

Autism: Time to despair or to be hopeful

Gina cannot get her face any closer to the paper. Her eyes move furtively. Using the rivets on the pads of her fingers, she navigates through the results of the graph. Comparing her three-year-old girl to other little girls her age feels more like a critique as she studies her daughter's assessment. Her baby girl is different. She is on the high functioning autism spectrum.

As a mother, she should be excited about her daughter's progress; but her eyes continually dart towards the areas of deficit. Her mind sprints as if it is in a race against the clock.

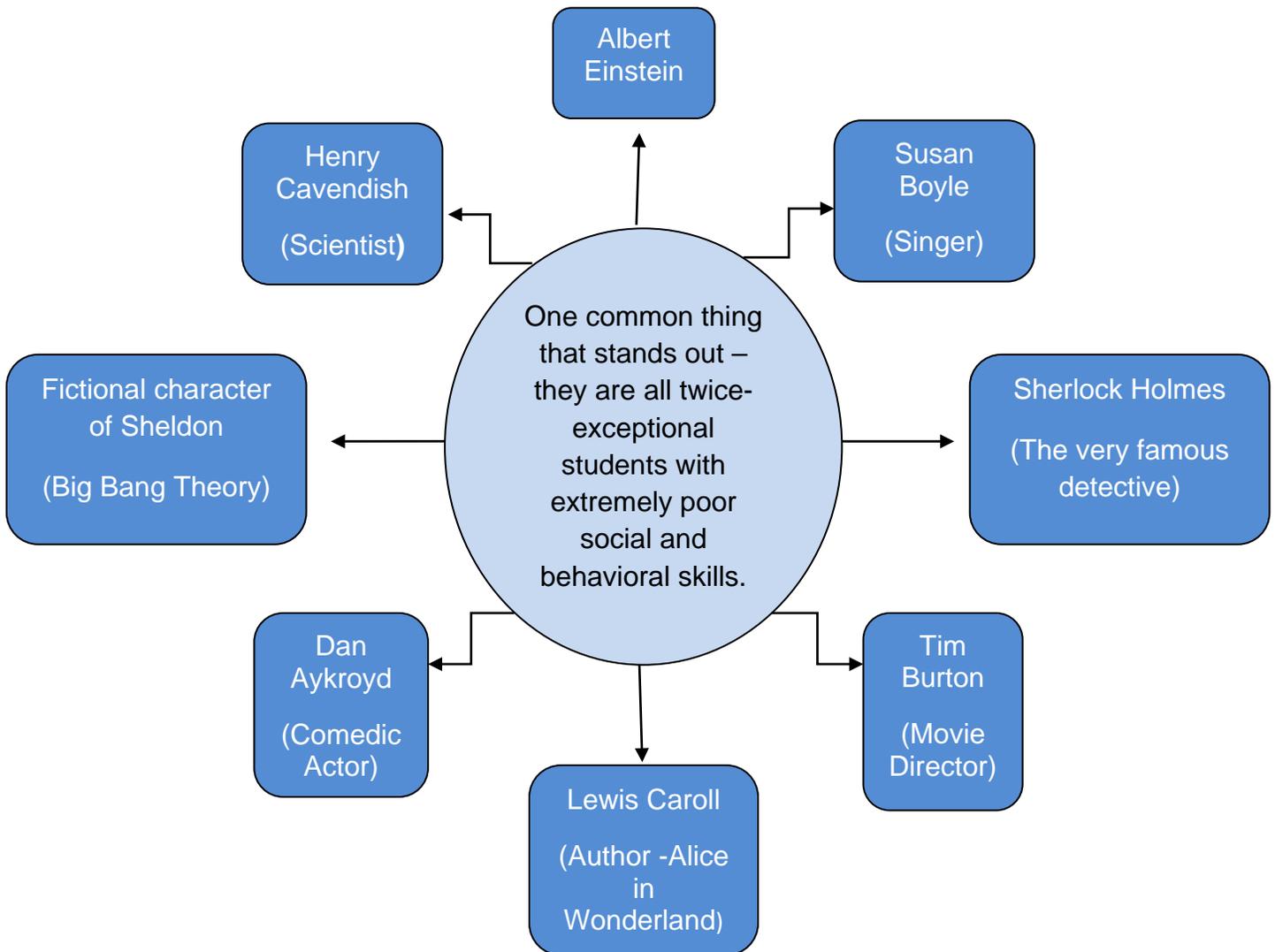
A story common in many households, across the globe ...

Autism Spectrum is the most challenging among all neurocognitive disabilities with no standard solution to address its treatment. Just like Gina who cannot sleep because the guilt weighing on her chest feels suffocating. She feels as if she can never do enough.

