



Why 2e Does Not Fit Well in the Traditional Classroom and What to Do About It **Homeschooling the Twice-exceptional Child**

By Corin Barsily Goodwin, Executive Director, Gifted Homeschoolers Forum, and Mika Gustavson, LMFT

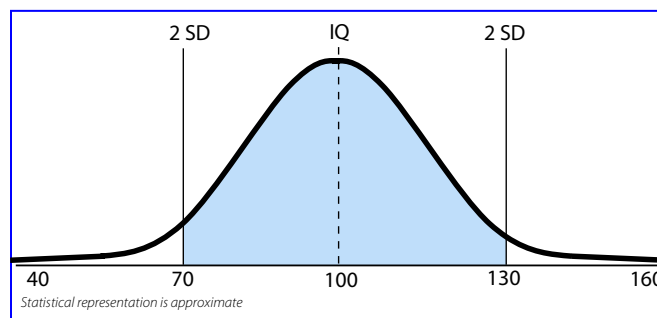
“Children with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, or other types of school problems who are also gifted in one or more areas must be allowed to be gifted in their areas of strength while they receive assistance in their areas of need. The discrepancy between their superior abilities and their dramatic weaknesses results in feelings of inadequacy, frustration and hopelessness. Many of these students are at high risk of becoming school dropouts. To bring sanctions against any child[ren] which prevent them from experiencing differentiation whenever or wherever it’s needed is simply not effective or fair.” (Winebrenner, Susan; The Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children, Fall 1998, XII)

Being twice-exceptional (2e) poses major challenges for children and the significant adults in their lives, particularly when the children’s major asynchronies (areas of uneven development) are not identified or understood. Learning differences (LDs) are often called *invisible disabilities* because they are not obvious at first glance, leading adults to assume that children are being intentionally lazy or stubborn. Once identified, some LDs may be overcome or compensated for through sheer effort and the passage of time. However, adults involved need to consider whether a child’s learning differences are something the child should struggle through, or whether some kind of accommodation would be more useful and appropriate. It also seems quite unfair to limit children’s opportunities to learn more complex concepts simply because their development of fine motor skills, or sequencing, or memorization has not kept pace with the development of their intellectual abilities.

Even for 2e children who are recognized as such, gifted education programs are unlikely to fully accommodate their needs. These programs tend to be rather limited in scope, as if there is just one type of gifted learner and one type of program that will fit the needs of all gifted children. Some education professionals will tell you that in-classroom differentiation (either at the “normal” level or in a gifted program) is a sufficient method for meeting the needs of even the most extreme asynchronies. However, there is simply no one-size-fits-all solution to educating 2e children; and the goal of meeting their needs with the reduced resources and oversized classrooms of today’s public school systems is rarely achievable.

2e Kids in the Classroom and Bow-Tie Theory

For those who prefer a visual image of why 2e kids may not get their needs met in the traditional classroom, picture an IQ line with 100 at the center and a standard deviation (SD) of approximately 15. Draw lines representing two standard deviations (SDs) on either side of the “100.” In that blue area, you have most children in the typical classroom. Their intellectual potential is close enough to all of the other 20 to 30 children, and their learning styles are similar enough to one another that a single teacher with a predetermined curriculum can likely give them the education that they are meant by their local school district to obtain.

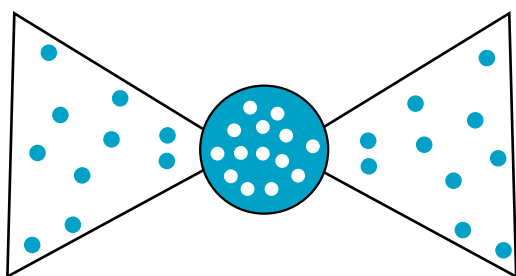


Note that we could be measuring other traits other than full-scale IQ. In this scenario, it’s possible for some of a 2e child’s subtest scores to be out of the blue area to the right... and some out of the blue area to the left!



Homeschooling the Twice-exceptional Child, continued

The children outside the blue area – gifted, LD, or 2e – do not fall into the area of relative educational comfort. Some of these children may be capable of successfully participating in the classroom, given sufficient differentiation or accommodation; but none of them has the same needs as the children in the center and, at least as much to the point, the same needs as one another. We can use the bow-tie graphic below to illustrate these differences in needs.



