



## Our focus in this issue – impulse and attention issues in twice-exceptional children

### Quote

“...to the teachers I say don’t teach your class as a single unit.

Realize that your room is filled with individuals and that your lessons need to be personalized to reach each of those individuals.”

—David Menasche, author of *The Priority List: A Teacher’s Final Quest to Discover Life’s Greatest Lesson*

### A Researcher’s View of Kids with ADHD

By Linda C. Neumann



Sydney Zentall, Ph.D., is a researcher who has been described by psychologist Thomas Armstrong as “one of the few true beacons of light in an otherwise uninspiring field of ADD/ADHD educational researchers...” Find out why.

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### Developing Self-regulation of Learning with 2e Students

By Richard Cash, Ph.D.



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### Iron Girl: One Parent’s Testimony to the Power of Dietary Change

By Suki Wessling



... one day I came across a reference on a parenting website to a tiny study done in France of boys with ADHD. All these boys, it turned out, had normal blood iron levels; but on further analysis, they showed unusually low ferritin levels.

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## Welcome!

Welcome to the March issue of *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter*. In this issue we look at a challenge to parents and educators alike — impulse and attention issues in 2e children. Three articles look at different aspects of this topic.

In our lead article professor and researcher Sydney Zentall helps us understand why these kids do what they do. Education consultant Richard Cash offers ways to help them learn the self-regulation skills they need to be successful learners. And Suki Wessling, a parent and writer, gives an account of the effects that a child's bio-chemistry might have on behavior.

Also in this issue we interview a 2e achiever, Sarah Renzulli, who describes the long tough journey from the child who “wasn't college material” (due to struggles with reading, attention, and other learning skills) to Ph.D. recipient. And we launch a new column: 2e Tech. Marlo Payne Thurman, a member of the *2e Newsletter* Editorial Advisory Board shares her perspectives on and recommendations for the latest in educational technology.

Speaking of our Editorial Advisory Board, we are pleased to welcome a new member: Dan Peters, psychologist, author, speaker, and frequent contributor to the newsletter. We are also sad to say goodbye to another Editorial Advisory Board member, psychologist Pat Schuler, who is retiring from her practice. We thank Pat for the many years of support she has given to *2e Newsletter* and to the twice-exceptional community as a whole, and we wish her well.

Be sure to check our website often as well as our Facebook page and YouTube channel, Your2eTV. We're always adding new information and programs.

Thanks for subscribing!

— Linda C. Neumann and J. Mark Bade

March, 2014

*2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter* is a publication about twice-exceptional children, children who are gifted and who have 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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## Why Do They Act That Way?

# A Researcher's View of Kids with ADHD

By Linda C. Neumann

Sydney Zentall, Ph.D., is a professor of Educational Studies at Purdue University as well as an author of books and numerous articles. In addition, she is a researcher who has been described by psychologist Thomas Armstrong as “one of the few true beacons of light in an otherwise uninspiring field of ADD/ADHD educational researchers...” (*ADD/ADHD Alternatives in the Classroom*, 1999).

What prompted this praise? When *2e Newsletter* posed this and other questions to Zentall, she said perhaps it was due to the way she looks at attention deficit disorder — through a different lens from most others in the fields of special education and school psychology.

### A Different Perspective on ADHD

“My work is based on the Optimal Stimulation Theory,” stated Zentall, who developed this theory in 1975. She explained it this way:

All organisms need stimulation, but some need more than an average amount while others need less. Children with ADHD have a physiological need for more stimulation in order to pay attention to relevant information and maintain that attention. In the absence of sufficient stimulation, these children will create it — sometimes in appropriate ways, but often in inappropriate ways.

Parents of children with ADHD and educators who teach them can think of plenty of inappropriate ways that these kids find to meet their need for stimulation. Fidgeting, chattering, and pestering others are just some of the many examples.

According to Zentall, many researchers in special education and school psychology look at children with ADHD through the lens of Behaviorism, a theory based on the idea that people learn behavior from the consequences provided — the rewards and the punishments. Behaviorists know that altering the consequences in a person's environment will alter his or her behavior as well as the person's thoughts and feelings. Zentall acknowledges the value of this theory and the place it holds in the fields of education and psychology. “Most children want to please and receive recognition, and reinforcement with rewards brings about an immediate change in behavior. However, this change is temporary; it depends on consistent feedback from a positive adult.”

As Zentall looks at a child who's fidgeting, chattering, pestering, or displaying other behaviors associated with ADHD, she sees one in need of increased and appropriate stimulation — what she describes as a novelty- and activity-based curriculum. “The Optimal Stimulation Theory,” she explained, “can predict that the child with ADHD who has too little stimulation will display behavior that is active or disruptive, will be easily distracted, and will act impulsively.” Much of Zentall's research has focused on testing this theory, comparing the effect of high and low levels of stimulation on the behavior and academic performance of children with ADHD.

### The Role of Stimulation

Through her research, Zentall learned that the placement of stimulation matters. One example she cited has to do with color. As part of her research, Zentall added color to relevant parts of tasks that children with ADHD were asked to perform. The color was used to highlight parts of letters a child was having trouble with in a handwriting task, for instance, or the irregular letters in a spelling task, or the operation sign in math problems. Using color this way, Zentall found, helped children perform better. On the other hand, when color was added to less important parts of the tasks, such as an introductory design on a lesson or the pictures on the borders of a page, Zentall observed that the children's performance fell to below average. This was especially true of young children performing a task that was unfamiliar to them, timed, or more difficult.

The same can apply to sound. Changes in the rate, volume, and pitch of a voice attract attention to what is important information, especially for children with ADHD. “Perhaps,” Zentall offered, “that is why yelling at these children can be disruptive in the long term — because it highlights inappropriate behavior.”



## A Researcher's View of Kids with ADHD, continued

### Adding Giftedness and other Variables to the Mix

Zentall has found that ADHD does not look the same across all populations of children. Age makes a difference, for example. Those who are younger, she noted, prefer activity and fast-moving games. Those who are older are more often characterized by inattention. They gravitate toward stimulating topics related to space, science fiction, and explorers, and reading content that's dangerous and scary.

There are also differences based on the subtype of ADHD. At least half of all children with ADHD show signs of hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention (referred to as the combined subtype of ADHD). A smaller percentage, less than a third, is diagnosed with the inattentive subtype. The challenges that children in this subgroup face are more likely to be academic than social. Furthermore, Zentall has found these children to be less competitive and more passive than children who also have hyperactivity and impulsivity.

Zentall has observed differences based on IQ as well. Gifted students *with* ADHD have demonstrated poorer working memory but also far greater creativity than gifted students *without* ADHD. Furthermore, they are drawn to different types of stimulation than their non-gifted counterparts. Children who are gifted and have ADHD are more likely to seek out cognitive and language stimulation, making use of their imagination and sense of humor, asking what if and why questions, and playing the role of provocateur — producing reactions in others. Those with ADHD and average intelligence, on the other hand, are more likely to play the role of helper and engage in concrete, active, or

sensory experiences like sports or building things. To illustrate these differences, Zentall cited this example:

Two boys with ADHD were presented with a boring task. The one with average intelligence used his nose to tap a choice on a computer keyboard. The gifted boy turned the boring task into a game of “Catch the Spies.” Both responses were unconventional and novel, she observed, but the latter was more cognitive.

### What Teachers Should Know

When asked what educators need to understand about gifted children with ADHD, Zentall replied, “First, they need to know that children with ADHD *can* be gifted. They also need to understand that inattention only provides early identification — it does not diagnose a child.” After all, she states, “children with ADHD, those who are gifted, and twice-exceptional children with ADHD are all easily bored by routine tasks and present challenging behavior as a reaction.”

What's important, she stresses, is to look for the cause of the inattention — to identify all possible influences and avoid settling for simple explanations. For example, the cause might be a learning disability. Research has shown that gifted children are more likely to inherit reading disabilities than those without giftedness, even though higher IQ is more generally associated with better reading comprehension.

A common cause of inattention, according to Zentall, is a mismatch between a task and a child's

abilities or interests. For instance, some children struggle when a task is too abstract or complex. Other students struggle when a task is too easy, too repetitive, too long, too verbal, too much handwriting, etc. So, she explained, when an educator observes an inattentive child, an important question to ask is, “How does this task differ from tasks in which this child shows attention and performs better?”

### Interventions

Zentall groups classroom interventions into two broad categories: those appropriate for younger children, who more typically express ADHD through physical actions, and those appropriate for older children who are likely to express ADHD through inattention. The interventions should be tailored to the type of stimulation the child requires. The table on the next page shows some examples.

In addition, Zentall observed, the interventions should make use of technology where possible. Technology is not only a source of novelty for these children but also an accommodation for the handwriting difficulties that characterize both the hyperactive/impulsive children with ADHD and those who are inattentive.

### Conclusion

In answering a question about the most significant findings she's made about ADHD during her years of research, Sydney Zentall replied, “When I first entered the field of ADHD, the children's behavior was described as purposeless. But it's been my mission



## A Researcher's View of Kids with ADHD, concluded

to show that their behavior is not a random overflow of activity. Rather, it has a function that's physiologically based, even though this purpose may not always be apparent."

