2012

From the Inside Out: An In-Depth Look into the Lives of Students with Dual Exceptionalities

Monique S. Sims

College of William & Mary - School of Education

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the Educational Psychology Commons, and the Special Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation
https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.25774/w4-pgcc-1x15

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
FROM THE INSIDE OUT: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK INTO THE LIVES OF STUDENTS WITH DUAL EXCEPTIONALITIES

A Master’s Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education, Gifted

by

Monique S. Sims

May 2012
FROM THE INSIDE OUT: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK INTO THE LIVES OF STUDENTS WITH DUAL EXCEPTIONALITIES

by

Monique S. Sims

Approved May 2012 by

Carol L. Tieso, Ph.D.
Chairperson of Master’s Committee
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ..............................................................................................................v
Abstract .....................................................................................................................................1

Chapter 1: Introduction .........................................................................................................2
  Introduction ..........................................................................................................................2
  Background of the Study ....................................................................................................4
  Methods and Procedures ..................................................................................................7
  Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................9
  Limitations .......................................................................................................................10
  Summary ..........................................................................................................................10

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature ..............................................................................12
  Giftedness and Special Education: Where it all began ..................................................12
  Dual Exceptionality ..........................................................................................................14
  Gifted students with Learning Disabilities ....................................................................16
  Gifted students with ADHD ............................................................................................17
  Gifted students with ASD ...............................................................................................18
  Academic and emotional difficulties of students with dual exceptionalities ...............19
  Teacher Perceptions ........................................................................................................21
  Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Relationships ...............................................................23
  Parental Resources and Support ....................................................................................24
  Students with dual exceptionalities: The Purpose of the Study? ..................................25

Chapter 3: Methodology ......................................................................................................27
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................27
  Participants .......................................................................................................................27
  Materials ..........................................................................................................................29
  Procedures ........................................................................................................................30
  Data Analysis ...................................................................................................................31

Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis ...........................................................................33
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................33
  Participant Demographics ...............................................................................................33
  Data Collection and Analysis ..........................................................................................34
  Patterns of Aptitude and Limitations .............................................................................35
  Special Programs .............................................................................................................39
  Behavior in School ..........................................................................................................41
  Teachers and Administrators ..........................................................................................43
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am so thankful for all of the participants who volunteered to be a part of this research study. Without them none of this would be possible. I want to thank them for allowing me to get to know them and share their stories.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, and professor, Dr. Carol Tieso. Dr. Tieso has guided me through every step of the thesis writing process and has encouraged me in my desire to learn more about students with dual exceptionalities. In many ways she has helped me to become a better writer and a better researcher, and has helped me gain confidence in my abilities as a student and as an educator.

I would like to thank Dr. Tracy Cross, Executive Director of the Center for Gifted Education, who has been my professor for several classes during my time at The College of William and Mary. He has also encouraged me to pursue my interests in students with dual exceptionalities and has challenged me to become a more critical thinker.

I would like to thank Dr. Mihyeon Kim, Director of Precollegiate Learner Programs at the Center for Gifted Education, for providing me with an avenue for securing participants for my study.

I would like to thank Andrea Alley, Gifted Education Teacher for Williamsburg-James City County School District, for being such a great model of an expert GT teacher.

I would like to thank Dr. Jan Stivers, Associate Professor, Special Education at Marist College, as well as my undergraduate academic advisor and professor. Thank you for helping me to realize my potential as a teacher and for encouraging me to pursue my M.A. Ed. in Gifted Education.

I would like to thank my family, who always kept high expectations of me as a student and believed that I could succeed.

I would like to thank my church family in Williamsburg. They have been my family away from home and have encouraged me non-stop throughout my entire journey as a graduate student.

Finally, I would like to thank God. “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:1
FROM THE INSIDE OUT: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK INTO THE LIVES OF STUDENTS WITH DUAL EXCEPTIONALITIES

Abstract

The study of students with dual exceptionalities has steadily grown over the past 30 years. Available research ranges from these student’s academic and social-emotional characteristics to their identification and instruction. While there is a great amount of research available, there is not much quantitative research or research that focuses on the student’s experiences. This study provides a closer look at the school experiences of students with dual exceptionalities, as well as their parent’s perspective of their abilities. A multiple case study design was used as the framework for this study and data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using pre-existing categories found in the extant literature on dual exceptionality, as well as emergent themes that surfaced from the interviews. Findings suggest that, although there were some variances, the current literature is similar to the first hand experiences of students with dual exceptionalities.

