dyslexia, is prodigious professional knowledge about and skill working with children with dyslexia and gifted individuals. In interviewing Tanya it became clear that she herself has high abilities in working with children and prodigious professional knowledge.

Explicit Instruction

Another key theme that emerged from the interview with Tanya was the need for explicit instruction for these learners, whether dyslexic or gifted and dyslexic. These learners, she emphasized, need explicit instruction in language in order to finally make sense of words in a

new way. Without explicit instruction, many will not be able to understand words. Tanya also explained the cost to society when these learners' needs are not captured and remediated with explicit instruction: illiteracy plagues society and affects all level of functioning, she said.

Researcher Bias

In investigating this topic, this researcher was careful to monitor her biases during the interview process as well as when analyzing the data. Biases included viewing the family in a particularly favorable light due to their dedication and success with improving their son's educational experiences as well as possible biases toward the various educational institutions where Steve attended due to either favorable or unfavorable educational outcomes. This researcher aimed to remove any biases in the interpretation and writing of the findings and conclusions.

Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

Steve is a bright and kind twice-exceptional child. He has been identified as profoundly gifted, and he also manifests mild dyslexia. His learning struggles combined with his intelligence perplexed his teachers, his parents and himself, and his school experiences led to growing frustration, poor self-image and a downward school trajectory. It took many years for Steve's parents, under the guiding hand of Steve's mom, to unravel his learning difficulties. Yet, with persistence the family successfully reversed Steve's growing alienation from school. Steve shows keen interest and strengths in science and math, as well as in complex reading material; however, he continues to struggle with writing. He also possesses an unusual aptitude for chess. Steve's parents - particularly Steve's mom - are ardent advocates for their son. They have utilized strengths-based strategies in their advocacy efforts, most notably by prioritizing his gifted needs and by adopting a separate spheres approach to his schooling, whereby they placed him in a gifted educational setting and provided independent, expert tutoring. The information gathered through this research project provides a rich story of their experiences as they navigated challenging educational experiences. The case narrative provides insight into Steve's strengths, interests, talents and disabilities through a strengths-based lens. The case study also provides evidence that his parents' understanding of his strengths, interests, talents and disabilities closely align his own; the knowledge and insights

gained from this qualitative investigation can serve as a springboard for future advocacy efforts, particularly as Steve enters the high school years.

The overarching theme that emerged from the research is Steve's achievement in school. He is making steady progress with his learning disabilities and is thriving in the gifted school environment. Several component themes arose in each set of research interviews, which all played a key role in Steve's achievement. The themes that emerged in Steve's interviews included: his love of and need for *complex material* to engage and motivate him to learn; how *seeing progress* at school improved his academic engagement and motivation to learn and enhanced his self-esteem; how a *sense of accomplishment* in having completed projects made him feel good about himself and boosted his sense of competency; and the way in which his desire to *keep up with others* helped to push him along in his efforts to learn. The themes that arose with Tina, Steve's mom, included: an *engaged parent advocacy,* where answers and information were sought and strategies put into place to meet Steve's needs; how the parents chose to *prioritize Steve's giftedness* over his disabilities as a way to keep him engaged with school, a cornerstone of a strengths-based approach; how the parents adopted a *separate spheres approach*, where they chose a gifted school coupled with *private tutoring support*, an instrumental sub-theme; and how the *flexibility from the school environment* made a significant difference to Steve's academic achievement. The themes that arose from Steve's tutor, Tanya, included: the significant role that *prodigious professional knowledge and skill about dyslexia and giftedness* play in being able to address these learners' needs; and the need

for *explicit instruction* in remediating Steve's dyslexic patterns and that of other children with dyslexia.

