

NAGC Early Childhood Network Newsletter

February 2014

Message from the Chair

Hello Early Childhood Network Members:
 The Early Childhood Newsletter is going to be published twice a year. In this edition I am excited to share with you several articles. The articles were all written based off of presentations delivered in the Early Childhood Network at the 60th Annual Convention and Exhibition. Please enjoy this edition of the Newsletter and if you are interested in writing an article or have a specific topic of interest to be included in future editions, please contact Ellen Honeck at honecks@comcast.net.

Sincerely,

Ellen Honeck
 Chair, EC Network

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qualifications and how to apply visit the NAGC website <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=2506>.

The EC Network is in need of a chair elect. If you are interested in volunteering, please email Ellen (honecks@comcast.net) or Laura (lbeltchenko@gmail.com). For more information on

NAGC Convention November 13-16, 2014:

Thank you to everyone who submitted a proposal and all the volunteers for the proposal review process. **Deadline has been extended until February 6, 2014!!!** We look forward to seeing you at the 61st Annual Convention and Exhibition - November 13-16, 2014 in Baltimore, MD. More info at www.nagc.org.

Did You Know??

The Early Childhood Network has a **Convention Attendance Grant**. The Early Childhood Network of NAGC recognizes the importance of practitioners who have direct, daily contact with young gifted children. In an effort to support and encourage the participation of practitioners in NAGC and the Early Childhood Network, attendance grants will be awarded for convention registration. More information can be found at <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=1414>

“Stealth Dyslexia” in Gifted Students: What Can Teachers Do?

By Bobbie Gilman and Dan Peters

Do you have a student who is verbally advanced, but making relatively poor progress in reading, written output and/or acquisition of math facts or calculation skills? Does your student perform at grade level on assessments, but show evidence of a struggle that is ATYPICAL for average students (e.g., needs extra time for classroom activities and homework, is reluctant to read aloud, forgets what has been taught, struggles to sound out words and spell, labors to put thoughts on paper, requires unusual support from teachers and parents)? If so, you may have a gifted student with “stealth dyslexia,” a significant reading disability hidden by high intelligence.

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disorder that impacts a student’s ability to hear words, decode words, and match sounds to symbols. “Stealth dyslexia” was coined by Drs. Brock and Fernette Eide, authors of *The Dyslexic Advantage* and *The Mislabeled Child*, to describe children with advanced cognitive ability who, similar to non-gifted children, struggle with sound-symbol recognition (phonemic awareness), reading fluency, spelling, writing, processing speed, and auditory processing of language. Stealth dyslexics, however, are often missed due to their compensatory strategies that produce “grade expected performance.”

Diagnosis of learning disabilities in high potential children grew more difficult with the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) and the adaptations to state/local regulations that followed around 2008. Previously, students with specific learning disabilities (SLDs) were routinely identified through comprehensive individual assessment of ability, achievement, and all areas of potential weakness by school psychologists and other qualified professionals. Teachers could refer for evaluation students who appeared bright but were not progressing as expected. Those who showed a significant discrepancy between IQ and achievement in an academic area, not explained by other causes (e.g., a lack of exposure to appropriate instruction, family crisis or other issues), were often found eligible for an IEP for a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Unless the state or district specifically set an upper limit on IQ, even gifted students with a 130 IQ (gifted level) and reading that scored 100 (average) could receive needed services for SLDs with appropriate evidence of disability.

Today, with IDEA 2004 and the inception of Response to Intervention, teachers bear the primary responsibility for locating students with potential learning disabilities by identifying students achieving below grade level. Because student potential need not be taken into account, gifted students who “meet expected grade requirements” in reading are unlikely to be recognized as needing interventions, even if their performance hides myriad weaknesses and falls short of expectations for a gifted learner. Rarely tagged for RTI interventions, they are unlikely to be considered for further special education services and an IEP.

Not coincidentally, university and private clinics report a dramatic increase in unidentified gifted children with learning disabilities. *Stealth dyslexia* is the primary challenge for many such students, can affect learning in all subject areas, and often occurs with related learning disabilities and sensory weaknesses. Without early intervention and accommodations to counter increasing reading and writing demands, compensation grows less adequate and academic performance, self-esteem, and emotional functioning deteriorate. When such students are not recognized in the classroom, they are rarely afforded accommodations through 504 Plans or for college board exams (which require a history of accommodations for a documented problem). Psychologists are beginning to see a new crop of unidentified gifted students with stealth dyslexia for whom college is out of reach, and even high school graduation is in jeopardy. Services are legitimate for all children who cannot succeed in school without them. Finding gifted students with dyslexia, using simplistic eligibility criteria, is more difficult due to their overlapping strengths and weaknesses.

Educators need to take a different approach. Look beyond the numbers and avoid the use of *cut scores* when determining service eligibility. Gifted/dyslexic students do function below grade level in their degree of struggle with

reading (and possibly writing and math). They exhibit difficulties that are inconsistent with your expectations for their perceived ability. Their difficulties persist, are stubborn to remediate, and threaten self-esteem. Trust these observations and request comprehensive assessment to document their disabilities.

Early identification and intervention is as critical for gifted students with dyslexia as for others with learning and processing disorders who are not gifted. Like others with a learning disability, gifted students need such services to ensure access to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), from which they, too, can derive reasonable benefit.

