

Embracing Twice-Exceptional Learners: A Picture Book & Website for Classroom Awareness

by

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Abstract

Twice-exceptional students—those who are both gifted and have a learning or developmental disability—are often overlooked in schools. Many educators are trained to recognize learning challenges but may not realize that a student with a disability can also be highly gifted. As a result, these students often go without the support they need to thrive academically. Our project aims to address this issue by creating a children’s picture book designed for students in Kindergarten through third grade, along with a companion website filled with resources for educators. The picture book will tell the story of a twice-exceptional child, highlighting their daily experiences, challenges, and strengths in a way that young readers can relate to. The goal is to help students see themselves in the story while also fostering understanding among their peers. Meanwhile, the website will serve as a resource for teachers, providing information on identifying twice-exceptional learners, strategies for supporting them in the classroom, and insights from experts in the field. To make our project as authentic and impactful as possible, we plan to conduct interviews with parents, teachers, and twice-exceptional students. Their real-world experiences will help shape both the story in the book and the guidance offered on the website. This project is deeply personal to us as future educators, especially since one of us is concentrating in gifted education. By combining research with storytelling, we hope to spread awareness about twice-exceptionality and provide tools that will help teachers better serve these unique learners. Our ultimate goal is to create something that will not only inform but also inspire meaningful change in how twice-exceptional students are recognized and supported in schools.

Introduction

As a student in the Honors college here at East Carolina University, I am required to complete a “Signature Honors Project”. This project involves working closely with a mentor for an entire academic year, conducting research, and either writing a research thesis or pursuing a creative endeavor. As an aspiring educator, My partner and I chose to take the creative approach by developing a children’s picture book that thoughtfully integrates both of our majors and concentrations. We felt that this picture book would reflect our shared passion for education and commitment to making a meaningful impact in the field. In the beginning stages of the project you are asked to format your project around a current problem that is being faced by many people in the world. The main problem we wanted to address with our project is the lack of knowledge on the term “twice-exceptionality” -- both for educators and students. We wanted our project to be useful and beneficial for both parties.

Background and Rationale for Topic Selection

Twice-exceptionality is a term often used in the gifted and talented realm of education. It can be defined as “intellectually gifted children who have one or more learning disabilities” (Dlugosz, 2021). Twice exceptional(2e) students are often overlooked and underserved within their schools, as most schools and educators are trained to look for signs of learning and developmental disability and that often takes precedence over identifying any kind of gifted education. The Davidson Institute offers a potential reason as to why 2e students are under-identified—many school districts do not have proper methods in place to identify these learners and this leads to these students being unable to access educational services that they may need (Dlugosz, 2021). Informing staff and educators on signs to look for, such as special interests, emotional intensity, and extreme creativity, while also providing them with resources to dive into

may counteract this issue. Likewise, providing a piece of media for students to read and relate to may help students identify themselves and constrict intellectual concerns. By creating a children's picture book that will include a website for educators to find more resources and information on twice-exceptionality. We hope to spread knowledge on the fact that this is a reality for a lot of students who are simply overlooked, as gifted for the sole fact that they may have a learning or developmental disability.

Picture Book Development Process

Our goal for this project was to create a children's picture book that illustrates the daily life, challenges, and strengths of a twice-exceptional student. Aimed at Kindergarten through 5th-grade students, the story follows a relatable character who learns to navigate both their gifts and challenges with the support of family, peers, and a caring teacher. The idea for the book began in the fall, when my partner Hannah and I developed the storyline through in-depth interviews with current and former educators, as well as research on the experiences of twice-exceptional students in classroom settings. We wanted to create a resource that not only helps parents and future teachers identify and support twice-exceptional learners, but also helps those students feel seen in literature. After drafting the script, we worked with the university's Writing Center to refine it before using Canva to design and illustrate the book. Once finalized, we laminated and bound the book through the Teaching Resources Center to complete our physical copies. To further support our work, we built a website that includes the story's background, our interviews, and helpful tools for educators. We presented both the book and website at the Fostering Inclusive Education for All Learners Conference on March 22nd, where we were given a 45-minute session to share our project and its purpose.

Research Methods and Data Collection

To guide the development of our project, we drew heavily from Hannah’s previous coursework in AIG (Academically and Intellectually Gifted) education, using many of the textbooks and resources she had from those classes as foundational research materials. However, we knew it was equally important to gather firsthand insights from those with direct experience working with or raising twice-exceptional children. To do this, we reached out to current and former professors who had spent time teaching in elementary classrooms, as well as current educators who have worked with twice-exceptional students. Additionally, we interviewed a parent of a twice-exceptional child to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes she has seen in navigating the school system. These interviews provided rich, real-world perspectives that helped shape both our story and the resources we created to accompany the book.

Key Findings from Interviews

Our interviews revealed several important insights into the experiences of twice-exceptional (2e) students, particularly from the perspective of both educators and parents. One of the most striking findings came from a mother who shared that, while she recognized early signs of twice-exceptionality in her child—such as emotional dysregulation and behavioral outbursts typical of ADHD, alongside exceptional strengths like advanced math skills and an impressive vocabulary—formal identification was challenging. Teachers and parents alike noted that 2e students often display high academic abilities in specific areas while simultaneously facing difficulties with social interactions or behavioral regulation due to neurodiversity. Educators emphasized the need for targeted strategies that support both areas of need and strength. These may include tailored interventions like social-emotional support, differentiated instruction, and in

some cases, grade acceleration. These findings helped shape the narrative of our book and guided the recommendations and tools we provided on our website.

Discussion of Findings and Impact on Book Creation

The findings from our interviews deeply influenced and inspired our creative direction. Listening to educators and a parent share their personal experiences with twice-exceptional students made us realize just how often these children's needs go unnoticed or misunderstood. For instance, the mother we interviewed described how her child's ADHD symptoms, such as emotional outbursts, often masked his giftedness in math and vocabulary, making it difficult to receive proper support. Teachers emphasized the complexity of supporting students who simultaneously excel and struggle. These stories helped us understand that a narrative resource like a picture book could serve as both a mirror for 2e students and a window for others to better understand them. The emotional depth and practical insights gained from these interviews reinforced our commitment to creating a book that not only tells a meaningful story but also acts as a tool for education, empathy, and advocacy.

Conclusion

Hannah and I at the close of this project are extremely proud to see how this project turned out. We have now taken a visible problem and a simple idea and turned it into a published book and website. As fellow elementary education majors we are excited to see if we can now incorporate this information into our student teaching as well as in our future classrooms. We feel that this project provides beneficial resources to help not only us as educators but other teachers as well in the future. We hope that because of this book, this can help future twice exceptional students feel more welcomed and supported within the classroom.

References

Dlugosz, Mark. "Twice Exceptional: Definition, Characteristics & Identification." Davidson Institute, 2 July 2024, www.davidsongifted.org/gifted-blog/twice-exceptional-definition-characteristics-identification/.