In an effort to help educators better understand why children with ADHD do what they do, Zentall teaches them to conduct functional analyses\* of their

\*This functional analysis approach is described in Chapter 2 of Sydney Zentall's recent book *Students with Mild Exceptionalities: Characteristics and Applications* (Sage Publications, 2013). This book also contains a chapter on gifted exceptionality.

students. The purpose is to find out how an individual child expresses his or her disability within a particular task and setting. For children with ADHD, as mentioned earlier, the primary goal of much of their behavior is to get the stimulation they need – emotional, sensory, cognitive, or social. (In contrast, much of the behavior of children with learning or intellectual disabilities functions to avoid failure and gain competence.)

Based on her research, Zentall has found that when educators understand the "why" of ADHD behavior, they are "excellent at intervention." She explained,

"If you know what these children are attempting to get or avoid, it's possible to help them find alternative ways to achieve these goals. But when teachers only see the disruptive aspects of ADHD, they more often resort to punishment."

*Sydney S. Zentall, Ph.D., Professor of Educational Studies at Purdue University, has been both a general and special education teacher as well as an educator of teachers. In addition, she is an author and researcher internationally recognized as an expert on the education of children with ADHD. She has also published books and articles in other areas of education, special education, and psychology. She is past president of the Division for Research of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC).*



Type of Stimulation Sought	Type of Intervention	Examples
Activity	Active learning responses in the curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manipulating materials</li> <li>Requiring responses to those materials by talking, role playing, jumping, drawing, etc.</li> </ul>
	Movement opportunities within the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changing centers or seats</li> <li>Taking on classroom helper roles</li> </ul>
	Movement opportunities outside the classroom	Sports
Peer attention	Peer learning groups	Structured problem-solving groups that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include turn taking</li> <li>Present a challenge</li> <li>Are designed with the expectation that the group will produce a clear outcome</li> </ul>
Cognitive and imaginative stimulation	Novel topics and tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher- or child-highlighted directions</li> <li>Animations</li> <li>Dramatics</li> </ul>
	Discovery projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Computer resource finding</li> <li>Outdoor observational projects (e.g., record birds, collect leaves/shells)</li> </ul>

### Summer Camp Listings

We're currently updating our annual listing of 2e-friendly summer camps and programs. The listing will be on our website soon; watch for it!

# Developing Self-Regulation of Learning with 2e Students

By Richard Cash, Ed.D.

One of the most confounding issues I've dealt with as a teacher of gifted children and an administrator for gifted programs was finding practices that were successful for twice- exceptional (2e) students. Every time my colleagues and I found strategies that worked one day, they would often not work the next day. The category of 2e is so broad in terms of students' ability and disability combinations that generalizing practices can be extremely difficult.

Recently, I've transitioned from my administrative role with the Bloomington Public Schools in Minnesota to full-time educational consulting. Many of the schools I work with are high-poverty schools struggling with low student performance. During my observations of general education students in these schools, I have recognized many of the same limitations in learning that I saw in my 2e students. This has led me to believe that, beyond the ability/disability equation, there's something both groups of students have in common.

## The Role of Self-regulation in Learning

My current work with teachers has been focused on the ideas and theories of self-regulated learning. Dale Schunk of the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, and Barry Zimmerman of the City University of New York, define self-regulation this way:

The process by which learners personally activate and sustain cognition, emotions, and behaviors that are effective toward achieving goals (2012).

Based on my experience, it seems that learners' skills and abilities do not fully explain student achievement, as in the case of 2e students. My suggestion is that 2e students may not have acquired and perfected the many strategies and techniques needed to perform tasks such as persevere, manage distractions, put effort forward, and persist at rudimentary tasks. Furthermore, like other students who struggle in school, many 2e students have not developed effective tools to work at a task that may seem meaningless. They don't know how to stay focused on the task at hand or how to do this thing we call "school."

Schools are a bastion of rules, structures, and order. For some gifted students, especially highly creative students, the rules are punishments for wanting to think or color outside the lines. For creative and gifted students, structures and order are meant to be challenged. Therefore, both non-2e and 2e students can benefit from learning effective tools for self-regulation.

## A Four-phased Approach to Developing Self-regulation

Zimmerman and colleagues (1996, 1997) state that the development of self-regulation is a four-phased process, described below.

### 1. Modeling and Observing

Students need to see others using self-regulation to manage thinking, feelings, and behaviors. For many gifted children this phase is usually short due to parents and others in their lives using effective strategies. However, in some cases, 2e students may need more time for this phase or additional models of strate-

gies for self-regulation. Over the course of this phase, teachers and parents should continue to verbalize what they are doing (behaviors), how they are doing it (thinking), and how they are feeling about it.

### 2. Copying and Doing

In this phase the students are using the strategies exactly the way the models used them. A strategy is a conscious action, meaning: I know when to use a strategy and I'm aware that I'm using it. This phase should be intensely emphasized for 2e students. Whether we are teaching strategies in math, reading, science, or self-regulation, we need to constantly reinforce with 2e students the strategies that we use. We also should be checking in frequently with the students to find out what strategies they are using to solve problems, manage behaviors, stay on task, and so forth.

Our job as teachers in this phase is to state out loud the strategies we use to self-regulate and have our kids copy these strategies. Then, we need to reinforce the strategies and request that students apply them as they have learned to do. Again, it may take longer for 2e students to grasp the strategies, but it's important not to give up. Equally important is not overwhelming students with too many strategies. Give students time to perfect one or two strategies before moving on to others.

### 3. Practicing and Refining

Once the students have amassed some strategies for self-regulation, we should then provide experiences where they are required to use them. Situations should be academic, affective in nature, and include



## Developing Self-regulation of Learning, continued

behavioral management. In other words, we must put students in learning situations that include emotions and take some time to solve.

For example, when investigating the Pilgrims coming to the “new world,” ask kids to think about the following:

- How people felt being crowded on the small boat for the eight months it took to cross the Atlantic Ocean
- How it might feel to share a small space with people you don’t know very well for such a long time
- How it was to be going from their home to a new uncharted place
- How the Pilgrims’ experiences might be similar to experiences the students may have had when they felt like they were leaving a secure place and going to an unknown place
- How students have learned to deal with people who are unlike themselves.

Linking the curriculum to feelings and how we manage those feelings is a very effective way to have students practice and refine their self-regulation. As in the earlier phases, this one will require more time for the 2e student to become comfortable and autonomous with the strategies.

### 4. Independence and Application

At this point, students should be putting to use independently the strategies of self-regulation. Students who reach this phase have made the strategies a part of who they are and can apply them without being asked or coached. However, the students still need constant support and encouragement for their use of the strategies.

A recommendation for this phase is to use reflection tools such as a journal, diary, or blog to document students’ personal learning development. We want to keep them focused on goals and what it takes to achieve those goals. “Effort is the key to success” (Dweck, 2006).

### Steps for Achieving Greater Self-regulation

After studying much of the research and writings on self-regulation [*See the sidebar to this article.*] and what it takes to be successful, I’ve created four steps to help 2e students achieve greater levels of self-regulation.

#### 1. Mobilize resources.

Teach students to do the following:

- Believe in themselves. Having a strong self-belief is the most powerful tool anyone can possess when building toward success.
- Use the support of others. Tell students that your role as teacher is not one of authority, but rather of a partner in their learning and success. Also show how fellow classmates can be supportive and useful in areas where an individual child may not be strong. A student who is not the best at math may want to partner up in math class with a student who is strong and willing to give assistance. Knowing the strengths of others — including the adults around them — and accepting their help are wonderful life skills for students.
- Use available materials. So many times in my classroom, I found that students did not know what materials were required on a daily basis or where to find materials when they needed them. I learned very early to repeat what tools were

needed on a daily basis (pencil/pen, paper, text, notebook, etc.). If these were materials students didn’t bring to class, I told them where in the room to find them. This seemingly simple act of coming ready to learn is a huge barrier for unregulated learners.

- Ask questions. Again, what seems like a simple idea is in fact an overwhelming struggle for many gifted and 2e students. Gifted students are reluctant to ask questions for fear of having their identity as gifted threatened. Asking questions is a powerful tool in learning and should be the expectation in the thinking classroom.
- Advocate for themselves. Knowing that we need something and knowing how to go about asking for it can benefit all of us throughout life. For 2e learners who need more support, it’s essential that they feel secure in asking for what they need.

#### 2. Remember that motivation is personal.

We all have certain beliefs that drive us, whether positive or negative. Positive beliefs energize us. They are the things we are passionate about, the rewards that make us feel good, and the goals we set for ourselves. Our negative beliefs are what we fear, things that make us anxious, challenges that seem overwhelming, and our own feelings of limitation. We develop intrinsic motivation when we rely on positive beliefs and overcome negative beliefs.

We must help 2e students identify what is positive about themselves and acknowledge what inhibits them. Our job then is to focus these students on the positive beliefs and set goals that have a meaningful reward when achieved.



## Developing Self-regulation of Learning, continued

It's important for all of us to know and recognize our negative beliefs so that when these beliefs creep in, we can override them. We can tell our students that when they are frustrated by not meeting a goal, they should focus more on what to do better next time, rather than focusing on why they failed to meet the goal.

