

The Gifted Student with Dyslexia

2E—Twice Exceptional—Uniquely Gifted

Nancy Cushen White, Ed.D.

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Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities

- ▶ **2% to 7% of gifted also have a disability.**
- ▶ **2E's span all socioeconomic backgrounds.**
- ▶ **Variety of disabilities:**
 - **Most common disability category associated with the gifted is learning disabilities.**
 - **Overwhelming majority of those with learning disabilities have dyslexia—a language learning disability affecting reading, spelling and written expression.**

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Risk of Falling Through the Cracks

- ▶ **2E students often fall through the cracks in the educational system.**
- ▶ **Parents and/or teachers may fail to notice both giftedness and learning disability—dyslexia.**
 - **Dyslexia may mask giftedness.**
 - **Giftedness may mask dyslexia.**

Giftedness Masks Disabilities

Disabilities Depress IQ Scores

Linda Silverman

- ▶ **Higher abstract reasoning enables children to compensate for weaknesses to some extent.**
- ▶ **Use of compensatory strategies**
 - **Makes challenges harder to detect**
 - **Requires more energy**
 - **Affects motivation**
 - **Breaks down when child is under stress or tired**
- ▶

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Unidentified 2E Students at Risk

- ▶ **May not receive the differentiated—specialized instruction they need**
 - **For their gifts—to develop their higher-level cognitive function**
- OR**
- **For their challenges—to develop their basic skills (e.g., handwriting, reading, spelling, written expression, math computation).**
- ▶ **May appear to be average students or underachievers who just need “to try harder.”**

Unidentified 2E Students at Risk

- ▶ **High intellect of students with dyslexia can make their struggles seem less severe than they actually are:**
 - **May be denied the direct instruction, accommodations and modifications necessary**
 - **To remediate their disabilities**
 - **To allow them to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities on tests and schoolwork.**

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Complexity of Needs of 2E Students

- ▶ Both their gifts and their disabilities must be identified and simultaneously supported.
- ▶ Inadequate or inappropriate instruction and support ultimately put the child at high risk for school failure.
- ▶ Much of the struggle these students endure is avoidable.
- ▶ Their responsiveness to appropriate disability support and intellectual stimulation is usually significant.

Paradoxical Combinations

Tannebaum and Baldwin

- ▶ The child with high tested intelligence and no learning disability may be able to generate creative ideas about new problems and innovative solutions to old ones.
- ▶ The child with high tested intelligence and a learning disability may be performing a task in a new or creative way at the same time that he seems not to be following instructions.

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Paradoxical Combinations

Gifted Students WITH and WITHOUT Dyslexia

Tannebaum and Baldwin

- ▶ The gifted child without a learning disability
 - May be a perfectionist with high expectations of himself and others—that are attainable.
- ▶ The gifted child with a learning disability
 - May have a need to avoid failure that leads to a refusal to perform a required task.
 - Unhappiness over failure to live up to his own expectations may lead to frustration and anger.
 - May deny that he has a learning problem by saying that school is “dumb” or boring or too easy.
 - May try to deceive teachers and parents by doing work so sloppily that it is impossible to evaluate.

Paradoxical Combinations

Tannebaum and Baldwin

- ▶ Gifted children frequently possess extraordinary critical thinking skills and may perceive unusual relationships in objects, events and ideas.
- ▶ The gifted child with a learning disability may combine ideas or express solutions that peers and teachers find bizarre. She may be regarded as disrespectful because of her tendency to question the teacher’s facts or conclusions.

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Paradoxical Combinations

Tannebaum and Baldwin

- ▶ The gifted child with no learning disability may show alertness, a high energy level, and an accelerated pace of thinking.
- ▶ The gifted child with a learning disability may be viewed as hyperactive because of her need to be actively involved.
 - May become impatient during history/science lessons that are textbook-oriented.
 - May ask thought-provoking questions that may be misinterpreted.
 - May experience difficulty keeping attention focused on written tasks.
 - May tend toward long-winded or pompous disquisitions that reveal more information than anybody wants to know—or can comprehend.

