



Exploring the Intersections of Giftedness and Neurodiversity: a social justice framework for serving 2e and 3e learners

KD Harris, M.A. and Cynthia Z, Hansen, Ed.D., ET/P

INTRODUCTION:

- Cynthia Z. Hansen, Ed.D., ET/P, is an AET Educational Therapist and Twice-Exceptional Education Consultant facilitating the growth of gifted and creative individuals with executive function delays, ADHD, dyslexia, and complex learning profiles using a collaborative, strength-based, whole-child approach.
- An educator for over 35 years, Cindy holds three California teaching credentials (Multiple Subjects, Social Studies, and Language Arts) and two California post-masters certificates (Gifted & Talented Education & Twice-exceptional Education).
- Dr. Hansen earned her doctorate from *Bridges Graduate School of Cognitive Diversity in Education* (BGS) and her teaching credentials and M.Ed. from UCLA.
- Dr. Hansen advocates for the gifted and neurodiverse community by providing professional development and parent workshops, nationally and locally, on issues facing gifted and 2e learners, as President of the *Tri-County GATE Council* in Coastal California, as a facilitator for *SENG* Parent groups, as an advisory board member for *The G Word* documentary film, and through her continued work at the BGS.
- Dr. Hansen raised two 2e sons and one 2e husband who helped her unmask her own complex profile and inspired her to speak out.

For more information, about educational therapy, go to www.CynthiaZHansen.com or contact Dr. Hansen at CZH.EdTherapy.2e@gmail.com.



INTRODUCTION:

- KD Harris, M.A. and Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership (CalPoly Pomona) has served for the past 35 years as a scholar-practitioner-activist with a practice centered around the advancement of social and educational justice for marginalized learners. Her work is inspired by her role as a parent of two 3e learners who have successfully launched. Her husband of 38 years is also neurodivergent.
- KD serves as the Co-Founder/Executive Director of the social impact non-profit, Let's Talk LD. Let's Talk LD provides student advocacy, parent education, and professional training and development services designed to improve outcomes across the lifespan for neurodivergent individuals.
- KD's activism and passions lie in improving postsecondary education, employment, and civic engagement outcomes for those who are neurodiverse.
- KD is currently pursuing doctoral studies in Educational Leadership at CalPoly Pomona. Her research interests include Youth Participatory Action Research, the Social-Affective Development and Identity Formation of Neurodivergent (ND) Individuals, College /Career Planning and Transition for ND Individuals, and Improving Post-Secondary Civic Engagement and Activism of ND Individuals.
- For more information about Let's Talk LD's social impact work can be found at <https://www.LetsTalkLD.org>.



Presentation Overview

- The 2e/3e Learner Profile
- Why disability rights are central to social justice work, and vice versa
- Examining the Provision of FAPE through a Social Justice Lens
- Wrap-Up, Insights, and Concluding Thoughts
- Q&A



Developing Perspective...

“I will not have my life narrowed down. I will not bow down to somebody else’s whim or to someone else’s ignorance”
– bell hooks