MONIQUE SHENISE SIMS
DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION, GIFTED EDUCATION
THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA
Chapter 1: Introduction

By definition, two things that are mutually exclusive cannot take place at the same time. For years giftedness and disabilities were seen as a coin: giftedness was on one side and disabilities were on the other. It was thought that a person could possess either exceptionality but not both. The seemingly mutually exclusive nature of these exceptionalities limited the amount of research into the possibility that giftedness and disabilities could occur together. This also meant that there were limited services and opportunities for these students. After years of research we now know that it is possible for a person to possess both of these exceptionalities. These students are known as dual exceptional. Much of the research provides insight into the academic characteristics of these students, their strengths and weaknesses in school, their social-emotional difficulties and best practices in serving these student’s unique needs. The purpose of this thesis study is to take the research one step further by going straight to the source. This study will provide a more in-depth look into the school experiences of students with dual exceptionalities by attempting to answer the following questions: What experiences do students with dual exceptionalities have with academics? What types of behaviors do these children exhibit in school?, What types of interactions do these students, and parent, have with teachers and administrators?, What are the social implications of dual exceptionality?, and What information is available to parents regarding their children’s dual exceptionalities?

Introduction

There are many variations of what it means to be gifted. This is supported by the fact that there is no one definition for what it means to be gifted. For example, some
schools may include leadership and creativity in their definitions of giftedness while others may focus entirely on specific academic ability. Though definitions vary, most of them are based on the 1972 Marland definition which defines giftedness as high performance or potential in the areas of general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006). On the other hand, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) (Ed.gov, 2012) sets forth specific criteria to be met in order for a student to receive special education services. There are thirteen categories of disabilities listed in IDEA 2004: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech and language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (Ed.gov, 2012, 2012). Students with ADHD usually have 504 plans which list accommodations necessary for these students to perform at the same level as their peers (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2009). All students who meet the criteria for any of the thirteen categories must be provided with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Unfortunately, while schools are required to provide special education services for students in need, many states do not mandate or fund gifted education services (NAGC 2008; NAGC, 2010).

If giftedness is variable within any group, then it would follow that students with dual exceptionalities are also a highly unique class of people. As with students who are solely gifted, there is no fixed definition of dual exceptionality. However, many researchers have attempted to provide some semblance of structure to this area of study.
Assouline et al. (2006), mentions that students with dual exceptionalities are those who exhibit gifts in a particular area, but who can also possess a disability in any of the categories mentioned in IDEA 2004. Others have stated that students with dual exceptionalities are those with high performance or ability who also have a learning disability that interferes with their academic and social achievement (Brody & Mills, 1997; Hughes, 2011; Baum & Owen, 2004). Though there are many definitions, students dual exceptionalities can be identified as having both a gift and a disability (King, 2005; Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; McCoach, Kehle, Bray, & Siegle, 2001). The two most common, and most researched, types of dual exceptionality are gifted/learning disabled and gifted/ADHD (Nicpon, Allmon & Sieck, 2011). Gifted students with Asperger’s and Autism follow these closely. This study will provide a look at these students’ academic and social experiences from the perspective of both students and parents. Thereby allowing for a better understanding of what it means to be a student with dual exceptionalities.

**Background of the Study**

Over many years, research has been conducted that has been concerned the academic and social characteristics of students with dual exceptionalities and the aspects of their environment that effect their academic and social-emotional development. What follows is a brief look at what this research reports about students with dual exceptionalities. All information relates to the purpose of this study: to determine the personal experiences of students with dual exceptionalities, parent’s perspective on their dual exceptional children, and how this relates to current literature and best practices.
Characteristics. According to the research, students with dual exceptionalities share many similar characteristics with their solely gifted peers. High task-commitment, intense interest in a specific area, the ability to reason abstractly and problem solve, being well versed in a particular subject area, and creativity are among the positive attributes associated with students with dual exceptionalities (King, 2005; Hughes, 2011, Baum & Owens, 2004). When given the opportunity to exercise their gifts, these children will succeed in school. However, they also struggle in many areas. For example, students with dual exceptional can exhibit a lack of organizational skills, inattention in class, slow processing speed and difficulty reading and writing (Baum & Owen, 2004; King, 2005). These struggles can negatively impact students’ relationships with peers and teachers, cause them to exhibit aggression or other disruptive behaviors, and lead them to have a negative image of themselves as students (King, 2005; Baum & Owen, 2004; Baum, 1989; Olenchak & Reis, 2002). Without proper interventions, these students will be left to struggle in school which will negatively affect their academics and their self-esteem. One of the goals of this study is to glean information directly from the students regarding their strengths and weaknesses as well as their experiences in school, both positive and negative, in order to provide first-hand experience to support the extant literature on the topic.