Paradoxical Combinations

Tannebaum and Baldwin

- ▶ The gifted child with no learning disability may possess highly developed language skills.
- ▶ The gifted-learning disabled child may use verbal skills to avoid or mask specific language and behavior disorders.
 - He may not use a large vocabulary when speaking, but have the ability to explain meanings of words far beyond his age expectancy.
 - He may enjoy playing with words and their diverse meanings, even at inappropriate times and in seemingly inappropriate ways.

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Paradoxical Combinations

Tannebaum and Baldwin

- ▶ **Gifted children are often unusually sensitive to feelings—their own and those of others.**
- ▶ **The gifted student with a learning disability may be sensitive to criticism by others and highly critical of herself and others, including teachers.**
 - **May be able to understand and express concern about the feelings of others even while engaging in inappropriate behavior toward peers.**
 - **May be able to size up situations and utilize them to her own advantage.**
 - **May become skillful at manipulating others, including her parents and teachers.**

Paradoxical Combinations

Tannebaum and Baldwin

- ▶ **A common characteristic of gifted students is possession of a keen sense of humor.**
- ▶ **The gifted student with a learning disability may use his sense of humor to clown and divert attention from failure in school activities.**

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Paradoxical Combinations

Tannebaum and Baldwin

- ▶ Dyslexia is a condition—not a disease—in which certain **adaptive behaviors** allow complete functioning in spite of the problem.
- ▶ Great emphasis needs to be placed on the development of a positive self-image and self-esteem.
- ▶ The gifts of these students must be emphasized at the same time and to the same extent that attention is given to remediation of their disabilities.
- ▶ They need to be given tools and strategies so that they can gain control of their learning.

The Teacher

- ▶ The teacher is a critical variable in the success of these gifted students with dyslexia in the classroom (Daniels, 1983).
- ▶ Teachers cannot become so rigid that necessary adjustments are avoided nor so flexible as to be manipulated by students.
- ▶ Either of these alternatives eliminates the support structures that children need in order for learn to occur.
- ▶ Teachers need enough ego to value their skills, competencies and knowledge when dealing with other professionals.
- ▶ “Essential, personal professional narcissism is needed to counter impractical or unrealistic suggestions or demands” (Daniels 1983).

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Type of Instruction

- ▶ Multisensory structured language instruction is appropriate for remediation of associative learning difficulties.
- ▶ It helps to strengthen short-term memory, working memory and concentration.
- ▶ For the daydreamer, it facilitates the ability to focus attention.

Type of Instruction

- ▶ Students are given the rationale for why they are asked to do things in a certain way or in a given sequence.
- ▶ They are given guided practice in functional use of skills before moving on to new skills further up in the hierarchy.
- ▶ Direct explicit instruction is the mode of presentation.
- ▶ Time on task—practice—is a critical factor in learning.

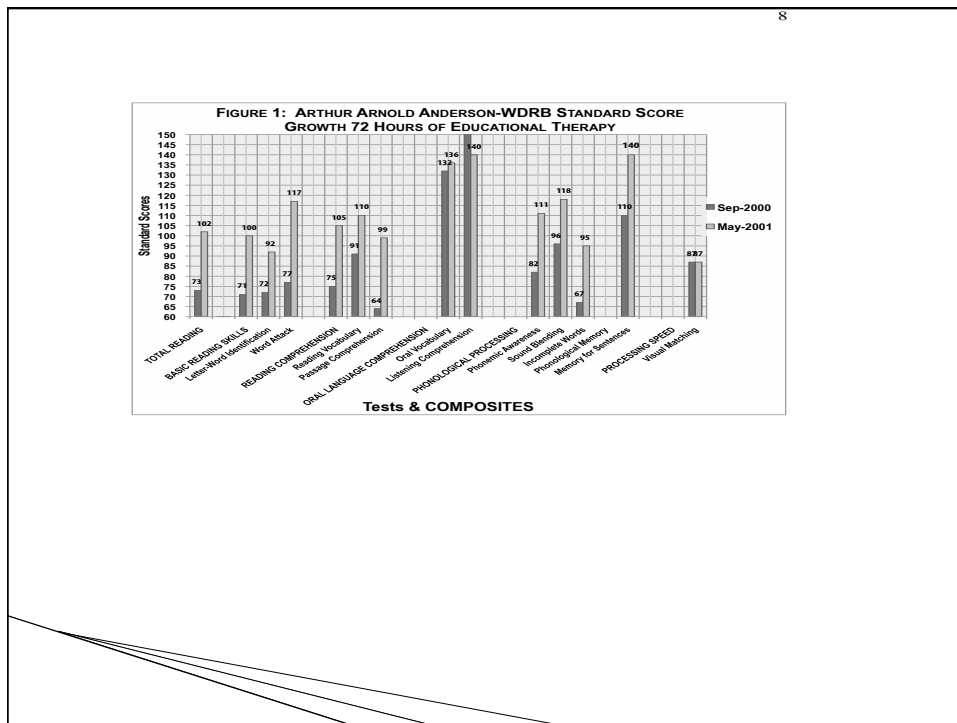
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Practice Makes Permanent

