ABSTRACT

IDENTIFYING AND SERVING GIFTED STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: CHALLENGES AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

by Julia A. Pemberton

The purpose of this study was to explore issues surrounding students who are twice-exceptional, and how the context of the school affects service delivery. Four male twice-exceptional students in grades 4-6 from southwestern Ohio, as well as their teachers, school psychologists, and parents, were interviewed about the students’ identification and services. The results indicated that all students were identified as LD by standardized tests and that three were identified as gifted using the IOWA test. Services were typically pull-out programs. Participants said the label allowed students to receive extra support and boosted self-esteem and that ideal services should be individualized to students’ needs. Many said that the LD services helped students with their area of disability and with classwork and allowed them modifications for work and tests. Gifted services were perceived as requiring much transition, involving extensive work, or as difficult due to requirements involving the student’s disability. Context influenced perceptions of services delivery.
IDENTIFYING AND SERVING GIFTED STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: CHALLENGES AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

A THESIS

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist
Department of Educational Psychology
by
Julia A. Pemberton
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2004

Advisor______________________________
Dr. Doris Bergen

Reader______________________________
Dr. Tsila Evers

Reader______________________________
Dr. Alex Thomas

Reader______________________________
Dr. Margaret Wright
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Overview of Literature

Throughout the United States, there are diverse procedures for identifying and serving students who are gifted and students who have disabilities. Practices of identifying and serving twice-exceptional students, or those students who are gifted and have learning disabilities concurrently, are very unclear. In addition to this problem, there is not a clear definition of twice-exceptional students, although most researchers agree that there are three subgroups of children whose twice-exceptionality remains unrecognized. These subgroups are: identified gifted students who have subtle learning disabilities; unidentified students whose gifts and disabilities are concealed by average achievement; and identified learning disabled students who are also gifted (Baum, 1990; Brody & Mills, 1997; Norton, Hartwell-Hunnicutt, & Norton, 1996).

There are a range of reasons for the difficulty in identifying and serving gifted students with learning disabilities. One of the most cited causes is that stereotypical expectations of either gifted students or students with learning disabilities curb the recognition of twice-exceptional students (Whitmore, 1987). The literature also shows that teachers and other professionals in education are not trained sufficiently in this area and that inappropriate identification procedures hinder identification and service delivery (Coleman & Gallagher, 1992; Dansinger, 1998; Perkerson, 1999). Finally, a lack of policy and procedures, as well as funding, contribute to the challenge (Boodoo, Bradley, Frontera, Pitts, & Wright, 1989; Coleman, 1995).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the issues surrounding students who are gifted and also have learning disabilities, and to investigate how the context of the school affects the identification and service of these students.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Practices in all aspects of gifted education, and to a lesser degree, special education, are varied throughout the United States. The practice of identifying and serving twice-exceptional students, students who have disabilities and are gifted, is even more vague. Many people do not understand that a child can have learning problems or other disabilities and also be talented in academics or other areas. Because of this misunderstanding, gifted children who also have learning problems are rarely identified and are usually not well served by schools (Brody & Mills, 1997). Following is a review of definitions and issues surrounding gifted children with disabilities.

Definitions

Definitions of disabilities.

There is very little variance among the federal definitions and most state definitions of disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, (1997) defines “child with a disability” as a child:

With mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

Ohio also uses the previous definition to identify a child with a disability. The above disabilities mentioned are not further defined within IDEA, with the exception of “specific learning disability,” which is the same as the Ohio Department of Education definition for specific learning disability described below.

Ohio recognizes the following disability categories: autism, cognitive disability (mental retardation), deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment. While these are all defined in law, because of the focus of this study, only specific learning disability is defined here according to Ohio Department of Education (2001) guidelines:
“Specific Learning Disability” means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor handicaps, or mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

Definitions of giftedness.

Experts have developed many different definitions of giftedness. Experts in the area of gifted education, the federal government, and state education agencies have all explained giftedness in various ways. Many definitions have developed throughout history since Terman’s definition formed in the early 1920s. The children he defined as gifted were a very exceptional group. Followed throughout their lifetimes, they have been brighter, more successful, more success-oriented, in better health, and better adjusted socially than other people. The families of children he identified were also slanted toward middle class, urban, and white families (Bireley & Genshaft, 1991).

Unquestionably, these characteristics do not fit all of the children who are now identified or should be identified as gifted. Others since Terman have developed other definitions of giftedness. Gardner (1983), Sternberg (1985), and Dabrowski and Piechowski (1977) have all focused on the range of talents and gifts and the levels of intelligence. In 1978, Renzulli discussed his three-part definition of giftedness and the issue of task commitment, which revolves around the question of whether someone is gifted if the gifts are not used productively. His other two components include above-average intelligence and creativity, and all three components must be met to be considered gifted. The chief benefit of these definitions of giftedness is that students do not have to demonstrate strengths in all areas of intelligence to be considered gifted.

The federal government’s definition of giftedness has remained steady with few changes. Recently, however, Congress recognized that gifted students are very diverse. In the “Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1999,” the Congress found that:

Gifted and talented students give evidence of high performance capability in specific academic fields, or in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, and require services or activities not ordinarily provided by a
school in order to fully develop such capabilities. Gifted and talented students are from all cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic groups. Some such students have disabilities and for some, English is not their first language. Many students from diverse backgrounds have been historically underrepresented in gifted education programs.

In this act, the term “gifted and talented” is given meaning by each State or local educational agency.

In 1999, Ohio Department of Education defined giftedness in Identification and Services for Children Who are Gifted as “students who perform or show potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared to others of their age, experience, or environment.” Ohio goes further to describe four areas of giftedness, including a) superior cognitive ability, b) specific academic ability, c) creative thinking ability, and d) visual or performing arts ability, which are described below.

a) Superior cognitive ability: In the preceding twenty-four months, the child must have scored two standard deviations above the mean on an approved individual standardized intelligence test.

b) Specific academic ability: In the preceding twenty-four months, the child has performed at or above the ninety-fifth percentile at the national level on an approved individual or group standardized achievement test of specific academic ability in that field.

c) Creative thinking ability: In the preceding twenty-four months, the child has scored one standard deviation above the mean on an approved individual or group intelligence test and also did one of the following: a) attained a sufficient score on an approved individual group or individual test of creative ability or b) shown sufficient performance on an approved checklist of creative behaviors.

d) Visual or performing arts ability: In the preceding twenty-four months, the child has a) shown through a display of work, an audition, or other performance, superior ability in a visual or performing arts area and b) meet the requirements of superior ability on an approved checklist of behaviors related to a specific arts area.
Definitions of twice-exceptional.

Like the definitions for giftedness, there are various definitions of students who are twice exceptional. Much of this is due to the confusion over the merging of the definitions of “gifted” and definitions of disabilities, such as “learning disabled” or “physical disabilities” and so on (Norton, Hartwell-Hunnicutt, & Norton, 1996). Karnes, Shwedel, and Lewis (1983) defined twice-exceptional children as children whose full progress is being hindered from physical, social-emotional, sensory, and/or learning problems and who show indication of being functionally or potentially gifted and talented. Brody and Mills (1997) identify twice-exceptional children as students who “possess an outstanding gift or talent and are capable of high performance, but who also have a learning disability that makes some aspect of academic achievement difficult” (p. 282).

Most experts recognize that there are at least three subgroups of children whose twice exceptionality remains unrecognized (Baum, 1990; Brody and Mills, 1997; Norton, Hartwell-Hunnicutt, & Norton, 1996). These subgroups are described regarding twice-exceptional students who have learning disabilities, but they can be applied to students who are served under special education in other areas, such as physical disabilities. These categories are: a) identified gifted students who have subtle learning disabilities, b) unidentified students whose gifts and disabilities are concealed by average achievement, and c) identified learning disabled students who are also gifted.

Identified gifted students who have subtle learning disabilities. These children are identified as gifted because of high achievement or intelligence test scores. They may demonstrate high verbal abilities, while other areas, such as spelling or handwriting, may be poor. They might be sloppy, neglectful, and disorganized. Often, divergence between the student’s expected and actual performance may widen as the child grows older.

Unidentified students whose gifts and disabilities are concealed by average achievement. These students are straining to stay at grade level in their schoolwork. Their high intellectual ability is working to balance weaknesses caused by a disability that has not been identified. These students do not show exceptional behaviors of any type, so they are difficult to recognize and identify.
Identified learning disabled students who are also gifted. These students usually perform poorly in school, and are first recognized because of what they are unable to do, rather than what talents they possess. People in the student’s life, such as teachers and parents, become focused on the student’s problem and pay little attention to the student’s assets and interests. Baum (1990) explains that this group is most at risk because of the negative message of being labeled with a learning disability: that there is something wrong with the student that needs to be fixed before anything else can happen for the student. These students are also often found to be off-task, daydreaming, and prone to becoming easily frustrated by their teachers.

Identification Procedures and Service Delivery

Federal procedures for gifted and talented students.

In 1999, Congress issued the “Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1999” to “give gifted and talented students the opportunity to develop their capabilities.” In this Act, they stated several findings, including that there is currently no Federal requirement to identify or serve gifted and talented students in the United States, and that there are approximately three million of these students. They also found that State laws vary widely, which has resulted in a substantial inconsistency in available services for gifted and talented students. In addition, some states and school districts assign funds to educate gifted and talented students, but many do not. Finally, Congress acknowledged that gifted and talented students have special educational needs that are not met through the opportunities and experiences generally available in regular education classrooms.

The purpose of the “Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1999” is to provide grants to States to support classes, programs, and other services that are intended to meet the needs of gifted and talented students in all grade levels. Because there are no Federal requirements for educating gifted and talented students, this Act does not specify identification procedures or service practices; it only provides the course of action for obtaining grant funding for programs and activities toward gifted and talented education.

Federal procedures for students with disabilities.

Unlike the “Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1999,” IDEA (1997) does give guiding principles for the identification and service delivery of students with
disabilities. Section 614 of IDEA specifies these procedures. In particular, the process for evaluations, eligibility determinations, initiating and completing individualized education programs, and making educational placements is outlined. However, individual states also have regulations for identification and service that the schools in those states use as guidelines for the identification process.

Ohio procedures for gifted and talented students.

In 1999, the Ohio Department of Education released the *Identification and Services for Children Who are Gifted*, which details the requirement that school districts develop plans for identification and services for students who are gifted. The State also developed a list of approved instruments that can be used to identify children who are gifted. However, each district must adopt their own district identification plan that must contain certain elements outlined in the law.

The requirements for services for children who are gifted are also broadly outlined. Each District Board of Education may include different options along a continuum of services, such as grade acceleration, cluster grouping, self-contained classrooms, magnet schools, honors classes, and post-secondary enrollment options, as well as others. Districts must also differentiate the instruction, and may do this through things such as replacement of the regular curriculum, curriculum compacting, exploration of career options, and mentorships. Each District must provide a written educational plan for these students that describes how that student will be served. Although each district must submit their identification and service plan, they are *not required to implement their service plan*. This is very different from the Ohio procedures for identifying children with disabilities, which are fairly specific and must be put into practice.

Ohio procedures for students with disabilities.