Autism is a never-ending life of comparing... a never-ending life of what seems to never be good enough—for the parent and for the child.

Interestingly, what we categorize as autism today may have been thought of as “giftedness” during Albert Einstein's lifetime. Therefore, what can be a positive perspective to introspect is that there is a very fine line between the world of giftedness and autism. They may actually be the same thing.

From the real world...



Abstract

Although children with autism are dependent on educators to provide guidance, students also need opportunities to exhibit independence and advocate for themselves or they will not be able to increase their independence in functional and adaptive skills.

Through ongoing studies and observations, educators found students who are taught through research-based structures, such as the least-to-most prompt hierarchy and Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication related handicapped Children (TEACCH) tasks, are better prepared to exhibit independent living skills during further education and independent living.

Identification: Can it be random?

Twice-exceptional students or gifted are being overlooked because the identification process is one-sided and/or eliminates dual diagnoses. Twice-exceptional refers to students who are both gifted and have a disability (Segen's Medical Dictionary, 2011).

Research was completed included reading scholarly journals, textbooks, and educational websites. Although, some children are gifted, their talents are often overlooked and unsupported, because the disability masks their abilities, testing criteria, and behavior.

Results have identified that this is because the students' disability camouflaged their areas of giftedness.

Educating the teachers on proper testing and teaching students who are twice-exceptional, they can facilitate the correct instructional methods. Twice-exceptional students have many variations. It is important to address both areas so that students are challenged and taught using both ends of the spectrum.

Research claims that correctly identifying twice-exceptional students can be difficult. Mills and Brody, as cited by Rizza & Morrison, pointed to the following three categories as indicators of the twice-exceptional student:

- (a) Evidence of an outstanding talent or ability
- (b) Evidence of a discrepancy between accepted and actual achievement
- (c) Evidence of the processing defect (Rizza & Morrison, 2007, p. 58).

"If the student with a disability has a gift or talent, it will eventually be recognized."

(Morrison & Omdal, 2000, p. 103).

Based on the Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act, schools may not identify twice-exceptional students on test scores alone and should use a response-to-intervention model (RTI) to monitor student progress (Rizza & Morrison, 2007, p. 56).

RTI is an approach used by school systems to intensely respond to both academic and behavioral concerns of at-risk students in the building (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2017). IQ tests are very beneficial in providing information but they are not always the best to determine placement for twice-exceptional students.

In the United States, there is an estimate of 300,000 children who are both gifted and diagnosed with a learning disability, but from that number, only 25 to 30% have autism.

Only 10% of the population with autism fall in the category of savants.

Only 1% fall in the category of extraordinary (Cash, 1999, p. 1)

According to the American Psychiatric Association's Fourth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV, 1994), there are several types of autism that develop differently (Cash, 1999, p. 1).

A person like Temple Grandin, who has autism, has managed to make a difference within society. Temple succeeded because she had the support from her family and the determination to strive for what she needed.

That is not entirely true for twice-exceptional students since failure of schools to identify and serve these children has been “an indictment against our society and a problem we should not tolerate” (Morrison & Omdal, 2000, p. 103).

When identifying students, the most efficient way is to use an IQ test or other form of measuring cognitive ability. With other criteria, students needing support in gifted and special education programs will be identified. Other useful materials include teacher’s reports, nominations, family, friends, community members, and other checklists.

Difference between Gifted and Giftedness with Learning Disorder, especially Autism

| Gifted | Giftedness with Learning Disorder (Autism) |
|--|---|
| <p>Excels in all areas, such as observation, verbal, and basic skills, as well as reading ability, problem-solving and persistence to a task or subject.</p> | <p>Twice-exceptional students with autism typically have some difficulties in those areas.</p> |
| <p>They do not struggle much with other non-academic challenges.</p> | <p>While highly intelligent reading problems occur because of cognitive processing defects, twice-exceptional students struggle with basic skills and reading. They also have non-academic challenges.</p> |
| <p>They may not get that easily irritated with things around them.</p> | <p>Twice-exceptional students are easily frustrated, highly sensitive to criticism, and have difficulty with social interaction (Colorado Department of Education, 2012, p. 10).</p> |
| <p>They will not face many difficulties in elaborating on a particular topic.</p> | <p>When it relates to special interests, they can give lengthy and elaborate details on a topic but have difficulties if it is a topic that does not interest them (Lovecky, 2005).</p> |
| <p>They may learn or adapt to overcome their challenges on their own.</p> | <p>Teachers need to encourage the students to try their best and use their strengths for overcoming challenges/areas of concern. As teachers, it is our responsibility to tap into our student's potential.</p> |

Twice-exceptional children with an autism diagnosis often exhibit behavioral patterns.