Imagine that the blue center area is that “comfort zone” closely centered around the norm. The kids in the wings of the bow tie are the gifted, LD, and 2e kids who are more than a couple standard deviations away from the norm. The further children are from the norm, the more differences they have from *each other* in addition to differences from “average” kids. Therefore, not only is it difficult to satisfy their educational needs with curricula designed for “average” students; but the further away students are from the norm, the more difficult it is to come up with *any* curriculum that is appropriate to an aggregate of these gifted/2e kids.

To further complicate matters, 2e children – especially those with abilities measurable at both ends – have asynchronies, in terms of learning styles and academic potential, that are significantly different from the “pleasantly gifted” child – the one whose IQ ranges from about 130 to 145 (using the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, third edition, or WISC-III). The “pleasantly gifted” child has the competitive advantage of high intelligence without the disadvantage of being “too” different. The individual learning styles of 2e children, however, are virtually guaranteed to be such that they will need major deviations from the educational norm.

As a result, despite efforts to steer all students towards a quantifiable level of academic attainment each year, this goal is not often achieved for 2e children in spite of their high levels of intelligence. Perhaps educational success ought to be determined on a case-by-case basis

for each child grounded in an understanding of his/her needs, abilities, and potential. The ideal situation for 2e children would be a program allowing them to learn at their own pace and in their own manner. Unfortunately, few traditional classroom situations have the resources to accommodate these children to their fullest extent, even when their needs are recognized. Consequently, many families feel frustrated by the educational experiences of their 2e children and find themselves seeking more flexible alternatives.

An Educational Alternative: Homeschooling

Homeschooling was once an arena dominated by political and religious extremes, and was not seriously considered as an option by the majority of middle-of-the-road parents. However, families of children for whom the traditional educational options are not working well are seeking alternatives, either out of sheer desperation or the desire to find what they believe is the best situation for their children. The increase in positive media coverage and the relative ease of access to free or low-cost resources and community via the internet have increased the viability of this option for many families.

While few will claim that educating any child outside of the traditional school system is a simple all-purpose solution, there are signs that homeschooling is becoming far more accepted than it was previously. The number of homeschoolers has been increasing steadily over the last 10 to 20 years – up from approximately 300,000 in 1992 to more than a million in 2003; and many of these children are identified as twice exceptional.

Twice-exceptional children, like any other children, deserve an educational environment tailored to their unique learning styles without forcing them into conformity with “all the other kids.” 2e children may learn differently from their classmates; and their increased emotional and sensory sensitivities leave them vulnerable in some classrooms, making learning an ever-greater challenge. Instead of soaring toward their potential, these children often hunker down and get lost in the crowd.

For 2e families, homeschooling can provide:

- The freedom to help their 2e children thrive, allowing the families to adjust the pace and location of learning in a way that is optimal for their particular child





Homeschooling the Twice-exceptional Child, continued

- The flexibility for children to pursue their own interests, leaving room to address weaknesses without loss of dignity and, thereby, reinforcing their self-confidence as competent individuals
- Greater access to others who are like-minded, greatly reducing the pressure on children to join a clique and their risk of being bullied.

Homeschooling Options

Homeschooling can take many forms. Some parents appreciate the support and supervision that school districts and charter programs offer (and some states require). They like being able to enroll their children in traditional classes for some subjects and to work on their own for others. Homeschoolers participating in these independent study programs may be able to take advantage of resources such as a science lab or orchestra that might not be available to them otherwise. Parents can benefit by having access to trained teachers who will assist with curriculum and other content issues. These resources can be very helpful for families, especially for those new to homeschooling or who are pursuing a “school-at-home” model, which replicates the predetermined structure and curriculum of the traditional classroom.

Families of 2e children, however, often prefer a less structured approach to education in order to create a more optimal fit for their child’s learning style.

Homeschooling allows for the development over time of an environment tailored to meet the needs of the 2e child. Such a program eliminates unnecessary repetition and arbitrary sequencing, as well as the focus on standards that do not support individual potential.

The flexibility inherent in homeschooling allows gifted children to learn in the way that best suits *their* needs. For example, children with auditory or visual processing difficulties may use up all of their mental energy merely by trying to sit still and pay attention in the classroom while surrounded by the distraction of whispering, coughing children and flickering fluorescent lighting. These same children are more likely to retain information if they can sit in a comfortable chair, alone in their room at home.