Comparison of Findings to the Literature

According to Baum (as cited in Besnoy et al, 2015), there are three kinds of twice-exceptional learners, and Trail (2011) indicates that of those three categories, those whose high abilities compensate for or mask their learning disabilities are the hardest to identify. Steve's masked dyslexia was, in fact, difficult to discern, and his parents' experience parallels the research in that regard. It took Tina and her husband about nine months from the time Steve was flagged for pull-out services before they obtained a diagnosis; it took about 11 months before they learned he would not be eligible for special education services, and it took two more years before they found a series of interventions that fully met his educational needs. Further, Steve manifested characteristics that are common to twice-exceptional learners, often as a result of their needs being under-identified or misunderstood for extended periods of time as discussed by Baum, Schader and Hebert (2014). Research reflects that twice-exceptional students often view themselves as inadequate, experience high anxiety, and suffer from poor self-concept, some of which was witnessed in Steve as the years went by (Baldwin, Omdal, & Pereles, 2015; Besnoy et al., 2015; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). Specifically, he manifested a growing sense of alienation from school, diminishing self-esteem, and a deepening frustration, which mirrored the experiences of participants in the Baum et al. (2014) study of twice-exceptional children. Unlike other twice-exceptional kids in the study, however, Steve did fit in with his peers at his old and new schools, perhaps due to support from his family and the abiding concerns of his earlier

private school teachers, and/or evidence of his gifted social-emotional functioning as highlighted by his mother.

Using A Deficit Emphasis

Steve's earlier private school, though caring, unwittingly utilized a deficit approach in trying to help him. School personnel were not only unable to address his gifted abilities, they also dwelled on remediating his disabilities, which proved to be unhelpful, stigmatizing and frustrating for Steve. As reported by Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, and Goldman (2013), a heavy emphasis on student deficits often undermines student learning and can result in feelings of demoralization, lower self-confidence, poorer motivation, poor expectations for success and a sense of stigma. Many of these negative, unintended consequences were true for Steve, and so his parents obtained a therapist for him to address them. Steve's experience is not uncommon for twice-exceptional children because as Reis, Baum, and Burke (2014) point out, deficit-foci remain the norm in educational settings. IEPs, by law, do not require that services be provided based on high intellectual abilities, nor are schools required to focus on talent development. This leaves children like Steve in a lurch and reinforces a downward educational trajectory.

Assessment & Special Education Identification Issues

When the public school assessed Steve, it utilized the profile of processing strengths and weaknesses approach adopted by many schools. The school undertook a comprehensive, collaborative and multi-dimensional approach in its assessment process, which Morrison and Rizza (2007) recommend as the best approach to identifying 2e students. Tina also credited the school for its thorough investigation of Steve. However, in its conclusion, the public school

system was unable to offer Steve any special education services because he did not qualify, i.e., he was not failing in school. Instead, his performance fell in the average range for his grade level, and according to federal guidelines, a student must be falling below grade level to qualify for federally funded special education services (Trail, 2011). With its focus on establishing or denying eligibility for special education services, it appears that the school missed an opportunity to help Steve's parents better understand his learning difficulties, as school personnel did not offer any suggestions or point the parents in helpful directions.

Tina and her husband's experience with the school's assessment process both dovetailed and differed from other parents in the research literature. They did not experience the deflection that some parents experience in trying to initiate and complete assessments for their children (Neumeister, Yssel & Burney, 2013). Conversely, their experience paralleled that of many parents in the Besnoy et al. (2015) study, in that they did lose confidence in the school's ability to help them. Unlike some parents in the Besnoy study, however, it was not because the school was uncooperative in the assessment process itself - the school was, in fact, cooperative. Rather, it was simply because the school could not offer them special education services. Tina and her husband realized that it would not be a good use of their resources and time to try and convince the school to offer specialized education to their son, and so they decided to turn their attention to finding other solutions.

Discrepancy Model

Tina and her husband hired a neuropsychologist to assess their son, who found that Steve was profoundly gifted and that he had stealth dyslexia. Though his parents passed this information to the school, by federal law, the school was not required to respond to the discrepancy between Steve's high ability as evidenced by his IQ testing and his average

achievement/performance as evidenced by the tests the school gave him and by his schoolwork. The school was also not legally required to grant services based on this discrepancy – even though the information was included in the school's assessment report. According to Tina, the school district did not offer gifted education services. Steve was viewed as an average learner because the policies at both the federal and at the school district level worked from a deficit model. Steve would have needed to be failing in grade-level work to receive additional support from the school, despite that he was a struggling learner and was experiencing increasing disengagement from school. The IDEA no longer requires a large discrepancy between ability and performance as a qualifying characteristic for special education services as pointed out by Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, and Goldman (2013). The findings of this case study indicate that this approach fails twice-exceptional students whose abilities mask their disabilities, as it ended up failing Steve.