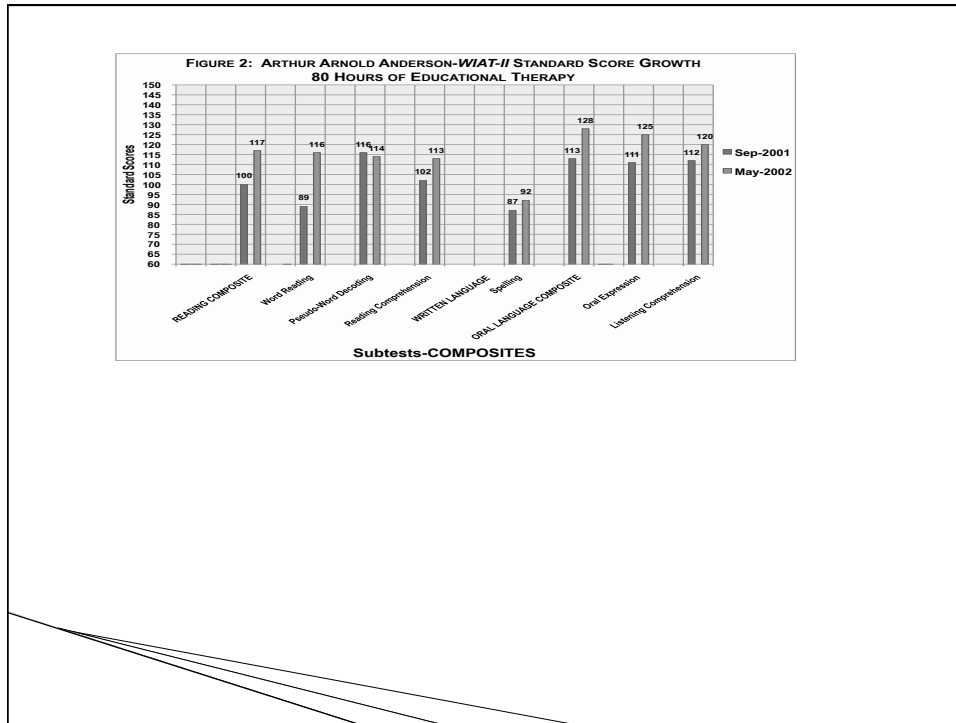
- ▶ If a student learns something incorrectly and practices it incorrectly over time, that incorrectness is what will become permanent.
- ▶ Children need daily opportunities to make functional, use of recently learned skills in order for them to become automatic.



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Paradoxical Combinations

Tannebaum and Baldwin

- ▶ How individuals process information, what they pay attention to, their thoughts, their feelings, and their responses to the world around them reflect and constitute their individuality.
- ▶ Individual variation is the core of our existence.
- ▶ These students are a treasure.
- ▶ They need to feel wanted.
- ▶ They need to know that success is within their reach.
- ▶ They are highly motivated.
- ▶ They need to learn how to learn before they are condemned to learn how to fail.

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