The 2e/3e Learner Profile



**AET
envisions a
socially just
world
where all
learners:**

reach their
innate
potential

grow
and
thrive

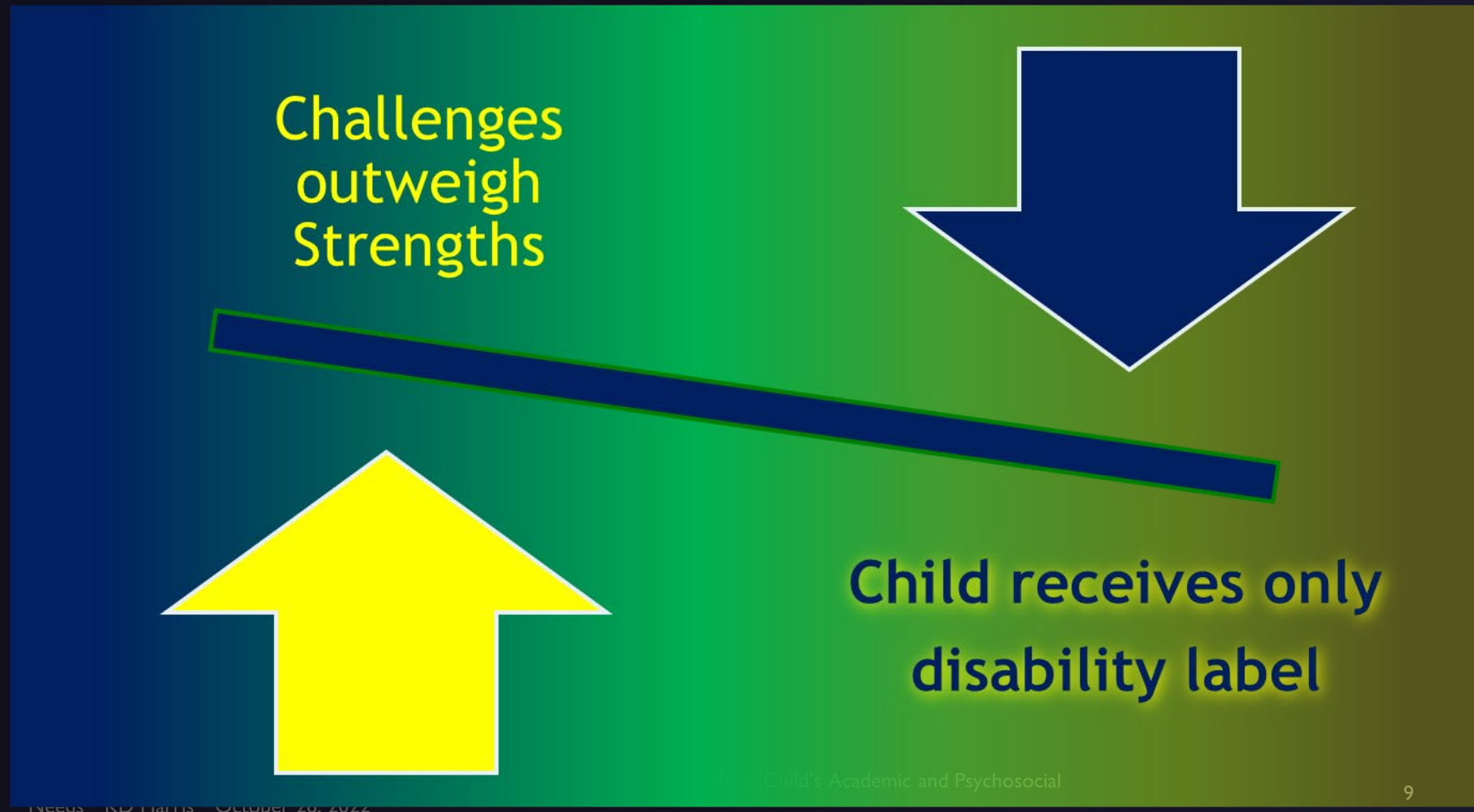
appreciate
their unique
abilities

The 2e/3e Learner Profile

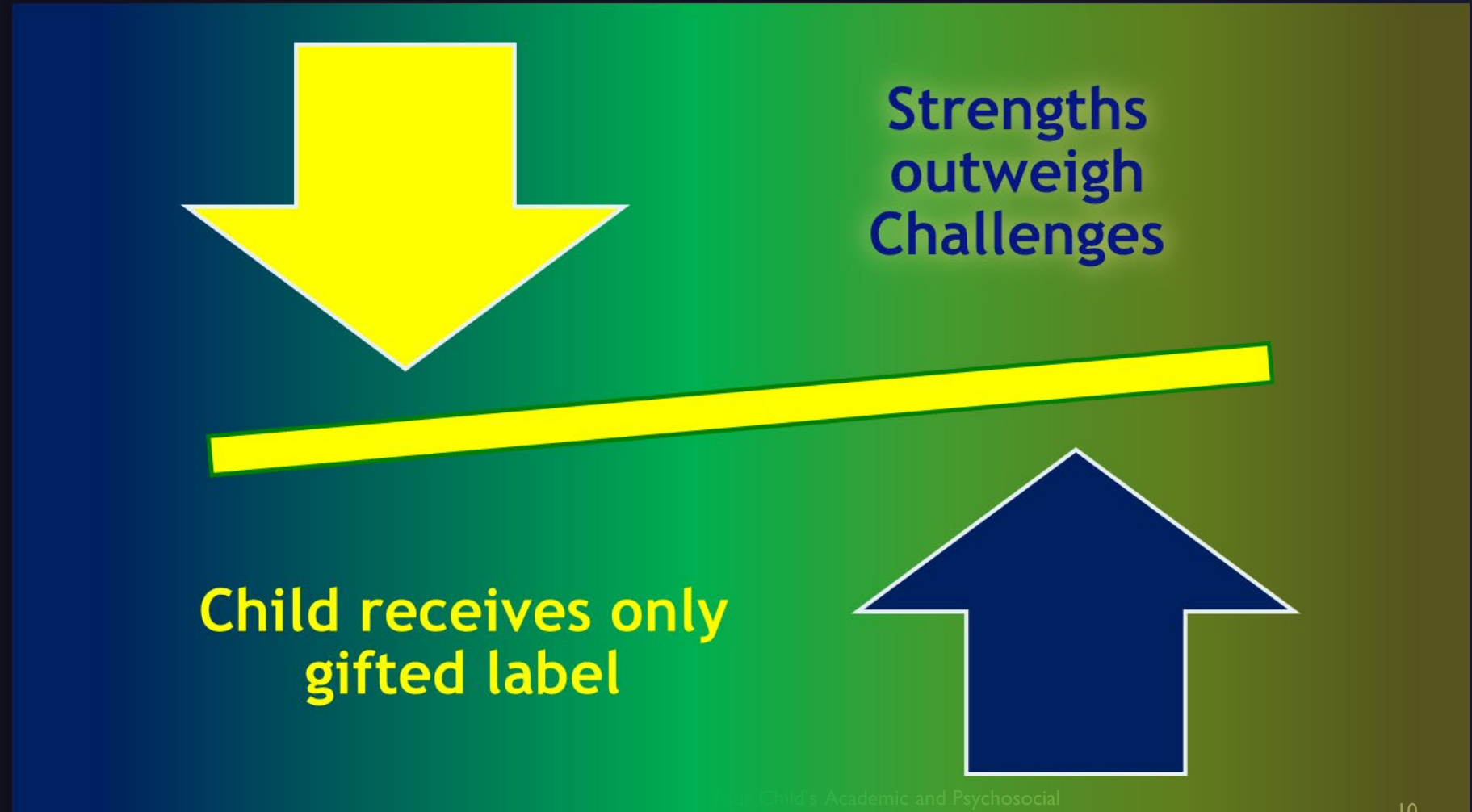
“With self-knowledge, students with G/LD can begin to take control of their lives and be assertive self-advocates for accommodations in school and in the workplace.”
(Dole, 2001, p. 132).

- [National Association for Gifted Children Statement on Twice-Exceptional Students](#)
- [Association for Educational Therapists Equity-focused Mission Statement](#) Educational Therapists seek to benefit the whole child by advocating for accommodations while embracing a child's strengths and multiple identities as learners and members of their communities.
- Legal Guidance: [“The Office of Civil Rights says that if schools "condition" participation in accelerated classes or programs by qualified students with disabilities by requiring these students to forfeit their necessary special education or related aids and services, it amounts to a denial of FAPE under Part B of the IDEA and Section 504.”](#)
- *Dole, S. (2001). Reconciling contradictions: Identity formation in individuals with giftedness and learning disabilities. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* 25(2), 103- 137.