Barriers to Collaboration

The lack of state and federal policies to recognize discrepancy data as a valid indicator of a learning disability is one reason that twice-exceptional children are denied help for their learning struggles. The paucity of professional knowledge about twice-exceptionalism is another reason why these children lack help from educators. Steve and his parents suffered on both counts: the private school teachers did not know how to appropriately respond to Steve's needs, and the public school district assessment process denied Steve any additional services. In his parents' mind, further collaboration was impossible based on these factors. Moreover, Steve's parents themselves knew very little about how to go about solving their son's educational struggles at the time. In the short-term, they had to institute triage-like measures, such as Steve's Daily Design and therapy, to cease the educational harm. For the intermediate-term, they, like

many parents of children with special needs - as relayed by Besnoy et al. (2015) - had to quickly master a steep learning curve to acquire the information they needed to save Steve.

A Strengths-Based Approach

Increasing numbers of educators view a strengths-based or talent-development focus as the critical component in engaging twice-exceptional students in both more interesting *and* more difficult work (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). Tina, through her research and reading, came across an article on strengths-based approaches to working with twice-exceptional children which made an important impact on her and her husband's future decision-making regarding Steve. Neihart (as cited in Reis et al., 2014) stresses the importance of keeping the focus on a student's strengths and talents, which results in more positive outcomes for students and minimizes social and emotional adjustment. Based on their growing understanding of this approach, Tina and her husband made thoughtful and strategic decisions about how to proceed with Steve's education in the wake of their negative school experiences.

Though not all of the steps Tina and her husband took embraced a conscious strengths-based approach, many by default reflected this orientation. The most important step they chose, which endorsed a conscious strengths-based approach, was to prioritize Steve's gifted abilities over his learning disabilities by placing him in a school for gifted children. This strategy was a cornerstone of their strengths-based approach, and it is one the research literature strongly supports. As discussed by Nicpon, Allmon, Sieck, and Stinson (as cited in Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013) Steve like other twice-exceptional students then had the chance to use his higher thinking skills and creativity at his new school, which improved his learning. Further, as elucidated by Baum and Owen (as cited in Reis, Baum, and Burke, 2014), once his strengths and talents received greater attention, he behaved more and more like a gifted student.

As Reis, Baum, and Burke (2014) highlight, a strengths-based approach does not eclipse continued attention on deficits, and Tina and her husband recognized that there were still missing pieces in Steve's educational supports. They had the good fortune and the economic means of being able to pair Steve with an expert tutor who could address his learning struggles. Thus, they adopted a separate spheres approach to remediating those disabilities. Through his tutor's help, Steve learned to work hard on tasks that were difficult for him.

Baum, Schader and Hebert (2014) showed how a unique program for twice-exceptional students, the Multiperspectives Process Model (MPPM), supported student growth in three realms: cognitive, social and emotional/behavioral. Though Tina and her husband's experience differs from the approach embodied by this program, the model may offer some insight for the family and for other parents of 2e children who have adopted a separate spheres approach to educating their child. The MPPM draws upon five key variables to ascertain student's needs: (1) the student's learning differences; (2) the student's family context; (3) the student's disabilities; (4) the student's gifts, talents and interests; and (5) the student's social and emotional readiness for learning (Baum et al., 2014). The program aided students such that "by graduation, students in the cohort described themselves as confident, hopeful, and looking forward to the next phase of their lives" (p. 319). Like Steve, when students came into the MPPM program, they had low motivation, unilateral negative school experiences and had been understood by educators through their deficits. Like them, Steve over time, increased his productivity in his new educational setting.