### 3. Live a growth mindset.

Dr. Carol Dweck (2006) wrote a remarkable book titled *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. In this groundbreaking text she identifies two ways people perceive the world: through a *fixed* mindset or a *growth* mindset. People with a fixed mindset believe their intelligence and talents are fixed traits that cannot be changed or enhanced. They measure their success or failure by the amount of intelligence and talent they believe they possess. Therefore, 2e students, who tend to fail more than they succeed, may begin to believe that success is not an option. A person with a growth mindset, on the other hand, believes that most skills and abilities can be learned. It follows, for them, that success or failure is due to how much effort they put forth and what strategies worked or didn't work to accomplish a goal.

Teachers can help kids develop a growth mindset by doing these things:

- Provide accurate, descriptive, and constructive feedback that focuses the learner on specifics for improvement.
- Praise effort, not ability. Say things like, "I'm impressed at the level of effort you put forth to achieve your goal." Or, "Even though you didn't achieve your goal, I can see you worked your

hardest at it." Or, "What might you change about the way you approached this task to ensure that you make your goal next time?"

- Provide challenges and supports. So often the curriculum we provide to gifted students is under-challenging. As a result, they miss opportunities to develop the skills needed to achieve at high levels. Some 2e students are able to pass through lower-level curriculum without much struggle; but when they encounter more challenge, especially in middle school, the other exceptionality becomes apparent. When they reach this point, it's important to scaffold the challenges with supports and encouragement.

### 4. Create a classroom of structure.

Twice-exceptional students should be made aware that the structures in the classroom are intentional for their success. To develop structure, follow the rule of the "3Cs":

**Be consistent.** Tell students often that success, intellectual risk-taking, and collaboration are the expectations in the classroom. Discipline, praise, and support your students equally. Any lapses in distribution of management will confuse students or unintentionally show favoritism.

**Be concise.** Keep rules and directions brief and limited to no more than three. Discuss and frequently review the rules and directions of a productive classroom. Share with students both rewards for following the rules and meaningful consequences for not following them. Remember that consequences don't always have to be punishment. They can be the delay of grati-

fication such as waiting longer for *choice time*, a time during the day when students can select what they would like to do.

**Be concrete.** Classroom guidelines, policies, and procedures should be posted around the room and reviewed on a routine basis. Post schedules where students can easily access them. If there will be changes to the schedule, make sure students are prepared. Unplanned events can be difficult for 2e students.

### Conclusion

Self-regulation is a critical factor in learning and life success. Students who are twice exceptional may need more time and more consistency in developing these strategies. Keep working at it with your students and remain positive and affirming in your feedback. Remember, these children don't choose to be 2e.

*Portions of this article originally appeared in "Cash in on Learning: What It Takes to Be Successful: Self-Regulation," by Richard Cash, Ed.D., at [freespiritpublishingblog.com](http://freespiritpublishingblog.com), © 2013. Used with permission of Free Spirit Publishing Inc., Minneapolis, MN; 800-735-7323; [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com). All rights reserved.*

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Zimmerman, B.J., & Kitsantas, A. (1997). Developmental phases in self-regulation: Shifting from process to outcome goals. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 29-36.



Dr. Richard M. Cash has worked in the field of gifted education for over 25 years. He has taught at the elementary, middle-school, and university levels, and has served as Director of Gifted Programs for the Bloomington Public Schools in Minnesota. His areas of expertise

are educational programming, rigorous and challenging curriculum development, differentiated instruction, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and brain-compatible classrooms. In addition, he authored the book *Advancing Differentiation: Thinking and Learning for the 21st Century* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2011), and co-authored *Differentiation for Gifted Learners: Going Beyond the Basics* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2013) with Dr. Diane Heacox, an expert in differentiation and gifted education. He is currently a private consultant to school districts around the U.S. and world. He may be reached at [www.nrichconsulting.com](http://www.nrichconsulting.com). ☎

### Resources

To learn more about self-regulation, see these resources:

- Cash, R.M. (2011). *Advancing differentiation: Thinking and learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc.
- Colvin, G. (2008). *Talent is overrated: What really separates world-class performers from everybody else*. NY: Portfolio Publishing.
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### Resources for Parents and Educators

## Spotlight On 2e Series

- ▶ Parenting Your Twice-exceptional Child
- ▶ Understanding Your Twice-exceptional Student
- ▶ Writing and the 2e Learner: Issues and Strategies
- ▶ Caring for the Mental Health of the Twice-exceptional Child
- ▶ The Mythology of Learning: Understanding Common Myths about 2e Learners
- ▶ The 2e Reading Guide: Essential Books for Understanding the Twice-exceptional Child
- ▶ Guiding the Twice-Exceptional Child: A Collection of Columns by Meredith Warshaw
- ▶ The Twice-exceptional Child with Attention Deficit
- ▶ The Twice-exceptional Child with Asperger Syndrome
- ▶ The Twice-exceptional Child with Dyslexia <sup>New!</sup>

Find out more at [www.2enewsletter.com](http://www.2enewsletter.com)

*\$12 for subscribers to 2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter; \$13.95 for others.*

## One Parent's Testimony to the Power of Dietary Change

# Iron Girl

By Suki Wessling

My daughter is different.

She has always been different. When she was in the neonatal Intensive Care Unit, officially fighting for her life, she was so alert that she would turn her head, looking for the source of a voice she apparently liked. (It was the booming voice of an animated Croatian doctor named Tony.)

When she became a toddler, her differences went from unusually brilliant and lovely to unusually active, aggressive, and unruly. She was still a lovely child, but there were days...like the one when another mom scooped her up just as she was about to run into the library parking lot; seconds before, she'd been sitting at my feet in the library. That was on the first day she'd learned to walk. Then there were days like the one when she decided to see what it would be like to dump a whole bottle of blue shampoo into a box of Chanukah ornaments. And there were many other days when her active hands, feet, and mouth caused our family so much pain I didn't know whether we'd survive intact.

### Finding What Works

Eventually, I became educated in the variety of ways such a child could be treated. We chose to reject the psychiatrist who talked — without looking at the brilliant little girl on the floor in front of her — about drugs before there was even a diagnosis. We also chose to reject the more punitive behavioral therapy approaches because our days became filled with “no sticker on the chart for that, sweetie” — a focus on her behavior rather than on our family's happiness.

Eventually we fell into our own way of dealing with things — homeschooling paired with occupational therapy, firm parenting, and a fervent belief that this was developmental and would work itself out. Reading research on developmental issues with gifted children helped me understand the trials my daughter was facing, as well.

Then one day I came across a reference on a parenting website to a tiny study done in France of boys with ADHD. All these boys, it turned out, had normal blood iron levels; but on further analysis, they showed unusually low ferritin levels. After a few months of supplementing with iron, the boys showed marked behavioral changes.

There are many reasons why I should have ignored this. Like most dietary behavioral studies, it was tiny. Like most, it depended on parents' observations, which are notoriously easy to sway with any little piece of hope that their home lives will settle down. Like all these studies, it set off the “snake oil salesman” bells of any scientifically trained brain like mine. But I couldn't forget it.

I asked our pediatrician to test my daughter's ferritin levels. The message on my answering machine when her results came back sounded bemused. “This is so interesting...” he said.

Although my daughter's blood iron levels were normal, her ferritin levels were less than half of the lowest normal indicator. Our pediatrician warned me that ferritin levels are notoriously unstable. If we tested her next week, he said, her levels could be normal. But it sounded like he was trying to convince himself, not that he really believed it.

### Conducting an Experiment

Our first attempt at remedying her iron levels was through dietary change. I had horrible memories of taking iron pills as a young teen because of anemia. I remembered the cramps and the disgusting black stuff that oozed from my body. I didn't want to subject my little person to that treatment.

So we attempted for a number of months to get a very oppositional, rather picky eater who had grown up in a vegetarian household to eat beef, liver, and clams. The result, not surprisingly, was that she became a committed vegetarian for the first time in her life.

Finally, in the fall of 2011, things were really at a low point and we decided we had to try again. Once more, we had her ferritin tested, and it was still very low. We consulted with a pharmacist knowledgeable about supplements and he recommended Optiferin from Pure Encapsulations as easy on the digestive system. Without telling anyone, even members of our immediate family, we started her on a 28-mg dose, twice a day.

My husband is a scientist, and I come from a family of scientists. We know that the biggest flaw in child behavioral studies of any kind is the reliance on parent observation. As much as they adore their children, their lives have been turned upside-down to the point that they will take part in a study in which their child ingests some unknown substance in the hope that it will help. It's hard to believe that their observations are unbiased.

So, although we trusted ourselves to be as coolly scientific as stressed-out, desperate parents can be, we decided not to tell



## Iron Girl, continued

anyone that we'd made any change at all. We went about our usual business: leaving our kids at my parents' house when we needed time, going to family gatherings, meeting with friends in our homeschooling circle, and sending our kids for their class days at their public homeschool program.

My daughter's teachers have known her since I had to remove her from regular school in kindergarten because her energy could simply not be channeled into a normal classroom. They have been incredibly accepting and loving toward my difficult one, accepting her as she is and working for years to integrate her with the other kids.

In the five years she's been in the program, they have seen incredible growth in many ways; but it always fell short of the overall goal to help her make it through entire class days without outbursts that disrupt the class. Typical disruptions included lying in the middle of the circle at circle time and laughing hysterically, or getting up on the table during science class, kicking markers and student work onto the floor.

Our home life during those five years had also improved. My daughter no longer ran away from me in public places, and she learned to channel her intense need for tactile stimulation to agreed-upon materials and locations within the house. On the negative side, however, her mood swings were unpredictable and wide. In the midst of what seemed like a particularly successful and serene morning, a simple broken pencil would set off a tantrum that lasted 45 minutes.

