



Twice-Exceptional Newsletter

July/August 2009
Issue 35

For parents, teachers and professionals.
Helping twice-exceptional children reach their potential.

Featured in this Issue

Our focus in this issue – how technology can help 2e students.

Quote

“Branding them as lazy
accomplishes nothing.”

– Mel Levine

Jann Leppien on Technology for Teaching	Find out how technology and the Internet can benefit 2e kids in the classroom, and the uses Leppien suggests for eight different types of technology.	Page 3
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Digital Education for 2e Students	By J. Mark Bade How an online school in New Zealand uses technology and sound instructional practices to educate 2e students.	Page 9
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Academic and Emotional Readiness	By a Multi-credentialed Bridges Academy Team The fourth in the “Mythology of Learning” series – the interdependence of emotional well-being and academic success.	Page 16
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Welcome!



It's transition time for us in the Northern hemisphere, with the summer solstice just a couple weeks past. Children are either celebrating or mourning the end of the school year, anticipating or dreading the start of the next one. Parents and educators are assessing how things went for their 2e children during the school year past, and planning how to sustain or improve the educational, personal, and social-emotional lives of those same kids.



To help educators and parents sustain and improve, this issue features technology and how it can help twice-exceptional children. Some of the technological applications we write about help kids directly, like assistive technology and online schools. Other applications help *adults* help kids, applications like online chats, online webinars, and social networking sites that allow us to inform and support one another.

Of the articles in this issue, Jann Leppien's offers educators ways to use classroom technology and the Internet to make the classroom a better place for 2e students. A homeschooling technophile mom, Kerry Jones, shares resources she uses for her 2e youngsters.

Virtual schools have much to offer twice-exceptional learners because of the differentiation available and because, for some students, using computers makes communication much easier. Read about a New Zealand online school that caters to 2e kids.

The Bridges Academy team continues their series of articles, with the latest examining the crucial role that emotional well-being plays in 2e learning.

As the Joni Mitchell points out in her song about the seasons, "We can't return, we can only look behind/ From where we came/ And go round and round and round/ In the circle game." We wish you well in the next month or two as you recover, regenerate, and prepare for the next school year.

Thanks for subscribing!

- Linda Neumann and Mark Bade
Glen Ellyn Media
July, 2009

2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter is a publication about twice-exceptional children, children who are gifted and who have LDs - learning difficulties that go by many names, including learning disabilities, learning disorders, and just plain learning differences. Our goal is to promote a holistic view of the 2e child - not just the high IQ, or the quirkiness, or the disabilities, but the child as a whole person. Comments and suggestions are always welcome by phone, fax, or e-mail.

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Using Technology to Benefit 2e Students

An Interview with Jann Leppien

Jann Leppien, Ph.D., is an associate professor at the University of Great Falls, in Montana, where the topics she teaches include curriculum and instruction, gifted education, and assessment and learning. In addition, she is a speaker, author, and member of the boards of the National Association for Gifted Children and the Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students (AEGUS). She regularly presents conference sessions on using technology in the classroom and offers insights, recommendations, and resources in this edited interview.



2e Newsletter: How do you think the increasing use of technology and the Internet in the classroom might benefit 2e students?

Jann Leppien: Technology enables 2e students to access information to support their learning and, to me, I believe it becomes a great equalizer for students with disabilities.

2e: Do you think it's becoming easier for teachers to accommodate 2e students' weaknesses by making use of technology?

JL: In school districts that provide technological support and professional development for teachers, it is becoming easier for teachers to accommodate 2e students' disabilities. Without this continuous support, teachers are left with a desire and a will to accommodate individual differences but lack the knowledge, financial commitment, and professional training that it takes to "put into practice" what's known about assistive tools.

2e: Which new technologies or web offerings do you think teachers should be paying special attention to and incorporating into their teaching?

JL: There are both new technologies and old technologies that need to be discussed. People are often unaware of accessibility devices inside their computer that can support a variety of disabilities. I've put together a list that explains some of these technologies and accessibility devices, and that address a variety of disabilities. [You can find this list on the 2e Newsletter website, along with the other articles from this issue.] Much of this information

has been extracted from Microsoft guidebooks that are available (www.microsoft.com/enable/guides/default.aspx). Microsoft also has a website that offers information and tutorials about the types of accessibility tools available to individuals (www.microsoft.com/enable).

2e: What are some good ways for teachers to get up to speed on using new technologies in the classroom?

JL: Many websites offer valuable information to teachers. A simple search in Google using the words *assistive technology* and *disabilities* will provide teachers and families with many wonderful sources of information.

Another way to get up to speed is to access Microsoft Accessibility Resource Centers, which are located throughout the United States. These centers help schools discover accessible technology solutions available on today's computers. They give training on assistive technology products and do presentations at schools. For information, visit www.microsoft.com/enable/centers.

Also, there are two sites that provide parents and teachers with assistive technology guides and other recommendations for technology that can help students in a variety of academic areas: www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/2488 and www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/2286

The Family Center on Technology and Disability (www.fctd.info/resources/search.php) is another online resource that offers a range of information and services related to assistive and instructional technologies. The site has articles on selecting appropriate technologies to support student learning as well as reviews of the latest assistive technology. Plus, the site has a great search engine that lets you select keywords that describe the type of disability, academic area, and the type of technology of interest to you.

2e: Are there resources available to help teachers put together lesson plans that incorporate technology?

JL: One of the best websites I've used was created by STAR Tech, a researched-based program that helps teachers integrate technology tools into the curriculum (www.startechprogram.org/technology/usingtech.html). The site offers information on how to use assistive technology to support student learning and





An Interview with Jann Leppien, concluded

how to design curriculum to be accessible by students with disabilities.

In general, if a teacher wants ideas on how to use a particular technology in the classroom, for example podcasts, he or she can do an Internet search by entering “podcasts for classroom instruction” or “podcasts lesson plan ideas” and receive a wealth of experiences and examples.

2e: What would you like people to gain from this interview?

JL: I would like them to realize that the most daunting challenge that people with disabilities face is the attitudes and assumptions that others maintain about their abilities. Technology helps to break these prevailing myths and provides a venue into the minds of children and adults. Additionally, technology makes learning accessible so that children with disabilities can keep pace with their classmates. ☒

Jann Leppien’s Technology Picks for Teachers of 2e Kids

Here Jann Leppien shares her ideas on how teachers might use or are using new devices and applications to engage and accommodate 2e students.

iPods

So you thought iPods were just for listening to music? Well, it’s time to use them for instructional purposes. Students who struggle with reading disabilities can use iPods to listen to novels and literature assignments in, what seems to them, a more socially acceptable way. Here are some resources to use in conjunction with an iPod.

- Apple’s iPod in Education site (www.apple.com/education/teachers-professors/mobile-learning.html) provides an overview of some classroom uses of the iPod. The Lesson Plan page contains more than a dozen activities for a number of grade levels and content areas, with print materials and audio files available for download. The iPod Resources section lists tutorials and how-to guides on recording audio and downloading information to other iPods. In the Learn More section, you can read numerous case studies on how iPods are being used successfully in both K-12 and collegiate classrooms.
- Kurzweil, an integrated scanning and reading program, converts scanned text into digital text so that written materials can be transformed into the MP3 format played by the iPod. Students must have a qualifying disability to access these derivative formats of copyrighted materials.
- The National Instructional Media Accessibility Center (www.nimac.us) is a federally-funded national electronic file repository that works with publishers to pro-

vide textbooks in derivative formats to K-12 schools, specifically for students with qualifying disabilities.

- Bookshare.org provides a wide range of reading materials in digital format, and it’s free to qualifying US students, K-12 schools, and post-secondary and adult education. Students who sign up may download materials directly to home or school computers, choosing from over 45,000 digital books, textbooks, teacher-recommended reading, periodicals, and assistive technology tools.
- Several groups provide public domain materials online in a digital format, sometimes audio. Lit2Go (<http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go>) is a free online collection of stories and poems in MP3 format.

Podcasting

Podcasting is a way of easily distributing a series of audio or video files on the Internet. Teachers can post Podcasts at a website to assist their students in understanding course content or class lectures, to access explanations of how to conduct online activities or course lessons, and to provide additional resources to support the topic being discussed. Students can create their own podcasts for assignments. Here are some helpful sites for podcasting.

