Unfortunately in today’s school society, we expect many children with varying degrees of ability to essentially “climb the same tree” as everyone else. The same tree may not be suitable for everyone in the same classroom. Source of image: http://scholasticadministrator.typepad.com/thisweekineducation/2012/08/cartoons-climb-that-tree.html#.WH7dbVMrKUk

**Definition of Twice-Exceptional (2E) Students**

According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), twice-exceptionality (2E) is defined as students who are gifted with a “co-occurring disability.” These disabilities are the same as those listed in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Among the disabilities listed for IDEA, hearing impairment and visual impairment fall into the idea that students should receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Gifted classes fall into this category of FAPE as well. So can your child be 2E, gifted and visual/hearing impaired? Absolutely! Source: National Associated for Gifted Children (NAGC). (n.d.). Twice Exceptionality. In National Association for Gifted Children. Retrieved from https://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement/twice%20exceptional.pdf

**“Please climb that tree.”**

Are all students created equal? Absolutely not! In one classroom, there are: students who are struggling with subjects; students who have a learning disability in Reading, Math, or both areas; students who are gifted and already know the material being taught; and students with sensory impairments with vision or hearing. How is it fair for one to assume that all of these students can take the same type of exam? It is not fair! This newsletter hopes to bring to light the uniqueness of a group of students, who have visual or hearing impairments and are gifted (also known as twice-exceptional students), characteristics of giftedness displayed by these students, and their needs in the classroom and how they can be best met.

**Table of Contents**

- Definition of Twice-Exceptional Students.............1
- Visual/Hearing Impaired Giftedness.....................2
- Teacher Tips Corner........................................2
- Mentor Spotlight.............................................3
- Parent Advocacy.............................................3-4
- References.....................................................4

Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.

-Mark Twain
Visual/Hearing Impaired Giftedness

Parents, you have a child or children who has visual or hearing impairments. From the mouth of a gifted specialist and many researchers, you are our greatest resource and knowledge base when it comes to identifying your child(ren) as being gifted (VanTassel-Baska, 1991). If you are unsure of characteristics of giftedness in visually impaired or hearing impaired students, take a look at the following lists created by Colleen Willard-Holt (1999):

**Characteristics of Gifted Students with Visual Impairments:**
- Fast rate of learning
- Superior memory
- Superior verbal communication skills and vocabulary
- Advanced problem solving skills
- Ease in learning Braille
- Great persistence during difficult tasks
- A motivation to know and learn
- Excellent ability to concentrate
- Nontraditional ways of getting information (creative problem solving in retrieving taught information)
- Self starter

**Characteristics of Gifted Students with Hearing Impairments:**
- Development of speech/reading skills without instruction
- Early reading ability
- Excellent memory
- Ability to function in the school setting
- Rapid grasp of ideas
- High reasoning ability
- Wide range of interests
- Nontraditional ways of getting information (creative problem solving in retrieving taught information)
- Self starter

**Teacher Tips Corner**

If you have a gifted student in your classroom that has a hearing impairment, try following some of these tips in your classroom to ensure that student’s success (Rose, 2012):

- Turn off any equipment that creates background noise. Many hearing aids amplify background noise as well as speech.
- Have heavy curtains, area rugs, or tennis balls on the bottom of chairs to reduce noise.
- When speaking, look directly at the student and face him or her when speaking and/or teaching.
- Have a signal to get your student’s attention before you speak.
- Speak clearly and naturally but do not over exaggerate your lip movements. Slow down slightly.
- Guys, keep your mustaches well groomed!
- Explain jokes or sarcasm to students because the tones are not necessarily understood.
- Write down assignments or notes and give a copy to the student. It makes focusing on listening easier!
This month’s “Mentor Spotlight” shines brightly on a talented young woman who has not let her disability of blindness stop her from pursuing her dreams of becoming a voice-over actor. Pictured above is Dionne Quan. She has been blind since birth (Cline & Hegeman, 2001). If you recognize the character to the right of Dionne, then you know that character as Kimi from Nickelodeon’s Rugrats television program and from her debut in the movie, Rugrats in Paris (she is also the voice of Trixie Tang from The Fairly Oddparents and Yasmin from Bratz). As a child, Dionne loved creating voices for the characters in stories that she read. She enrolled in acting classes at the age of 10, and shortly thereafter, enrolled for instruction from a local voice-over coach. How is she able to read her lines? Why in Braille of course! Her lines and cues are translated into Braille before each session and the mics are held far away enough so that you cannot hear her fingers tracing over the paper as she reads. She is truly a shining mentor (Quan, n.d.; Cline & Hegeman, 2001)!

Sources for images: http://bratzillaz.wikia.com/wiki/File:Bratz_yasmin_doll.png
http://fairlyoddparents.wikia.com/wiki/Trixie_Tang
http://mcdonalds.wikia.com/wiki/Dionne_Quan

As stated on page 2 of this newsletter, parents are their child’s best instrument and resource for making sure their needs are met in the school setting. As your student gets to higher grade levels and more challenging academic demands, be sure to talk to your child’s teacher(s) to make sure they are receiving proper accommodations (see “Teacher Tips Corner” on page two). Also, check in with your child’s teacher and monitor their work and report cards to watch for underachievement. A growing concern among many gifted specialists, general education teachers, and parents are the fact that many gifted students are beginning to underachieve in their general education courses. To many general education teachers, a gifted child’s underachievement is seen as average work, and that average is still okay (McCoach & Reis, 2000). As your child’s advocate, you know their true potential and how much they can achieve in their studies.

Know. Advocate. Be a part.
Parent Advocacy

If you are not sure about what you can do, or if you are still pondering about life with a twice-exceptional gifted child with visual or hearing impairments, check out the following websites that will give you a good jumping point to start the conversation!

- National Associated for Gifted Children (NAGC): www.nagc.org. They have great resources for parents of gifted students. Check out dates for annual national conference. Join for more information as well!
- Alabama Associated for Gifted Children (AAGC): www.alabamagifted.org. This is the state affiliate of NAGC. They also have local annual conferences! Consider becoming a member!
- Hoagies’ Gifted Education Page: www.hoagiesgifted.org. This is your one stop shop on all things gifted! Definitions, resources, and tips are all a part of this excellent site.

References


“Through the Minds of our Gifted Children” created by Leah Morrison (2017).