In the MPPM program, the challenging aspects of learning were deliberately embedded in the curriculum with careful planning and attention from the staff. Thus, teachers integrated compensatory strategy instruction into an enriched learning environment. This is not the type of

instruction Steve received at his gifted school, rather he received instruction in difficult tasks privately from his tutor. Thus, Steve is not experiencing a program at school specifically tailored to his unique learning struggles and gifts with careful planning and attention from the staff like the MPPM students. Though this strategy is working for Steve and the family for now, it may be that having this type of instruction embedded in a school curriculum would serve him better over time. Tina and her husband could not find a program that addressed the duality of Steve's learning needs, thus they privately remediated Steve's learning difficulties through their separate spheres approach. While the flexibility of the gifted school remains a key variable in making this strategy work, deeper collaboration between the parties on addressing these issues is minimal. Though Tina expressed at times that she preferred the existing scenario, and even expressed that it was not necessarily fair to ask the schools to tackle the full range of Steve's needs, it may be that as academic demands increase for Steve over time, an educational setting that can address the duality of his needs would better foster his growth and learning. The challenge for Tina and her husband, and other parents of 2e children, however, is finding an educational institution of this sort. While Steve's current school is working well for him now, his parents will need to continue to monitor his growth through their separate spheres approach, and they may need to make adjustments in their strategy at some point, perhaps during the transition to high school, which serves as a natural bridge for kids.

Another key component of the MPPM program addresses learning preferences, which this researcher was able to garner from the research interviews and will share with the family. Further, through this research, the family now has a detailed record of their past school experiences referred to as "family context" in the MPPM approach, which may be of some use to them in the future with schools who embrace a deeper level of collaboration. Overall, Steve's

parents' strategy has paid off: over the course of fourth and fifth grades at his new school for gifted kids, after a brief bumpy start, Steve's interest in learning and his motivation for learning returned, and his self-esteem and sense of accomplishment have significantly improved.

Parents As Key Educational Advocates

Tina and her husband have been key educational advocates for their son consistent with research that indicates that parents or primary caregivers are a child's most significant educational advocate (Besnoy et al., 2015). Further, in accordance with the research of Duquette, Fullerton, Orders, and Robertson-Grewal (cited in Besnoy et al. 2015), Tina and her husband also seem to understand that advocacy is a constant parental duty that requires ongoing parental involvement in and monitoring of the educational setting. Unfortunately, as discussed by Besnoy et al., in their early school experiences with Steve, Tina and her husband encountered school staff who lacked knowledgeable about the phenomena of twice-exceptionalism, which undermined collaboration. The lack of federal and school policies to support twice-exceptional learners equally undermined collaboration.

Like other parents in the Besnoy et al. (2015) study, Tina and her husband lost confidence in the earlier two school systems' ability to help their son. However, their experience differed from other parents in that the schools were very forthcoming in assessing Steve. Their experience was also different in that the private school attempted to supplement Steve's learning, but their lack of expert knowledge about this learning profile and their inability to deliver explicit instruction ended up producing more harm than good. Tina and her husband also did not experience attempts by the school to deflect their efforts to have their son's disabilities assessed, or attempts to mislead them in terms of their rights.

In the Besnoy et al. (2015) study, parents had an overwhelming concern that the disability would completely undermine their child's gifted potential. While Tina had concern, she was more positive about her son's growth, which may have reflected their current positive experiences. Also, like those parents, Tina and her husband saw themselves as key advocates for Steve, and they, too, turned to outside supports to educate themselves to meet his needs.

Tina and her husband's experiences also paralleled Neumeister, Yssel, and Burney's (2013**)** qualitative research, which found that parents became successful advocates for their children only after they embraced two key responsibilities: (1) that they were the ones responsible for recognizing and comprehending the facets of their child's 2e manifestation; and (2) that the primary caregiver assumed the bulk of responsibility for the child's learning growth. Tina and her husband have embraced both of these responsibilities: (1) they appear to have embraced the mindset that they are primarily responsible for making sense of Steve's learning profile and needs as evidenced by their behaviors and by Tina's disclosures, and (2) Tina, as the primary caretaker, assumed the bulk of the responsibility for learning about and coordinating Steve's educational needs. Another interesting finding of Neumeister et al. research is that mother's worked to normalize their child's disability within themselves and within their children. Tina's experience was similar to this finding, but also different: Tina viewed Steve's learning difference as a manageable difference, similar to the normalizing approach of these other mothers, but she also went beyond this approach in that she viewed Steve's dyslexia as an advantage, as delineated in the book The Dyslexic Advantage. Tina advocated an interesting position in this regard, one that may, in fact, have the potential to help Steve manifest his full potential. Overall, Tina embraced a very positive attitude toward Steve's learning struggles. The approach that she and her husband took in their advocacy efforts for Steve coincides with