- Podcast.com. This website (<http://podcast.com>) is a popular one for accessing podcasts.
- Ideas for Podcasting in the Classroom. At this website (http://fcit.usf.edu/podcasts/book_talks.html), you can find ideas on instructional uses of podcasting and creating a podcast.





Jann Leppien's Technology Picks, continued

- Podomatic. This free, cross-platform program makes creating, publishing, and listening to podcasts easy. Start by registering for free here: www.podomatic.com/home. (Students can use their teacher's account to ensure safety.) To create podcasts, you'll need a microphone, which laptops typically have installed. Podomatic also offers PodAmigo, which downloads daily podcasts to your MP3 player, iPod, or iTunes; and PodMail, where visitors can listen and respond to your podcast.
- Librivox. This website (<http://librivox.org>) makes available free audio books from the public domain in MP3 format.

The Kindle 2

This electronic book reader would be of use to a struggling reader who needs *hear* books. It provides access to hundreds of thousands of books. The Kindle 2 has text-to-speech capability, at an adjustable pace, and includes a headphone jack. Find details at Amazon.com.

YouTube

At this website (www.youtube.com), teachers can get access to videos and supplemental information to support the curricular units they're teaching. To find out about "the 100 best YouTube videos for classroom use," see this website: www.smartteaching.org/blog/2008/08/100-best-youtube-videos-for-teachers.

Delicious

At this social bookmarking website, you can save all of your bookmarks online, share them with other people, and see what other people are bookmarking. It also links you to the most popular bookmarks being saved across many areas of interest.

Teachers can use Delicious to save bookmarks of interesting websites so that students can have access to support their understanding of a topic. Students can use Delicious to keep track of all the source materials and commentary that they research on a topic. Plus, they can share resources and collaborate with friends on group projects. Both teachers and students can post their own podcasts at the website. *[Be sure to check out 2e Newsletter's collection of bookmarks on gifted and 2e-related topics at <http://delicious.com/2eNewsletter>.]*


Facebook

Facebook is one example of social networking websites that allow users to communicate with a community of members. Facebook does include academic groups that can link directly to external academic tools. Via their Facebook accounts, students can choose to interact with members of a study group, for example, or with individuals throughout the country who are studying a similar topic.

Digital Smart Pens

A new device I'm particularly fond of using is the Livescribe SmartPen (www.livescribe.com). As you use this digital pen, it records your notes in two ways. It creates digital copies of everything you write by hand, while recording audio at the same time. It also links the two together. All of this information is uploaded to your computer where the Livescribe software archives and makes your notes fully searchable. In addition, the device offers features like a calculator, translator, and a paper piano that plays a mini-piano you draw on paper.

Literacy Support Software

An example of a literacy support program is Read and Write Gold, which can be used in combination with other text-based programs to help students who have learning disabilities and cognitive challenges. It provides support with reading and writing tasks by offering text-to-speech, word prediction, vocabulary, spelling and editing, translation, and computation support, all accessed through a single tool bar. Read and Write Gold also offers scanning and voice recognition. For more information, see www.readwritegold.com. 

Correction

In the May/June issue, the acknowledgement for the source of the article "The Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model" should have read: Based on *The Cluster Grouping Handbook: How to Challenge Gifted Students and Improve Achievement for All*, copyright © 2008, Free Spirit Publishing.



Getting a Helping Hand from Technology

Resources to Boost Homeschool Learning for 2e Kids

By Kerry Jones

One thing many people are surprised to learn when they find out that I've been homeschooling for almost 10 years is that I'm a terrible teacher. I'm not exaggerating. All you have to do is ask my two sons, and they will eagerly agree with me. But when severe health problems sidelined my son the summer before he was to begin kindergarten, I suddenly had a new job description: homeschooling mom. When son number two began his own schooling career, it wasn't long before I realized that his special needs would not be adequately addressed in a traditional classroom setting either. You might say my boys got the short end of the stick – not only were they not suited for school, they were also stuck with an instructionally-challenged mom for their teacher.

A couple of years into our homeschool adventure, I realized that even though I probably couldn't teach a dog

how to dig up a bone, I did have a skill that might save my boys from educational ruin. I have a talent for finding just the right technology to assist their learning. Because I'm somewhat of a "techie" myself, my boys were familiar with technology from a very early age. Even as preschoolers, they were outfitted with electronic learning devices disguised as kiddie laptops, personal CD players stocked with learning songs, and a passel of handheld games that beeped and blinked. So it wasn't a huge stretch to begin our schooling with an assortment of educational and assistive technology.

Over the years, I've spent what feels like a fortune on devices, software, and assistive tools. Some of them have been a pure waste of money; others have been pure life savers. As a result of all those tests and trials, I feel qualified to advise others on what are the best technological tools for educating their children at home. The chart that starts below shows



Type of Resource	Name	Description	Ages	Comments
Curriculum	Time4Learning Homeschool Curriculum	A multimedia online curriculum for homeschooling or learning outside of school	Pre-school, elementary, and middle school	This multimedia online curriculum is wonderful for gifted children because it allows them to work independently and at their own pace. It also provides great assistive tools such as text-to-speech capabilities for lessons, graphic organizers for writing assignments, and animated math manipulatives. Because of its unique ability to work with both gifted and LD children, Time4Learning is by far my favorite overall homeschool curriculum for outside-the-box learners.
Online instruction	ALEKS Math	Math instruction	K-12	Anyone who's ever wished for an intuitive math program will love this resource. ALEKS uses precise placement tests to find out just what a student has already mastered, where more work is needed, and what has not yet been covered. The lessons are eerily intuitive, with built-in tips and helps every step of the way. If a student is solving a problem and gets most of the steps right but ends up with the wrong answer, ALEKS can pinpoint where the student went wrong and hone in on that skill. Both gifted and LD learners can benefit because ALEKS lets learners advance as quickly as they are able, while still providing multiple interactive supports when needed.



Resources to Boost Homeschool Learning, continued

some of my very favorite resources to recommend for children with giftedness, learning disabilities (LDs), or a combination of these. These resources can work equally well in the classroom as in the homeschooling environment.

We live in an age when homeschooling parents need not have a special education degree to successfully homeschool their twice-exceptional children. More and more educational publishers and software developers are creating products targeted at outside-the-box




Type of Resource	Name	Description	Ages	Comments
Educational Software	Read, Write, and Type	A program that integrates phonics, reading, writing, and keyboarding	Primarily for grades K-4	With Read, Write, and Type, children use their eyes, ears, mouths, and fingers to create a multi-sensory learning experience. The program also integrates phonics, phonemes, reading, writing, spelling, and typing into one learning system, helping to build multiple learning connections.
	Co-Writer	Word prediction program	All	This word prediction program works with any writing application. Type in the first couple of letters of the word, and a list of words you might be looking for comes up. You choose the word, and it's automatically entered (correctly spelled, no less) into your writing. This program can even help students who spell phonetically because it uses linguistic word prediction to figure out what word they were looking for. This program is a godsend for struggling writers. A free version, LetMeType, is available with fewer bells and whistles.
Service	National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped	Free audio books through a mail lending library	All	If you have a documented learning disability, such as dyslexia, you can qualify for this free service. The number of books available through this program is impressive, making it easy to find almost any book in audio form that is assigned via curriculum or that your child chooses for leisure reading.
	Nettrekker	Subscription educational search engine	All	If you are the type of homeschooling parent who wishes you had the know-how to simply create your own curriculum, this educational search engine is the resource that just might make that possible. It helps you locate online resources, websites, and reference materials for all areas of study. It's also useful for finding additional materials to supplement the curriculum you already use. You can often find discounts for Nettrekker subscriptions at Homeschool Buyers Coop.



Resources to Boost Homeschool Learning, concluded

learners. The resources described here are only the tip of the iceberg. Plenty are available and accessible to homeschoolers who want to improve their children's education by integrating specific technologies into their day-to-day learning.

Kerry Jones is a homeschooling parent and freelance writer who writes extensively about educational and assistive technology. To read more of her articles, find out more educational technology resources, or check out her blog, you may visit her [website](#). 

