Teaching Strategies for Twice-Exceptional Students

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Purpose

In this study, we sought to understand what strategies current teachers in 2e programs use to support their 2e students. Such exploration will broaden understanding of effective practices and provide guidance for preparing future teachers who will work with this population. Through interviews with practicing teachers, we examined experiential evidence and explored the relationships between teachers' classroom experiences and the recommendations in the literature to date.

Background

Definition:

- 2e students have both **gifted abilities** and a **disability** such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, or a Specific Learning Disability (Texas Education Agency, 2023).
- They require **both gifted education services and special education services**. (Hughes et al., 2011). Approximately **1** in every **50-500 students** istwice-exceptional, though many more are likely unclassified (Hughes et al., 2011).

Challenges Faced by 2e Students

- Gap between identification methods of **special and gifted education programs** (National Association for Gifted Children, 2014)
- Social intelligence difficulties leading to social isolation, bullying, and mental health issues (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2010; Morrison & Rizza, 2007)
- **Disability can mask giftedness**, resulting in students appearing "average" and not receiving necessary support. (Gilman et al., 2013)

Identification and Assessment

- **Special education referral** can be initiated by various individuals, requiring a **comprehensive screening** (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2023).
- **Gifted identification** often uses a combination of **objective** (tests, records) and **subjective** (nominations, observations) methods (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.).
- **Both** methods of exceptional-student identification should be considered to overcome the "ability-achievement gap" (Morrison & Rizza, 2007).

Classroom Strategies for Supporting 2e Students

- Goal: To provide specialized instruction addressing both exceptionalities with enriched learning opportunities.
 Integrated Instruction: Combining special and gifted education services in lesson planning and support services (Hughes et al., 2023)
- View 2e students as gifted first with subsequent disabilities (Hughes et al., 2011). Teacher training on the unique needs of 2e students is crucial (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011).

Cultivating Academic Strengths and Interests

- Enriched Remediation: Teaching disability-related concepts within engaging contexts. (Foley-Nicpon et al.,
- Interest-driven learning as a reward for completed work and positive behavior. (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011; Reis et al., 2022)

Cognitive and Learning Management:

- Setting achievable goals and providing organizational tools like checklists and graphic organizers (Hughes et al., 2011)
- Providing constant, specific, and constructive feedback (Foley-Nicpon et al., Hughes et al., 2011)

Social-Emotional Remediation:

Explicit instruction on conflict resolution and behavioral management. (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011)
 Providing warnings for routine changes and teaching emotional recognition. (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011)

Research Questions

- I. How do educators proactively and reactively modify instruction to respond to 2e students' complex learning needs?
- 2. How do educators <u>collaborate</u> to create a holistic, strengths-based support system for 2e students?
- 3. How do educators <u>accommodate</u> 2e students' emotional needs to promote long-term social and mental growth?

Methods

PARTICIPANTS

 5 currently-practicing educators who regularly work with twice-exceptional students.

DATA COLLECTION

- Online, individual interviews
 - Questions focused on integration of both exceptionalities, accommodation of social-emotional needs, and best practices for holistic collaboration

DATA ANALYSIS

- Open descriptive coding of open-ended questions
- Sorting data by research category