The *Rules for the Education of Handicapped Children* (1982) outlines the regulations for identifying and providing services to children with disabilities. The process begins with preevaluation activities, which include: documenting any interventions attempted; providing the parents of the child with a suspected disability with written notice of procedural safeguards; and acquiring parental consent for the evaluation. The next step is the multifactored evaluation (MFE). The MFE requires descriptive evaluation in all areas related to the specific disability. For children suspected
of having a specific learning disability, an evaluation is required in the following areas: a) general intelligence; b) academic performance; c) vision, hearing, and motor abilities; d) communicative status; and e) social and emotional status. If a severe discrepancy between achievement and ability which adversely affects his or her educational performance to such a degree that special education and related services are needed, the child is identified as learning disabled.

Once the MFE team has found that a child has a disability of any kind, an Individual Education Program (IEP) conference must be held. The IEP team reviews the MFE report, determines the nature and degree of special education services needed, and develops an IEP in which the child is educated in the least restrictive environment. For a child with a specific learning disability, the IEP describe the instruction that will be provided for the child in one or more of the areas where a deficit was found by the MFE. Program options for this instruction comprise of: a) supplemental services; b) individual/small group instruction; c) special class/learning center; and, d) home instruction. Instruction for a child with a specific learning disability can include one or a combination of more of any of these program options.

Problems with the Identification of Twice-Exceptional Students

Few studies have been conducted that have focused on the identification procedures of gifted learning disabled children. In 1989, Boodoo, Bradley, Frontera, Pitts, and Wright investigated the identification procedures for these students in Texas. They sent one form of surveys to special education centers and another form to directors of gifted and talented programs. The special educators were asked about whether learning disabled students were being served in gifted programs, who recommended them, and the reasons behind whether or not they were receiving services. The gifted and talented coordinators were asked for the district definition of giftedness, what services were available for gifted students, the criteria used for identification, and the number of students with learning disabilities who were referred or admitted to the program. From the special education survey, they found that approximately 91% of the districts that responded did not identify any gifted learning disabled students. The results of the gifted program survey showed that no gifted learning disabled students were identified for the gifted program in 77% of the districts that responded.
Grimm conducted a similar study in Minnesota in 1995. In contrast to the Texas study, she found that many gifted students with disabilities were being served in gifted programs in Minnesota. Seventy-seven percent of the responding coordinators in special education reported having students with disabilities in gifted programs. In addition, 81% of the responding gifted education coordinators showed that gifted students with disabilities were being served in the gifted program. These results are very different from those of Boodoo et al., illustrating the differences in identification among different areas of the United States.

Despite the positive findings of the Minnesota study, there are still many states like Texas, where gifted students with disabilities are being overlooked or ignored. There are various things that contribute to the problem of identifying twice-exceptional students. Some of the most outstanding reasons are described here.

Conventional expectations.

One reason students who are gifted and learning disabled are underserved is that educators and parents often hold stereotypic ideas of children who are gifted and children who have learning disabilities (Whitmore, 1987). Children with disabilities, their parents, and their teachers may ignore signs of superior intelligence because they put more focus on the disability and the stereotypical expectations of that disability (Whitmore & Maker, 1985). Conversely, the criteria many schools use in the referral process is based on student “success” and is established through features such as positive behavior, grades, and work completion. Many bright students with learning disabilities are not below grade level in their achievement and exhibit these positive qualities, so they are passed over for referrals for learning disabilities (Dansinger, 1998).

The literature does describe possible characteristics of children who are gifted and have learning disabilities (Cline & Schwartz, 1999; Norton, Hartwell-Hunnicutt, & Norton, 1996). They include: strong verbal language; strong problem-solving skills; extreme curiosity; leadership abilities; unusual imagination; creativity; advanced comprehension of concepts; superior analytical skills; and fast recall of information verbally. Weaknesses of these children might include: lack of motivation and attention, poor self-concept; limitations in academic areas; problems staying focused on a task; poor memory; lack of organization; sensitivity to criticism; anxiousness and frustration;
and boredom. Hughes (1995) has also illustrated some contradictions found in children who are gifted and have learning disabilities. For example, the child may have poor memory for facts, yet has superb comprehension. They may favor complex and challenging work, but become distracted easily and set impractical goals for themselves. These paradoxes make identification even more complex.

**Insufficient training of educators.**

Related to the obstacle of stereotypic expectations for these children, professionals are usually not given instruction on twice-exceptional students. Special educators are given little instruction in giftedness and Gifted educators rarely study learning disabilities. Additionally, regular classroom teachers are given little training in either area (Perkerson, 1999). Furthermore, many professionals are not aware that both gifted education and special education services may be necessary or are available for some students, so referrals are never made (Dansinger, 1998). Because educators do not have specific information about the attributes of these students, the classroom teacher may concentrate on disruptive behaviors and learning deficits instead of the student’s abilities (St. Jean, 1996).

Strengthening this claim, Minner (1990) states that regular classroom teachers and gifted education teachers are less likely to refer students with learning disabilities for gifted services. In 1987, Minner, Prater, Bloodworth, and Walker examined the influence that the Learning Disability and Physical Handicap labels have on regular education teachers when recommending students for referral and placement of these students in gifted programs. Sixty-eight teachers from three states were randomly assigned to one of three treatment conditions. Each group was given a short vignette that described a gifted child: one-third had a vignette that described a student with a learning disability; one-third had a vignette that described a student with a physical handicap; and one-third had a vignette that described a student with no labels. The teachers were asked whether they would refer the student in their vignette for possible placement in a gifted program and if they would preliminarily recommend that the student be placed in a gifted program. They found that teachers thought that the nonlabeled student and the student with a physical handicap would be placed in a gifted program to a significantly greater degree than the identically described student with a learning disability. Minner found a similar
effect in 1990 when he studied how 197 teachers of gifted children responded to different vignettes. The vignettes either described a gifted student with either a learning disability or with no label, and from a low, middle, or high socioeconomic status background. As in the previous study, the teachers rated their willingness to refer the student for a gifted program after reading the vignette. The results indicated that gifted educators were significantly influenced by the presence of the learning disability label and the social class of the student. The authors propose that a lack of knowledge about twice-exceptional students and stereotypical beliefs about gifted and learning disabled students might instigate the low numbers of referrals and the possible identification of these students. They also suggest that more research needs to be done to investigate the influence preservice and inservice programs have on the attitudes teachers hold toward special populations of students.

Another problem related to teacher training is that there is little collaboration or communication between teachers of regular, gifted, and special education. When educators fail to cooperate, communicate, and collaborate, misunderstandings and inaction often result. The first step in providing services for students with special needs is to be aware that cooperation, communication, and collaboration are crucial (Dansinger, 1998).

A lack of training in the identification procedures of twice-exceptional students also hinders recognition of these students. However, this may not be completely because of a lack of training, but a problem with the identification procedures themselves.

**Inappropriate identification procedures.**

The conventional methods educators often use are not always sufficient to identify twice-exceptional students. Identification protocols do not consider the unique qualities of this group of students and, as a result, many twice-exceptional students do not meet the qualifications for either program. Among the population of twice-exceptional students, documentation of underachievement must be evident before one can even screen for learning disabilities (Beckley, 1998). This is a problem because many twice-exceptional students are able to compensate for their learning problems. On the other hand, Coleman and Gallagher (1992) found that students with disabilities are frequently not identified for gifted education when traditional methods of identification are used.
Researchers have proposed possible reasons for this, including: standard measures and norms are often used (Whitmore & Maker, 1985); many tests require responding that is difficult for those students with physical and/or sensory disabilities (Johnsen & Corn, 1989); and students with communication problems may not respond well on heavily verbal tests (St. Jean, 1996).

One method for identifying students with learning disabilities and twice-exceptional students is evidence of an aptitude-achievement discrepancy. Brody and Mills (1997) explain that gifted students who have learning disabilities in a related area should demonstrate evidence of a discrepancy between their high ability and their achievement. They state that even though the use of an IQ-achievement discrepancy has been challenged by researchers for use of detecting learning disabilities, this evidence is especially important for identifying twice-exceptional students. Their reasons for this is that the somewhat high achievement of many of these students conceals a disability unless their achievement is compared to their ability. However, they agree that, as with the identification of students with learning disabilities, identification decisions should rely on professional judgment built on a multifactored evaluation, in which standardized tests are only one component.

Other researchers have promoted additional means of identifying these students that can be used in combination with standardized tests. Some of these include portfolio-type assessments that provide insight into the child’s thought processes and uniqueness of ideas; creativity tests, such as the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking; the Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (SRBCSS); and peer and self-nominations (Davis & Rimm, 1994; Eisenberg & Epstein, 1981; Vaidya, 1993).

Lack of policy.

Most states and school districts have policies regarding students with disabilities and students who are gifted as separate units, but may not have policies that pertain to twice-exceptional students. This is unfortunate because of the reality that the education of these children presents distinctive problems that are not solved by addressing the disability and the giftedness separately (Pendarvis & Grossi, 1980). The absence of procedures to identify twice-exceptional students in most public schools leads to the lack
of awareness of the occurrence of students who are both gifted and learning disabled (Boodoo, Bradley, Frontera, Pitts, & Wright, 1989).

**Lack of funding.**

Another reason many gifted students with learning disabilities are not identified and involved in gifted programs is the lack of funding for such programs (Coleman, 1995). Because there is not adequate federal or state funding, many schools have difficulty sustaining gifted programs for any children. In addition, there are questions about who is responsible for the costs of identifying and serving these students (Perkerson, 1999). In Ohio, even though school districts must identify gifted children, they are not obligated to provide services to them. One reason for this may be that the state cannot guarantee financial support for programming.

**Perceptions and Attitudes of Gifted Children with Learning Disabilities**

There is very little research on gifted people with learning disabilities, especially research on the opinions and insights of those people who struggle with disabilities yet are gifted. In 1995, Reis, Neu, and McGuire conducted extensive interviews with twelve high ability college students with learning disabilities and their parents. They used three methods of data collection: records and testing information, written responses to an open-ended questionnaire, and in-depth interviews each student and one of their parents. Many of the participants had been identified as having a learning disability late in their school careers, possibly because their high ability concealed some sign of their learning disability. Their mixed academic achievements caused many of them not to be included in gifted programs. The subjects reported many negative school experiences, such as difficulty with parents, social problems, and frustration with certain academic areas. Positive school experiences often revolved around the individual teacher support they received throughout school. Parents easily recalled their children’s negative school experiences and claim that the school systems “did not know what to do” with their children. Students did note that they had many positive out-of-school experiences that helped them form positive personal attitudes and personal characteristics. Some of the positive personal characteristics the researchers found in the subjects were high motivation, a high level of task commitment, perseverance, and endurance.
Although this study was carried out with college students, it does provide some insight about how the perceptions and experiences of gifted students with learning disabilities are related to overcoming the obstacle of having a learning disability. Much more research is needed in this area to further understand the experiences of these children and to figure out the best way to serve them.

**A Qualitative Approach to Research**

Like the previous study, this study will use qualitative methodology. Qualitative research involves interpreting and comprehending the subjective occurrences of an individual’s interactions with institutions such as schools and families (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). In a phenomenological approach, the researcher approaches the study with an open mind and “carries out investigations in which the conclusions are post hoc rather than a priori” (Lancy, 1993; p.9). The investigator completes the observations, recording and classification, and makes conclusions, keeping in mind to portray the reality of the participants.