Type of Resource	Name	Description	Ages	Comments
Service (Continued)	Discovery Education Streaming	Subscription online digital media library with content from the Discovery Channel and educational publishers	K-12	Sometimes studying about a subject just isn't enough. Gifted students often want to delve deeper and satisfy their curiosities. Students with learning difference sometimes need to do more than read about something; they need to see it in action. This resource meets both needs by providing a comprehensive database of educational videos and video clips on almost any imaginable subject. Whether you're studying gophers, the Magna Carta, quadratic equations, or deep space, Discovery Education Streaming has a video to supplement your learning. Originally, this resource was only available to schools but in recent years has opened up to homeschoolers as well. Be sure to check Homeschool Buyers Coop for subscription discounts.
Learning Website	ReadWriteThink	Free resources for home or classroom use created by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English	K-12	For reading and language arts instruction, you may never have to look much farther than this website. Click on the "Student Materials" section to find multiple interactive tools that will enhance your daily instruction. Both gifted and LD students will enjoy activities such as creating interactive trading cards, using a word generator to practice blending words, using an interactive essay map, writing a letter with the letter generator, and creating time-lines. There are also many lesson plans on the site to help teachers discover even more creative uses for the tools. The website also offers lesson plans, standards, and web resources.
	Talking Calculator	An interactive calculator that's part of a PBS website based on the kids' mathematics series Cyberchase Online	Designed for kids ages 8 to 12, according to the website	Those who don't struggle with an LD may have a hard time understanding why simple things such as a calculator can baffle outside-of-the-box learners. But if you've ever seen a child trying to make sense of which number to enter first in a subtraction problem, or continually mixing up the symbols for division and multiplication, you'll understand. A talking calculator takes the guesswork out of guided math computation by providing consistent auditory feedback to the user. (For a talking calculator that you can purchase, check out the Calc-U-Vue®.)



A Profile of New Zealand's Alpha School

Digital Education for 2e Students

By J. Mark Bade

In 2004, a confluence of events led Frances Hill, living in a rural area of New Zealand's South Island, to team with her husband and start a venture she called Alpha, "a digital school that could connect gifted students across New Zealand and even globally, a school that would meet the emotional and social needs as well as the cognitive needs of gifted students."

Alpha serves gifted students with learning blocks (twice-exceptional, or, as Hill calls them, GLD) and gifted students who are disengaged from school. Hill's term for the latter type of student is GTU – gifted and talented with an ingrained pattern of underachievement, despite lack of evidence of an LD. Some students stay at Alpha for only one term, while others stay for years.

Currently, Alpha serves home-schooled students on a full-time basis and mainstream-schooled gifted students on a part-time basis. Students like Liam, an exceptionally bright young man with dyspraxia who stayed at Alpha for three years; distractible and gifted Callum, still with Alpha at the high school level; gifted but underachieving Bronte, who attended Alpha for her last year of primary school; GTU Gwen and GLD Ross, brother and sister who used Alpha as a "wonderful bridge back to learning," according to their mother; and twice-exceptional, unhappy Kate, who in a short time at Alpha broke a cycle of non-productivity and, according to her father, regained her confidence.

Many Offerings

The curricula conveyed by Alpha includes instruction for:

- The Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) curriculum, of which the National Curriculum of New Zealand is a subset
- Digital literacy
- Thinking skills
- Social and emotional literacy.

The school has in place facilities for a range of students:

- A preschool program called BrightStart
- A full-time primary school operation for ages 5 to 13
- A full-time high school operation called Tutors Online for ages 14-19
- Part-time schooling via Alpha Plus for gifted students ages 5 to 15 who are in mainstream schools.

Hill says that the Alpha Plus enrollment is often the

only recognition those students get of their giftedness. She notes that regular schools in New Zealand are notoriously dismissive of GLD and GTU students.

The Alpha Plus digital facilities include:

- A digital classroom
- A forum for protected blogging
- A Wiki for collaborative learning and authorship
- After-school social interaction in chat rooms
- An after-school learning games room.

The Philosophy of the School

Before an Alpha student receives instruction, two things happen. First, using a range of tools, the school performs an analysis of the student's needs and learning preferences. This analysis results in what the school calls a *synergistic learning profile* (SLP), an assessment of each student's natural learning style in the areas of:

- How the student best absorbs information – the student's sensory style
- Environmental preferences – physical, temporal, social
- How the student processes information – brain dominance and thinking style
- Memory function – how the student stores and retrieves information
- Expressive style – the cognitive resources the student accesses naturally for showing what he or she has learned.

The SLP assessment is also designed to find indicators of significant underachievement or specific LDs.

The mother of Alpha students Ross and Gwen notes that Alpha took care to understand each of her children's learning needs, recognizing strengths and weaknesses. They were able to work at their own pace while Alpha "raised the bar" in terms of high standards for learning and achievement.

Second, based on the SLP, the school performs a *needs analysis* to tailor the appropriate learning programs to the student's learning profile. According to Hill, the needs analysis collates the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of the student and identifies key areas for development, advancement, and support.

The Alpha School allows for a high degree of differentiation, says Hill. Students proceed at their own pace, perhaps participating in a math program at one level and a literacy program at another level. Learning





Digital Education, continued

is conducted in small learning communities consisting of students, teachers, and mentors. Mentors may be older students who tutor younger students, or they may be adults from business, the arts, and academia who are available to “consult” online on particular topics.

A Focus on Digital Technology

The Alpha School has been developing and refining its digital offerings since 2004. Those offerings vary by audience group – pre-school, primary, full-time high school, and high school part-time gifted. Currently, learning in the primary grades makes use of this technology:

- Forums via safe blogs
- Interactive Wikis for co-authorship of work products
- Movie-making tools
- Tools for creating digital learning games
- Interactive whiteboards
- Protected chat facilities
- Interactive conferencing suites
- (Optional) broadband webcams
- Synchronous digital classrooms in which students are receiving instruction and participating with the teacher and each other via their computers, as if they were all in the same physical classroom.

The starting point for all of a student’s activities is the Central Hall, open 24 hours a day and shown in the screen capture below.



From the Central Hall, students can access such rooms as a meeting circle with whiteboards; a resource room containing websites, templates, and more; forums to teach specific skills; and fact files, which convey more knowledge-oriented information. Also accessible through the Central Hall are syndicates (rooms for students to socialize); a theater for after-school educational games; a notice board; a writers’ workshop; and a graphics and photo gallery. Each student has a customizable home page with a private conference room accessible only to the student, the family, and the teacher. A library contains works in a variety of media, and student works of appropriate quality may be accepted into the library.

The Digital Classroom

Teacher-to-student learning occurs in digital classrooms. These allow private and group messaging for class discussion; an interactive teaching environment using PowerPoint, video, Internet access, and document sharing; and assessment and feedback tools. The facilities are designed to be private and safe for students; all activity is recorded and/or monitored. The illustration on the next page shows what a digital classroom looks like at its simplest.

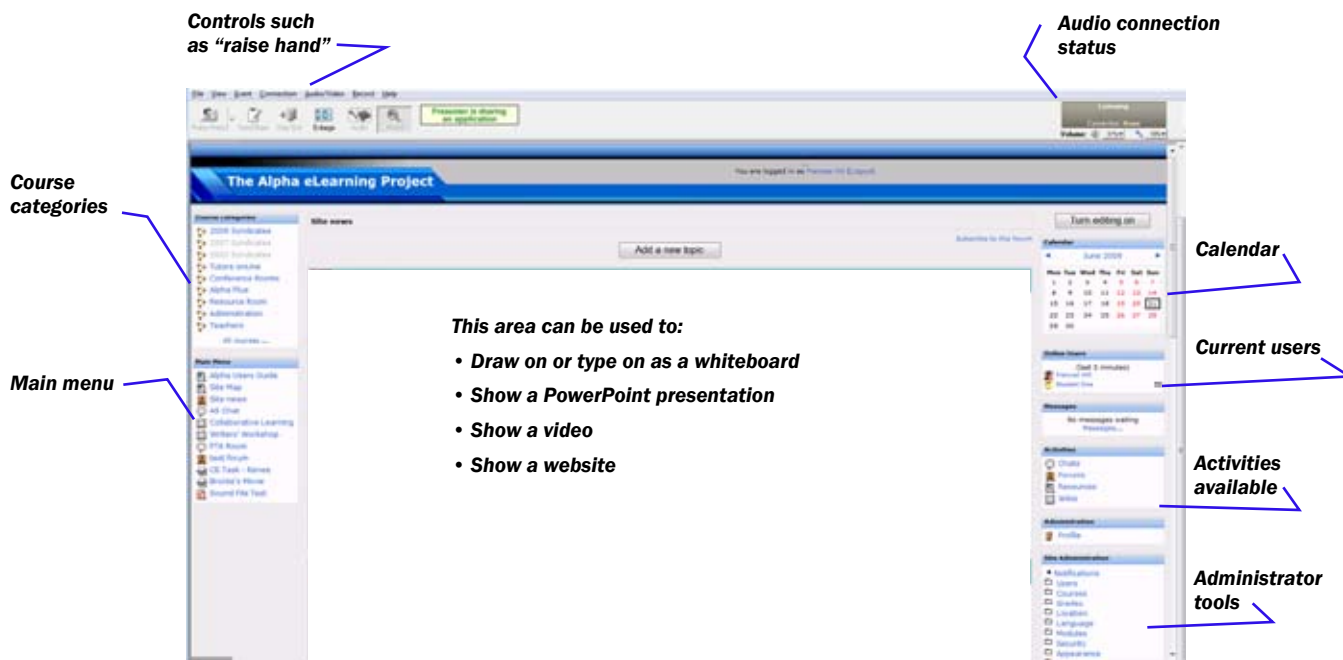
The large, white area is filled during instruction with a variety of communication elements. For starters, teacher and students may write or draw on the screen like a whiteboard. This area can also show the images of students who attend using webcams. (Otherwise, students not using webcams have an audio presence in the classroom.)