Qualitative Results

Qualitative Results									
Modifying Ins	Modifying Instruction to Accommodate Needs			Strategies for Managing Stress			Inter-Staff Collaboration		
Code	Definition	Example	Code	Definition	Example	Code	Definition	Example	
Multimodal Learning Flexible	Learning each student's method of learning to ensure they can comprehend class content in a way they will understand. Differentiating	 "If you say a lot of things, they might not really hear it trying to provide that information in multiple ways is really important" "You can make that 	Explicit Instruction of Emotional Literacy	Educators should equip 2e students with tools to recognize, articulate, and advocate for their needs respectfully and effectively.	"We use I-statements how to share my wants in a way that's respectful and assertive, but not aggressive."	Continuous Support Across Grade Levels	Some school professionals see the same students grades 1-12, so they can track students' growth within their specialized areas continuously.	"We have a speech and language pathologist for each division We have two occupational therapists, 1st through 12th grade We have a reading specialist a math specialist."	
ASSESSITION OUTS	student understanding is paramount for 2e students, because some may struggle with certain forms of assessment. This can mask inherent content understanding.	[writing] in a completely different if it's gonna turn into more like a script and you're gonna read it and have all these visuals."	Collaborative Problem-Solving to Uncover Causes of Emotional Behavior	Rather than assuming reasons for behavior, educators should partner with students to explore underlying feelings and needs.	 "You kind of work with the child to figure out the why behind their behavior instead of having adult theories." "I noticed you started throwing things across the room during ELA what's up?" 	Highly Collaborative Team Approach	Regularly scheduled biweekly meetings, team emails, and problem-solving sessions help coordinate care and communication of student needs across the staff.	• "We have pre scheduled bi weekly meetings the entire therapy team will meet with the classroom teachers We also have team emails for each student."	
Social-Emotional Needs	2e students may have especially strong learning preferences, so it's important to accommodate them when designing lessons.	who stormed out of the room she hated videos at the beginning of class. For whatever	Consistent Reflection and Goal-Setting	Giving students structured, recurring opportunities to reflect and set goals fosters autonomy and emotional growth.	 "They reflect on strengths and barriers then the next ten weeks I give it back to them." "We write it in Sharpie and it lives on the wall we address it every class." "Letting them know it's OK to have somebody there to help you, but also teaching them how to communicate." "If you're having issues with the teacher I can help you my mentor would go with me to the principal." 	Flexible and Responsive Support Structures		■ I had one young lady at an intermediate school who was identified as gifted, but had severe challenges in reading and math I was going every two weeks because she had intense need before she was identified because there was a clearer disability"	
Strengths and Points of Growth	out each students' specific academic and behavioral strengths and	the barriers to success?"	Scaffolding Self-	Students should be encouraged to speak up with adult support when needed, slowly building independence and confidence.					
	points of growth, which makes it easier to know which accommodations this student needs and how to incorporate them in each lesson.		Advocacy with Gradual Independence			Empathy Awareness Among Educators	Helping teachers understand and appreciate 2E students' behaviors reframes challenges and builds	"My strategy is to provide a context for empathy for the adult towards the child I try to case manage the adult."	
Using Artificial Intelligence Software	While by no means a comprehensive or flawless tool, Al resources can take knowledge of preexisting accommodations and create new strategies for their unique learning needs.	"I will upload [student accommodation documents] to ChatGPT and then I'll literally put in the exact concerns and I will literally get strategies."					trust-based, supportive environments.		
			Affirm Emotional Effort without Over-Praising	Acknowledging students' emotional and behavioral efforts helps build self-recognition and internal motivation.	"I'm not praising what they're doing, but I'm labeling it students' confidence dramatically increases."	Consistent Sharing of Information	Staff members collaborate closely to support 2E students, sharing insights and strategies to ensure consistency and across classes.	"If someone notices something—a behavior shift, a strength, a struggle—they'll bring it up so we can all adjust and support that student together."	

Preliminary Discussion/Implications

Initially, findings seemed to indicate that teachers perceive the following to be best practices for teaching 2e students:

- Multimodal learning and flexible assessment promote access and equity.
- Accommodating students' emotional needs and sensory preferences is critical to academic success.
- Explicit emotional literacy and collaborative problem-solving build agency.
- Consistent reflection and gradual independence scaffold lifelong self-awareness.
- Strength-based planning supports targeted differentiation.
- Strategic use of AI enhances individualized planning.
- Collaborative and responsive systems ensure cohesive, long-term support.

Limitations

- Small sample size (5 participants)
- Sample size intentionally limited to teachers with experience in working with 2e students

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