Another essential component of the qualitative approach is the use of “grounded theory.” This model is developed from the idea that theory should be grounded in the data, or emerge from the data. Once information is obtained through observations, interviews, and record reviews, speculations and theories can be formed (Lancy, 1993).

There are numerous advantages to using qualitative methodology. This research allows relatively unstructured interviewing and observation in natural settings. The researcher can attend to the social transactions that occur as well as collect relevant documents and records. Another advantage of this approach is the use of triangulation, in which different interviews and perceptions of the same subject or behavior are examined. Triangulation helps lessen the threat of unreliable or invalid research, which is a common criticism of qualitative research. With this feature, any incorrect misinterpretations become visible in the contrast of different vantage points (Dooley, 2001).

The individual’s perceptions are of principal significance in a study of this nature. Through interviews with each relevant person, it will be possible to obtain more detailed information about each student’s situation in their natural environment. This is important to learning about the context of the school and social transactions between the professionals, student, and parent, and how that influences the student’s education. Also,
the relaxed and relatively informal tone of the interview should help the participants feel more comfortable sharing their personal views and professional judgment.

Purpose of Study

There is a very small amount of information available in the literature about twice-exceptional students and their needs. Even more limited is the research on these students’ perceptions of their school experiences and how their education is affected by having the dual label of gifted and learning disabled. In addition, how do the people who live and work with these children feel about the child’s circumstances? As knowledge about twice-exceptional students slowly increases, it is important to understand what educators and twice-exceptional students experience when managing and coping with the issues that surround this label. This study will try to answer some of these questions.

Research Questions

There are many questions and challenges that surround the identification and service programming of students who are gifted and learning disabled, yet there is a lack of information in the literature about what children and their educators experience because of this label and how the challenges of this label affect their education. This study focused on practice in Ohio. The questions this study sought to answer are:

1. How are these children identified?
2. What types of service or interventions have been put into place as a result of the gifted/learning disabled label?
3. What kinds of programming do educators and parents see as ideal for twice-exceptional students?
4. What are the various informants’ perceptions of the gifted/learning disabled label?
5. What are the various informants’ perceptions of the resulting services?
6. How are the contextual situations affecting the circumstances and the perceptions of the informants?
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Participants

Participants consisted of 4 male students in grades 4-6 who had been identified both as being gifted and as having learning disabilities, as well as at least four people who worked with each student. For three of the participants, these people included the student’s school psychologist, the regular education teacher, the special education teacher, the gifted education teacher, and one of the student’s parents. The fourth participant’s former gifted education teacher was unavailable because she no longer taught at the student’s school. The students, along with the relevant individuals involved in his education, were considered part of that student’s “team.” All of the students attended schools of approximately 600-900 students in rural/suburban school districts. The students and their teams are further described below.

Participant #1: Adam was an 11-year-old student in fifth grade at an elementary school that served students in kindergarten through sixth grade. He was referred for a multi-factored evaluation (MFE) in spring of his fourth grade year, with the Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) determining that he possessed superior cognitive ability but that he had a learning disability in the areas of mathematics and written language. His educational plan outlined services for mathematics and written language that were delivered in the classroom and, in addition, he participated in the gifted program for social studies. Adam, the school psychologist and Adam’s mother were interviewed, as well as his gifted educator, special educator, and regular education teacher.

Participant #2: Sam was a 12-year-old student in fifth grade at an intermediate school that contained students in the fourth and fifth grades. His first multi-factored evaluation took place in spring of his second grade year when he attended another school out of the district. He was determined to have a specific learning disability (SLD) in the areas of basic reading skills and written expression. His initial Individual Education Plan (IEP) called for him to receive help in the areas of reading and written expression for 45 minutes per day with the special educator, as well as gifted programming. After his second MFE in spring of his fifth grade year, he continued to be eligible for the same services. However, due to his progress toward his goals, Sam no longer required as much
direct service from the special educator. Sam only received 50 minutes of direct service per week. In fifth grade, Sam attended an enrichment class every day. Sam, the school psychologist, his mother, his gifted educator, special educator, and his language arts teacher were interviewed.

Participant #3: Russ was a 9-year-old fourth grader at an elementary school for kindergartners through fourth graders. Russ first qualified for SLD services in spring of his second grade year, although he had been receiving intervention in the areas of reading and written expression since kindergarten. He worked with the SLD tutor for 30 minutes daily on reading and writing. He also began receiving some enrichment services during third grade. In fourth grade, Russ attended his gifted math class daily and was pulled-out for social studies and science enrichment once per week. Russ, the school psychologist, his mother, gifted educator, SLD tutor, and gifted educator were interviewed.

Participant #4: Mike was a 13-year-old sixth grader who began receiving special education services in kindergarten for speech/language difficulties as well as sensorimotor problems. He attended a middle school for fifth and sixth graders. Mike was retained in kindergarten and began receiving services for written expression, mathematics, and reading during this time. From first through third grade, Mike’s IEP goals were specific to speech and language and written expression, and by fourth grade, Mike’s speech/language services were discontinued. At the time of this study, Mike had made good progress and was receiving services in the area of written expression through an SLD tutor on an as-needed basis. He began receiving math enrichment in fourth grade and continued through the first half of fifth grade, when it was decided that Mike would no longer participate in enrichment. Mike, his father, the school psychologist, his SLD tutor, and his math teacher were interviewed. His fifth grade gifted teacher was no longer a teacher at the school and was unavailable to be interviewed.

Process of Selection

Participants were recruited by contacting school psychologists and gifted educators in the southwestern Ohio area. Information about who can give names of potential participants, parent permission, and the typical age range of identified students in that school were obtained from the initial phone contact. Once possible participants were identified, the researcher visited the school to meet them and hand out letters.
explaining the research and consent forms. If the participants were unavailable during that initial visit, they were contacted via telephone or email to schedule an interview time. Parents were initially contacted by the school psychologist, who explained the study and ascertained if the parent was willing to participate and have his or her son participate. Once all potential participants consented to being interviewed for the study, interviews were scheduled.

Due to the low incidence of students who have been identified as both gifted and having learning disabilities, all of those who consented to participate in the study were chosen to participate. In addition, only males were referred for the study since there were no females who had been identified as gifted and as having a learning disability in the schools contacted by the researcher.

Materials

The materials consisted of a semi-structured interview of 30 minutes to 60 minutes in length for each category of participant (i.e. one interview for each student, one interview for each school psychologist, etc.). The interview contained questions that covered identification procedures for the school, how the student was identified, the services they are receiving, and their opinions about the identification process and service options. There were global questions for all interviews, along with additional questions specific to each category of participant. The interview was structured in such a way that the researcher could ask more specific questions if it was decided that more detailed information was necessary.

Audio tapes and a tape recorder were used to record each interview, with participants’ permission.

Procedures

Procedures were used that are in accordance with the grounded theory method. The inquiry occurred according to the procedures developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This model is based on the idea that theory should emerge from the data. Once information is obtained through observations, interviews, and record reviews, the researcher can form theories about the information. Following is an explanation of the procedures used in this study.

Data Collection
Phase 1: Once subjects were recruited, a site visit was scheduled with the schools. The purpose of the site visit included meeting the participants and collecting relevant background information on the child’s education. Also, this was an opportunity to learn about the school environment and context. Finally, interviews were scheduled at this time or after the visit by phone or through email.

Phase 2: The next phase was the interview phase. All interviews occurred in the students’ schools, with the exception being the students’ parents if they wished to have the interview in their home or workplace. The interview protocol was used to guide questioning. However, if new issues or relevant topics were raised during interviews, new questions were added as needed during the interview.

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted in an open-ended way, in accordance with grounded theory. It did not occur at only one point during the inquiry, but began with the very first interview and data collection. This acted to “facilitate the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 242).

As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the technique of constant comparison was used to analyze the data. This strategy entailed examining the data for categories of phenomena and experiences and for relationships between these categories. As social phenomena were classified, they were compared across the categories. The researcher generated hypotheses after examining the initial interviews and underwent modification throughout the data collection process. Because new information was continually compared with the old information, new features and relationships were ascertained. The individual stages of the data analysis are described below. The stages do not necessarily occur exclusively, but interacted with each other.

Stage 1: Unitizing: In this stage, pieces of meaningful information were extracted from all of the data. These chunks of meaning, or units, were heuristic, or aimed at answering a research question. Furthermore, the units were interpretable when there was no additional information other than the broad context in which the interview was conducted. These units were found in observations, the education background
information, and in the interviews. After finding a unit, it was recorded and coded by the source, type of respondent, and data collection episode (such as interview #1).

Stage 2: Categorizing: As the units were recorded, themes, or categories began to emerge. Units that “looked” or “felt alike” were put together and formed into categories. Once categories were formed, the properties of these categories were specified into a rule for inclusion into the category and the category was named. Once all the units were included into a category, the entire category set was reviewed to look for overlap and for possible relationships between the categories.

Stage 3: Delimiting the theory: Delimiting involved reducing the original list of categories because of the improved integration as the analysis continued. Also, the categories became saturated at this stage. This meant that the categories were so well defined that there was no longer a need to add further examples to them. The theory emerged at this stage.

Stage 4: Writing the theory: The purpose of the case report was be to improve the reader’s understanding of the experiences and perception of twice-exceptional students and the educators that worked with them. It includes an explanation of the concern, a thorough description of the school context and the interview findings, and a discussion of the outcomes of the inquiry, or a working hypothesis.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Results were analyzed with respect to the research questions. The findings are summarized below.

How were these children identified?

For all of the participants with the exception of one, the identification of the learning disability and the identification of giftedness were made using separate measures. Three of the students were identified as having learning disabilities through standardized testing and one was identified through the Intervention-Based Assessment process in their schools. One student was identified as gifted through individual standardized testing and the remaining three students were identified through the group administered IOWA test.

Adam was identified as gifted through standardized intelligence and achievement testing when he was referred for a learning disability during fourth grade. The results of the intelligence test indicated that he had a high total IQ score, but that there was a severe discrepancy between that and the math calculation section of the achievement test. Adam did not remember very much about being assessed as having a learning disability, although he did remember having to “talk with some people.” When asked how he qualified for the enrichment/gifted program, he said, “some people say by passing a test and getting good grades on that test. And I got the score I need for [the gifted program].” Adam’s mother recalled “a process of doing lots of different testing” and “different scholastic ability tests…it was just the testing and the parent meetings and finally, the IEP. It was a long process.” The school psychologist at Adam’s school said that his fourth grade teacher had referred Adam because of concerns about his writing and math skills, as well as emotional concerns such as “bouts of crying and refusing to do work.” A review of records at Adam’s previous school revealed similar concerns, so they decided to complete an MFE. She mentioned that he had high ability scores in math and language, and that there were discrepancies between his achievement scores in these areas. However, based on state standards of that time, the only area of severe discrepancy between ability and achievement was in the area of math calculations. Because of the poor quality of his writing skills compared to his ability, however, they believed he had a
learning disability in the area of writing as well. Adam’s identification as gifted “came as a result of the multi-factored evaluation” and was something the team thought “would be helpful for increasing his self-concept and his own understanding of how writing really was.” The gifted teacher said that the school psychologist “gave him a WISC test and he scored a 127. And even though that’s not enough to enter the program, because his achievement scores were still lower, he got in with creativity.”