I was saved from academic worry by the fact that as a highly gifted learner, she didn't have to study in order to keep above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardized tests. However, the mood swings and inability to

take part in group activities, although improved over the years, were still impeding her ability to lead anything like a normal eight-year-old life.

After starting the supplements, we agreed to hold our observations for three months. Once in the first month, my husband and I had a hopeful, "It seems like... could it be?" sort of conversation. Otherwise, we watched, took notes, and waited. At three months, we tested her ferritin levels again and they were normal.

The change was not miraculous. She is not a different child, but she is a changed child. For the "before" scenario, I picture a wide waveform that shows her former mood swings, from the depths of despair so black that she would lose all sense of time and place, to the heights of passion in which she would lose control of her body and say whatever exciting words came to mind.

The "after" picture shows the waveform unaltered in quality, but squashed and elongated in shape. Before, her moods would swing from one extreme to the other in a matter of hours. After, she still gets upset and she still gets elated, but she doesn't swing so suddenly that the rest of the family is left with vertigo; and she doesn't swing so wildly that we have to lock her away and keep her contained.

In other words, she's still unusual, but in a normal sort of way.

### Confirming Our Results

Being the scientists that we are, after three months we sent questions out to those who knew my daughter best: her occupational therapist, her teachers, and my mother. "So," I inquired casually. "We were wondering if you'd noticed anything about her behavior

lately that you could share with us."

The responses couldn't have been more significant:

"This year I find her more able to control herself," wrote one teacher. "She likes to hang around the outside of the group during most circle times, but she is much better about handling our suggestions (which sometime turn into warnings). Most often she will correct her behavior."

"I've seen a huge improvement in how she handles the moments when she's not ready to support a group goal," wrote another teacher. "She checks in with me before science to bail ahead of time, which is better than going to science and destroying the group space. She has seemed much less prone to storming out, to declaring that she will never participate again, to needing to declare her undying annoyance with me."

"Her behavior in school this year is milder overall," wrote another teacher. "She is able to handle transitions easier."

Her occupational therapist was similarly struck by the change. "She seems to be responding well and controlling her reactions," the OT said in a phone interview with me. "Before, if I asked her to do something that she didn't like — like write or typing — she would be pretty adamant about it and often say, 'I don't want to be here.' We'd make a plan, but when we got to what she didn't want to do, she'd still resist. Now, she's a little more accepting of the plan and willing to try."

My mother also noted change. Even when my daughter was not thrilled with an activity, it no



## Iron Girl, continued

longer ended in a tantrum. Family gatherings were now seldom interrupted by her outbursts.

My daughter's opinions about team-building activities, clearing her plate, practicing penmanship, and doing math on paper had not changed. She still made her opinions known very clearly; but her ability to control her responses to negative stimuli had clearly improved so much that those who knew nothing about the dietary change had been impressed with her progress.

### The Implications of Our Results

I think the outcome of our experiment has pretty clear implications. First, medical and psychiatric science is in its infancy in the areas of child behavioral and intellectual development. As the last 20 years of growing dependency on drug therapy to control children with behavioral differences shows, we are still at the Band-Aid stage of treating behavioral problems in children. None of these drugs promises to fix what's wrong with the kids, but rather to mask it so that they can make it through a day at school or a dinner with their families.

Second, the medical establishment has been too slow to acknowledge the potential of such "alternative" and "integrative" theories as environmental and dietary causes and treatments for a whole host of ailments, from behavior to cancer. Although I am hardly one to jump on the supplement bandwagon with all the snake oil salesmen, I find it distressing that every pediatrician doesn't know to test a child's blood for ferritin deficiency before prescribing potentially toxic and life-changing drugs.

Third, and possibly most important, there is not enough funding for studying medical solutions

### Can We Know for Sure?

One might argue that our experience with our daughter was not related to the ferritin studies in which the subjects were largely males diagnosed with ADHD. An ADHD diagnosis, however, would not have been hard for our daughter to come by. That first psychiatrist we saw is a good example of the attitude of many professionals parents consult with every day. Instead of worrying about what was really happening in the neurology of the child in front of her, she saw her job as pleasing the parents with the drug that would subdue their unruly daughter. Even our family therapist, who had known this eight-year-old since she was three, said, "Of course, your daughter *clearly* presents an ADHD profile."

On the other hand, our daughter's pediatrician (who had known her since birth) said to me, "There is no way that this child fits within the diagnostic criteria for ADHD." After all, many of our daughter's behavioral oddities disappear completely when she is fully engaged in learning. In fact, throughout her schooling we have noted that teachers who stimulate her adequately largely see "nothing unusual" in our child, except perhaps her exceptional brightness and speed of learning.

These two respected professionals with long experience with our child were willing to stake their reputations on opposite diagnoses. This goes to show how malleable the diagnostic criteria for ADHD are. Our pediatrician saw our daughter when she was happy and relaxed. The therapist made her statement after working with our daughter and her

brother on their intense and difficult relationship. No wonder my daughter appeared uncomfortable and twitchy — if there are things she hates more than being forced to talk about her feelings and to speak respectfully to her brother, I haven't found them. (Not even math worksheets!)

So there is no question that our daughter could easily have received multiple confirmations of an ADHD diagnosis, and there is no question that her blood iron levels showed the exact patterns seen in studies. In addition, more than one caregiver has remarked on our daughter's proclivities to express her "masculine" side, preferring short hair and boys' clothing. Perhaps this preference stems, in part, to her relating more to the behavior of active boys than the passive princesses she perceives many girls to be.

Complicating the situation even further, the incidence of misdiagnosis of gifted children, who sometimes present profiles similar to kids with ADHD, has been documented (Webb et al, 2005). The same underlying condition could be responsible for those gifted children who do not fully fit the ADHD diagnostic criteria and those children diagnosed with ADHD but without gifted characteristics. Both groups may, in fact, share an interrelated explanation for their lack of impulse control and wide mood swings.

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Webb, J., Amend, E., Webb, N., Goerss, J., Beljan, P., & Olenchak, F. R. (2005). *Misdiagnosis and dual diagnoses of gifted children and adults*. Scottsdale, Arizona: Great Potential Press.

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## Iron Girl, concluded

that won't make money for pharmaceutical companies and doctors. A psychiatrist who prescribes a stimulant to a child has just gained a long-term patient and become a supporter of the drug's manufacturer. A pediatrician who suggests iron supplementation and other simple lifestyle changes is not offering the quick fix that parents might be seeking but is, in fact, offering actual solutions to vexing problems. That pediatrician might see the child twice in a year instead of once; but if the dietary change is successful, there is no long-term financial gain for anyone. My daughter's supplements initially cost us \$10 per month; and now that her ferritin levels have evened out, we have lowered the dose. The blood tests are pricy; but since we have stabilized her iron levels, we do them less frequently.

### Conclusion

It's hard for me as the mother of a child who has struggled her whole life to explain how I felt when we began to see positive changes in our child's behavior. There were certainly feelings of vindication (thank God we walked out on that psychiatrist!) and self-congratulation for finding that first citation buried deep on a parenting website.

Most importantly, I feel like we have gotten our child back. That sweet baby with her laugh and twinkling eyes that I fell in love with is back. She's not perfect — like all of us, she has her challenges — but she's someone I can imagine succeeding in life. I no longer wonder if our family will be able to survive this child. These days, I feel that she is fully a part of us and we

of her. The war is over, and now she can go forward to whatever future she wants to make for herself.

*Suki Wessling writes about parenting, education, homeschooling, and gifted children for a variety of publications. Her book, From School to Home-school (Great Potential Press, 2012), is a manual to help parents transition from a school-based to a homeschool-based mindset. Learn more at [www.SukiWessling.com](http://www.SukiWessling.com).* 



## Where to Find Out More on Ferritin

### Articles in the Popular Press

- “ADHD & Iron: Can Nutritional Supplements Improve Symptoms?” by Laura Stevens, *ADDitude Magazine*, Fall, 2008, [www.additudemag.com/adhd/article/3993.html](http://www.additudemag.com/adhd/article/3993.html)
- “Joan Endyke: Studies Link Iron Levels in Children to ADHD,” by Joan Endyke, *Wicked Local Norfolk*, March, 2010, [www.wickedlocal.com/norfolk/news/lifestyle/health/x1447156084/Joan-Endyke-Studies-link-iron-levels-in-children-to-ADHD#axzz1VucghPaa](http://www.wickedlocal.com/norfolk/news/lifestyle/health/x1447156084/Joan-Endyke-Studies-link-iron-levels-in-children-to-ADHD#axzz1VucghPaa)
- “Study Links Low Iron to ADHD,” by Salyn Boyles, *WebMD Health News*, <http://www.webmd.com/add-adhd/news/20041217/study-links-low-iron-to-adhd>

- “What Causes Low Ferritin?” *Livestrong.com*, [www.livestrong.com/article/97353-causes-low-ferritin/](http://www.livestrong.com/article/97353-causes-low-ferritin/)

### Study Results

- Konofal, E., Cortese S., Lecendreux, M., Arnulf, I., Mouren, M.C. (2005). Effectiveness of iron supplementation in a young child with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Pediatrics*, *116*, e732.
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## Some ADHD Resources from 2e Newsletter