the growing research and orientation of positive psychology as espoused by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, (2000), which asserts the need to focus on people's strengths and abilities, not just their weaknesses.

Limitations & Gaps in the Research

It is important to note that the research focus of this paper is one case study, thus, generalizations cannot be broadly applied based on these findings. They can, however, add incrementally to researchers', parents' and educators' knowledge about how different families solve their twice-exceptional children's complex learning needs. Research in this area is also limited by the number of educational institutions that are tackling this issue; thus, it is difficult to find programs to study. Moreover, there is still disagreement among some educators about the validity of disability claims made by parents of 2e kids and psychologists. There also is a pervasive lack of knowledge about this issue among educators. All of these factors highlight the need for additional research, training and programs to address these learners' needs.

Implications for Future Research

When there are so few schools that address the issue of twice-exceptionalism well, or at all, how do different families of twice-exceptional children get their children's educational needs met? Might additional and broader-based research help inform both public and private institutional efforts to assist these learners and their parents? Clearly, Steve's family is very fortunate in that they had the resources (time, money and education) to help them meet their child's needs. What of families with limited resources at their disposal – are there programs or safety nets in place to help capture some these children? Given the controversial nature of the

use of discrepancy data in school assessments for twice-exceptional students, longer-term research on outcomes for twice-exceptional children who fall between the cracks might help inform future policies that capture these learners. Is there a strong link between twice-exceptional learners and high school drop-out rates? Steve's early elementary school experience seems to indicate that there may be. This subject is rife with further research possibilities. Indeed, such research is needed.

Overall Significance of the Study

Important to note is the lack of gifted education services in both states in which Steve resided. Had gifted education been offered, the family may have received more support, though not necessarily. There are some states that are currently addressing the needs of twice-exceptional learners through their gifted programming, though they remain far and few between.[16] What seems clear is that the essentiality of the provision of gifted education is brought into even sharper focus when the needs of twice-exceptional learners are considered: twice-exceptional students *need* complexity in their educational experience in order to boost their educational outcomes and to give them the motivation to tackle their learning disabilities. Steve's experience is testament to this reality. Challenging curriculum is a vital and necessary component of twice-exceptional students' educational achievement.

Overall, this study highlights an interesting case study about a family who has solved their twice-exceptional child's educational needs in a creative and strengths-based manner. It is a happy story that can serve to give other parents hope and inspire their own advocacy efforts on behalf of their twice-exceptional children. The study also highlights the need for educators to become more familiar with this learning profile in order to, in the least, point parents in the right

direction for services if they can not offer services themselves. It also may help some educators to be more flexible in their approach to these learners if the parents are actively seeking supplemental services to help their child. Finally, the qualitative nature of this study points out how much data can be gleaned from investigative questioning of subjects – findings were rich in detail and provided many insights, which complimented the quantitative assessment data. This approach seems especially useful with a population for whom there are no easy answers. Solutions are as complex as these learners themselves. Helping to provide answers to the issues they face will require both grit and astute discernment from parents, educators and researchers alike.

About the Author

Lisa Krausz is completing a Master's of Science in Education at Dominican University of California. She is also attaining a Gifted Education Certificate from the University of Nevada, Reno. Ms. Krausz would like to work with parents to help them find solutions to their gifted and twice-exceptional children's educational needs.