Standardized testing was also used to identify that Sam had a learning disability in second grade, but he was not identified for the gifted program until the school-wide IOWA testing performed in fourth grade. Sam did not recall how he was identified as having a learning disability, but he did remember receiving help from various tutors over the years and during summers. He said that his third grade teacher “helped me realize I was gifted in math and science.” When Sam’s mother was asked about the process Sam underwent to be identified as having a learning disability, she said that he had experienced difficulties learning his alphabet and other pre-reading skills in preschool. She said his teachers said that Sam was “being defiant.” Sam was diagnosed with ADHD during this time and began taking medication. However, he continued to have problems learning the alphabet and simple words in kindergarten. An evaluation done at a nearby hospital revealed that he had a “procity issue as far as listening and tonality” and Sam began receiving therapy from a speech and hearing specialist, who told his parents that he had a central processing disorder. In first and second grade, Sam was attending school at a private school and receiving outside tutoring. Sam began attending school in his current school district in third grade, when he qualified for an IEP. Because his evaluation was performed while he was at the private school, the school psychologist and teachers had little information about the MFE process. However, the school psychologist mentioned that “he was referred primarily for his reading and word attack problems, time on task, also. And then it was after this was written that they came to [his current district] and he was identified as gifted.”

Russ was identified as having a learning disability through the IBA process in his school. He began receiving intervention in first grade and was formally identified as having a learning disability through standardized testing at the end of first grade. Russ gave an interesting answer when he was asked what types of things he had to do to work
with the LD tutor. He said, “I took a test so I could get into [the LD tutor’s] class and I guess I had the IQ. A very high IQ or I passed real good and I got to go to [the LD tutor].” He understood that he had high ability but did not mention that he had a low score in the area of reading achievement. When asked if he remembered anything about that test, he said “blocks that you had to put in certain ways. And this one paper with adding. That’s about it.” Russ’ mom also remembered the testing. She said that he saw the school psychologist and she tested him at the end of first grade. She also recalled being interviewed. Like Sam, the school psychologist and the teachers, with the exception of the LD tutor, did not participate in Russ’ initial MFE, so they had limited information. The school psychologist did mention that the IBA process was only getting started when Russ was identified, so he would have been identified through standardized testing. His LD tutor recalled that when she began working with Russ in first grade, he had extensive trouble reading and that he would often say things like, “Well, I don’t know how to do this. I can’t read this. What does this mean?” Everyone interviewed understood how Russ became eligible for gifted services. He was eligible for the gifted/enrichment classes through scores he received on the IOWA test in third grade. Russ showed clear understanding of this when he said, “we took this thing called the IOWA test and I guess I passed what they wanted me to do. Reading was the only thing I didn’t pass. Which, oh well.” His mother also remembered Russ being identified for the gifted program after receiving high scores on the IOWA test.

Mike had met eligibility requirements for special education in the area of speech and language in preschool and was eligible for services because of a specific learning disability for reading, writing, and math as well as speech in kindergarten. Since first grade, however, Mike was only receiving SLD services in the area of writing and received speech services until fourth grade. He was identified through standardized assessments. Mike remembered first getting help for writing “in first or second grade or both.” He remembered all the LD tutors he had had through elementary school, but did not know the process he had gone through to be identified as having a learning disability. His father provided much information on Mike’s educational history. When Mike was three years old, it was discovered that he had a hearing problem. He began receiving speech therapy at this point. Mike’s father said that Mike actually began working with an
LD tutor in kindergarten for reading, writing, and math and that his teachers also reported attention problems at this point. Mike’s father said that he believes many of Mike’s early learning problems were actually due to his hearing problems, and that once he had surgery on his eardrum and received tutoring, Mike “went from behind to ahead.” He was also aware that Mike was not going to have an IEP after this year. As with Sam and Russ, Mike’s school psychologist and teachers were not involved with his initial MFE and therefore did not have a great deal of information. They all knew that he had been identified in elementary school and that it was done using standardized ability and achievement tests before the IBA process had been used for identification. All of the educators understood how Mike had been identified as gifted. He was eligible for gifted/enrichment services due to high scores on the IOWA test taken in fourth grade. Mike did not know how he had been identified as gifted, but did remember going to enrichment classes during fourth grade and for the first half of fifth grade. Lastly, a follow-up on Mike’s case revealed that Mike was re-evaluated at the end of the school year and was released from special education services due to his success that year in the regular classroom without specialized education.

**What types of service or interventions were put in place as a result of the gifted/learning disabled label?**

There were no services put in place as a result of the gifted/learning disabled label combined. Services for the children’s learning disabilities and giftedness were separate. All students had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and all received modifications that addressed their learning disability, such as extended time for tests or modified assignments. One student, Adam, had a special education aide that worked with him in the regular education classroom to address his IEP goals. The other three students worked with an LD tutor once per day every day, usually for the duration of a class period. However, at the time of his interview, Mike was only working with his tutor on an as-needed basis due to his academic progress during that school year.

Gifted services offered to these students included pull-out enrichment services a few times a week and pull-out services in specific classes that the students attended in lieu of the regular education class (for example, the student would attend a gifted math class instead of the regular math class with the rest of his class). For instance, Sam and
Russ attended a pull-out enrichment class a few times a week. These were not related to the regular curriculum. Sam’s class was a gifted class that covered general “enrichment” topics, such as a “mystery” unit. Russ attended an enrichment social studies class and a science class that were unrelated to the regular curriculum that each met once per week. Russ was also a part of a pull-out gifted math class that met every day and focused on the grade level curriculum. Adam attended a pull-out social studies class every day instead of the regular social studies class that related to the regular curriculum. For these classes, the students received their grades for these subjects from the gifted teacher. Mike decided not to participate in any enrichment/gifted activities in his school during his 6th grade school year, although he had participated in a general enrichment pull-out class during 5th grade. Table 1 shows the four students’ learning disability and gifted identification and educational experiences.

Figure 1

*Descriptions of Participants, How They Were Identified, and Resulting Services*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>How was student identified?</th>
<th>Types of services/interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Standardized test – discrepancy formula</td>
<td>Individualized intelligence test • IEP • Modifications • In-class special education aide Pull-out for curriculum-related Social Studies class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Standardized test – discrepancy formula</td>
<td>Group administered IOWA test • IEP • Modifications • LD tutor Pull-out for general enrichment class a few times/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russ</td>
<td>IBA process and standardized test – discrepancy formula</td>
<td>Group administered IOWA test • IEP • Modifications • LD tutor Pull-out for curriculum-related Math class. Pull-out for general enrichment in science, Social Studies once/week each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Standardized test – discrepancy formula</td>
<td>Group administered IOWA test • IEP • Modifications • LD tutor (as-needed basis) Did not receive services during 6th grade, pull-out in 5th grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What were the various informants’ perceptions of the gifted/learning disability label?

When asked questions intended to find out the participants’ perceptions of the gifted/learning disability label itself and its benefits and drawbacks, four ideas emerged from the data. The first was that, for these children, being identified as being twice exceptional has provided the student with extra support and practice in both the gifted and learning disability areas that have been identified. For example, a child considered gifted in math but who has a learning disability in the area of reading received support in reading and received math enrichment. Twelve participants’ responses contained this idea. All four students mentioned this. For example, Adam said that his special education teacher “helps me with some of my papers and she gets some students, and whenever we have a paper, like at times we can’t write, we go down to the conference room and we do the paper together.” Adam’s school psychologist and regular teacher also talked about the this benefit of the dual label. Sam’s regular teacher explained how the dual label has helped him:

Well, it’s very beneficial to him because he gets a chance to show off his giftedness in math, and then he gets to go up with all the [gifted] students, but at the same time, he gets a chance to get that extra help that he needs, and I think it really helps him feel good about himself because, by having that extra time to do things in language arts, it’s been very helpful to him.

She also expressed her approval of the programming at her school because it addresses all of Sam’s needs:

Well, I think that the program that they have in place here is good, where they get the services of both where, if they’re gifted, they get a chance to be in the [gifted] program so they can get the accelerated materials that they need and then at the same time get the extra help that they need. And then they end up in a regular classroom setting with everybody so it’s kind of a happy medium, so I think that the program here is very good.

Sam’s special education teacher discussed that she thought the label ensured that Sam received the additional stimulation he needed while also getting intervention from her:
I think that he gets that cognitive intervention that I can’t give him sometimes because of the other needs in the class. I think that being able to go somewhere else helps him feel like he’s getting some extra stimulation. It certainly makes me feel like he’s getting that extra that I feel like I can’t provide for him.

The school psychologist at Russ’ school also mentioned this idea. When asked about the benefits of the dual label for Russ, she replied, “Well, he gets the LD services, which he certainly needs, but he also gets the enrichment of the gifted classes.” Mike as well as his school psychologist and LD tutor said that the label has given Mike more access to resources. His LD tutor explained that because of the label, he was involved in programming where “he’s challenged and he’s able to excel in the areas that he’s really strong in. Yet, his weak areas, he also gets assistance in that area…”

Another widespread view was that the gifted/learning disability label boosts the student’s self esteem and helps them in their social status with other classmates. Ten participants conversed about how even though the student was aware of their difficulty in certain subject areas, they were more confident because they also knew that they had strengths in other areas. In addition, many commented that the student’s acceptance among other classmates increased once the student was labeled “gifted” and their classmates saw that the student was a part of the enrichment/gifted program. Only one student revealed this view. When Russ was asked how he saw himself compared to the other kids in school, he said,

Good, because there are a lot of people that I thought were very smart that thought they would make it into the advanced class and they didn’t and I realized there were only five kids…four kids, originally, that made it. (Interviewer: And you’re one of them. So that makes you feel pretty good?) Yes.

Three parents, Sam’s mother, Russ’s mother, and Mike’s father, explained how being identified as twice-exceptional has helped their children’s self-esteem. Sam’s mother explained an advantage of the dual label:

Well, I think the biggest advantage for me, as a parent, is being able to say, “it’s okay that you can’t read, because you can do other things really, really well.” And perhaps a part of why his self-esteem is so good is because he recognizes there are things he does very well. And I think it’s sad that other kids who have learning
difficulties don’t have things that they can say, “but I’m a really good…” And I think it’s up to the parents to find out what that is, even if it’s a really good soccer player or I’m really good at playing the piano or I’m really good at something. Every kid needs to be really good at something.

Russ’ mother said that a benefit has been that being identified as gifted helped Russ because “he doesn’t feel like he’s dumb. Because a lot of the kids who can’t read, they’re labeled dumb right away.”

Various teachers of all four students also commented on their students’ increased self-esteem. Russ’ LD tutor said,

Academically, I’m sure it’s wonderful. But I think, socially, it’s been a great thing for him. Because this is the guy that everybody thought, “Oh, well, you know.”

The other kids. You know, well he goes…and they don’t even say he’s LD.