### Online Resources

- “10 Common Challenges and Best Practices for Teaching Students With ADHD” — An article from Scholastic Instructor, [www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/10-common-challenges-and-best-practices-teaching-students-adhd](http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/10-common-challenges-and-best-practices-teaching-students-adhd)
- ADDvance — Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D., and Patricia Quinn, M.D., answer questions about ADHD and provide resources, [www.advance.com/resources/index.html#links](http://www.advance.com/resources/index.html#links)
- ADHD Resource Center — Articles, video clips, FAQs, and other information from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, [www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Resource\\_Centers/ADHD\\_Resource\\_Center/Home.aspx](http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/ADHD_Resource_Center/Home.aspx)
- “Attention Deficit Disorders and Gifted Students: What do we really know?” — An article by Felice Kaufmann, M. Layne Kalbfleisch, and F. Xavier Castellanos, [www.sengifted.org/archives/articles/attention-deficit-disorders-and-gifted-students-what-do-we-really-know](http://www.sengifted.org/archives/articles/attention-deficit-disorders-and-gifted-students-what-do-we-really-know)
- Attention Research Update — A monthly look at research on ADHD by David Rabiner, a research professor at Duke University, [www.helpforadd.com](http://www.helpforadd.com)
- “Challenges of Identifying and Serving Gifted Children with ADHD” — An article by Lori Flint, [www.iusd.org/parent\\_resources/gate/ADHD.pdf](http://www.iusd.org/parent_resources/gate/ADHD.pdf)
- “Girls and ADHD: Are You Missing the Signs?” — An article from Scholastic Instructor, [www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/girls-and-adhd-are-you-missing-signs](http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/girls-and-adhd-are-you-missing-signs)
- *Helping the Student with ADHD in the Classroom: Information for Teachers* — A publication from the National Association of School Psychologists, [www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/revisepdfs/adhd.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/revisepdfs/adhd.pdf)
- Hoagies Gifted, attention deficit — The portion of this website on all things gifted devoted to attention deficit, [www.hoagiesgifted.org/adhd.htm](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/adhd.htm)
- “The Secret Lives of Girls with ADHD” — An article by Dr. Ellen Littman in *Attitude*, a magazine from the organization CHADD, [http://drellenlittman.com/secret\\_life\\_of\\_girls\\_with\\_adhd.pdf](http://drellenlittman.com/secret_life_of_girls_with_adhd.pdf)
- “Tips for Parents: Parenting your Gifted Child with ADHD” — An article by Megan Foley Nicpon, [www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles\\_id\\_10534.aspx](http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10534.aspx)
- *Late, Lost, and Unprepared: A Parent’s Guide to Helping Children with Executive Functioning*, by Joyce Cooper-Kahn and Laurie Dietzel (Woodbine House, 2008)
- *Raising Girls with ADHD: Secrets for Parenting Healthy, Happy Daughters*, by James W. Forgan Ph.D. and Mary Anne Richey (Prufrock Press, 2014)
- *Teaching Teens With ADD, ADHD & Executive Function Deficits: A Quick Reference Guide for Teachers and Parents*, by Chris Zeigler Dendy (Woodbine House, 2011)
- *Understanding the Gifted Child with Attention Deficit*, Spotlight on 2e Series, Glen Ellyn Media, [www.2enewsletter.com/topic\\_store\\_spotlight\\_details.html](http://www.2enewsletter.com/topic_store_spotlight_details.html)

### Books and Publications

- *101 School Success Tools for Students With ADHD*, by Stephan M. Silverman, Jacqueline S. Iseman, and Sue Jeweler (Prufrock Press, 2010)
- *ADDitude* magazine, [www.additudemag.com/adhd/index.html](http://www.additudemag.com/adhd/index.html)
- *Different Minds: Gifted Children with AD/HD, Asperger Syndrome, and other Learning Deficits*, by Deirdre Lovecky (Jessica Kingsley, 2004)
- *How to Reach And Teach Children with ADD/ADHD: Practical Techniques, Strategies, and Interventions*, by Sandra Rief (Jossey-Bass, 2005)

### For Kids

- *The Hank Zipzer* series, by Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver, Grosset & Dunlap
- *The Joey Pigza* series, by Jack Gantos, HarperCollins
- *Phoebe Flower’s Adventures (for girls with ADHD)*, by Barbara Roberts, Advantage Books 

## Interview with Sara Renzulli

Sara Renzulli recently earned a Ph.D. in counselor education and counseling psychology, quite an accomplishment for someone identified in grade school as having dyslexia, ADHD, and both information processing and auditory processing disorders. You might think that she got all of the support she needed in school, given that her parents are Joseph Renzulli and Sally Reis, educators and researchers well known in the field of gifted education. You would be wrong. In this edited interview with 2e Newsletter, Sara shares experiences and observations from her journey through school as a twice-exceptional student.



**2e Newsletter:** You were identified in fifth grade as having learning and attention issues. Were you identified as gifted?

**Sara Renzulli:** In second grade I scored at the 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile on the Stanford Achievement Test, which convinced most of my teachers that I was not very intelligent. The teachers and administrators repeatedly tried to tell my parents that I was a sweet child but definitely not gifted in academic areas, even though my verbal IQ is in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile.

**2e:** What were those early years of grade school like for you?

**SR:** I was an inconsistent student. Looking back, I see that I excelled in the areas my disability didn't affect, like art and physical education; and I struggled in areas impacted by my reading and processing disability — most of the other academic areas.

My dyslexia made it extremely hard to learn how to read. I remember being so frustrated. If things were explained to me orally or read out loud to me, I understood what was going on. I just couldn't decode words on my own — in fact, I still can't.

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**...my childhood friends all learned left from right with no problem. I had to have R and L written on my hands every day for nearly a year.**

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**2e:** Before your diagnoses, had you already figured out that you had learning challenges that others didn't have?

**SR:** I felt confused because at home my parents were telling me I was smart, but at school I was consistently placed with the worst readers and slowest learners. I remember thinking, even at that young age, that I was different from everyone else in my remedial learning groups, but I didn't know why. For instance, my child-

hood friends all learned left from right with no problem. I had to have R and L written on my hands every day for nearly a year.

I also would do anything to avoid reading aloud in class, or having to work with the teacher one-on-one. In fact, I went to the nurses' office almost every day during reading class. I had a whole host of illnesses that I would rotate through — I was convinced I was fooling my teacher.

All of this made me insecure. When I was with my friends, I never wanted to talk about the academic part of school. I couldn't understand why I was different from them in school, but could play with them like all was normal outside of school.

**2e:** How did you manage to keep up in school?

**SR:** My parents re-taught me all the content that I didn't understand every night when I got home from school. Their background in education helped them scaffold the material and make connections to things that I understood. My parents also read to me for at least an hour every night. They would place their fingers under the words as they were reading and make me follow along. That's how I learned how to read, by memorizing what a word looked like and hearing it. Eventually I completely memorized several books — *Norma-Jean Jumping Bean* was my favorite. I memorized when to turn the pages and used this trick to "fake" everyone in sustained silent reading period or reading class.



## Interview with Sarah Renzulli, continued

**2e:** What kinds of services and accommodations did you receive in grade school?

**SR:** Before I was formally diagnosed with a learning disability in fifth grade, I was placed in remedial reading and math classes. After the diagnosis, I was eligible for a number of services. I worked with a special education teacher all through middle school and completed another remedial reading program. I was also able to take untimed tests, usually in the special education room. By the time I reached eighth grade, my confidence had returned. I was feeling comfortable in my own skin — and I was feeling smart.

**2e:** What happened when you reached high school?

**SR:** The transition was hard for many reasons. I went from a very small middle school to a large regional high school. Before, all the teachers knew each other and knew me. They were all aware of my learning disability, but I never felt as if it was a big deal. In high school I felt like my name should have been “Dyslexic girl with demanding parents,” and that made me angry, sad, depressed, and frustrated. It made me close off to most of the world.

But there were some good things — I was placed in a special education program for students who had college potential. It was the first time I really was able to interact with other students who had similar learning profiles. I felt like this small group of students could actually understand the confusion that I experienced every day. And I received a number of accommodations like extended time on tests, alternate test formats and testing locations, a copy of teachers’ notes, and school-assigned tutors for different subjects. Plus, they had me complete another remedial reading program.

But if they had just focused on my strengths rather than my weaknesses, I think I wouldn’t have felt like such a failure.

**2e:** What happened when you switched to a private high school?

**SR:** It was terrifying to go away to boarding school at 15; but I was in a very dark, bad place. Just the thought of returning to my public school made me anxious and depressed. The private school had such a loose special education system, that when I disclosed my learning disability, their reaction was, “OK, what can we do? Whatever you need to be successful.”

I didn’t have an answer. During my entire education, people were telling me what I needed. So, I said, “Let me see how the classes are, and I’ll let you know.”

Smaller class sizes and teachers willing to spend extra time really helped me achieve academic success. The only accommodation I regularly took advantage of was extra time on tests, but that was available to any student who asked. While this may seem inconsequential, it made me feel like I was not that different from everyone else. It made me realize that speed says very little about intelligence.

**2e:** How did things go for you in college?

**SR:** My first year, I had to work very hard just to get mediocre grades. I spent more time reading and writing than any of my friends. I’d search for secret quiet spots on campus where I could get work done without anyone disturbing me.