References

Anzul, M., Evans, J. F., King, R. & Tellier-Robinson, D. (2001). Moving beyond a deficit perspective with qualitative research methods. *The Council for Exceptional Children, 67*(2), 235-249. Retrieved January 24, 2017 from http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=9d05b441-0218-454b-bc48-f49657b5fa1c%40sessionmgr4008&vid=11&hid=4203

Assouline, S. G., Nicpon, M. F. & Huber, D. H. (2006). The impact of vulnerabilities and strengths on the academic experiences of twice-exceptional students: a message to school counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 10*(1), 14-24. Retrieved January 24, 2017 from http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=14&sid=9d05b441-0218-454b-bc48-f49657b5fa1c%40sessionmgr4008&hid=4203

Baldwin, L., Omdal, S. N., & Pereles, D. (2015). Beyond stereotypes: understanding, recognizing, and working with twice-exceptional learners. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 47*, 216-225. Retrieved January 30, 2017 from http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=c4c2b2f0-8a4a-43fe-b3d2-26fe14bfbf00%40sessionmgr4010&hid=4109

Baum, S. M., Schader, R. M., & Herbert, T. P. (2014). Through a different lens: reflecting on a strengths-based, talent-focused approach for twice-exceptional learners. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 58*(4), 311-327. Retrieved January 31, 2017 from http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/0016986214547632

Besnoy, K. D., Swoszowski, N. C., Newman, J. L., Floyd, A., Jones, P. & Byrne, C. (2015). The advocacy experiences of parents of elementary age, twice-exceptional children. *Gifted*

Child Quarterly, 59(2), 108-123. Retrieved January 24, 2017 from http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/0016986215569275

Bisland, A. (2005). Using learning-strategies instruction with students who are gifted and learning disabled. In Johnsen, S. K. & Kendrick, J. (Eds.), *Teaching gifted students with disabilities* (pp. 161-178). Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press, Inc.

Brody, L. E. & Mills, C. J. (1997). Gifted children with learning disabilities: a review of the issues. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 30*(3), 282-296.

Coleman, M. R. & Gallagher, S. (2015). Meeting the needs of students with 2e: it takes a team. *Gifted Child Today, 38*(4), 252-254. Retrieved January 24, 2017 from http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=24&sid=9d05b441-0218-454b-bc48-f49657b5fa1c%40sessionmgr4008&hid=4203

Eide, B. L. & Eide, F. F. (2011). *The dyslexic advantage: unlocking the hidden potential of the dyslexic brain.* New York, New York: Plume, Penguin Group.

Hale, J., Alfonso, V., Berninger, V., Bracken, B., Christo, C., Clark, E., Cohen, M., Davis, A., Decker, S., Denckla, M., Dumont, R., Elliot, C., Feifer, S., Fiorello, C., Flanagan, D., Fletcher-Janzen, E., Geary, D., Gerber, M. Gener, M., Goldstein, S., Gregg, N., Hagin, R., Jaffe, L., Kaufman, A., Kaufman, N., Keith, T., Kline, F., Kochhar-Bryant, C., Lerner, J., Marshall, G., Mascolo, J., Mather, N., Mazzocco, M., McCloskey, G., McGrew, K., Miller, D., Miller, J., Mostert, M., Naglieri, J., Ortiz, S., Phelps, L., Podhajski, B., Reddy, L., Reynolds, C., Riccio, C., Schrank, F., Schultz, E., Semrud-Clikeman, M., Shaywitz, S., Simon, J., Silver, L., Swanson, L., Urso, A., Wasserman, T., Willis, J., Wodrich, D., Wright, P. & Yalof, J. (2010). Critical issues in response-to-intervention, comprehensive evaluation, and specific learning disabilities identification

and intervention: an expert white paper consensus. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 33,* 223-236. Retrieved January 31, 2017 from http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/073194871003300310

Jimerson, S. R., Sharkey, J. D., Nyborg, V., & Furlong, M. J. (2004). Strengths-based assessment and school psychology: a summary and synthesis. *The California School Psychologist, 9,* 9-19. Retrieved January 26, 2017 from http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=8&sid=cf0485b7-866e-428e-9b64-14e281a8d8b3%40sessionmgr4008&hid=4208

Kalbfleisch, M. L. (2014). Twice-exceptional learners. In J. A. Plucker & C. M. Callahan (Eds.), *Critical issues and practices in gifted education: what the research says* (pp. 671-689). Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press, Inc.