Interestingly, this idea did not emerge in any of the interviews with Adam, his school psychologist, or his teachers. Indeed, Adam’s school psychologist, who had previously noted that one reason the team decided to identify Adam as gifted and include him in the gifted program was to help his self esteem, said that it may have actually done the opposite. Because Adam was only included in the social studies gifted program and not the math gifted program like all the other students identified as gifted, he was not fully included with that group. His school psychologist explained,

Many of the other students who are in that program also go – they’re more of a group that go to accelerated math together and they’ve established a lot more comrodory. Adam is not included as part of that group. He does not feel a part of that group and I don’t think the other students welcome him into that group. So, I think the drawback has been, because he doesn’t have all the strengths that those other kids have – that many of them are well adjusted socially – and because of his learning disabilities, it’s hard. They are not as accepting of Adam. So, socially, he has not blended in well at all. And in terms of the group work that they do, he doesn’t mix in or pick a part or get chosen as frequently, you know, one of the kids who is part of that group who goes to accelerated math and has strong social skills, and is also part of [the gifted program], you know they have their own
clique, so to speak...when that happens, it hasn’t enhanced his self-image in the way we had hoped initially.

Following the theme that the twice-exceptional label helped the students’ self esteem and social status were remarks that the students these people are working with are very accepting of themselves and have a clear idea of their strengths and weaknesses. Six participants brought this up during the interviews. These participants said that the students just understood and accepted that they have weaknesses in some areas and strengths in others, and that as a result, they need help in some areas and get to go to enrichment/gifted classes for the others. One student, Sam, expressed how he understands his strengths and weaknesses. When asked how he saw himself compared to the other students, he said, “Like, I see I’m gifted in some areas, but in some areas I’m not. And there are a lot of kids that are good all-around.” Later, when he discussed what the other students in the gifted program he is in are like, he said simply, “They just like to do stuff I don’t. Like, read a lot and write. They’re gifted in all subjects; I’m just in math and science.”

Sam’s gifted teacher and mother also talked about Sam’s comfort with his abilities. Two other parents, Russ’ mother and Mike’s father, discussed this at some point during their interviews. Mike’s father said this about his child’s label and resulting services:

As far as he was concerned, these are things I have to do. As far as he was concerned, it was just another obligation. Just something I got to do. He made, as I say, he’s very comfortable with this. He knows that he’s good at some things and some things, he needs help. He has adjusted to this. And he’s comfortable.

Lastly, when asked about their perceptions of the gifted/learning disability label, Three participants, Adam’s mother and gifted teacher and Sam’s mother, noted that it helps people see the student’s true potential. Instead of only being seen as a student who has general low skills, as is the risk when identifying a student as having a learning disability, participants said that people see the student as having very high potential but needing help in reaching that potential. Adam’s gifted teacher explained the reality of this circumstance when she answered a question about the benefits of the dual label for the student:
I don’t even know if…that’s a tough question, because I don’t believe in labeling. The only thing about the dual labeling, is that sometimes when kids get labeled IEP, people kind of shove them off and say, ‘Oh, they’re stupid.’ So this way, by giving him the gifted label, someone can kind of take a second look and say, ‘oh, well maybe…’ and then try and get him to do certain things or push him in a certain direction.

In conclusion, four themes emerged about the participants’ perceptions of the gifted/learning disability label. They said that the label results in services that give extra support to the student in the areas of giftedness and learning disability, that it boosts the students’ self-esteem and helps their social adjustment, that some students simply understand their abilities better, and that the label serves to help people understand what the student is truly capable of accomplishing.

**What kinds of programming did educators and parents see as ideal for twice-exceptional students?**

The most prevalent answer to this question during the interviews was that ideal programming for twice-exceptional students is a program that is individualized to the student’s needs. All but one of the adult professionals’ answers contained this idea. None of the parents mentioned this idea, however. Participants said that programming needs to take the students’ giftedness into consideration and most mentioned that this programming should take the form of pull-out services, or services that are carried out outside of the regular classroom.

For example, when asked, “What do you think is the best way to educate these students?” the school psychologist at Adam’s school answered,

I think, ideally, I would like to see a program that…where they’re special needs are met in a different way than students who are not gifted and have learning disabilities. I think that the way that LD assistance is provided…very often the students’ needs are not necessarily met because they are higher functioning than the typical student who is identified with a learning disability, but in my opinion, they’re more the classic learning disabled student, and I would like to see a program where they can be properly challenged because of the cognitive strengths that they have, but then also where some instruction could be provided to help
them move to the cognitive ability level rather than the focus being on making sure they pass.

Sam’s school psychologist stressed that the twice-exceptional student should be challenged in the subjects of their giftedness, but that alternative means to access their intelligence might be required:

Well, I think it’s kind of simplistic, but I think you have to look at their needs. I really think you have to tailor someone’s…you know, if someone’s exceptional in math, we have to challenge them, and it may not be in pull-out form, but you have to have those opportunities. I also think that because they are, their intelligence level is higher, we need to give them challenging things that, if their disability is in writing, we have to give them alternative assessments so that we can challenge their ability and their intelligence and their cognitive skills, but yet give alternative assessment.

Sam’s special education teacher gave a teacher’s perspective on the idea that the instruction for a twice-exceptional student will be different from the typical student with learning disabilities that she works with:

Well, I think you take into consideration that this is probably not the average child that has a disability where they may not necessarily need extra interpretation when they’re reading or extra interpretation when they are working on extended critical thinking activities. Being aware of the fact that they might not necessarily want you to be there all the time like some other student may want to feel that close proximity. They need some more independence. They need the ability to feel “I can do this on my own.” “She’s there if I need help” kind of attitude.

School psychologists, special educators, regular educators, and gifted educators often included the sentiment that most of all, instruction should be tailored to the individual student’s needs, and that both the student’s learning disability and giftedness must be considered when designing programming for these students.

Three participants, Adam’s mother, Russ’ school psychologist, and Mike’s special educator, included the view that instruction for twice-exceptional students should include one-on-one or small group assistance. Adam’s mother said, “As far as his writing goes, he probably needs lots of assistance, more one-on-one, I think. I think he’d be better off
in that kind of an atmosphere, rather than in a group.” Russ’ school psychologist further added to this idea when she said,

Well, I think we’ve struggled with that whole issue of pull-out versus in the classroom services. I do think, for them, small group is probably the best, just because a lot of the issues…I know last year, the gifted teacher talked with me about a couple of them are eligible in social studies or science, and then they couldn’t read the material. If it’s small group, she can make sure that they have the material read to them.

Finally, Sam’s and Russ’ parents thought that the programs should teach to their child’s specific learning style. Russ’ mother said that her child learns information easier when it is presented to him orally and that because of his difficulty with reading and writing, she believes oral tests over the material would benefit him. Sam’s mother discussed Sam’s successful experience with the Orton Gillingham (multisensory) approach to teaching reading. Referring to that approach, she expressed that, “I would like to see the school systems have the ability to find out the learning styles – if they’re kinetic learners, if they’re a visual learner, whatever it is and operate within that learning style.” After discussing how his learning style could be addressed in a learning disability program, she went on to add,

Now, the other side of the camp, with his giftedness, I would like to see them coordinate his learning styles into that area, too. So, again, if he’s a kinetic learner, then let’s get him some hands-on things to do. I signed him for several science and space camps this summer that he’s going to…he’s ecstatic about. This is a kid that’s going to go to school for the summer and is thrilled. You know, so why not let him build bottle rockets and build bridges and things like that because that’s what he likes to do. He’s not going to be one that sits down and reads about how to do these things because he’s not a reader. So, I think the gifted programs as well as the learning difficulty programs need to be geared to the child’s learning style.

Therefore, these educators and parents believed that instructional programming for gifted students with learning disabilities should be individualized to the student’s specific needs. They suggested that the form that this programming should take ranges from pull-out
services to one-on-one services to services that attend to the student’s learning style. While this ideal was promoted, it was not always perceived as being implemented. **What are the various informants’ perceptions of the resulting services of the gifted/learning disability label?**

Just as the participants told their perceptions of the ideal programming, they also gave their perceptions of the actual services. Because the gifted and learning disability services for each of the students were offered separately, the participants spoke of their opinions of the services independently. When discussing the learning disability services, two main ideas surfaced. The chief theme was that the LD services assisted the students in their area of disability and with their work in their regular classes. All four students said this, as did three other adult participants. When asked how he felt about working with the LD tutor, Russ replied:

> I like to because I want to learn how to read. (Interviewer: So she helps you with that.) Uh-huh. And some kids she kind of helps because usually when you need someone to talk to, [the regular educator] has to teach things to us but she doesn’t have much time. (Interviewer: [the LD tutor] does have time.) Yeah, she has time. [The regular educator] has other kids to worry about, too.

Mike gave a similar response when asked the same question. He said, “Well, I just - I don’t know how to describe it. But I really did enjoy working with the other tutors and [his current tutor]. Mainly because they knew how to help me.” Adam’s regular teacher said that Adam “gets more help in language because of the IEP.” Sam’s regular teacher and Mike’s LD tutor also made similar comments.

Four participants talked about a second theme: that the LD services allow them to have modifications for their assignments and tests, although this was not necessarily looked upon as a positive consequence by all respondents. Mike’s school psychologist discussed how Mike would not be able to do well if the teachers did not allow modifications in the way he provided answers on classwork or tests (orally). She said although he is a “smart kid,” he just cannot write well and therefore cannot demonstrate his knowledge through writing. Russ’ gifted teacher said that the LD services:

> …also benefits, and I don’t even know if he would see them as benefits, but to have a test read to you is definitely a benefit. I think any time you take a test, if
it’s read to you, students usually do better. Now I don’t know if he had no reading problem if he’d do as well on the test reading it on his own. You don’t know. So, I think it’s a benefit test-wise. Especially standardized tests because usually the kids that have the tests read to them do better.

However, Sam’s regular educator expressed that the modifications for tests are a drawback. She said:

The only thing that I would say might be a small drawback is that, because he gets the additional time with everything he takes…standardized tests, math included…it makes you not real sure of how gifted he is. You see, because, whereas we might have 25 minutes to do something in a regular classroom for testing, he would get the additional time. And if some of these kids had that additional time, they might score just as high as he does.

Participants also gave their perceptions of the gifted services in which the students were involved. Two key themes surfaced. First, nine participants said that the gifted class involved extensive work or that it was difficult because there were many requirements that involved the student’s disability. Second, six participants mentioned that there is a lot of transition and that the student misses a lot of class when they participate in gifted/enrichment classes. Interestingly, participants did not mention this when they discussed the pull out LD services.

All four of the students mentioned the difficulty level of the gifted/enrichment class, as did some of the other participants. Every student mentioned that the writing was either the most difficult or his least favorite part of the gifted class. When Mike was asked why he decided to quit the enrichment class at his school, he explained, “It was just too much to handle. I could not handle the projects.” Adam said that “I think it’s a little too much writing…it’s hard.”

Two parents talked about the extra work requirements of the gifted/enrichment class. Russ’ mother gave examples of the amount of work when she was asked what the drawbacks of being included in two different pull out programs when she explained that they were “a lot of extra work. There’s just a lot of extra homework he has sometimes.” Mike’s father discussed how he explained to Mike that the gifted program would mean that he would have extra work. Mike’s father said that he “knew he (Mike) wasn’t doing
the work and his teachers kind of said that,” which led to the decision that Mike should stop participating in the program.