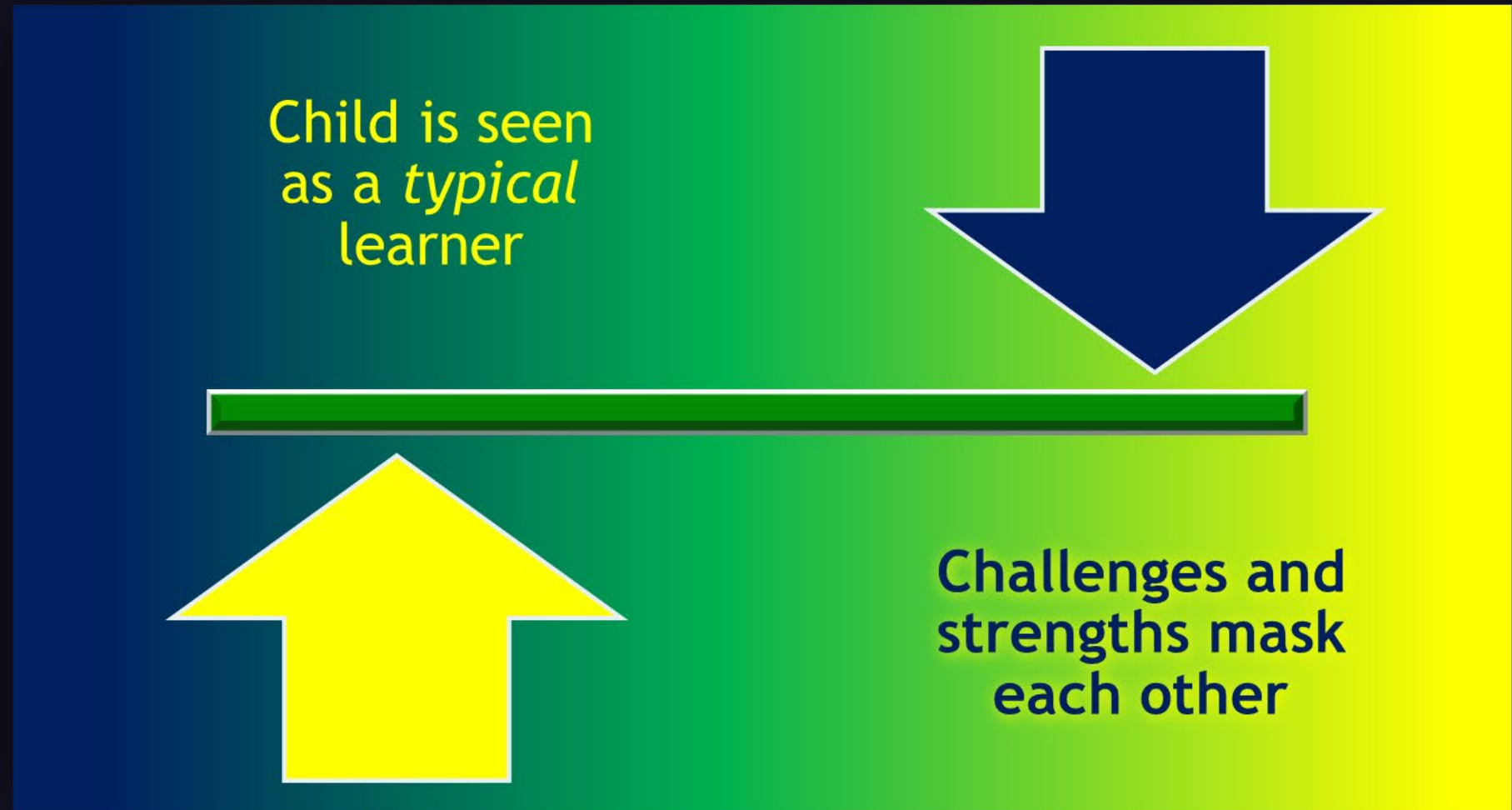
The 2e/3e Learner Profile



The 2e/3e Learner Profile



The 2e/3e Learner Profile



The 2e/3e Learner Profile

Table 1
Giftedness/Asperger's Disorder Checklist (GADC)© Prereferral Checklist

Gifted	Asperger's Disorder
Memory and Attention	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Excellent memory for facts and information about a variety of topics — Typically accurate recall for names and faces — Dislikes rote memorization tasks although he/she may do it well — Intense focus on topics of interest — If distracted, is likely to return to a task quickly with or without redirection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Superb memory for facts and detailed information related to selected topics of special interest — Poor recall for names and faces — Enjoys thinking about and remembering details, facts, and figures — Intense focus on primary topic of interest — If distracted by internal thoughts, redirecting to task at hand may be difficult
Speech and Language	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Extensive, advanced vocabulary — Communicates understandings of abstract ideas — Rich and interesting verbal style — Engages others in interests — Asks challenging questions — Expressive language/speech pattern of an older child — Elaborates with or without prompts — Understands and engages in sophisticated and/or socially reciprocal humor, irony, and sarcasm — Understands cause/effect or give and take of conversation — Able to communicate distress verbally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Advanced use of words with lack of comprehension for all language used — Thinks and communicates in concrete and literal terms with less abstraction — Uninviting verbal style — Style or content lacks reciprocity and engagement of others in their personal interests — Repeats questions and information — Pedantic and seamless speech — Little or no elaboration with run-on speech — Misunderstands jokes involving social reciprocity — Has difficulty understanding give and take of conversation — Communicates distress with actions rather than words
Social and Emotional	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Able to identify and name friends; enjoys high social status in some circles — Aware of social norms — Keenly aware that he/she is different from peers — Spontaneous sharing of enjoyment, activities, interests, or accomplishments — Engages others in conversation — Aware of another's perspective and able to take and understand others' viewpoint — Follows unwritten rules of social interactions — Shows keen social insight and an intuitive nature — Usually demonstrates appropriate emotions — Aware of others' emotions and recognizes others' feelings easily — Able to read social situations and respond to social cues — Shows empathy for others and able to comfort a friend in need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Demonstrates significant difficulty and lacks understanding of how to establish and keep friends — Indifferent to social norms of dress and behavior — Limited recognition of differences with peers — Little or no interest in spontaneous sharing of enjoyment, activities, interests, or accomplishments — Shows significant difficulty initiating or engaging others in conversation — Assume others share his/her personal views — Unaware of social conventions or the reasons behind them — Lacks social insight — Demonstrates inappropriate or immature emotions and flat or restricted affect — Limited recognition of others' emotions — Misreads social situations and may not respond (or even know how to respond) to social cues — Does not typically show empathy or concern for someone in need
Behavioral	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — May passively resist but will often go along with change — Questions rules and structure — Stereotypical behaviors (e.g., hand or finger flapping, twisting, or complex body movements) not present — When problems arise, he/she is typically distressed by them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Actively or aggressively resists change; rigid — Adheres strictly to rules and needs structure — Stereotypical behaviors (e.g., hand or finger flapping, twisting, or complex body movements) are present — When problems arise, parents or teachers are distressed by them while student may be unaware of distressing situation unless personally affected
Motor Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Well-coordinated — Interested in team sports — Demonstrates appropriate development of self-help skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Lacks age-appropriate coordination — Avoids team sports — Delayed acquisition of self-help skills