Laija-Rodriguez, W., Grites, K., Bouman, D., Pohlman, C. & Goldman, R. L. (2013). Leveraging strengths assessment and intervention model (LeStAIM): a theoretical strengths-based assessment framework. *Contemporary School Psychology, 17*(1), 81-91. Retrieved January 26, 2017 from http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=9&sid=cf0485b7-866e-428e-9b64-14e281a8d8b3%40sessionmgr4008&hid=4208

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA; Jossey-Bass.

Morrison, W. F. & Rizza, M. G. (2007). Creating a toolkit for identifying twice-exceptional students. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 31*(1), 57-76. Retrieved January 26, 2017 from

http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=11&sid=cf0485b7-866e-428e-9b64-14e281a8d8b3%40sessionmgr4008&hid=4208

Neumeister, K. S., Yssel, N. & Burney, V. H. (2013). The influence of primary caregivers in fostering success in twice-exceptional children. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 57*(4), 263-274. Retrieved January 24, 2017 from http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/doi/full/10.1177/0016986213500068

Reis, S. M., Baum, S. M. & Burke, E. (2014). An operational definition of twice-exceptional learners: implications and applications. Gifted Child Quarterly, 58(3), 217-230. Retrieved January 24, 2017 from http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/doi/full/10.1177/0016986214534976

Rhee, S., Furlong, M. J., Turner, J. A., & Harari, I. (2001). Integrating strength-based perspectives in psychoeducational evaluations. *The California School Psychologist, 6*, 5-17. Retrieved January 26, 2017 from http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=13&sid=cf0485b7-866e-428e-9b64-14e281a8d8b3%40sessionmgr4008&hid=4208

Rivera, D. B., Murdock, J. & Sexton, D. (2005). Serving the gifted/learning disabled. In Johnsen, S. K. & Kendrick, J. (Eds.), *Teaching gifted students with disabilities* (pp. 145-151). Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press, Inc.

Roberts, J. L., Pereira, N., & Knotts, J. D. (2015). State law and policy related to twice-exceptional learners. *Gifted Child Today, 38*(4), 215-219. Retrieved January 26, 2017 from http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.dominican.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=15&sid=cf0485b7-866e-428e-9b64-14e281a8d8b3%40sessionmgr4008&hid=4208

Seligman, M.E. (1990). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Seligman, M. E. P., Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: an introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 5-14.

Trail, B. (2011). *Twice-exceptional gifted children: understanding, teaching, and counseling gifted students*. Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press, Inc.

United States Department of Education (2006). *Identification of specific learning disabilities*. Retrieved January 26, 2017 from: http://www.idea.ed.gov/explore/view

Endnotes

[1] IEP refers to the combined legal document and educational plan as well as the planning process designed to provide appropriate services to students with special needs; 504 Plans are similar in content and process, but are initiated for disabling conditions not addressed by the IDEA.

[2] The term "twice-exceptional" is becoming more mainstream and is often abbreviated as 2e; it is also spelled both with and without a hyphen. Federal, state and other authorities utilize the term twice-exceptional, but it is still not wholly accepted as some are still resistant to the idea that these two exceptionalities can co-exist (Baldwin, Omdal, & Pereles, 2015).

[3] Comorbidity is a term that Reis, Baum, and Burke (2014) use to describe the way in which the high abilities and disabilities of a twice-exceptional student interact to create a unique experience. The term derives from medical and psychological nomenclature, and usually refers the co-existence of two or more medical or mental disorders. When the two characteristics interact, the result is a combination distinct from if either characteristic where present alone. Reis et al. (2014) assert that this unique interaction is a key feature of twice-exceptional learners, and that understanding co-morbidity is critical to successfully meeting the needs of these learners.

[4] Tier 1 provides universal interventions, Tier 2 provides targeted interventions, and Tier 3 provides intensive interventions.