Adam’s special education teacher, Russ’ school psychologist, and Mike’s special education teacher brought up the additional workload and difficulty level of the gifted program as well. Adam’s special education teacher commented that Adam “doesn’t want to do anything that’s challenging,” and that Adam struggled in the gifted program because “in [the gifted program], you’re expected to work hard independently.” Russ’ school psychologist remarked that a drawback of having a reading disability and participating in the gifted program is that:

A lot of times, if they can’t read, a lot of the stuff they do in science or social studies and math and everything – it involves so much reading. This stuff that they choose to do involves so much reading that if you can’t read, it’s hard. It’s very difficult.”

Mike’s special education teacher had this experience with another student in addition to Mike. She said:

For the student who has a learning disability in written expression, to go into a gifted program where they’re expected to do more work, they see that as not fun and I’ve had students – two of them – drop out of the gifted program because they don’t want to do the extra work. That’s the big drawback.”

Like the first theme, the comments that combined to form the second theme that came out of the data about the gifted/enrichment services were also generally negative. Adam’s school psychologist, Sam’s mother, and notably, Russ and all three of his teachers that were interviewed made comments that fit this theme. Russ said that one of his favorite things about the math gifted/enrichment classes is that he misses the regular math class every day. However, when he was asked why he is quitting the general enrichment social studies class that met once per week, Russ said, “I had more homework because I was missing it (his regular class) and it was too long.” Missing too much of his regular class for the general enrichment class caused him to have additional homework and to miss the class lesson during that period. Russ’ gifted teacher said that his LD tutor was initially upset about Russ’ participation in the gifted program because it took away from his other classes. She said that the LD tutor complained, “he just needs time. He’s
not getting his stuff done. He needs time for reading.” The LD tutor also referred to this
during her interview, saying that Russ was “missing work” and that “he can’t afford to
waste time.” Russ’ regular teacher expressed her frustration with the scheduling problems
that arise because of the enrichment classes. She said:

   His math is pullout where she does it and gives him the grade and everything. But
   now, it’s like he goes for science enrichment and misses English. And he goes for
   Social Studies enrichment and misses reading. So, and since those are just more
   like ego boosters more than anything and I feel like he’s out of class for a lot of
   things. So he ends up with a lot of homework.

Russ and his teachers were not the only participants that discussed the high amount of
transition and missed classes. Sam’s mother conversed about the high amount of mobility
he has throughout the day. She said,

   I think another drawback would be that he might not always be in the classroom
   when certain things are discussed and I think Sam does a lot of things auditorily,
   so if he hasn’t heard a specific instruction happen, he’s not one to look up on the
   board and see that it’s written down that such and such is due the next day.
   Because of that, it’s not always in his planner and because it’s not in his planner,
   we don’t get it done. So, I think coming and going out of class when you’re an
   auditory learner can be an issue.

In addition, Adam’s school psychologist observed that Adam had trouble at the beginning
of the year “moving place to place during the day and having to be responsible to two
different teachers during the course of the day.” She said that his adjustment to this
increased throughout the year, however.

   In conclusion, participants made relatively positive remarks when discussing the
students’ special education services yet made mostly negative comments when discussing
the gifted education services. Numerous participants said that the LD services helped
students increase skills in their area of disability as well as helping them complete work
in their regular curriculum. Many also said that additional benefits of the LD services are
that the students receive modifications for tests and receive instruction in a small group
format. The major themes that came about when discussing gifted/enrichment programs
were that the programs involved much additional work and often included a lot of work
in the area of the child’s disability and that the students missed classes due to being
pulled out for enrichment programs.

**How were the contextual situations affecting the circumstances and the perceptions
of the informants?**

In order to analyze the contextual situations of the four school teams, participants’
comments about the team circumstances were organized into a table for each team. The
table is organized by answers to the following questions: how many of the team members
and who each participant reports they work with concerning the student, whether the
team actually uses a team approach, whether the team has an ongoing relationship, and if
the parent is an actual team member or if communication to the parent is one-sided (that
is, the educators provide the parent with information but the parent is not an equal team
member). A team approach was defined as the team formally meeting to solve problems
or discuss issues that arose with the student. Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 present this data with
explanations following each table.

**Figure 2**

**Adam’s Team of Educators and the Team Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Who he/she reported working with regarding this student</th>
<th>Team Approach?</th>
<th>Ongoing Relationship?</th>
<th>Is parent a true team member or is communication one-way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Psy</td>
<td>Parent, Gifted, Special, Regular</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, one-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>School Psy, Gifted, Special, Regular</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, one-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Teacher</td>
<td>School Psy, Parent, Special, Regular</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, two-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed. Teacher</td>
<td>School Psy, Parent, Gifted, Regular</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, one-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Teacher</td>
<td>School Psy</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No, one-way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked “in serving this child, how do you work with (name of educator,
parent, or student)?” the school psychologist, parent, gifted teacher, and special education
teacher all said that they worked with all other educators on the team and gave examples.
The special educator said that she works with the regular education teacher primarily
through her aide, who is in that classroom every day. However, for each team member, the regular education teacher said that she did not work the other teachers or did so “not that often,” and that she only worked with the school psychologist during meetings. Except for the parent and the regular teacher, everyone’s answers indicated that they meet as a team whenever problems or issues arose with Adam. Also, with the exclusion of the regular teacher, all team members indicated that they had an ongoing relationship and did not only meet or talk about Adam during MFE or IEP meetings. They talked in the hallways or arranged meetings with Adam’s parents to discuss plans to help him. Finally, the answers the team members gave indicated that communication was typically one-way communication with Adam’s parents. Adam’s mother said that she received suggestions from the school psychologist and other teachers about how to keep Adam motivated and worked with the teachers during the IEP meetings. The gifted teacher discussed how she and Adam’s mother emailed back and forth about Adam and his progress and that she worked with his mother by “monitoring and seeing how things are going and asking for suggestions, giving suggestions to help make him more successful.”

Figure 3

*Sam’s Team of Educators and the Team Context*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Who he/she reported working with regarding this student</th>
<th>Team Approach?</th>
<th>Ongoing Relationship?</th>
<th>Is parent a true team member or is communication one-way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Psy</td>
<td>Parent, Regular</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, two-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>School Psy, Special, Regular</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No, only with the Special Ed. Teacher</td>
<td>Yes, two-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Teacher</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed. Teacher</td>
<td>School Psy, Parent, Regular</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, two-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Teacher</td>
<td>School Psy, Parent, Gifted</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, two-way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the educators on the team reported working with Sam’s parents, except for the gifted teacher, who reported that she did not work with anyone except for the regular teacher regarding Sam. Sam’s mother said that she worked with everyone except for the
gifted teacher. The teachers all reported working with each other about Sam, except for the gifted teacher, who said that she works with all of the regular education teachers every other week in general, but does not really find the time to work formally with the other teachers regularly. The school psychologist said she only met with Sam’s teachers and mother to gather information for the reevaluation; however, she did mention that this team worked well together during the MFE reevaluation meeting that year and that “things appear to be going really well.” Other team members said that the team of educators and parents only convened together during the reevaluation meeting. In addition, Sam’s mother indicated that she spoke often with the special education teacher, although the special education teacher did not mention this. Sam’s mother had much to say on the subject of communication with the school. When asked about working with the gifted teacher, she said, “Don’t know who she is. She’s never contacted me. She’s never involved us. I’ve never seen anything come home that I would recognize as something that’s from the gifted program. As far as I know, I don’t know that he’s doing anything with her.” Conversely, she said that “[the special educator] has been really, really great…she’s always been accessible.” She also mentioned about the team members – “I’m assuming that they’re working together. I know that every once in a while at the IEP meeting, one of them will ask the other one what’s going on, which kind of surprised me because you’d think they would know.” She also discussed how the system seems so “complex now and somewhat convoluted” since he has four regular teachers (and a gifted and special education teacher). Other teachers mentioned that it was difficult to maintain communication about individual students among all of the other teachers because of the organization of the system, as well. Lastly, with the exclusion of the gifted teacher, communication among the educators and Sam’s parents appeared to be two-way communication, in which Sam’s parents and the educators gave and received information and suggestions about working with Sam.
Communication among all of the team regarding Russ was more limited compared to the first two teams. The school psychologist had not had to work with Russ at the time of this study; however, he was going to be re-evaluated at the end of the year, so she knew she would work with him in the spring. However, communication between Russ’ mother, his LD tutor (special education teacher), and his regular teacher occurred frequently. These people all reported working with each other regarding Russ, and the LD tutor also reported working with the gifted teacher as well. A team approach and ongoing relationship only appeared to be present among Russ’ mother, the LD tutor, and the regular teacher. Likewise, although there was no communication between the gifted teacher and Russ’ mother and the school psychologist and Russ’ mother, there was a high level of two-way communication between Russ’ mother and the LD tutor and regular teacher. During the interview, Russ’ mother discussed how she sees his regular teacher every day since she walked to the school to pick up Russ as well as outside of school in

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**Figure 4**

**Russ’ Team of Educators and the Team Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Who he/she reported working with regarding this student</th>
<th>Team Approach?</th>
<th>Ongoing Relationship?</th>
<th>Is parent a true team member or is communication one-way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Psy</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Special, Regular</td>
<td>Only with the Special Ed. And Regular Teachers</td>
<td>Only with the Special Ed. And Regular Teachers</td>
<td>Yes, two-way with Special Ed. And Regular Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Teacher</td>
<td>Special</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed. Teacher</td>
<td>Parent, Gifted, Regular</td>
<td>Only with Parent and Regular Teacher</td>
<td>Only with Parent and Regular Teacher</td>
<td>Yes, two-way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Teacher</td>
<td>Parent, Special</td>
<td>Only with Parent and Special Ed. Teacher</td>
<td>Only with Parent and Special Ed. Teacher</td>
<td>Yes, two-way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
social situations. The regular teacher also discussed this, saying, “…his mom is here every single day. Picks him up every single day and makes sure, you know, ‘Does he have anything he needs to do? What is he doing?’ So, she’s on top of things.” In addition, Russ’s mother said that the LD tutor was “like sometimes a second mother to him. She really looks out for him.” She also tutored him over the summers in addition to working with him during the school year since first grade, so they had developed a good relationship. The LD tutor discussed this also, and said that, “I work with [Russ] every Monday, so I see her every Monday. We go through how are things.” She also said that “[the regular teacher] and I work very well. We confer almost daily.” Therefore, interactions between these three team members were frequent and primarily positive ones.

Figure 5
Mike’s Team of Educators and the Team Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Who he/she reported working with regarding this student</th>
<th>Team Approach?</th>
<th>Ongoing Relationship?</th>
<th>Is parent a true team member or is communication one-way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Psy</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Special Ed. Teacher, Regular Teacher</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No, one-way (parent preference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Teacher</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed. Teacher</td>
<td>Parent, Regular Teacher</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Teacher</td>
<td>Special Ed. Teacher</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communication concerning Mike among team members appeared to be the lowest of the four teams. The school psychologist had worked somewhat with Mike’s fifth grade teachers the previous year, but had not spoken with his current teachers. In fact, she was not aware at the time of the interview that Mike was working with the LD tutor on a consultative basis and had resigned from the gifted program the previous year. However, Mike’s parents and the LD tutor had worked with each other, although on a limited basis at that time in the school year. About the LD tutor, Mike’s father explained, “…she’s a
really good communicator as far as letting us know what’s going on.” This seemed to be especially true about the previous school year, in which Mike had worked more closely with the LD tutor. Mike’s dad said that he had conferenced with the regular teacher, but the regular teacher said, “I know his father socially because of the PTSA, but no, I don’t know mom and I’ve never conferenced with either one of them.” The regular teacher and the LD tutor worked together regarding Mike, but were doing so less and less due to Mike’s decreasing reliance on the LD tutor for help. Overall, there was neither a team approach nor on-going communication among these team members.