A behavior is an action or reaction of a person or animal in response to external or internal stimuli (American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition, 2011).

When children demonstrate behaviors, it is generally in the form of internalizing or externalizing. A student with autism typically exhibits internalization patterns. External behavior can also occur consisting of hand flapping, rocking, yelling/loud noises, and loping, directed either towards other people or themselves.

Accommodations developed for some of these behaviors vary, depending on the behavior and how it impacts the student.

When supporting these students, teachers need to learn which behaviors indicate the student is being over stimulated or having difficulties. By identifying early triggers, a teacher can prevent the behavior from occurring. The teacher should also put steps into practice, where the students are about to recognize when they are reaching specific levels and can initiate a solution.

Best Practices to up skill the genius: What Research says?

When introducing a new task, one might argue a student may need frequent support and encouragement to persevere and master the skill.

A prompt time delay or fade plan can be put into place.

- Constant time delay (CTD) is a method to gradually fade the teacher-given prompt while allowing the student time to achieve the correct answer (Kurt & Parsons, 2009).

In the field of teaching methodology and application, a study by McDonell and Ferguson showed most-to-least prompt hierarchy has been an effective teaching intervention, specifically when teaching life skills (as cited in Aycut, 2012).

- Prompts used in the prompt hierarchy include full physical, partial physical, direct verbal, indirect verbal, give a model, and gestural. Teachers must determine the type of prompt to implement prior to starting a trial or lesson (Aycut, 2012).

Aycut (2012) conducted a study that found the most-to-least prompt hierarchy to be the most efficient when teaching students life skills.

- An older study showed when the prompt hierarchy was used in conjunction with a progressive time delay procedure, students showed a decrease in errors and interfering behaviors (Heckaman, Alber, & Hooper, 1998).

A teacher could implement the least-to-most hierarchy model.

- The least-to-most prompt hierarchy model provides the student with a natural response time. If the student answers incorrectly, the implementer would utilize one of the prompt methods. Mostly, a direct verbal is utilized after a child gives an incorrect response. making it difficult for students to master skills at an adequate rate and may cause a higher frequency of errors (West & Billingsley, 2005).

Verbal prompts can be direct in form of a clear directive, such as 'get your pencil' or indirect in the form of questions, such as 'What do you need to be able to write your name on the paper'?

- While verbal prompts provide the child with a clear expectation, they are also the most difficult prompts to fade. Modeling prompts are less restrictive than verbal prompts and can even be a great way to implement peer interactions (MacDuff, Krantz, & McClanahan, 2001).

When using gestural prompts, the teacher could implement a visual cue system.

- As the gestural prompts fade, the student could refer to the visual without needing a reminder to do so. Visuals are a reasonable accommodation, even when it comes time for students to get a job.

Teachers should evaluate which teaching method allows the student to generalize the skill to their greatest potential (Aycut, 2012).

- In addition, the goal is that teachers will be able to determine which procedure allows for the student to accomplish the most sessions, ultimately achieving more skills in a faster period of time (Hughes & Frederick, 2006; Snell, 1982; Zhang, Cote, Chen, & Liu, 2004).

The approach for "Time Delay"- which means letting the student build the skill at his pace over a graduated approach.

- When such approach is used in conjunction with a time-delay, there are two different ways to implement the strategies: using a zero-second time delay where the student is prompted immediately to achieve the correct answer (errorless learning) or a multiple-second time delay where the determined prompt is implemented 3-5 seconds after a natural response window (Aycut, 2012).

School Intervention or Home intervention or the simple approach of Plan-Do-Assess-Review?

- 1 • All students, need strategies to excel in school. According to Winebrenner (2003), “twice-exceptional students cannot improve by simply “trying harder” (p. 132).
- 2 • Some ways to enhance education for students with ASD are to remove or minimize distractions causing overstimulation, establish clear procedures and routines, reduce choice selection, and implement a reward system.
- 3 • When teaching, educators should differentiate instructions to better support the student’s learning styles.
- 4 • When teaching, educators should differentiate instructions to better support the student’s learning styles.

Linguaphile Skills Hub: The Ecological Model of Learning

- 1 • We assess, support, and provide the graduated approach to children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- 2 • With our blend of technology and human intervention and the graduated approach with the correct choice of subjects, we value taking out the genius among the students.
- 3 • Not one size fits all and therefore in the Educational Intervention process, all subjects do not fit the need for children with learning challenges.
- 4 • It is important to assess and work towards strengthening the positives in the child rather than trying to make the child adjust to our normal life.

Geniuses are made, not born!