The teacher may present or may allow students to present by assigning them “presenter’s rights.” A presenter may share a PowerPoint presentation or a video movie. Presenters may also stream a website into the presentation area. (Sites are screened for safety and user-friendliness.) For example, Alpha has a special arrangement with the BBC to use certain resources from the BBC website for instruction.

In main classrooms such as these, one teacher may teach up to 34 students, although to enhance interactivity Alpha uses lower teacher-student ratios than that. There are also back-up classrooms in which up to 15 students may work in smaller groups. Primary students also have access to an online tutor facility for instant interaction with a teacher.



Digital Education, continued



Full-time high school students at Alpha use the Online Tutor facilities in ways similar to primary students. They take 20 50-minute periods of online instruction each week. Their schedule also includes time for off-line task completion and scheduled, online sessions with mentors.

The part-time high school students who are part of the Alpha Plus program make use of these digital facilities:

- A digital classroom
- A forum for protected blogging
- A Wiki for collaborative learning and authorship
- An after-school social interaction in chat rooms
- An after-school learning games room.

Learning Online

Most Alpha students seem to take well to the mostly-digital environment. The mother of Callum reports that her son has been thrilled from the start by the digital nature of the online environment. The mother of Bronte says, "I really believe she has had a first-class, 21st-century digital education."

At Alpha, Liam was recognized for his abilities, interest, and talents, says his father. "His school work was able to be presented to his teacher via a variety of media." Thanks to what his father calls "two very productive years" at Alpha that repaired "the damage done by the normal

school system," Liam is now a happy young man doing well in high school.

According to her mother, Kate took quickly to touch-typing. "The capabilities of a word processor and presentation tools unlocked all of the creative talent," her mother explains. "All of a sudden she could write down words as fast as her brain thought of them. It also helped with her perfectionistic tendencies."

Teachers, Parents, Mentors

The Alpha School also offers digital facilities for teachers, parents, and mentors. Teachers can receive professional development on the topics of giftedness and twice-exceptionalities. Alpha offers a PTA chat room so that parents can meet on-line to organize supportive activities, discuss issues, or simply chat. There is also a room for mentors.

A Student Day at Alpha School

On the Alpha website is a description of a typical student day, which runs Monday to Thursday from 8:15 to 12:40 for older students, 9 to 12 for younger students. Friday is an off-line day for activities such as science investigations, interviews, or art work. Alpha students may use Friday to collaborate with one another, for example to produce media pieces such as videos



Digital Education, continued

or PowerPoint presentations based on their learning activities.

Early each school day, according to Hill, students go to the online notice board to read the teacher's daily site news. Here they learn about the focus for the day and any issues of note. Following that, students and teachers greet each other in an audio conferencing meeting, organize the day's learning activities, and book online facilities such as interactive whiteboards. During this time, students may present work products such as PowerPoint presentations, movies, documents, or student-led discussions.

Learning programs may be structured or unstructured, depending on the individual student's learning profile. Students who require a structured program take four learning sessions of about 45 minutes each, interspersed with breaks. Students move between their computers and a variety of learning tasks, says Hill, remaining in constant audio contact with their peers and with their teacher.

Autonomous students, those who require less structure, consult with teachers to organize their own daily learning. They book sessions with teachers and mentors and organize collaborative sessions with other Alpha students. They might work continuously on a particular area of learning.

Students close the morning with a brief online meeting. Afternoon activities are usually devoted to "live" sports or optional courses. Students often return to work in the evenings or on weekends because most Alpha facilities are open 24/7.

A Teacher's Day at Alpha

According to an example on the Alpha website, a typical morning for an Alpha teacher might include:

- Sitting in on an audio discussion among the students who edit the school's online student magazine
- Entering a digital classroom where older students are mentoring younger students in the application of animated PowerPoint
- Helping students create MP3 audio files to report their learning
- Arranging collaborative learning projects
- Assisting students in editing media pieces and streaming those onto the digital classroom wall
- Monitoring a technical design session on one of the interactive whiteboards
- Delivering a group lesson on problem solving

- Teaching one-to-one in a student's personal conference suite
- Responding instantly to a student who needs assistance
- Calling the class together for an interactive audio conferencing learning session
- Sitting in on arranged student/mentor sessions and learning along with the students.

Social Interaction Online

Home-schooled students who attend Alpha are able to socialize online, supplementing their local social networks. Students get together in syndicates, or chat rooms, and also interact in other rooms accessible from the Central Hall.

Beyond academic subjects, Alpha teaches social and emotional literacy because, Hill says, many students come to Alpha with a lack of self-confidence. Learning modules in the social and emotional literacy curriculum have titles such as "A Sense of Self."

The social and emotional literacy instruction, along with the chance to demonstrate strengths, results in gratifying transformations, according to parents of Alpha students. Kate's mother says that her daughter felt like she belonged. "The social network was very strong, even though kids were hundreds of kilometers apart. She was with peers..."

Callum, too, feels very much a part of the group, according to his mother. "I don't think there is any lack of a school atmosphere," she says.

The Technology

Frances Hill has used several main pieces of technology to create Alpha as it exists today. She began with an open-source software package called Moodle. On this platform, she built and implemented courses and associated instructional materials such as lessons, assignments, testing, and resources. Later, she added speech and drawing capabilities when the school established what are now their backup classrooms.

Using Moodle, Hill has put online hundreds of modules which are available to meet individual learner needs and interests. She has been able to use the capabilities of Moodle to support chatting among teachers and learners, and for site administration. Another feature of Moodle is that it records all activity to insure privacy and





Technology “Hits” in the 2e Arena

Several articles in this issue feature particular ways in which technology helps 2e children, or helps us to help them. Here’s a smorgasbord of other technological applications – in no particular order except for the first two – that have made things easier for parents, educators, and twice-exceptional children themselves. Please note that this list is not comprehensive and we solicit additional applications that readers have found useful.

- **The Internet.** Perhaps the best thing about the Internet is that it cut out the middleman, putting all of us in direct contact with providers of information, goods, services, and with knowledgeable peers. Now we can easily find out exactly what’s in the DSM-IV, for example, or what skilled lawyers recommend for situations we encounter with our 2e children.
- **Hoagies’ Gifted Education Page.** If it was ever just a single “page” on the world wide web, that was a long time ago. Webmistress Carolyn K has been building this *enormous* site since IP addresses were coded in Roman numerals. The gifted resources alone would warrant the inclusion of this site here, but there’s a 2e section as well at www.hoagiesgifted.org/twice_exceptional.htm.
- **Websites.** There are health and brain sites such as those from the National Institutes of Health and the Mayo Clinic; organizational websites such as NAGC, CEC, LD Online, and SENG; education websites from *Education Week*, the Davidson Institute, and *Edutopia*; news sites from *Science Daily* and Google News. And, of course, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Giftedness, now housed by Hoagies’ and CEC.
- **Blogs.** These websites let those with an interest in 2e-related topics express opinions, share information, and relate to the 2e community worldwide. Among the best are the Eide Neurolearning blog; Laura Vanderkam’s Gifted Exchange; the Gifted Homeschooler’s forum, with a section on 2e; and all the blogs from literate, caring parents of 2e kids who share their lives out of love and/or desperation. Find more blog pointers on *our* blog at <http://2enewsletter.blogspot.com>.
- **E-newsletters.** They’re timely, tree-saving, often free, and able to focus narrowly on specific topics (like 2e, giftedness, AD/HD, etc.). Some e-newsletters



Digital Education, concluded

safety.