What to look for:

- High verbal abilities and average academic performance
- The “conundrum kid” who fails to perform to perceived potential
- Poor handwriting; mixture of upper and lower case letters
- Poor spelling; words spelled correctly on Friday’s spelling test are forgotten by Monday
- Late reading; fails to respond to literacy efforts that emphasize *more* reading; reading level may improve by end of school year, but gains are lost by fall.
- Reluctant reading; reading is slow and labored; lack of sight word recognition; guesses on new words; skips words; leaves off the beginnings or ends of words
- High reading comprehension with lower reading skills; gets the “gist” of what they read
- Reading has progressed to a level of strength, but written output remains difficult
- Difficulty memorizing math facts
- Frustration with learning and producing work; homework and class work are arduous. Concerns by parents that the child’s reading progress is slow relative to that of family members, mimics that of a dyslexic relative, or requires unusual support by parent

What to do:

- Monitor students who exhibit the above characteristics
- If symptoms persist, refer them to the Student Success Team or RTI team and request comprehensive assessment to determine eligibility for an IEP or a Section 504 Plan. When combined with evidence of substantial struggle, patterns of significant discrepancy between ability/achievement, reasoning/processing skills, and reading compared with another area of achievement are significant indicators of SLDs. Having a formal plan is essential to ensure future accommodations.
- As co-occurring disabilities are common, parents may want to read about writing and math disabilities, as well as disorders of sensory, visual and auditory processing in *The Mislabeled Child* (2006) to assess and address likely disabilities with specialists. Where interventions are possible and can be provided, reading challenges may be diminished.
- Refer for an evaluation of visual processing abilities from a Developmental Optometrist (see covd.org for a referral).
- Refer for early intervention in a multi-sensory reading program (i.e. Orton-Gillingham based, Davis Dyslexia, etc.)
- Use all of the above to set up a comprehensive educational plan that teaches at their conceptual level and accommodates for their weaknesses in reading, writing, and processing (e.g., they thrive with advanced literature study, but require audio books, dictation of papers). Use their learning strengths to address their weaknesses (e.g., focus on sight words, use word patterns/families, use patterns to teach math facts instead of drill, try visualization approaches to spelling)

References and Recommended Reading

- Eide, B., & Eide, F. (2006) *The mislabeled child: How understanding your child’s unique learning style can open the door to success*. New York: Hyperion. This book is a reference for parents and teachers of symptoms of a variety of disabilities children may experience.
- Eide, B. L., & Eide, F. F. (2011). *The dyslexic advantage*. New York: Hudson Street Press. This book focuses on individuals who overcame dyslexia, providing concrete suggestions for developing typical strengths and overcoming weaknesses at different age levels.

Ensuring Gifted Children with Disabilities Receive Appropriate Services: Call for Comprehensive Assessment (2013), National Association for Gifted Children Position Statement, <http://www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=10834>

Gilman, B. and Peters, D. (2013, November) *Stealth dyslexia: Flying under the radar*, (Taped) presentation at the National Association for Gifted Children 60th Annual Convention and Exhibition, Indianapolis, IN.

Gilman, B. J., Lovecky, D. V., Kearney, K., Peters, D. B., Wasserman, J. D., Silverman, L. K., ...Rimm, S. B. (2013). Critical issues in the identification of gifted students with co-existing disabilities: The twice-exceptional. *SAGE Open* 3: doi: 10.1177/2158244013505855 This article explores current regulations, solutions, and offers case studies of students missed (especially see Students A, B, and E). It is easiest to read and access at: <http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/3/3/2158244013505855.full>

Barbara (Bobbie) Gilman, M.S., is Associate Director of the non-profit Gifted Development Center in Westminster, CO, which specializes in assessment of gifted and twice-exceptional children for educational planning and advocacy, consultation with parents, and research on the gifted and effective gifted assessment.

Daniel B. Peters, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist, is Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Summit Center which provides assessment, consultation and treatment to children, adolescents, and families, with special emphasis in gifted, talented, creative, and twice-exceptional individuals.

Gilman and Peters co-chair NAGC's Assessments of Giftedness Special Interest Group.

Montessori Teachers' Beliefs, Values, and Perceptions of Creativity

By Duna Alkhudhair and Paige Hendricks

Early childhood educators are often faced with different views on educating young children. Some believe young children must begin to formalize foundational reading, writing, and arithmetic skills (Fryer, 1996; Woods, 1995). Conversely, others offer more creative-based programs and opportunities for children that include exploration, self-directed interest, and play (Beetlestone, 1998). This challenge prompted a phenomenological study, which examined Montessori teachers' beliefs, values, and perceptions of creativity. Six teachers from several Montessori schools were interviewed for the study. The data generation was comprised of in-depth interviews, an examination of artifacts as described by the participants, and a written response, which asked teachers to provide examples of creativity in their classrooms.

The Montessori Classroom

Maria Montessori (1912), an Italian physician, discovered and developed an educational approach based upon her work with young children, who were labeled as "mentally retarded" in impoverished areas of Rome. Her individualized approach to teaching revolutionized previous understanding of education (Edwards, 2002). Montessori contended that children must be allowed to reach their full learning potential over time in order to better themselves and society as a whole (Montessori, 1966). Her early childhood educational practices involved learning based upon personal interest (Drummond, 1993), begin learning from the child's current level of understanding (Bruce, 1988), and allow the child uninterrupted periods of work and play (Kim, 2011). This approach, discovered over one hundred years ago, stands today as an example of a successful and developmentally appropriate educational learning practice, similar to what researchers describe today as the facilitation of creative learning.