In summary, the team context was different for each of the groups. Adam’s team was the only one who appeared to meet formally as a team for most issues that arose with Adam. However, although other teams did not work in that manner, they seemed to have communication arrangement that worked well for them in general. In the cases of Russ and Mike, especially, teachers often made decisions about students without consultation with the entire team, instead communicating only with another teacher or the parent. Because of this, some team members were unaware of concerns with or progress of the students.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Based on the examination of factors in these four cases, it seems practices of identifying and serving twice-exceptional students, or those students who are gifted and have learning disabilities concurrently are vague and disparate. In addition to this problem, there is not a clear definition of twice-exceptional students.

There are a range of reasons for the difficulty in identifying and serving gifted students with learning disabilities. First, people often have stereotypical expectations of either gifted students or students with learning disabilities (Whitmore, 1987). Second, research shows that educators are not trained adequately in this area and that they often use inappropriate identification procedures that impede identification and service delivery (Coleman & Gallagher, 1992; Dansinger, 1998; Perkerson, 1999). Third, a shortage of policy, procedures, and funding are huge challenges (Boodoo, Bradley, Frontera, Pitts, & Wright, 1989; Coleman, 1995).

This study aimed to investigate the challenges and issues that arise when identifying and serving twice-exceptional students. Many themes surfaced from the interviews with the students, parents, and educators. Before the interviews even occurred, however, during the search for participants, it was noteworthy that almost all of the districts or schools who were contacted about participating in the study suggested male students. In fact, only one girl was mentioned as a possible participant (this school decided not to be involved, however). This is the trend in other areas of identification, though, with boys typically being referred more often for disabilities and ADHD. Besides the low number of girls available for this study, there was a low number of students in general who fit the description of a twice-exceptional student. Most districts that were contacted only had one or two students who were receiving services for both learning disabilities and giftedness, if any at all. This made finding participants for the study very difficult and consequently, a limitation of this study was the low number of participants. However, this is not surprising; the difficulty in finding participants is reflective of Boodoo, Bradley, Frontera, Pitts, and Wright’s research that many districts do not identify gifted learning disabled students and that students with learning disabilities are often not identified for gifted programs (1989). Another significant finding about the
participants was that all of the students had learning disabilities in the area of language arts. This also correlates with the reality that the areas which most students with disabilities are identified in is either writing, reading, or both areas. However, areas of gifted services for these students included social studies, math, and science.

An additional discovery was that there actually were no procedures to identify “twice-exceptional” students. Instead, they were completely separate entities. Except for Adam, who was actually being assessed for a learning disability when it was discovered that he had a high ability score on his ability testing, all students were identified at different times using different means. They were identified as having a learning disability using individual standardized tests to find a discrepancy between ability and achievement, but qualified for services based on the score they received on a group administered ability test at a later time in their education. None of the students were referred for assessment because they were believed to be twice-exceptional. All were referred because they were suspected of having a learning disability in the area of language arts. This study supported other research that has found that educators can hold stereotypical ideas about children who have difficulties with reading or writing (Dansinger, 1998; Whitmore, 1987). These students’ teachers assumed that their students had learning disabilities but did not expect them to be gifted, although they saw them as bright children. In addition, with the exception of Adam’s gifted teacher, all of the educators said that they learned about twice-exceptional students entirely through their experiences in the classroom and that they had received no training or schooling in this area. This illustrates the inadequacy of training about twice-exceptional students that has been noted in the literature (Coleman & Gallagher, 1992; Dansinger, 1998; Perkerson, 1999).

Various themes cropped up during the interviews. First, over half of the participants said that being identified in both areas gave students extra support and practice in gifted and LD areas. Many also said that boosted the students’ self-esteem and helped their social status. Second, more that half of the participants said that their idea of ideal programming for students was programming that was individualized to the student’s needs.
When asked their feelings about the actual services that were provided, their responses were separated based on learning disability services and gifted services, further emphasizing that they saw these as completely separate services. In general, the comments about learning disability services were positive. Participants remarked that the LD services gave students the help they needed to make progress in the regular classroom and that the modifications help them succeed. Notably, statements about gifted services were considerably negative. Participants discussed how the gifted classes required much reading and writing (areas of disability) and that the class involved much more work for the student. The other theme was that there was a lot of transition and that the student misses a lot of class when they participated in gifted/enrichment classes. No participant specifically mentioned special education services when they talked about how much transition these students had during their school day, possibly because they felt that these services were more important or necessary than the gifted services. The impression was that if anything were to be done to decrease the transition between different classes and teachers, it would be that the gifted services be stopped. This is interesting since, when talking about the advantages of having the gifted label, participants talked about how being labeled “gifted” helped students’ self-esteem, social status, helped educators, parents, and students understand the students’ true potential, and challenged the students in areas they would not have been without having been identified as gifted.

There were a number of limitations to this study. First, as mentioned earlier, this study had a small sample due to the difficulty of recruiting participants. A higher number of participants would have provided the researcher with students who might have had even different experiences than the participants included in this study. In addition, more time to spend with participants would have been beneficial. Because of time constraints on the sides of the researcher as well as the participants, only one interview was possible with each person. The opportunity to further discuss any subsequent questions that might have arose after talking to other participants would have been helpful and valuable. In addition, more observation of the students and educators that participated in this study would have been useful. Although one of the participants and his gifted teacher was observed in his gifted class and two of the school psychologists had been observed in practice, there was not enough time available to observe all of the students in class or the
teachers and school psychologist working. Having this information would have added to the researcher’s understanding of the context of those teams and their interview responses. Finally, as is always a limitation with studies based on self-report, self-report bias was a drawback in this study. However, this study focused on the perceptions of these students and their educators.

The findings of this study have implications for identification and service delivery practices in education. The following are recommendations based on this study. First, education and training for educators about students who are twice-exceptional are important and necessary. Many educators are not even aware these students exist until they are confronted with them in their classroom or during assessment, leading to the under identification of these students and potentially inadequate services when they actually are identified. Second, more inclusive methods of incorporating gifted and LD services into the classroom might be one way to eliminate or lessen the problem of transition from teacher to teacher and class to class. However, as research has indicated, insufficient training of regular education teachers in the areas of giftedness and special education might cause this to be difficult to achieve (Perkerson, 1999). More training on the needs of the students and having regular educators team teach with gifted and regular teachers are possible solutions. Third, following this idea, better communication about what students are doing in these various classes could help alleviate problems with students having a large amount of make-up work in missed classes. Another suggestion would be to decrease regular classroom work requirements for those students involved in gifted and special education programs, especially those assignments that are similar to those taught in the outside classes. Be flexible about work requirements so that students can enjoy the benefits of participating in the gifted program while not being punished with more homework. For effective communication to occur, there needs to be good teamwork among the educators that work with these children. As Dansinger noted, there is little collaboration or communication between teachers of regular, gifted, and special education and that confusion and inaction are often a result (1998). This was the tendency with Sam’s, Russ’, and Mike’s teams of educators. Lack of communication and collaboration appeared to cause misunderstandings between the educators and between the educators and the parents. Establishing and maintaining cooperation, communication,
and collaboration is imperative when providing services for students with special needs. A final recommendation is that further studies need to be conducted in order to learn more about identification and service delivery options for gifted students with learning disabilities, as well as more examination into the effect of teamwork and school context on how these students are served.

In conclusion, more research is greatly needed in the area of twice-exceptionality so that this neglected group of students can be better served in schools. Additional studies should be carried out to learn more about these students and the research that has been performed about these students should be included in education training programs.
REFERENCES


Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997, Pub. L. No. 105-17, XXXXX


APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this research study is to explore the issues surrounding students who are gifted and also have learning disabilities and to learn the perspectives of these children and those involved in their education. The researcher will be interviewing gifted children with learning disabilities and at least one parent, as well as the child’s school psychologist, regular education teacher, gifted educator, and special educator. The benefits of this interview will be that you may gain some additional insights into the student and the matter of gifted students with learning disabilities. In addition, you will have the opportunity to obtain a final report of the research study.

I would like you and your child to participate in one interview that will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour. It may be necessary that you be contacted after the interview if clarifications are needed or if more questions arise. If the information participants give is revealed outside the context of the research, sensitive information could be disclosed that might be damaging to others involved with the student. Every precaution to avoid this will be taken. Your responses will be kept confidential and no responses will be connected with individuals. The information will be kept in a secure file and only the researcher and the research advisor will have access to your interview comments. For the interview, the researcher is requesting that audiotaping be permitted to aid in reporting the accuracy of the individuals’ comments. If you or your child do not agree to be audiotaped, the sessions will not be taped. In addition, your permission is necessary to discuss your child with the psychologist and other educators. Your and your child’s participation in the interview is voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. If you have questions about the interview process, please contact Julia Pemberton at 513-524-8503 or Doris Bergen at 513-529-1660. If you have questions about human subjects protection, please contact the Office of Scholarship and Teaching, 513-529-3734.

I understand the purposes of the overall research study and agree to be a participant in the interview. I understand that my responses will be confidential and that no individual responses will be identified, and that I may withdraw from participation without penalty. I also agree to allow the researcher to discuss my child with the other educators involved in the study.

__________________________________              ______________________________
Sign name      Date

I agree that my child can be a participant in the interview. I understand that his or her responses will be confidential and that no individual responses will be identified, and that he or she may withdraw form participation without penalty.

___________________________________  ______________________________
Sign name      Date

I further agree that the interview sessions may be audiotaped. I understand that no individual responses from the audiotape will be identified.

___________________________________  ______________________________
Sign name      Date
Dear Participant:

The purpose of this research study is to explore the issues surrounding students who are gifted and also have learning disabilities and to learn the perspectives of these children and those involved in their education. The researcher will be interviewing gifted children with learning disabilities and at least one parent, as well as the child’s school psychologist, regular education teacher, gifted educator, and special educator. The benefits of this interview will be that you may gain some additional insights into the student and the matter of gifted students with learning disabilities. In addition, you will have the opportunity to obtain a final report of the research study.

I would like you to participate in one interview that will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour. It may be necessary that you be contacted after the interview if clarifications are needed or if more questions arise. If the information participants give is revealed outside the context of the research, sensitive information could be disclosed that might be damaging to others involved with the student. Every precaution to avoid this will be taken. Your responses will be kept confidential and no responses will be connected with individuals. The information will be kept in a secure file and only the researcher and the research advisor will have access to your interview comments. For the interview, the researcher is requesting that audiotaping be permitted to aid in reporting the accuracy of the individuals’ comments. If you do not agree to be audiotaped, the sessions will not be taped. Your participation in the interview is voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. If you have questions about the interview process, please contact Julia Pemberton at 513-524-8503 or Doris Bergen at 513-529-1660. If you have questions about human subjects protection, please contact the Office of Scholarship and Teaching, 513-529-3734.