A still-newer technology allows for higher-end interaction among teacher and students. This corporate-grade technology is supplied by a global telecommunications vendor and supports each main digital classroom at Alpha, enabling video and audio conferencing, the whiteboard, and presentations by means such as video or PowerPoint.

Alpha’s effective use of technology to teach (and socialize) twice-exceptional children has not been lost on parents. As one parent says, “Alpha’s use of the digital learning environment is intelligent, motivating, flexible, and is ideal for individualized learning.”

Looking Ahead

As a result of Alpha’s trials and operation, Alpha 2009 is a much more sophisticated operation and is barely recognizable when compared with its 2004 operation, says

Hill. The Alpha Digital infrastructure, able to accommodate thousands of students, is enabling the school to step into the international arena. “Recently in Alpha we had a teachers’ meeting,” says Hill. “In attendance were two teachers from Shanghai, one digital engineer from Israel, another from Perth in Australia, another teacher from Sydney, and a teacher from America. Our only concern is to match the time zones!”

The parents of students who have attended Alpha are quick to credit Hill for her capabilities and dedication. Liam’s father echoes other Alpha parents when he says that he is “constantly thankful for Alpha and for Frances’ expertise in teaching students like our son.”

Frances Hill is scheduled to present at SENG’s July, 2009, conference in Orlando, Florida. Find more details at www.sengifted.org. ☒



Technology “Hits,” concluded

to check out are at Wrightslaw, EdNews.org, Edutopia, LD Online, Gifted Education Press Quarterly, and David Rabiner on AD/HD. Of course, there’s our own monthly briefing sent out as a free e-newsletter.

- **Chats and webinars.** The Gifted and Talented Online Conferences site (www.giftedonlineconferences.com), owned and administered by Sally_L, has for years provided text-based chats on giftedness. Recently, OGTOC began offering webinars. [For more information on Sally_L’s work, see the article on the next page.] Education Week’s online chats sometimes cover topics of interest to the 2e community, for example Carol Ann Tomlinson on differentiated instruction (see www.edweek.org/chat). And the National Center for Learning Disabilities offers NCLD Talks at www.ncldtalks.org on topics such as RTI, academic strategies for kids with LDs, and testing and evaluation. Many of the text-based chats are free, and archives are available.
- **Social networking sites.** For parents, educators, and others with an interest in gifted kids, check out Sally_L’s social networking site on Ning: <http://giftedonlineconferences.ning.com>. (There’s a 100-plus-member group on twice-exceptionalities there, one of over 100 groups organized around different topics and areas of interest.) But social networking sites are not just for adults to keep up with and communicate on 2e matters, they’re also great for kids. 2e kids can communicate with peers who aren’t in their schools or communities. Along with instant messaging and text messaging, social networking can help like-minded kids around the world share interests and viewpoints.
- **Online education resources.** Parents and kids can find online courses from schools like MIT or repositories such as iTunes U. Educators can find lesson plans, lesson elements, and places to share tips and techniques on all kinds of topics. Plus, there are entire virtual schools online to supplant or supplement the traditional public school education. [For an example, read about the Alpha School in this issue of 2e Newsletter.]
- **Assistive technology.** Many twice-exceptional children are able to take in content or express what they’ve learned thanks to assistive technology. Examples are text-to-speech software for input, voice recognition programs, and handheld electronic devices for keyboarding and organizing. In addition to the many sites listed in the articles in this issue, some places to learn more about assistive technology are: www.ldonline.org/article/Assistive_Technology_at_Work and www.greatschools.net/content/specialNeeds.page.
- **Brain research.** With the advent of brain imaging (functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fMRI) and its variants, researchers are extending the boundaries of knowledge about giftedness, about LDs, and even about the combination of the two, as Dr. Jeffrey Gilger is doing at Purdue University. [Read more about his 2e research in the March/April, 2009, issue of 2e Newsletter.] For brain research in general, check out the Society for Neuroscience and the Dana Foundation. For more information on the implications of brain research for education, see <http://brainconnection.positscience.com>.

Send us your opinions about technologies that help 2e children, and help others help them: Mark@2eNewsletter.com. ☞



Using Technology to Get Parents, Educators, and Clinicians Together

Sally_L's Online Conferences and Webinars

Utah resident Sally_L has been using Internet technology since 2003 to provide online conferences for the gifted community. Her venture, Our Gifted and Talented Online Conferences (OGTOC), originated as a project through NAGC's Professional Achievement Certificate program, a mentored, individualized professional development experience. Through the program, Sally_L secured free server space from a university in order to conduct her online conferences.

"I wanted to create a bridge for all who have roles in educating and parenting gifted children," says Sally_L, who like her friend Carolyn_K, webmistress of Hoagies', prefers a modicum of privacy in the public areas of the Internet. She envisioned a place to meet and discuss topics via fast-paced, in-depth conferences.

Like many in the gifted community, Sally_L's interest in the field results from personal experience with her own family. She says that OGTOC has been her labor of love through the years, and she now reaches over 1,300 members of her network.

Recently, OGTOC evolved from text-based chat into a 24/7, multifaceted social networking site. The conferences have turned into webinars where a presenter's voice and graphics go out to attendees, who can respond and ask questions in real time via text. The first two webinars featured the Drs. Eide on the topic of twice-exceptionality and

Mary Ruth Coleman on RTI for 2e students.

The OGTOC social networking site is <http://giftedonlineconferences.ning.com>. See a screen capture below. At the site, Gifted Online Conference members may:

- Set up their own pages with a profile, comment wall, photos, and listings of their friends and groups
- See profiles of other members, adding comments to their walls or adding them as a friend
- Join discussion forums
- Join and participate in any of over 100 groups centered on special interests, including 2e, profound giftedness, and parenting
- Add blog posts on the site
- Communicate with other members via private email
- Invite others to join this OGTOC site.

OGTOC also has a Facebook page to increase its reach to users there. Sally_L says she is starting to use Twitter to provide information to her network, but she has even more in mind for that technology. "I am coordinating a national-wide Twitter effort where each state will have a 2e Twitter group – for example, Idaho2e and Utah2e," says Lyon. "If any readers would like to become a leader in their state, please contact me at OurGiftedOnlineConferences@gmail.com." She asks that interested Twitter leaders include their state and "2e Twitter" in the subject line. ☞





Understanding the Connection for Twice-exceptional Students

Academic and Emotional Readiness

By Lesli Preuss, Ph.D., Susan Baum, Ph.D., and Carl Sabatino,
Head of School

Nelson is a 13-year-old boy who is striking in many ways. He stands at least a head above his peers and can communicate about electronics in a sophisticated way. He's also a master at building and architecture, and he has planned an ecologically friendly city that he hopes to get approved for construction one day. He has a heart of gold and can often be found volunteering at Habitat for Humanity or the ASPCA. Yet, Nelson has recently been asked to leave his school for fighting and "extreme anxiety." He vomits daily when he arrives at school and is incapable of getting along with his classmates. He argues or physically fights with them on a regular basis. Despite these emotional issues, when his parents attended a school conference to discuss Nelson's difficulties, they persisted in talking about Nelson's academic work and his need to be challenged. That theme dominated the meeting at school rather than why he was emotionally upset in an arena that should play to his natural gifts.

Maggie is a young girl of ten, scheduled to begin the fifth grade this fall. Maggie tests at the 99.9th percentile on all standardized intelligence and achievement tests, with commensurate grades in school. Over the past year, however, she has begun to refuse to attend school and cries every Sunday night because she can't face the thought of going to school for another week. Her teachers have noticed a precipitous decline in her participation in class and report that Maggie is heading to the school nurse's office about three to four times per day. She has been missing assignments and her grades are dropping in spite of her clear intellectual prowess. Her parents are puzzled. There have been no obvious social issues – Maggie doesn't report being teased or bullied – yet it's clear that she's very unhappy at school.