The big mistake I made was thinking that I didn’t need special education accommodations anymore. My par-

ents did make me register for them my first semester, but the only accommodation readily available was extended time on tests. I found that professors were somewhat annoyed with the request because they had to set up a time to give the test privately; so I rarely asked. It was partly because I didn’t want to feel like an imposition (again) and partly out of stubbornness. Looking back, what I should have done was report the professors who were uncooperative and been more of an advocate for myself.

**2e:** You attended a small liberal arts college that you thought would be a good fit for a student with your learning profile, but that wasn’t the case. What was lacking in that school?

**SR:** Being small, my college didn’t have the resources that a larger institution would have, like a comprehensive center for students with disabilities. It also lacked a functional advising program and a career services center. Maybe if the school had had these things, I’d have majored in something other than history.

**2e:** How did you switch from history to school counseling?

**SR:** After spending time at jobs that I either hated or that didn’t quite suit me, I began seriously thinking about graduate school. I had many conversations with my mother, who convinced me to talk to Dr. Orville Karan, head of the school counseling program at the University of Connecticut, where both my parents teach. My mother asked me to think about my strengths and what I enjoy doing. I consider my strengths to be my verbal abilities and my ability to identify and solve problems. She said, “That’s

## Interview with Sarah Renzulli, concluded

what counselors do!” So I met with Dr. Karan, and immediately applied for the master’s program in school counseling.

I loved those classes and was determined to be successful. To combat my fear of failing, I worked harder than anyone else in the program. I graduated with a 4.0 in the spring of 2011, and I applied to and was accepted in the Ph.D. program for counselor education and counseling psychology.

**2e:** Did your graduate school success help you to finally get past your fear of academic failure?

**SR:** That fear returned in full force when I entered the doctoral program. I was worried about the quantitative statistical sequence of courses that I would have to take, as math and numbers are a weak area for me. To prove to myself and everyone around me that I could do this, I hit the books and worked tirelessly for two more years to complete this degree. I graduated with a 4.0, and completed my dissertation research on academic counseling strategies to help students on academic probation at college.

At this point, I think I’m finally over the fear that “I’m

not smart enough for this”; but I think it’s natural to harbor some fear when facing a new challenge. That fear is magnified for those of us with learning disabilities because we can never be sure how our disability will affect a new venture; and no amount of hard work can completely mask a disability. That’s why it’s so important to choose a field that focuses on your strengths.

**2e:** How do you plan to use your training in counselor education and counseling psychology? What changes would you like to be able to bring about?

**SR:** This is a challenging question because there are so many things I’d like to accomplish. Currently, I’m an academic advisor at UConn, and I absolutely love what I’m doing. I feel fortunate that I’ve found work that’s challenging, dynamic, and different every day. I continue to have strong research interests, specifically on how to improve the academic performance of students struggling at the post-secondary level. I have submitted several articles this year, and plan to continue to focus on scholarship. As for the future, many avenues are open! ☺

### Just Published! *The Twice-exceptional Child with Dyslexia*

The newest booklet in the  
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## A Symposium on Twice-exceptionality

# The Puzzling Paradox of 2e Learners

A day-long symposium took place on February 17, 2014, in Los Angeles. Hosted by The Center for 2e Research and Development, the event focused on the “Puzzling Paradox of 2e Learners.” The purpose was to introduce the concept of twice-exceptionality to those unfamiliar with it and to answer questions such as: ◀ How can we address the needs of 2e students who are frequently neither recognized nor appropriately served in classrooms? ◀ What resources would help? ◀ What research-based and evidence-based practices are available? ◀ What are the most pressing concerns?

In addition, panels made up of parents and professionals discussed a variety of topics concerning raising and educating twice-exceptional children and answered questions from attendees.



Dr. Brock Eide, a physician specializing in learning differences who spoke on the topic of stealth dyslexia. He is shown holding the 2e Center’s “Starting with Strengths” award, presented to him and Dr. Fernette Eide, his wife and co-author with him of *The Dyslexic Advantage* and *The Mislabeled Child*.



Jonathan Mooney, author and dynamic public speaker. His talk wove together his past experiences as a student with dyslexia and ADHD with his forward-thinking ideas on learning and education.



Susan Baum, director of the 2e Center and educator, researcher, and international consultant with expertise in promoting achievement for high-ability, at-risk students. In her presentation, Baum focused on the five “puzzle pieces” required to build a picture of success for 2e children.

## The Puzzling Paradox of 2e Learners, concluded



Among the highlights of the day's events was a panel discussion with four parents of twice-exceptional children. (See above.) Panel members candidly shared their experiences in trying to both understand and find a learning environment that would accommodate their children's strengths and challenges. Here are some comments from their discussion.

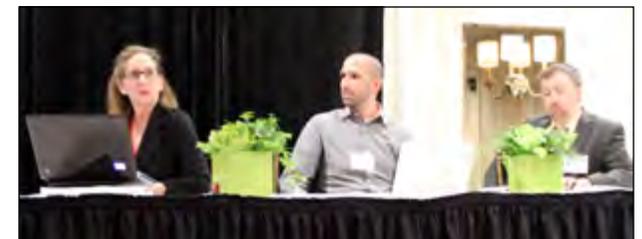
- In response to the question "How did you find your way?" one parent replied, "It was like Dante's inferno, starting in hell and working your way up."
- A parent heard from her 2e child: "Let's face it, I'm just going to work at Target for the rest of my life."
- When asked to characterize her son's journey, a parent answered that it was like Leave It to Beaver on one hand — feeling optimistic that things would get easier — and like the movie Groundhog Day on the other — finding that it was the same over and over. What she needed to find, the parent explained, was a place in the middle where she and her son "could actually learn with each other." Once she arrived at that place — where she could "stop trying to make her son into something he was not" — that's when, she said, "my kid had an advocate in me."
- "I had my gifted child who made me think that raising kids was super easy. Then I had my [2e] child who humbled me."
- "As his mom, I learned to outsource help with school work so that I could remain his mom and advocate."
- "I had my kid tested millions of times and came back with millions of different answers. I threw all that away. I just came to understand that he was really bright, and I just backed him in what he wanted to be. I don't really know what his gift is — he doesn't even know — but I know he'll be OK." ☒



A panel on "Prevalence, Problems, and Providers," with Rena Subotnik, Lois Baldwin, and Mark Woodsall



A panel on "Identification Barriers," with Leslie Preuss, Sandra Kaplan, Joseph Lee, Diane Cullinane, Marcie Boothe, and moderator Jann Leppein



A panel on "Environments that Work," with Rose Blucher, Michael Dennis, and Chris Wiebe

## 2e Tech – The Beginning of a New Column

By Marlo Payne Thurman

*We are pleased to introduce a new feature – a column on educational technology by Marlo Payne Thurman, a member of our Editorial Advisory Board. Marlo spends plenty of time combing the Internet to find new websites, new apps, and new tools that can help teachers better connect with and inspire their twice-exceptional students. She'll be sharing her discoveries with 2e Newsletter readers.*

*Educational technology is a term applied to any technology used to improve teaching, increase learning, or enhance the tasks of school management. Examples of educational technology span a wide range from radios and television; to cameras and mobile phones; to the Internet; to computers, tablets, camcorders, and other handheld devices. Given this wide array, it isn't hard to see that educational technology has the potential to benefit students by increasing their access to information and by giving them new and interesting ways to demonstrate their learning.*

*In a field over 100 years old, the past 10 years have seen many new tools making their way into our classrooms. Supporters in the field see this as a good thing and believe that educational technology has the potential to radically transform education and, thereby, improve the lives of all children. Skeptics, on the other hand, see the field and its products as distractions to traditional learning environments, blaming an industry driven by capital for introducing unnecessary "toys" into children's education.*

Given that academic standards geared towards building 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are present in almost all public schools, the question in my opinion is not whether technology is good for the classroom, but how will we use it. Like it or not, technology is here to stay! Determining how we use these new tools to educate children means answering some additional questions:

- Who will use educational technology?
- How much and what kind of technology should be in the classroom?
- What role does the teacher play as technology moves to center stage?
- To what extent will we as a society have a say about the inherent changes that technology will bring to our system of education?

With all of these questions in mind, this column aims to give the readers of *2e Newsletter* information and access to some of the best and most current resources in this field. Future columns will return to the original educational technology debate; but for this first column, I wanted to share one of my favorite online links to a great big list of free tools for educators. (See the yellow box below.)

### 2e Tech Pick of the Issue

*321 Free Tools for Teachers  
From Free Educational Technology*

<http://elearningindustry.com/321-free-tools-for-teachers-free-educational-technology>

I have personally played with about half of the tools listed and in doing so have found ways to add interest, challenge, and excitement in the classroom. In fact, I just created an online quiz game that gave my students a chance to work in teams to explore the Special Education Performance Standards required for all Colorado teachers. Without this activity, this material – while very important – would've been extremely dry. So, with this pick of the month as a start, I hope you enjoy this new addition to *2e Newsletter* and I welcome your feedback!

