

The Twice Exceptional Learner by Dr. Kirstina Ordetx



Children who are identified as twice exceptional or “2e” learners often pose a conundrum for their teachers. The ideal classroom environment for the twice-exceptional student is very far from what exists. The current models of gifted, regular, and special education classrooms do not make for a good fit. Twice exceptional learners need a thoughtful combination of acceleration, remediation, and social-emotional supports.

For these children, testing results typically indicate:

- Evidence of a discrepancy between expected and actual achievement
- Evidence of an outstanding talent or ability
- Coincident evidence of a processing deficit (with processing defined broadly as the ability to interpret higher-order perceptions, as in auditory processing).

The double exceptionality means that the student excels in one area and struggles in another. This incongruence may place the student at a higher risk for frustration, self-criticism, and low confidence. 2e students require both academic and emotional support. They may face problems with social acceptance in traditional learning environments, as they are prone to sensitivity, emotional immaturity, and/or a focus on ideas and interests that may not be shared or understood by their peers.

A strength-based approach to teaching is highly recommended. The unique learning strengths of the twice exceptional learner are vast and deserve to be recognized and celebrated.

Strengths of the 2e learner may include:

- Leadership in “teaching’ or mentoring roles
- Wide range of interests when motivated

- Focus interest and passion about certain topics
- Independent when driven
- Strong observation skills
- Excels with real-world problem-solving
- Persistence
- Highly inquisitive
- Vast and detailed imagination

Twice exceptional students thrive in a learning environment that teaches to the *multiple intelligences*. Understanding their strengths and personal learning styles is a first step in building confidence as a learner. Opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge through *project-based learning* are necessary to foster motivation and confidence. Teachers who recognize and understand the student's learning challenges will incorporate strategies and modifications to help with compensation and grade-level maintenance. These modifications will include explicit instruction and modeling of *executive function skills*. A lack of organizational, time management, and study skills can have a negative impact on both the emotional wellbeing and school performance of twice-exceptional students. A thorough evaluation can assist in the development of an appropriate, individual education plan to monitor progress and set future goals.