Exposing a Myth

It's a common myth that academic success is independent of social and emotional well-being. Believing that social/emotional issues can be separated from academic concerns is problematic and can lead to faulty solutions. Nelson's and Maggie's scenarios represent some of the challenges facing twice-exceptional students every day. These students present us with a dual challenge – to help

This article is the fourth of a series of articles contributed to 2e Newsletter by Bridges Academy, a school for twice-exceptional students in Studio City, California. Over the school's 15-year history, its faculty and administrators have had the opportunity to evaluate models and practices suggested by the research of Dr. Susan Baum and other leading scholars. In this series, they share some of what they have learned.

them achieve academic success *and* to help alleviate their apparent social/emotional pain.

However, many well-meaning parents ask schools to focus on the academics without understanding the role that emotional well being plays. Some parents, sometimes parents of twice-exceptional children dealing with persistent social/emotional issues, want to set aside those concerns for later discussion. They believe that focusing on the academic concern – either greater challenge or perhaps remediation – will improve performance. Still other parents grasp the connection between academic success and social/emotional concerns but believe that more challenging work will mitigate their child's social/emotional problems.

What's needed is a deeper, and ultimately more useful, understanding of the relationship among these variables: academic success, social/emotional state, and more challenging work. Looking at the unique intersection of two theories from the fields of psychology and education can shed some light on the relationship among the three variables. In the rest of this article we'll look at the significance to 2e education of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and of Talent Development Theory.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

One of the most common grievances of the students at Bridges Academy is that they feel they did not "fit in" at their previous schools. Children's sense of being understood and feeling accepted is an integral part of their success in an environment of higher-level learning. A careful examination of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs diagram, shown on the next page, effectively demonstrates the importance of meeting certain emotional needs so that a child will be "available to learn."

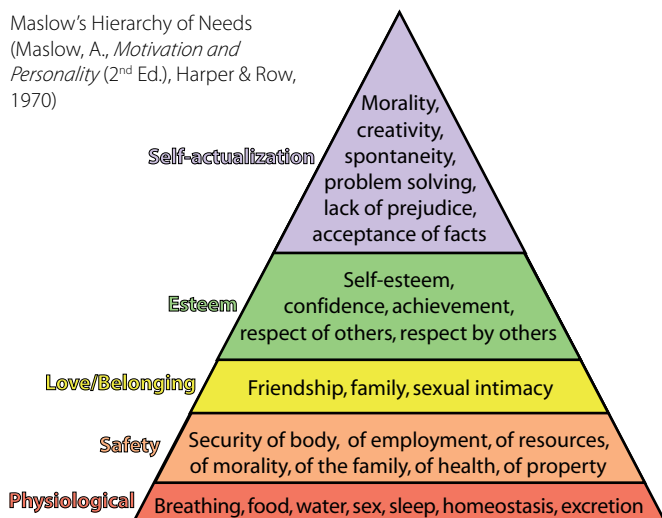




Academic and Emotional Readiness, continued

The idea that a sense of belonging forms the foundation of self-esteem, achievement, and higher-level thinking is not novel. Maslow posited his theory of five hierarchical levels of human needs nearly four decades ago (Maslow, 1970). Notice in the diagram that there are five levels of needs. Moving from the bottom of the pyramid to the top, each grouping of needs must be met before a person can progress to the next higher level. According to Maslow, our physiological needs must be met before we can develop a sense of love and belonging, which requires a sense of trust in others. The higher needs on the pyramid will never be reached if an individual has not developed a sense of belonging and trust in others. Therefore, we cannot expect

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
(Maslow, A., *Motivation and Personality* (2nd Ed.), Harper & Row, 1970)



a child who lacks a sense of confidence, self-worth, and self-actualization to demonstrate problem-solving abilities, creativity, and academic achievement.

When it comes to meeting the needs of underachieving students, many educational settings have ignored the middle levels of Maslow's pyramid. Concerns about a child's fitting into an environment and feeling like a valued member of the learning community are rarely considered in seeking solutions to academic difficulties, especially for gifted and 2e students. However, this kind of environment is essential in order for a child to learn.

Talent Development Theory

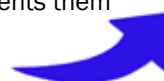
Now, let's see what role Talent Development Theory plays in meeting the needs of twice-exceptional students. This theory recognizes the importance of aligning curriculum and instruction to students' strengths, interests,

readiness levels, and talents.

Subtle and not-so-subtle factors can influence feelings of belonging. For instance, a curriculum that fails to consider student strengths, interests, readiness levels, and talents can make students feel invisible and undervalued, without an invitation to learn. When Bridges Academy applies Talent Development Theory to 2e students, we look at a student's need to belong by assessing the classroom to see if the child's social/emotional distress stems from an academic origin. Specifically, the factors we look at are the amount of stimulation, appropriateness of the instructional strategies, and grade level. Sometimes, altering the environment to address these elements of learning may be all that's needed. The changes have a positive psychological impact, and we see students become excited about the material, feel comfortable with their performance, and see themselves as accepted and respected by their peers for their academic ability. The academic changes fulfill fundamental needs in Maslow's pyramid.

Nevertheless, when a child performs poorly and/or has a bad day at school, it's more often than not due to peer conflict and/or isolation rather than whether or not the right educational material was presented. The 2e child is particularly affected because of asynchrony (uneven development across cognitive and psychological domains). In many schools, a typical day for a 2e student includes moving between grade levels and classrooms so that he or she does not belong to any particular group. Many of these students have experienced a painful and frustrating journey in their search for a good match. Some have attended multiple schools by the time they reach high school. They don't experience the consistency and sense of belonging that most neuro-typical students enjoy. In fact, they often feel alienated by their differences. Such feelings of isolation negatively influence self-esteem and positive identity formation.

By virtue of their classification, 2e students have no place in most school systems. They do not fit comfortably in either the gifted program or the special education program. These students may obtain services from multiple school departments throughout the day. The traditional educational system creates a dilemma for 2e students like Nelson or Maggie, introduced earlier in this article. They never master the essential stage of belonging, which creates enormous emotional distress and prevents them from performing at their expected levels.





Academic and Emotional Readiness, continued

How to Develop a Sense of Belonging

The student body at Bridges Academy, more than 110 and growing, is comprised of gifted students with AD/HD, dyslexia, nonverbal learning disabilities, and other learning disabilities. It is well documented that the brains of these students work differently than neuro-typical brains. Many of these students have extraordinary social skills, while others do not. How do we help our students feel as if they have found a place to belong? There are several key characteristics of the program that promote the development of this feeling:

- The entire student population is 2e. Students are socializing with others like themselves, often for the first time.
- Every student is bright and has an awareness and understanding of his or her own disabilities and the disabilities of other students. The program is geared toward assisting children with multiple exceptionalities.
- The talent-development model that the program employs makes use of differentiated instruction, which has been found to lead to less isolation and feelings of being different than an accommodation model (Tomlinson, 1999). The faculty enriches the content, creates alternative processes and products, and carefully controls the learning environment. Several accommodations are built into the structure of the classroom.

In addition, the attitude of the administration, faculty, and students toward cognitive and emotional diversity also encourages a student's sense of belonging. While there are many diversity programs implemented in schools across the country, few focus on cognitive, psychological, and emotional exceptionalities. At Bridges Academy, these exceptionalities form a critical element of the curriculum. On any given day, a student may say or do something that arises out of this form of diversity. It's not uncommon to hear a child say something like "I'm sorry, I just had a 'Bridges moment.'" This assertion is not an excuse for behavior, but rather a statement of that child's awareness of his or her neurological difference that helps the other students understand an awkward social moment. There is a school-wide acceptance of individual differences, which leads to understanding and compassion. In this kind of environment, a student is more likely to feel acceptance, love, and belonging.

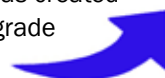
Bridges' philosophy in regard to 2e students is not like other schools'. Many programs are based on a deficit model, and teachers strive for students to learn and function in a more neuro-typical way. For example, if a student is struggling with writing and/or note taking, the traditional program helps the student find a process that leads to greater production. At Bridges, skills are taught with an emphasis on helping the student to identify his or her preferred learning style and mode of expression. A student who communicates well using video essays or PowerPoint presentations will learn to hone these skills while also learning the basics of writing. We recognize that our students are not "typical"; they are unique. There is no blueprint for success that they can follow. Each will find his or her own path to success guided by personal interests and talent development. The faculty facilitates this process by guiding emerging talent and providing opportunities for it to flourish.