*Marlo Payne Thurman, M.S., is a school psychologist, education consultant, and member of the 2e Newsletter Editorial Advisory Board. She specializes in assessment, advocacy, cognitive training, sensory and behavior support, and socio-emotional coaching for*



*individuals from around the country who are gifted yet asynchronous. Marlo operates the Brideun Learning Communities, which designs custom play-based therapeutic programs and, in addition to her private practice, she provides consultative support to new 2e program start-ups. Marlo holds a board position with the United States Autism and Asperger's Association, is the director of the U.S. College Autism Project, and teaches a course in the Special Education Department of the University of Northern Colorado. ☞*

## Young Adult Should Begin With a Job

**Q** *Is there a way to guide a 21-year-old on a career path? In school my son was gifted but an underachiever (with high-achieving older sisters). He shows little interest in college or trade school.*

**A** Your young adult son needs to join the world of work and learn to support himself. While college isn't for everyone, it's much more difficult to find interesting and well-paid work without some post-high school education. Apparently your young man hasn't identified what he wants to do, and the best way to begin sorting that out is by taking a job. At least knowing what he doesn't want to do will motivate him to search out more interesting opportunities.

You will have to be insistent about the job search and may even need to give him a solid deadline, after which he will be expected to move out on his own. I don't mean you can't help him financially if he's working; but if he chooses to avoid work, you'll have to make it clear that you don't consider that an acceptable choice.

During his job search, there are creative alternatives to charging room and board. You could require his doing maintenance around the house like painting rooms, landscaping projects, or even blacktopping the driveway. At age 21, he's no longer a child and needs to experience the weight of responsibility that accompanies adulthood.

In this economy, finding work isn't easy. He may be unhappy with earning the minimum wage; but with no higher education, that's all he can expect. Some jobs do provide opportunities for training. Since he is a capable young man, if he works hard, he could be selected for advancement opportunities. Or, if he finds

himself thoroughly bored in a rotten job, it may be just the motivation he needs to decide to further his education.

Encourage your son to explore schooling options. A four-year liberal arts degree at a university may never be a good fit for him, but there are so many other choices for returning students. Perhaps distance learning through an online program in the evenings? Or attending a technical college part-time and working toward a two-year associate's degree? However, don't invest in his going back to school if he isn't motivated; that will only result in more frustration for you. Since he has a history of school underachievement, I would recommend he either save up for at least part of his tuition or take a loan for his schooling. His financial participation is likely to motivate him to take his classes more seriously, and you won't bear the financial burden if he chooses to repeat his old patterns.

You could also encourage him to see a counselor to explore possible career directions. There are questionnaires and assessments he can take that may get his wheels turning. Sometimes a little outside encouragement can help point a young adult in the right direction.

Lastly, there is yet another powerful motivator that may nudge a young man toward taking responsibility. This is not something parents can arrange or force; but it's documented by research, and I have observed it at work in my clinical practice. I'm speaking, of course, about love. When an underachieving young man falls in love with a high achieving young woman who believes in him, he often rises to the level of her expectation. Not always, but frequently enough that it's worth mentioning.

### Follow-up to this Q&A

*[Dr. Rimm received the following response to the advice she offered in this case. —Ed.]*

Dear Dr. Rimm,  
Thank you so much for your response to our question of how to get our son started on a career path. It's amazing, but your last paragraph has played out in recent months and a love relationship has moved our son on. He has a good job, is being very responsible, and seems to be growing up. It has taken time, but we are hopeful. Both my husband and I appreciate your thoughtful and wise response.

*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 free newsletters about taking daughters and sons to work and/or how to prevent underachievement in college, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for each newsletter to P.O. Box 32, Watertown, WI, 53094. Read Dr. Rimm's articles for parents and teachers and submit family questions online at [www.sylviarimm.com](http://www.sylviarimm.com). All questions are answered. ☞*



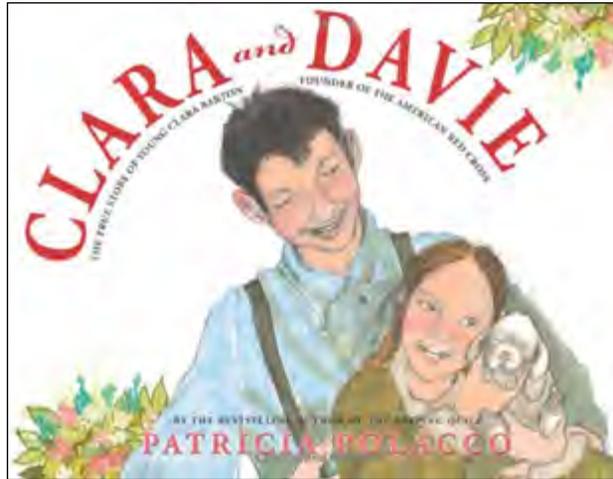
## A Story More than Worth Telling

It won't surprise regular readers of this column that we are returning to author Patricia Polacco once again. We last visited her in November, 2012, with *Bully* (2012, G.P. Putnam & Sons). Aside from being one of my favorite authors and illustrators, she always seems to be right "on spot" when it comes to so many issues, especially the subject of disabilities.

Polacco, herself, is dyslexic. She told her personal story in *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (2012 reissue, Philomel Books), the well-known and very important picture book. In it, she tells how one teacher recognized her potential and taught her how to read.

Polacco bases many of her books on real-life events and narrative histories from her childhood. Our book for this issue began that way as well. It's *Clara and Davie, The True Story of Young Clara Barton, Founder of the American Red Cross* (2014, Scholastic Press). What makes this story even more poignant is to learn that Polacco is related to Clara Barton through her mother's family and that she is telling the true family stories about the young Clara.

Clara was the fifth child born, on Christmas Day, 1821, to a family of two sisters and two brothers. She was ten years younger than Davie, her youngest brother. Soon after Clara's birth, her mother died. She was basically raised by her oldest sister, Dolly, and most especially by her brother, Davie. Davie adored his little sister, and it was he who "... taught her to climb trees, to chase fireflies, to jump deep furrows and throw clods of earth." (p. 4) It was also Davie who taught her to love nature and animals. Soon it became common knowledge that Clara had a special way with hurt and sick animals. Even the neighbors brought their animals to "Clara's healing hands."



But there were problems. Whenever Clara talked, she struggled. "Her words just didn't come out right. Horse was "horth." Snapdragons were "thnathdar-gonth." (p. 5) Since others teased her about her speech, she became very shy. School, where she was both teased and bullied, was a disaster. Finally, Polacco tells how Clara runs away from home. Davie finds her in the barn with her animals and persuades their father that she should be taught at home. He agrees and the whole family helps out. Then this bright little girl begins to blossom.

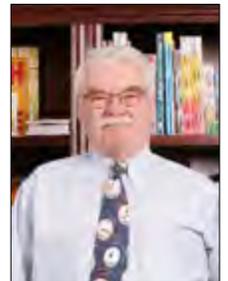
Clara's healing powers are finally and fully realized when Davie, her beloved brother, falls from the barn and is seriously injured. While the doctor does not expect Davie to live, Clara begins the long, slow process of nursing her brother back to health. Eventually, she inspires him to learn to walk again. On the first day that he begins to walk, Davie tells her, "You do have the gift

of healing. It's in your heart — and your hands.... Some day you are going to be a very great lady, Clara." (p. 24)

*Clara and Davie* will more than satisfy even the most critical of readers. Polacco has told a family story with warmth, humor, and wonderful sensitivity. The details of the story, the depth of the emotion, the theme of loving and caring sing out in this beautiful book, which Polacco also illustrated in her imitable style. The language flows; her illustrations move the plot forward; and the fact that it is a short biography will meet and please the many gifted readers who favor this genre. (An added feature of this book is historical notes at the end that are quite good.)

I always keep my eye open for books that inspire. Especially, those that deal with the issues that our wonderful 2e learners share. *Clara and Davie* will not only inspire and please, but the book could easily lead to a more in-depth study of Clara Barton and the work she accomplished that changed the medical profession forever.

*Professor Emeritus Bob Seney is retired from teaching in the Masters of Gifted Studies Program at Mississippi University for Women. At conferences, he often presents a session titled "What's New in Young Adult Literature." Reach him at [bseney@muw.edu](mailto:bseney@muw.edu).* 📧



## Happenings in the 2e Community

### Davidson Deadlines Coming Up

April 1st is the application deadline for two programs offered by the Davidson Institute and Davidson Academy. The Davidson Institute offers a THINK Summer Institute, a three-week residential summer program on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno, where students can earn up to six college credits by completing two university courses. The 2014 THINK Summer Institute will run from July 12 through August 2. Tuition is \$3,400 and covers course credits, books and materials, room and board, and the cost of planned activities. Need-based scholarships are available. To qualify, students must be 13 to 16 years old during THINK and must meet or exceed composite SAT score of 1130 (excludes writing portion) or ACT score of 26. Homeschooled students are eligible to apply. To learn more about THINK, please visit [www.Davidson-Gifted.org/THINK](http://www.Davidson-Gifted.org/THINK).

April 1 is also the deadline for applying to the Davidson Academy of Nevada for the 2014-15 school year. The Davidson Academy is a free public day school for profoundly gifted pupils on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno. The Academy's classes are not grouped by age-based grades, but by ability level, providing profoundly gifted young people an educational opportunity matched to their abilities, strengths, and interests. To be eligible to attend The Davidson Academy, students must be at the middle or high school level across all subject areas and score in the 99.9th percentile on IQ or college entrance tests, such as the SAT or ACT. For admission details, please visit the Academy's website at [www.DavidsonAcademy.UNR.edu](http://www.DavidsonAcademy.UNR.edu).