[5] Many 2e kids are anxious about school, some are defiant, and others highly creative in jettisoning assignments in weakness areas. Because of teachers' notions about what constitutes giftedness, these challenging behaviors often undermine a teacher's perception of the student as well as teacher ratings on student behavior checklists (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).

[6] Important to note, however, is that gifted programs without accommodations for weaknesses do not meet the needs of twice-exceptional learners either: when gifted subject material corresponds to the student's strengths, less accommodation may be needed, but when gifted subject material falls within areas of weakness, the twice-exceptional student will require appropriate accommodation in order to succeed (Reis et al., 2014).

[7] School psychologists use different language to describe the factors that influence children's behaviors. The more commonly accepted terms include risk and protective factors, stress, assets, resources and resilience. Children may experience risk factors (negative influences), protective factors (positive influences), and stress (caused by not meeting the demands around them or an inability to function well). They may have assets and resources (characteristics, traits or aspects of one's self, family or community that promote well-being), or buffers (factors that help protect against the influence of risk factors), and they may develop or manifest resilience (the ability to do well or bounce back in the face of challenges). Assessments that take these factors into account, help psychologists and educators develop a more holistic understanding of the child (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004).

[8] While there are many empirically validated assessment tools based in a deficit approach -- which cover things like processing deficits, poor achievement and social and emotional difficulties -- there are not as many empirically validated assessment tools that assume a strengths-based approach (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004). Laija-Rodriguez et al. (2013) review several tools with a strength-based approach, including the Values in Action Inventory for Youth (VIA – Youth; Peterson & Park, 2003), a self-report inventory that measures 24 different character strengths, the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) which measures social-emotional characteristics (LeBuff, Shapiro & Naglieri, 2009), and the Behavioral & Emotional Rating Scale-2 (BERS-2;

Epstein, 1999). Jimerson et al. (2004) also review the Behavioral Assessment Scale (BASC; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992), and the California Healthy Kids Survey – Resilient Youth Development Module (RYDM; Constantine et al., 1999). However, many of these scales are not targeted toward gifted kids per se. Also, many of them focus on character strengths or social-emotional factors, yet there remains a need for more strength-based assessments that focus on learning and adjustment because many kids have learning problems (Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013).

[9] Baum, Schader, & Hebert (2014) identify five factors that made social growth possible: (1) creating a psychologically safe environment where students did not feel shamed or excluded; (2) giving students the time they needed to grow and change; (3) being patient with the asynchrony of their development by being attuned and accepting with each student's sporadic growth; (4) supporting student development of positive relationships with a range of people from peers, teachers, staff and family members; and (5) fostering a strengths-based, talent-focused culture which gave parents hope.

[10] Feelings of disconnection and alienation undermine performance and are more prominent among students with disabilities, which can then depress intrinsic motivation, expectation for success and active engagement in schoolwork, especially in adolescence. Also social rejection and alienation result in lower self-concept, loneliness and frustration. These factors can contribute to high school drop-out (Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014).

[11] While Steve's dad had hoped to participate in the interviews, business commitments kept him detained.

[12] This researcher was able to review the subject's assessment data and evaluation reports from the public school district, which contained data from the neuropsychologist's assessment. These reports must remain confidential, and thus are not cited in the references.

[13] The Davidson Institute provides more information on stealth dyslexia on their website. Here is a link to an article written by the authors of The Dyslexic Advantage: http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10435

[14] There were three reports that this researcher examined by the public school district: an overall report of the tests conducted by the school psychologist, which also included data from the other two reports; a report of the testing conducted by the special education teacher; and a report of the testing conducted by the speech and language pathologist. These reports must remain confidential, and thus are not cited in the references.

[15] Tanya, Steve's tutor, drew a chart of language fluency on the white board during our interview. She explained that language fluency can be understood as being comprised of nine layers of an upside down pyramid, with the uppermost and largest layer being handwriting, followed in descending order by spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, sentence development, idea generation and organization. When a person is utilizing all of the layers well, they are practicing language fluency.

[16] A quick search on the internet reveals that several state public education departments discuss twice-exceptional students on their websites, specifically Maryland, Colorado, Virginia, Minnesota, and Missouri.