Example Students

Let's get back to Nelson and Maggie. How would Bridges Academy help these students?

The faculty support team would conduct a careful observation and analysis of Nelson's academic/social/emotional environment. Most of his talent development occurs outside of school. He uses the SIMS game at home to create sophisticated city infrastructures, and he takes part in multiple community organizations. A thoughtful strategy for helping Nelson would use his interests to mend his difficulty with his peers and build relationships with them. If Nelson forms the Bridges Academy Architecture Club, for example, or if he conducts fund-raisers at school for the prevention of animal cruelty, then he will find other students who share these interests and he will develop the sense of belonging he craves. The school psychologist will work closely with Nelson's parents to help them understand and accept the idea that a focus on their son's emotional well-being in the short run will lead to greater academic successes in the long run. It also will strengthen the parent/school partnership every 2e student needs for success. If Maslow's theory holds true, Nelson's academic performance will also improve.

Maggie's story presents a slightly different scenario. There is no sense of peer rejection, nor is there peer acceptance. Her asynchronous development has created a sense of isolation. Maggie attends a fifth-grade





Academic and Emotional Readiness, concluded

English class and sixth-grade math and science classes, and she participates in a Homework Support class that pulls her out of an advisory period. Maggie would thrive in a class that mixed fifth and sixth graders who participated at their own academic level, while remaining within the same group of students throughout the day. The differentiated model used at Bridges Academy allows this to happen, ensuring that the enrichment and support Maggie requires to succeed are available in the same classroom. This model also allows Maggie to complete assignments in a variety of equally valued formats. Viewing Maggie's situation through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, her sense of belonging would increase, her self-esteem would be enhanced, and she would develop a general sense of well-being. With these needs met, Maggie could quickly return to her outstanding academic performance.

Conclusion

In Bridges Academy's inclusive, strength-based educational model, students are at the center of the program; and they are given a place to belong. Students are on a path to achievement, self-esteem, and creative production. It's essential for parents and professionals to understand and accept that the ideal 2e educational environment strongly emphasizes meeting the social/emotional needs of students so that they are available for learning and able to focus their attention on developing their gifts. Bridges Academy offers a working model of this approach, which it adapts and refines to meet the complex needs of its students.

All of the authors of this article work at Bridges Academy in the following capacities: Susan Baum is Director of Professional Development; Lesli Preuss is School Psychologist; and Carl Sabatino is Head of School. 2e

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 A collection of columns from 2e Newsletter by Meredith Warshaw, creator of the Uniquely Gifted website.



The 2e Reading Guide: Essential Books for Understanding the Twice-Exceptional Child. Reviews of 20 books from 2e Newsletter that highlight the key experts and issues in the twice-exceptional field.



A Meeting of the Minds on 2e

On Saturday May 2, over 30 people from around the country convened at a symposium at the Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development at the University of Connecticut at Storrs. What the invited attendees all had in common is a focus on and a commitment to twice-exceptional children. Represented were researchers, educators, mental health professionals, advocates, publishers, and parents. Organizing, co-sponsoring, and underwriting the event were the Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students (AEGUS), the Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, and Bridges Academy.

The title of the symposium was "The Evolution of Understanding the Twice Exceptional Learner: A Symposium on Research Needs and Policy Development." Its organizers envisioned it as "a ground-breaking day of discussion on the research needs and policy development of programs for twice-exceptional children." Judging by the results achieved by the end of the day, the event lived up to that description.

Symposium participants spent hours brainstorming and discussing. Among the results of their efforts was the

development of a definition of twice-exceptional students. Although the term *twice-exceptional* is becoming more widely used, participants agreed that there has been no consensus on its meaning. After much debate, the group crafted the definition shown below with the hope that it will lead to better understanding of these children by practitioners, parents, and state agencies.

The day's work also produced a list of topics for future research into twice exceptionality and for future articles for publication. In addition, participants discussed criteria for identifying 2e children, and looked for ways to increase awareness of the existence and needs of twice-exceptional children.

By the end of the day, all agreed on the need to continue a dialog among those who attended the symposium and to encourage others who are interested to join in. Plans were discussed for future meetings at November's National Association for Gifted Children conference in St. Louis and at next year's 2e conference scheduled for March 11 through 13 in Chevy Chase, Maryland. [See the *listing on the events page of this newsletter for details on these events.*] ☒

Definition of Twice-Exceptional Students

Conceived by a Joint Commission of Participants Representing The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT), the Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students (AEGUS), AEGUS, and the Bridges Academy

Twice-exceptional learners are students who give evidence of the potential for high achievement capability in areas such as specific academics; general intellectual ability; creativity; leadership; AND/OR visual, spatial, or performing arts AND also give evidence of one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria such as specific learning disabilities; speech and language disorders; emotional/behavioral disorders; physical disabilities; autism spectrum; or other health impairments, such as AD/HD.

Identification of twice-exceptional students requires assessment in both the areas of giftedness and disability, as one does not preclude the other. Twice-exceptional students qualify to receive an individual education plan (IEP) or a 504 accommodation plan. This plan must address both their strengths and weaknesses. Twice-exceptional students require differentiated instruction, accommodations and/or modifications, direct services, specialized instruction, acceleration options, and opportunities for talent development. These services are necessary for twice-exceptional students to achieve growth at a level commensurate with their abilities, develop their gifts and talents, and learn compensation skills and strategies to address their disabilities. ☒



Open Doors Learning Center

A New School in Scottsdale for 2e Children

The elements of the story Kelly Rostan tells about her family may sound familiar to many parents of 2e children, at least up to a point. A gifted son who has also been assigned at least seven other labels from the alphabet soup of multi-exceptionalities. Trials of medication and special diets. Holistic practitioners. The feeling that, as a parent, you're alone in your search for answers and support.

But in the 12 years since her son's birth, Rostan and her husband, a family practitioner of osteopathic medicine, have gathered support, information, and knowledge of what works for their son and what doesn't. By now, says Rostan on her website www.az2e.org, "We have been able to weed out most of the people who have been obstacles to [her son's] progress."

One daunting need for the family, however, is a school to provide the right environment for her son. So Rostan, in collaboration with an experienced, like-thinking educator, is taking things a step further than most parents. She's starting a new school, the Open Doors Learning Center, in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Where Do You Start?

It's not as if the new venture is starting from scratch. In 2004, at a conference sponsored by The Gifted Development Center, Rostan heard consultant and therapist Marlo Payne Thurman (formerly Rice) speak on the intensities and sensitivities of the gifted. Rostan says of Thurman, "I felt as though she was describing my child. I made arrangements to visit Brideun and have been in contact with her ever since." Brideun was a school for the twice-exceptional founded by Thurman to test and verify her educational model for such children. (See the January, 2006, issue of *2e Newsletter* for a profile of Brideun.)

Rostan has been involved in a gifted parent support group, which, among other things, has brought Thurman to Scottsdale to share her school model and her expertise with 2e kids. Rostan has also advocated for 2e change in the Scottsdale school system. According to Rostan, she was one of two parents asked to participate on a 2e task force for the Scottsdale Unified School District.

"We spent an entire year developing a 2e model that became a 2e program in one of our elementary schools," she says. She helped bring in 2e experts like Thurman and Dennis Higgins to speak to educators, administrators, and the community at large, and to consult for the 2e program.

However, when the teacher involved in the elementary school's 2e program left, the program was discontinued, according to Rostan.

Rostan's collaborator in the new school is Terry Damlos, who has 19 years of teaching experience and is the founder of the Open Doors Center. The two, says Rostan, share a desire to provide an alternative educational environment that will serve the needs of 2e students, as well as other "out of the box" learners.

Of her teaching experience, Damlos says, "It seems that I was always drawn to the kids who were very bright, but had another label attached to them – Asperger's, AD/HD, and so forth. Not only was I drawn to them, but they were drawn to me as well. Perhaps I identified with them and could empathize with them. I respected them as amazing beings and they knew that; they responded well in my class."