### 2e on YouTube

We've posted the first videos on our YouTube channel, Your2eTV. ("2eTV" was already taken.) The first video is a four-minute piece recorded at last November's NAGC Convention with Susan Baum, who is certainly familiar to readers of *2e Newsletter*. In the video, Baum provides some basic tips to both parents and educators. The second video presents Matthew Wanzenberg, Ph.D., on the topic of the transition to college for twice-exceptional high schoolers. His perspective is that of "coach" — one who can facilitate the transition. He explains how the process works, what a coach needs from parents and student, and what a successful transition looks like. <http://goo.gl/Nz5Z45>

### Jack Kent Cooke Young Scholars Opportunity

The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation has opened the 2014 application process for its Young Scholars Program. The program is committed to advancing educational opportunities for high-achieving, low-income students, according to the organization. The Foundation seeks 7th graders from low- to moderate-income families from across the nation who stand out in their schools for their high academic ability and achievement, persistence, and desire to help others. Young Scholars come from all racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as from rural, suburban, and urban communities throughout the United States. They are typically in the top one percent of their class academically, with family incomes averaging \$25,000 per year. This year the Foundation will select approximately 60 students. The deadline for the first phase of the application process is March 20, 2014. <http://goo.gl/zzUqxY>

### Expert on the Intersection of Gifted, LD Dies

James J. Gallagher, a noted expert on both gifted and special education, died in January. On its site, the National Association for Gifted Children has posted an obituary that highlights his role in setting policy at the state and national levels. Among his many achievements, according to the obituary (<http://goo.gl/UVMccR>):

- Introducing the concept of the IEP
- Approving initial federal funding for Sesame Street
- Helping establish federal policy for GT students.

*The New York Times* also ran an obituary: <http://goo.gl/bRcWqd>

### Thanks, Wendy

The issue you're reading right now is the last one that Wendy Eisner, Ph.D., of Nassau County, New York, will receive.

Why is that significant? Three reasons, the most important of which is that there is light at the end of the tunnel for 2e parents!

First, Wendy has been with us since Issue 1 and has contributed to our success directly and indirectly, as a booster and as a contributor of editorial content. In fact, her contributions to the 2e community pre-date *2e Newsletter*, having started as one of the founders of the group Long Island Twice-Exceptional Children's Advocacy (LI-TECA). As a contributor, Wendy has guided readers of *2e Newsletter* on topics such as:

- Preparing a 2e child for the transition to college
- A model for educating twice-exceptional middle-school children

## Highlights from the Blog and Briefing

WHAT IF your twice-exceptional child's anxiety-induced movements are interpreted by his school as sexual in nature? What if the school contacts the state's child protection services, hinting at abuse by the family? Sounds like a nightmare — and for one family in New Jersey it was. <http://goo.gl/XgoR7H>

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENTS. Wrightslaw's issue of *Special Ed Advocate* in mid-March is the first of a two-part series on comprehensive assessments — what the assessor does, the information obtained, and how the information can be used. If you have a 2e kiddo, chances are good you're going to need to know about this topic at some point. <http://goo.gl/E4JTdJ>

LD ONLINE's mid-March newsletter focuses on writing, a common issue for twice-exceptional children. Find out whether the newsletter has something of interest for your situation. <http://goo.gl/NL6vuN> (If the March issue isn't the current issue by the time you get to LD Online, try this link: <http://goo.gl/JeqCCX>) While these articles are slanted mainly at teachers, parents can use all the information they can get too, right? (And — self-promo alert — don't forget that we offer a "Spotlight on 2e Series" booklet about writing and the 2e student.)

LEARNING CHALLENGES AND THEATER. At the site of the Child Mind Institute is an article about how kids of

the LD or 2e persuasion can thrive in theater-related activities. In the article, drama teachers comment on how being involved in theater can benefit these kids. <http://goo.gl/vbb1nI>

NCLD has issued the 2014 "State of Learning Disabilities" report. The executive director of NCLD says, "The data in this 2014 report reveal that, left unaddressed, as many as 60 million individuals risk being left behind, burdened by low self-esteem, subjected to low expectations, and diminished in their ability to pursue their dreams." <http://goo.gl/WEasJb>

SID CEASAR died recently, and, for anyone old enough to remember his comic genius, there were a couple interesting anecdotes in his obit. He was evidently three years old before he started talking. And one of his earliest teachers once called Caesar "one of the dumbest pupils I ever had." Interesting, huh? <http://goo.gl/QzIWQT>

RESOURCE FROM THE CHILD MIND INSTITUTE. This organization offers a free PDF titled "Parent's Guide to Getting Good Care," which focuses on obtaining mental health care for children. The editor of the guide writes, "In this guide we take you through the steps to finding the best professional (or team) to treat your child. Along the way, we offer things to look for to ensure that you're getting quality care, and questions to ask to evaluate both the clinicians and treatments they offer." <http://goo.gl/9OzkbV> And good going, Child Mind Institute. 📖

## Happenings, concluded

- Guidelines for identifying and meeting the needs of twice-exceptional students. Second, her contributions as editorial contributor were rooted in her experience at Nassau Community College, where she was founder and program coordinator for The Achilles Project. This unique program, which addresses the needs of twice-exceptional young adults entering college, was the result of Eisner's background in psychology and education, experience as a parent, and role in 2e advocacy. She organized and chaired a college-wide, collaborative effort among faculty members, administrators, and consultants, to explore what needs could be served by a special 2e program and then went on to design that program. She also has trained faculty and counselors, both at NCC and other college campuses, in 2e educational strategies. She

currently serves on the Achilles Advisory Board.

Third, Wendy is graduating from the 2e community, personally and professionally, and pursuing other research interests. Observing this transition, she says, "However, one is forever part of the 2e community in several respects: a deep understanding of the existential condition of the 2e individual, lifelong relationships with other members of the community, and joy in the support provided to struggling 2e youngsters."

We wanted to share this message because it illustrates that all of the time and effort parents and educators put into helping twice-exceptional children will, eventually, have a successful end-point.

We thank Wendy and wish her, like all graduates from the 2e community, the best of luck in future endeavors. 📖

## National and International Events in 2014

March 22-25, *The Wallace Research & Policy Symposium on Talent Development*, Arlington, Virginia. By Belin-Blank Center and NAGC. For scholars in gifted education and talent development. (Concurrent sessions on Monday, the 24th, include at least five on twice-exceptionality.) More information at [www2.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/Researchers/Wallace](http://www2.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/Researchers/Wallace).

April 9-12, *CEC Convention and Expo*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. For special education teachers, administrators, researchers, professors, and students. More information at [www.cec.sped.org/Professional-Development/Annual-Convention](http://www.cec.sped.org/Professional-Development/Annual-Convention).

July 13-18, *Confratute*, Storrs, Connecticut. For educators of gifted students. By the Neag Center for Gifted Education at the University of Connecticut. More information at [www.gifted.ucon.edu/confratute](http://www.gifted.ucon.edu/confratute).

July 18-20, *Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted Annual Conference*, San Jose, California. For parents, educators, clinicians. More information at [www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org).

July 28-August 1, *18th Annual Edufest*, about gifted education, Boise, Idaho. For K-12 teachers, parents, counselors, special education teachers, administra-

tors, and gifted education coordinators. More information at [www.edufest.org](http://www.edufest.org).

November 13-16, *Annual Convention of the National Association for Gifted Children*, Baltimore, Maryland. More information at <http://nagc.org/nagcconvention.aspx>.

*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.* ☞

## Local Events, Webinars

SENG WEBINAR. On March 18, SENG presents a 90-minute webinar in which psychologist Dan Peters will address worry, fear, and anxiety in gifted and twice-exceptional young people. Fee: \$40. <http://goo.gl/t00V9Q>

MANHATTAN OPEN HOUSE. On March 31, the Quad Manhattan will host an open house for those interested in its Quad Prep School or Quad Summer School, both aimed at twice-exceptional kids. <http://goo.gl/WpQpQB>

LANG SCHOOL OPEN HOUSE. Also in Manhattan, The Lang School for twice-exceptional children is holding an open house on April 7<sup>th</sup>, from 6-8 pm. <http://goo.gl/chkvHr>

NEAR SANTA MONICA? The Summit Center is presenting a course called "Empowered Parenting Gifted and 2e" in six Thursday-morning sessions extending from late April through May. The course is based on Melanie Prager's *Empowered Parenting Basics*, customized for gifted and 2e kids. <http://goo.gl/NywiOx>

IN NEW ENGLAND? On April 5th, the Massachusetts Association for Gifted Education is holding its annual conference, featuring a talk by Deirdre Lovecky. Lovecky is an author, clinician, and member of the Editorial Advisory Board of *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter*. <http://goo.gl/8FMuAB>

NAGC WEBINAR. As part of its Webinars on Wednesdays series, NAGC is presenting an April program titled

"A Twice-exceptional Discussion to Help Teachers and Parents Better Advocate for Services." Scheduled to present are Megan Foley Nicpon of the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa, and psychologist Dan Peters, co-founder of the Summit Center in California. Both speakers have contributed to *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter* and are frequent presenters at conferences around the country. The webinar is free to NAGC members, \$59 to others. <http://goo.gl/lvYpiy>

NEAR CHICAGO? The Center for Talent Development is holding its annual conference for families of gifted kids on June 28th on the campus of Northwestern University in Evanston. <http://goo.gl/3ti3xc> ☞