I understand the purposes of the overall research study and agree to be a participant in the interview. I understand that my responses will be confidential and that no individual responses will be identified, and that I may withdraw from participation without penalty. I also agree to allow the researcher to discuss my child with the other educators involved in the study.

Sign name

Date

I further agree that the interview sessions may be audiotaped. I understand that no individual responses from the audiotape will be identified.

Sign name

Date

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APPENDIX C

School Psychologist Interview

Thank you for participating in this interview about students who are gifted with learning disabilities. I am going to ask you some questions about the gifted and special education programs, as well as about (child’s name). Your answers will help me understand more about the process of identifying twice-exceptional students and what issues arise as a result of a child being identified and served. Your answers will be confidential; they will not be shared with others inside or outside the school.

1. Tell me about your experiences with children who have been gifted and learning disabled.

2. What do you think is the best way to educate these students? (Pull-out, regular education with modifications, etc)

3. Explain what you feel being a twice-exceptional child means.

4. Where or how did you learn about twice-exceptional children?

5. How does your district typically identify students who are learning disabled?

6. How does your district typically identify students who are gifted?

7. What methods does your district use to identify students who are gifted with learning disabilities?

8. Tell me about (child’s name).

9. Why was this child referred? Was the child suspected of having a learning disability, being gifted, or both? Who made the referral?

10. Was there anything special about the process of identification?

11. What kind of service plan does the student have? (IEP? Gifted classes?)

12. What role did the parents play in deciding on this service plan?

13. What has (have) the child’s parent(s) said about the child’s behavior at home?

14. What have been the benefits of having the dual label for the student?

15. What have been the drawbacks or problems with the dual label?
16. How do you think the student has adjusted to having this label and his/her service plan?

17. How many other individuals are involved with (child’s name)?

18. In serving this child, how do you work with: the gifted educator? the regular educator? the special educator? the parent? the student?

19. How have these peers worked together? Prompt: Tell me more. How often do you meet?

20. Do you have anything else you’d like to tell me about?

In accordance with the constant comparison method, some questions may be added to this interview for subsequent interviews.
Regular Education Teacher

Thank you for participating in this interview about students who are gifted with learning disabilities. I am going to ask you some questions about the gifted and special education programs, as well as about (child’s name). Your answers will help me understand more about the process of identifying twice-exceptional students and what issues arise as a result of a child being identified and served. Your answers will be confidential; they will not be shared with others inside or outside the school.

1. Tell me about your experiences with children who have been gifted and learning disabled.

2. What do you think is the best way to educate these students? (Pull-out, regular education with modifications, etc)

3. Explain what you feel being a twice-exceptional child means.

4. Where or how did you learn about twice-exceptional children?

5. How does your district typically identify students who are learning disabled?

6. How does your district typically identify students who are gifted?

7. What methods does your district use to identify students who are gifted with learning disabilities?

8. Tell me about (child’s name).

9. Why was this child referred? Was the child suspected of having a learning disability, being gifted, or both? Who made the referral?

10. Was there anything special about the process of identification?

11. What kind of service plan does the student have? (IEP? Gifted classes?)

12. What role did the parents play in deciding on this service plan?

13. What has (have) the child’s parent(s) said about the child’s behavior at home?

14. How is the student doing in your class? Academically? Socially?

15. What have been the benefits of having the dual label for the student?

16. What have been the drawbacks or problems with the dual label?
17. How do you think the student has adjusted to having this label and his/her service plan?

18. How many other individuals are involved with (child’s name)?

19. In serving this child, how do you work with: the gifted educator? the school psychologist? the special educator? the parent? the student?

20. How have these peers worked together? Prompt: Tell me more. How often do you meet?

21. Do you have anything else you’d like to tell me about?

In accordance with the constant comparison method, some questions may be added to this interview for subsequent interviews.
Gifted Education Teacher

Thank you for participating in this interview about students who are gifted with learning disabilities. I am going to ask you some questions about the gifted and special education programs, as well as about (child’s name). Your answers will help me understand more about the process of identifying twice-exceptional students and what issues arise as a result of a child being identified and served. Your answers will be confidential; they will not be shared with others inside or outside the school.

1. Tell me about your experiences with children who have been gifted and learning disabled.

2. What do you feel is the best way to educate these students? (Pull-out, regular education with modifications, etc)

3. Explain what you feel being a twice-exceptional child means.

4. Where or how did you learn about twice-exceptional children?

5. How does your district typically identify students who are learning disabled?

6. How does your district typically identify students who are gifted?

7. What methods does your district use to identify students who are gifted with learning disabilities?

8. Tell me about (child’s name).

9. Why was this child referred? Was the child suspected of having a learning disability, being gifted, or both? Who made the referral?

10. Was there anything special about the process of identification?

11. What kind of service plan does the student have? (IEP? Gifted classes?)

12. What role did the parents play in deciding this service plan?

13. What has (have) the child’s parent(s) said about the child’s behavior at home?

14. How is the student doing in your class? Academically? Socially?

15. What have been the benefits of having the dual label for the student?

16. What have been the drawbacks or problems with the dual label?

17. How do you think the student has adjusted to having this label and service plan?
18. How many other individuals are involved with (child’s name)?

19. In serving this child, how do you work with: the school psychologist? the regular educator? the special educator? the parent? the student?

20. How have these peers worked together? Prompt: Tell me more. How often do you meet?

21. Do you have anything else you’d like to tell me about?

In accordance with the constant comparison method, some questions may be added to this interview for subsequent interviews.
Special Education Teacher

Thank you for participating in this interview about students who are gifted with learning disabilities. I am going to ask you some questions about the gifted and special education programs, as well as about (child’s name). Your answers will help me understand more about the process of identifying twice-exceptional students and what issues arise as a result of a child being identified and served. Your answers will be confidential; they will not be shared with others inside or outside the school.

1. Tell me about your experiences with children who have been gifted and learning disabled.

2. What do you think is the best way to educate these students? (Pull-out, regular education with modifications, etc)

3. Explain what you feel being a twice-exceptional child means.

4. Where or how did you learn about twice-exceptional children?

5. How does your district typically identify students who are learning disabled?

6. How does your district typically identify students who are gifted?

7. What methods does your district use to identify students who are gifted with learning disabilities?

8. Tell me more about (child’s name).

9. Why was this child referred? Was the child suspected of having a learning disability, being gifted, or both? Who made the referral?

10. Was there anything special about the process of identification?

11. What kind of service plan does the student have? (IEP? Gifted classes?)

12. What role did the parents play in deciding this service plan?

13. What has (have) the child’s parent(s) said about the child’s behavior at home?

14. How is the student doing in your class or with you when you work with him in a group or individually? Academically? Socially?

15. What have been the benefits of having the dual label for the student?

16. What have been the drawbacks or problems with the dual label?
17. How do you think the student has adjusted to having this label and service plan?

18. How many other individuals are involved with (child’s name)?

19. In serving this child, how do you work with: the gifted educator? the school psychologist? the regular educator? the parent? the student?

20. How have these peers worked together? Prompt: Tell me more. How often do you meet?

21. Do you have anything else you’d like to tell me about?

In accordance with the constant comparison method, some questions may be added to this interview for subsequent interviews.
Parent Interview

Thank you for participating in this interview about students who are gifted with learning disabilities. I am going to ask you some questions about the gifted and special education programs, as well as about your son/daughter. Your answers will help me understand more about the process of identifying twice-exceptional students and what issues arise as a result of a child being identified as being both gifted and having learning disabilities and being involved in special programs. Your answers will be confidential; they will not be shared with others inside or outside the school.

1. How would you characterize your child’s special needs?
2. Explain what you feel being a twice-exceptional child means.
3. Where or how did you learn about twice-exceptional children?
4. Tell me a little more about your child.
5. What process did your son/daughter go through to be identified as having a learning disability?
6. What process did your son/daughter go through to be identified as being gifted?
7. Why was your child referred? Was your child suspected of having a learning disability, being gifted, or both? Who made the referral?
8. What is being done for your child at school now that he/she has been identified?
9. What role did you have in deciding on this service plan?
10. What do you think is the best way to educate your son/daughter? (Pull-out, regular education with modifications, etc). What would you like to see your son/daughter doing in school?
11. How does your child do in class? Academically? Socially?
12. What have been the benefits of having both labels of learning disability and gifted for your child?
13. What have been the drawbacks or problems with your child having two labels (learning disabled and gifted) or being involved in two different special programs (if applicable)?
14. How has your child adjusted to having this label and his/her service plan?
15. How many other individuals are involved with (name student)?
16. While working with the school during the process of identifying and determining your child’s needs, how have you worked with: the school psychologist? the gifted educator? the regular educator? the special educator?

17. How have these peers worked together?

18. Do you have anything else you’d like to tell me about?

In accordance with the constant comparison method, some questions may be added to this interview for subsequent interviews.
Student Interview

Thank you very much for talking with me today. I’m meeting with people in your school and other kids like you who are very bright, but still have some problems learning in school. I also would like to learn more about programs like the ones you are involved in, and the good things and not so good things about school for you. What we talk about will be between you and me; I won’t share your answers with anyone in or outside of school.

1. Let’s start with talking about things you enjoy. What kinds of things do you like to do outside of school?

2. What do you like best about school? Why?

3. What do you like least about school? Why?

4. What is the easiest thing or subject for you at school? Why?

5. Is there one thing that is hard for you? Why?

6. Compared to other kids, how do you see yourself in school? When did you first realize you were different (according to previous answer)?

7. How did you start getting help with (name subject) with (name program/teacher)?

8. How did you get in the (name gifted program)?

9. What kinds of things did you do to find out you could get extra help with (name subject) and be in (name gifted program)? Any tests? Talks with the school psychologist? Your teacher? Anything else?

10. What do your parents think about the programs you are in now?

11. What kinds of things are you doing with (name special education teacher)? How does what you do in these classes fit with your regular classes?

12. What kinds of things are you doing in (name gifted education program)? How does what you do in these classes fit with your regular classes?

13. Do you like being with the other kids who work with (name special education teacher)?

14. Tell me a little about the group in (name gifted education program)?
15. Some kids really like to work with (name special education teacher), but some do not like being there. How do you feel about it? What is the best thing about it? What is your least favorite thing?

16. Some kids think that (name gifted program) is a lot of fun, but some kids think it is too much work. How do you feel about it? What is your favorite thing? What is your least favorite thing?

17. Do you have anything else you’d like to tell me about?

In accordance with the constant comparison method, some questions may be added to this interview for subsequent interviews.
APPENDIX D

Student Background Information Form

Please answer the following questions about the student’s educational background.

Student’s Name_______________________________________

Date of Birth______________________  Grade_________________________

Number of years attended this school_______________________

Date child was first referred to the IAT____________________

Date of first post-evaluation meeting________________________

What was the outcome of the evaluation? Use the back of this sheet if necessary.

Date of IEP______________________________________

What is the educational plan for this student?

Date of second evaluation (if applicable)_______________

What was the outcome of this evaluation?

Date of last IEP revision (if applicable)_______________

How did the educational plan change?

Thank you for filling out this form! I look forward to talking with you soon.