Getting Organized

The new school has been offered space in a church in Scottsdale. Computers are being donated. The group will have access to a kitchen and green area for playing and planting a garden. "The only thing we currently need," says Rostan, "are cupboards for storage of supplies."

Barbara Probst, occasional contributor to *2e Newsletter* and author of the book *When Labels Don't Fit*, will be on the school's advisory board, says Rostan. So will Marlo Payne Thurman, who was recently appointed chair of the Asperger's division of the United States Autism and Asperger's Association. Another advisory board member is Miriam Cherkas-Julkowski, Ph.D., a former professor and long-time practitioner in the area of giftedness and disabilities who will also provide consultation and evaluation services.

As the school prepares for its August launch, Rostan says she has received a great deal of interest, especially after creating a website. The school organizers have held information meetings and have provided an opportunity for interested parents and their children to experience a hands-on lesson with Damlos.

The school will start out with a group of no more than 10 students of mixed ages in grades 3 through 8. The curriculum will be based on "expeditionary learning," thematically-oriented units combining traditionally separate topics such as math, language, writing, etc.



A New School in Scottsdale, concluded

Arts will be emphasized and integrated into every unit.

Damlos says that her teaching technique is the result of years of research, observation, and trial and error. She emphasizes the “expeditionary” aspect – children *experiencing* what they learn about. Also important to Damlos is the element of *service learning* – students bringing their knowledge and experience back to community. For example, if a thematic unit centers on gardening, it may culminate with students taking an expedition to a local food bank and proudly donating the vegetables they’ve grown in the school garden.

Social skills will be embedded into all activities. Rostan, a professional occupational therapist, looks forward to creating sensory-friendly spaces that benefit the students. A speech therapist will be available for consultation if needed.

Damlos says, “What I want Open Doors to achieve is to bring joy back into learning. I want the children to use their creativity and imagination to discover knowledge. I want them to truly respect themselves and others and discover and experience this wonderful world that we live in.”

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Why Start a New School Now?

Rostan expresses hope that this is the right time to offer an alternative educational choice, even in light of the difficult economy. She notes the major budget cuts in Arizona and how the state is ranked 50th nationally in per-pupil spending for public education by the *Report Card on American Education*. “A program geared for 2e kids who don’t fit into our public school system is desperately needed in our community,” she maintains.

Rostan’s son and her husband are her biggest

supporters, she says. She goes on, “We feel strongly that there must be an educational environment where all students are recognized and celebrated for their unique gifts and talents. Where teachers become facilitators, mentors, advisors, and friends. Where kids can develop a true love of learning, by having the opportunity to be curious, to create and explore.”

For more information about the Open Doors Learning Center, visit www.AZ2e.org or www.opendoorscenter.org. ☐



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Gifted Boy with Attitude Lacks Motivation

Q *I have a 10-year-old boy who is in a gifted program. He only goes one day a week to this class, and the rest of the time is spent in his regular fourth-grade class. He has no motivation to do anything. He skims by, keeping his grades at a B or sometimes an A, but he could do so much better. He challenges his teacher's way of teaching and doesn't pay attention in class. When he gets home he picks fights with his younger sister or his father and me, and we have to nag him to do his homework, chores etc... I'm at my breaking point with his negative attitude. He strives at things until he knows them and then gives up and doesn't want to listen to suggestions to do better. We've taken him to counseling and started him on a rewards program, but there aren't any huge changes. Every day I cry over what he might become because of his lack of enthusiasm. Please help!*

A Your concern sounds all too familiar to me. Without knowing the details I couldn't tell you the exact problem. It may be that he isn't sufficiently challenged in school. You would know that if he shows motivation in the gifted program but not in the regular classroom. It's also possible that he became accustomed to too much praise and attention as a very young child. Sometimes that happens with children who speak early, learn to read on their own, or show other unusual talents. People praise them so much that they depend on praise and when they have to share attention in the classroom they feel attention deprived. They act up to get attention or avoid work that doesn't feel easy to them.

A most typical problem is that gifted children can be too competitive. In the early grades they're best at everything and learn so easily. When the curriculum

becomes more difficult, they feel ashamed to work hard, almost as if working hard instead of learning easily would show they weren't smart enough. We tell children in our Family Achievement Clinic, "The harder you work, the smarter you get," but children often assume that if you're smart, all work should come to you quickly and easily.

It always helps children to love learning if they find material very interesting, but there is much they must learn that isn't particularly exciting but is fundamental. Sometimes rewards are helpful, but it takes time before they're effective. Emphasizing that effort counts, and praising your son for perseverance when he shows it, instead of reminding him of how smart he is, may improve motivation gradually; and it can prevent feelings of pressure.

My book *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades* (Great Potential Press, 2008) has just been revised and updated in a third edition. I think you would find it very helpful for understanding your son's problem.

Dr. Sylvia Rimm is a child psychologist and clinical professor at Case University School of Medicine, author, newspaper and magazine columnist, and radio/TV personality. For a free newsletter about underachievement, send a large self-addressed, stamped envelope to P.O. Box 32, Watertown, WI, 53094, or read "Solving the Mysterious Underachievement Problem" at www.sylviarimm.com. ☐





You Don't Get to Pick 'em

By Tracy McElhinney

When I was a student, I loved school. I worked hard and was a very good student. I couldn't understand the kids who didn't like school. Of course, I expected that my own kids would be studious and like school the way I did. The problem is you don't get to pick your kids. What I believe is that you get the kids God sends you, and the kids God sent me didn't like school much. I couldn't understand it, and I was disappointed.

My older son enjoys learning the information – he just doesn't see any point in doing homework. Unless my son can see value in doing a task, he won't do it. The teacher may think there's a lot of value in the homework that's assigned, but my son rarely does. Still, he has a free period at school every day that he spends attending AP European History. I suggested he sign up for the class so that he could get credit for it since he's always there. He told me that he enjoys the teacher, the information they discuss, and the students in the class; but he doesn't want to take it for credit because then he'd have to do a ton of homework.

I could tell you stories about crying after attending parent/teacher conferences because I thought he might flunk out of junior high. And I could tell you about all the different books I read, the experts I consulted, and the many methods I tried to get him to do his work. In a nutshell, all that trying to make him fit into the "traditional school box" did was drive us both crazy!

I've come to the conclusion that my son is going to do things his own way, whether I like it or not. (He's been doing this ever since he was in the womb and turned breech six weeks before he was due. He wouldn't turn to the head-down position, no matter how many things the doctor tried. I just didn't understand until much later that it was an indication of his personality.) I finally decided I had to accept him the way he is and let him do things the way that works for him for the sake of both our sanity. My job as a parent is to provide him with food, clothing, shelter, guidance, and love. Trying to squash my son down to fit into the "traditional school box" when he obviously doesn't fit is not the most loving thing I could do for him. When I came to realize that, I decided I had to stop doing it.

I have taught my son the values I think are important, but I have to let him be himself and follow his own path. The way I see it, that's how God sent him into this world, and who am I to challenge God's judgment?

Tracy McElhinney a registered dental hygienist and the mother of two sons aged, 17 and 21. Both are gifted with "a few added quirks." She has been meeting with other parents of gifted children in an ongoing "Gifted Gab" group for the past 15 years. She is also a founding member of Idaho2E, a network of Idaho parents with an interest in 2e kids. She may be reached at tracymc59@msn.com. ☞



Events

July 17-19, 2009, *SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted) Annual Conference*, Orlando, Florida. For parents, educators, families. See www.sengifted.org.

July 26-31, 2009, *Edufest*, Boise, Idaho. About gifted and talented education. For educators, but also with a Parent's Day, Kid's Day, and an Institute for Counselors. See <http://sites.google.com/site/edufestprogram>.

August 3-7, 2009, *18th Biennial World Conference for Gifted and Talented Children*, Vancouver, Canada. For educators, researchers, parents. More information at www.worldgifted2009.com.

November 5-8, 2009, *Annual Convention of the National Association for Gifted Children*, St. Louis, Missouri. For educators, parents, clinicians. More information at www.nagc.org.

March 11-13, 2010, *Diamonds in the Rough: Smart Kids Who Learn Differently*, Chevy Chase, Maryland. By Weinfeld Education Group and AEGUS. For educators, parents, students. More information posted as it becomes available.

Please note: For state association conferences relating to giftedness, see Hoagies' website. For additional conferences on learning differences, see the website of the Council for Exceptional Children. ☞