Note. From Amend, Beaver-Gavin, Schuler, and Beights (2008).

The 2e/3e Learner Profile



Typical Characteristics...

...OF GIFTED CHILDREN	...OF TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental asynchrony (uneven development – advanced cognitively but delayed in other areas such as in social/emotional and motor skills) • Highly developed curiosity • Precocious development and use of language • Active imagination • Tendency toward divergent (creative and unusual) thinking • Keen observation skills • Ability, from an early age, to remember large amounts of information • Unusual sense of humor • Advanced moral reasoning about issues related to fairness and justice • High-level reasoning powers and problem- solving abilities • Heightened sensitivities (referred to by psychiatrist/psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski as overexcitabilities) in these areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychomotor - Sensual - Imaginational - Intellectual - Emotional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disorganized, often losing track of belongings • Uneven academic pattern with extreme areas of both strength and weakness • Trouble remembering to do or follow through with tasks and sticking to a schedule • Poor sense of time and difficulty estimating the time needed to complete tasks • Difficulty performing multi-step instructions and performing tasks sequentially • Slower to process language and respond than might be expected, based on their intelligence • Difficulty taking a systematic approach to problem solving • Writing difficulties, including trouble organizing thoughts, writing legibly, and spelling • Fear of embarrassment that leads to avoidance of risk taking in the classroom • May have narrowly focused interests • May show less maturity than their age peers

Examining the Provision of FAPE through a Social Justice Lens

- Disproportionality
- Deconstructing Deficit Thinking
- Social Power and Systemic Barriers
- [Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District , 137 S. Ct. 988 \(U.S. 2017\)](#)



Why disability rights are central to social justice work, and vice versa

- “Special Education” is a system built on the fundamental precept that differences should define human beings, who are divided into two groups, dis/abled or non-dis/abled (Connor & Gabel, 2013, p. 101).
- Twice-exceptional students of color are inadequately served in traditional classroom settings for several reasons, to include a failure by educators to properly identify the student’s cognitive giftedness and/or their disability (Mayes, et al., 2014; Wormald, 2015; Baum, 2014; Dole, 2001; Mayes, 2016; Mayes, 2020; Robinson, 2017).
- Twice-exceptional (both cognitively gifted and diagnosed with a learning or behavioral challenge) students are estimated to be 6% of the population of all students with a disability (Blustain, 2019; Wormald, 2015).
- Mayes, et al. (2014) reflect that “while current literature provides insight on twice-exceptionality, gaps still exist in understanding within group diversity” (p. 126). The issue of within group diversity in twice-exceptional learners is further examined by Osagiede-Omon (2020) and Park & Foley-Nicpon (2022).
- Students of color are also notably underrepresented in gifted education, largely due to systematic bias and racism (Mayes & Hines, 2014).

Why disability rights are central to social justice work, and vice versa

- Rabren, Eaves, Dunn & Darch (2013) examined the post-school satisfaction of students with learning disabilities and discovered “many young adults with LD experience problems related to employment (underemployment, low wages, and frequent job changes), participation and success in post-secondary settings, involvement in community and leisure activities, and dependency on parents and others” (p. 15). Many of these students do express concerns about their future (Mayes, et al., 2014).
- At the intersection of disability, race, and giftedness, there are notable tensions due to the realities of socio-cultural biases that impact access and opportunities for the 3e student (irrespective of a student’s potential).



