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Understanding the Learning & Advocacy Needs of a Twice-Exceptional Student Through A Strengths-Based Lens: Review of the Literature

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Cover Page Footnote

Thank you to Madalienne Peters for making this literature review an enjoyable and manageable process.

RUNNING HEAD: Twice-Exceptional Student

Understanding the Learning & Advocacy Needs of a Twice-Exceptional Student Through A Strengths-Based Lens: Review of the Literature

Lisa Krausz

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. They also call for the involvement of parents and the student herself in the process of better understanding and meeting the student's needs. Collaboration is a key component of strength-based approaches. 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

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

Introduction

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

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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 (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). Strengths-based approaches also 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.

Review of Academic Research

General Background Information

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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. In 2010, the Joint Commission on Twice-Exceptionality was established to work on developing a definition of twice-exceptionality. 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 *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (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).

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)

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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).

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 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

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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). 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).

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 (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). 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 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,

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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.

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. Thus, teams must be familiar with the issues that affect twice-exceptional students and must undertake a more holistic view of students

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(Coleman & Gallagher, 2015; Morrison & Rizza, 2007; Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014).

Strengths-Based Approaches

As an outgrowth of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), 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). 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

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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 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).¹

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). Other models address the cognitive, academic and social-emotional needs of the student within a strengths-based frame, like the LeStAIM model, which is rooted in ecological theory (Laija-Rodriguez, Grites, Bouman, Pohlman, & Goldman, 2013). 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,

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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.

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.

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MPPM enabled the positive development of the students, but each differed markedly in her cognitive, social and emotional and behavioral growth. Students also 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. Specifically, 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. 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 (Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014).

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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. 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 (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).

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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.

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 (Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, 2013). 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

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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.

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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

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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.

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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).

Conclusion

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.

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