Using Strength-Based Pedagogy to Engage and Challenge 2e Students’ Development: Current Research and Personal Journeys

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What we are going to talk about today

1. How I began this work / experience with Neurodiversity / 2E
2. Overview of our previous research on 2E.
3. Overview of our current research
5. Advice for educators
How I began this journey

- Calls to our UConn GT center
- Friendship with Sue Baum (who will speak next)
- LD university program in our dept
- Personal knowledge of many smart students with neurodiversity
Overview of pertinent, previous 2E research
Talents in Two places: Case Studies of High Ability Students with Learning Disabilities in a Competitive University

We studied:

• self-perceived academic strengths and weaknesses;
• specific educational intervention and assistance necessary to succeed in an academic environment;
• types of counseling/support strategies necessary to help realize their potential
Difficulties Encountered and Social and Emotional Challenges—Previous Research

Late Identification as having a learning disability

- Teacher Negativity
- Peer Challenges
- Enrollment in less than challenging classes
- Poor self esteem and lack of confidence
- Difficulty in reading and writing
- Retention / self-contained special education classes
- Inappropriate (remedial) special education program
- Anxiety and depression
In previous 2E studies...

- Parent advocates were a primary reason that gifted students with learning disabilities are able to succeed in school—they never gave up and knew, intrinsically, that their children had strengths and talents, even when all educators refused to see them.
• Neurodiverse students more often receive services focusing on remedial intervention
• Effective teaching should find a balance between developing students’ academic strengths and interests and helping them compensate for their learning differences
• Extra-curricular activities can be extremely beneficial
• The use of enrichment and strength-based strategies enhance learning and healthy social and emotional development
• Twice-exceptional learners are students who demonstrate the potential for high achievement or creative productivity in one or more domains such as math, science, technology, the social arts, the visual, spatial, or performing arts or other areas of human productivity AND who manifest one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria (Reis and Baum, 2014, p. 222).
Current Research:
What is Project 2E-ASD?

https://giftedasd.project.uconn.edu
Our Research Team
Can you give me some advice on my college bound 2e/ASD student? Where should she go? Should she start at a smaller college? Have you conducted any research about this group? How can I help her?
Why study this population?

In 2020, the CDC reported increasing numbers (one in fifty-four children) are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Little educational research exists on smart kids with ASD, especially related to effective instruction....
Transition to competitive colleges..

• Students with ASD currently **enroll at lower rates than their peers** with all other types of disabilities (Gelbar et al., 2015; Shattuck et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2016)

• They **leave college programs prior to completion at higher rates than their peers** (White, Ollendick, & Bray, 2011).

• Low rate of college participation has **significant economic and personal costs** for youth with ASD, their families, and society (Wei et al., 2016)
What do disability providers believe, in their work with this population...

- Students with ASD experience:
  - anxiety (91.2%)
  - social isolation (85%)
  - loneliness (81.4%)
  - depression (62.8%)
Interviews with 40 Successful College Students Identified as 2e/ASD

Some Colleges and Universities Attended

- NYU
- UConn
- Cornell
- USC
- Cal Arts
- BU
- BC
- Drexel
OUR FINDINGS:

• Most participants’ academic talents were formally recognized by their teachers and parents.

• Half were identified as being academically talented in elementary or secondary school.

• Almost all knew that they had academic talents and strengths and found teachers who supported them.
Findings include:

• A majority of our participants (n=21; 53%) received enrichment and/or talent development opportunities and were identified as having talents/strengths.

• 90% of the sample (n=36) participated in at least one extracurricular activity in high school and 50% (n=20) had participated in at least one residential (camp or enrichment) experience.

• Almost three quarters of participants took AP or honors courses (or courses in which they could earn college credit) while in high school (n=29, 73%).
and what to do if one was coming, how to head one off.
Talents can be developed in these students in high school...

- Extracurricular Involvement
- Residential Experiences
- ID as Talented and Advanced Courses
- Enrichment Pedagogy

Talent Development
Which Extracurricular Activities Worked Best?
Many trials and changes...

Molly explained:
Robotics team—I loved that as I struggled a lot socially growing up but in robotics, I liked having a team. It made me feel good about myself... I was part of the women’s science club. I founded a girls who code club. I was a math tutor. I am a STEM nerd.

Dylan explained:
Tennis, documentary film, senator for senior year, mock trial, band, and choir. Every year we make a film for a competition, there’s a topic, we made one about education declining because there are funding problems in my town. I did it for two years.
Interviews with secondary high school teachers, counselors, and special ed teachers.

- Most teachers had never reflected on what they do with their 2e/ASD students

- Very few had clear ideas about what works well.

- High school teachers and counselors explained that they have so many different types of learners, all with different interests and motivations. One Jason, simply explained, “I learned that I had to treat each student differently.”
All participants explained that having self-awareness, self-advocacy, and time management/organization skills were essential to their success in college.

Seventeen participants (43%) indicated that they attended a community college, smaller regional campus, or another college before transferring to their current/final college.

When faced with challenges, difficulties, or adverse conditions, rather than give up, these participants found a reasonable path, figured out how to cope, compensate, or pursue a new direction.
and I said to them, I want to find a good liberal arts school.
Advice for the elementary / middle school years

- Find a non-academic hobby/extra-curricular activity
- Have conversations about learning differences
- Advocate for academic modifications that align with students’ strengths and interests
- Learn how to use compensation strategies, assistive technologies, and different techniques to enhance your own learning that work for you
- Find a safe haven/place in school
- Develop an interest/find a strength
High School

• Have a transition plan entering high school – make sure you learn how to utilize accommodations
• Advocate to be assigned to teachers that work well with students with learning differences
• Have in school or out of school non-academic activities
• Let your own voice, needs, concerns and ideas be heard
• Start all meetings with a positive update from all teachers present
• Discuss post-secondary goals early in high school career and plan accordingly
Pamela recently graduated from a competitive college and completed her MS degree.
Enrichment Pedagogy

Developed by researchers and educators whose classrooms and practices have served as laboratories for enrichment and innovations that have subsequently become mainstays of our field.
TYPE I*
GENERAL EXPLORATORY ACTIVITIES

TYPE II
GROUP TRAINING ACTIVITIES

TYPE III
INDIVIDUAL & SMALL GROUP INVESTIGATIONS OF REAL PROBLEMS