Why disability rights are central to social justice work, and vice versa

- For 3e learners, access to gifted education programs has proven difficult. In many cases their learning challenges mask their cognitive gifts, and as students of color, there are growing opportunity gaps in Gifted and Talented Education (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014).
- A picture has emerged that clearly illustrates the inequities faced by students of color when endeavoring to gain access to GATE programs. However, a rigorous body of literature anchored in DisCrit, and Critical Race Theory has focused the lens on how ableism and racism shape attitudes and institutions that perpetuate the 'othering' of those who the dominant group considers broken in one way or another.
- Increasingly, however, the Disability Rights movement has effectively worked to discredit the deficit and medical models of disability. Armed with powerful and unapologetic voices, Disability Rights leaders are demanding person-first language that recognizes and honors the humanity and capabilities of people with dis/abilities.

Why Does Research Matter?

What analysis has shown is that what happens during elementary and secondary school educational planning directly impacts the post-secondary outcomes of students with dis/abilities (Benz, et al., 2000; Frieden, 2004; Gaylord, et al., 2004; Johnson, 2003).

IDEA provides for collaboration between many stakeholders to ensure appropriate development of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and transition planning (Munsell & Schwartz, 2021).



The Research: Metacognition

- Gifted students, often have delayed executive skills that may appear unevenly strong or weak depending on the situation or environment, effecting their production rate and follow-through.
- "Efficient learners use metacognitive strategies, but students with learning disabilities tend to lack the skills to direct their own learning. However, once they learn the metacognitive strategies that efficient learners use, students with learning disabilities can apply them in many situations." (Lerner and Kline, 2006, p. 184)

The Research: Self-Determination Theory

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

- Wehmeyer (1998), as cited in Ju et al. (2017) defined self-determination as a combination of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable a person to function effectively as a self-advocate of their own volition by engaging in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior.
- Self-determination is a combination of attitudes and abilities that lead people to set goals for themselves, and to take the initiative to reach these goals.
- It means making your own choices, learning to effectively solve problems, and taking control and responsibility for one's life. Practicing self-determination also means one experiences the consequences of making choices. (Retrieved from National Parent Center on Transition and Employment, <https://www.pacer.org/transition/learning-center/independent-community-living/self-determination.asp>)

The Research: Self-Efficacy Theory

SELF-EFFICACY THEORY

- To devise an effective educational plan, a student needs strong self-efficacy, or as psychologist Albert Bandura (1977) theorized, the extent to which an individual believes that s/he has the capacity to engage in the requisite behaviors that increase the likelihood that a specific goal can be attained, or a specific action executed and completed.
- Students who are neurodivergent tend to have lower self-efficacy than their counterparts without LDs (Klassen, 2002; Hen & Goroshit, 2012).

The Research: Community Cultural Wealth

COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH THEORY

- Dunn & Burcaw further state that for an individual with dis/abilities to have a strong sense of self-worth and to see themselves as having the same worth as non-dis/abled people, s/he must believe that s/he can perform actions (tasks, activities) that are important to self, others, and the community-at-large.
- As reflected by Putnam (2000), as cited in Acar (2011), social capital can be an effective tool for positively affecting educational achievement, student behavior and development.

Wrap-Up and Concluding Thoughts



Insights

How can this presentation
inform your practice as
caregivers?



Insights

- Student Absent from Educational Planning
- Lack of Parent and Professional Training Focused on Student-Centered Educational Planning
- Beliefs that Students with Disabilities Possess Developmental and Social-Emotional Limitations and/or a Lack of Persistence



Insights

- Bias/Ableism serves as a barrier to the identity formation and the self-determination of students WHO MAY STRUGGLE ACADEMICALLY



Insights

- Ableism may color teaching and parenting practices in a manner that undermines students who struggle to access effective educational and transition planning
- **When dis/ability is pathologized, expectations are lowered**



Insights

- Opportunities for self-directed educational experiences and career exploration should be available to 2e/3e students.
- These students must be provided with access to a general education curriculum that connects the classroom to their lived experiences, as learners who are both gifted and neurodivergent.



Insights

- Educators and counselors must recognize the notable barriers faced by 2e/3e students who experience academic challenge.
- Those barriers include lack of access to interventions designed to address emotional and mental health challenges
- Conversely, students must be afforded access to content that is at their high cognitive level



Insights

- Educators and counselors should be trained in Universal Design for Learning practices so that all learners, irrespective of ability, can access the curriculum.



Thank You

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