The brains of kinesthetic learners, on the other hand, work best when they are in motion. These children may opt to sit on the living room floor and build Lego™ starships during a discussion of whatever subject is at hand, or they might listen to their lessons via an audio book and headphones while hanging upside down at the park. Homeschooled children who learn well in interactive groups can seek out similar children, while others who prefer solitary or small-group studying for some subjects are allowed those opportunities, as well.




Some Homeschooling Resources from Corin Goodwin and Mika Gustavson

Websites

- Gifted Homeschoolers Forum (GHF): support, advocacy, and community for families homeschooling gifted and 2e children around the world (<http://giftedhomeschoolers.org>)
 - Links, books, and online resources (<http://giftedhomeschoolers.org/2eresources.html>)
 - Articles (<http://giftedhomeschoolers.org/articles.html>)
- Hoagies' Gifted Education Page (www.hoagiesgifted.org)
 - Homeschooling gifted children (www.hoagiesgifted.org/home_school.htm)
 - Twice exceptional (www.hoagiesgifted.org/2e_exceptional.htm)
- Uniquely Gifted: resources for gifted children with special needs (<http://uniquelygifted.org>)

E-mail Discussion Groups (Listservs)

- Gifted Homeschooling: associated with Gifted Homeschoolers Forum (<http://giftedhomeschoolers.org/maillinglist.html>)
- GT-Spec-Home: discusses gifted children with learning disabilities and/or other neurological problems and who may be homeschooled (www.gtworld.org/gtspechome.htm) 



Homeschooling the Twice-exceptional Child, concluded

Homeschooling Benefits

A major benefit to homeschooling 2e children is that these highly intelligent learners tend to have more time to pursue interests not covered in the traditional classroom. They can seek out mentors and experts willing to share specialized knowledge in a manner and at a level that satisfies their hunger for learning. Homeschoolers in these situations have the opportunity to be exposed to a broad variety of individuals and potential role models who can have a positive impact on both the children's academic and emotional growth. Homeschooled children are not limited to a particular teacher nor a predetermined lesson plan or unit length; and if the depth and speed of their neural connections take them someplace other than where they have been directed to go, they have the freedom to follow their thoughts and exercise their creativity. The abilities to seek knowledge, think analytically, and consider a variety of perspectives are critical life skills that are frequently overlooked by the standardized education policies and rigidity of most modern curricula.

For 2e children with Asperger Syndrome or other social/emotional challenges, there is also great value in separating social and academic environments. These children can feel successful by reaching academic goals on their own, without the distraction of potentially debilitating social distress. They can have opportunities to learn interpersonal skills concurrently (and at their own developmental pace) in settings such as park day groups;

scouting events; and other, more structured activities. In addition, homeschooling parents can be more available to help their children navigate difficult social situations as they occur, giving their children the benefit of receiving direct guidance from a caring adult rather than from age peers whose own social skills are still developing.

Available research shows that the long-term outcome for homeschooled children is generally very positive. These children tend to do well on standardized tests; they are readily admitted to colleges and universities; they move on to successful, often entrepreneurial, careers. Furthermore, they are more likely than their traditionally educated counterparts to be involved in a positive manner within their communities.

Concluding Thoughts

These "difficult children" have the potential to be world leaders, just as they have the potential to fall through the cracks if mishandled. They have unique learning styles, and their innate ability to think "outside the box" needs to be nurtured in a way that is just not easy to do in a traditional classroom setting. While homeschooling the 2e child can be challenging and is not a solution for everyone, there are many transferrable concepts. The paradigm of how we educate our gifted and twice-exceptional children deserves reconsideration and reflection on a national scale.

Corin Barsily Goodwin is the Director of Gifted Homeschoolers Forum (<http://giftedhomeschoolers.org>). She homeschools her two 2e children while commuting between the San Francisco Bay Area in California and rural southern Oregon. Corin co-chaired the Legislative Committee for the Home School Association of California (HSC) and served as their Gifted/Special Needs Advisor. Before having children, Ms. Goodwin was a policy and economic analyst. She is hard at work on her new book on gifted educational alternatives with co-author Mika Gustavson.



Mika Gustavson, LMFT, is in private practice, specializing in gifted and twice-exceptional children and families, transitions into parenthood, childhood trauma, and domestic violence. A "pet project" is raising the awareness of mental-health professionals about the impact of sensory processing disorders on children, their families, and their schooling. Mika has taught adults in a wide variety of settings on related topics and is currently co-authoring a book with Corin Barsily Goodwin. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband, son, two cats, and a dog, all gifted and some 2e. ☺