Interaction with teachers. Dual exceptional student’s interaction with teachers is also important. These students need a lot of support in their areas of weakness for them to reach their maximum potential in their areas of strength. However, often times, teachers don’t recognize that these students are gifted. This is due to any number of reasons. For example, a student’s difficulty with writing may prohibit her from expressing her creative
and complex ideas (Hughes, 2011; Baum & Owen, 2004; Sousa, 2009). Another problem is that many teacher education programs do not offer training in how to recognize and teach gifted children, especially those who are dual exceptional. Teachers enter the field of education without the ability to recognize characteristics of giftedness and they may not know that a student can possess both a disability and gifts (Bianco & Leech, 2010). In a study conducted by Bianco and Leech (2010), the researchers tested the ability of 277 teachers (special education, general education, and gifted education) to accurately refer a student for participation in gifted education programs based on disability level. The teachers were divided into four groups and each group was given a vignette. All vignettes featured the same student, however the student had varying degrees of disability depending on the group. Those teachers who had the student who possessed more disabilities were far less likely to refer a student for gifted services. This type of bias can also be reflected in the way teachers interact with their students. It is imperative to learn more about dual exceptional student’s positive and negative interactions with their teachers, and the parent’s experiences interacting with teachers and administration.

**Parents of students with dual exceptionalities.** Parents play an integral role in their child’s education, especially when that child is in need of special services. Baum and Owen (2004) state that parents are to be the student’s number one advocate. Parents must be diligent in working with schools to provide the best fit in academic and social-emotional intervention. Because of their differences and struggles, students with dual exceptionalities need a great deal of support. Parents can provide the students with academic help at home, either themselves or with a tutor, provide their children with positive encouragement, and work directly with teachers when challenges arise (Baum &
Owen, 2004). Though parents are an integral part of the support system, there is not much mentioned about them in the literature on students with dual exceptionalities. In addition, there also isn’t much support available for the parents of students with dual exceptionalities in the form of parent groups and parent-oriented information. This study will survey the parent’s perspective of their child’s experiences and attain more in-depth information related to the challenges that parents face when working with schools and raising their dual exceptional children.

**Best Practices.** The final goal of this study is to relate the experiences of both these students and their parents to the current literature on best practices for educating students with dual exceptionalities. The focus of dual exceptional education should not rest solely on the remediation of the student’s weaknesses. Rather, the focus should be placed on scaffolding students and helping them to maximize their strengths (Baum & Owen, 2004). If a student is interested in a specific topic, they should be afforded the opportunity to conduct more in-depth research with the modifications and accommodations necessary to support their areas of weakness. These students should also have the opportunity to participate in enrichment and acceleration opportunities (Brody & Mills, 1997). Focusing on a student’s strengths will help to build their self-esteem and increase their motivation.

**Methods and Procedures**

This study will use a multiple case study approach to gain insight into the experiences of students with dual exceptionalities, both academic and social-emotional, from two perspectives: the dual exceptional student and their parent(s)/guardian(s). This study will involve three phases.
Phase 1 of this study involves the location of a population. The College of William and Mary’s Center for Gifted Education runs an annual Summer Enrichment Program for Gifted Students through its Precollegiate Learner Programs division. This program is comprised of two sessions that run through the month of July. Pre-Collegiate Programs also has access to the email addresses of people who have participated in past programs run by the Center for Gifted Education. The goal of this multiple case study is to interview five to ten students, and their parents, using a semi-structured interview format. Due to the nature of the population and time constraints, a convenience sample will be used for this study.

Phase 2 involves getting permission to email the Summer Enrichment Program mailing list will be asked of the Director of the Precollegiate Learner Programs, Dr. Mihyeon Kim. If approved, an email will be sent out to all people on the Summer Enrichment Program mailing list asking for parents who would be interested in having their dual exceptional children, and themselves, participate in this study. Students who participate must meet the following criteria:

- Be identified as gifted by their school district and have learning difficulties,
- Be identified as dual exceptionality their school district,

OR

- Be identified as dual exceptional through testing/evaluation done outside of the school district

Parents who wish to be included in the study will send an email confirmation to 2Eresearch@gmail.com. Those who respond to the email will be sent a letter detailing the
purpose of the study as well as a parental consent form. Parents will fill out the form, sign it electronically, and send it back via email.

The names of students, and their parents, who decide to participate in the study will be kept confidential. During the interview, participants will have the option of discontinuing the interview at any point or skipping over any of the questions that they may feel uncomfortable with. It is my hope that students and parents will be open and honest about their experiences. However, at no time will anyone be forced to do so.

Phase 3 involves consent for participation. Consent forms have been received via email, I will set up a time and place to meet with the participants and conduct the interview. Each interview will be voice recorded in order to obtain a more accurate representation of student and parent experiences. Voice recorded interviews will be transcribed and compared in search of common themes. Parents and students that would like to participate but are unable to arrange a face-to-face meeting will be given the opportunity to answer the interview questions and return them electronically.

Before each interview begins, participants will be given an informed consent form to sign. This will provide documentation supporting their willingness to enter into the study. There are no foreseeable risks to any of the participants. Due to the nature of the study, identifying characteristics (i.e. Name) of participants will be kept confidential. However, the researcher will protect the participant’s confidentiality. No identifying characteristics will be presented in the final report and all paper documents will be

Data Analysis

Because this is a qualitative study, data will be analyzed and reported using descriptive methods. Data from student and parent interviews will be transcribed and
reviewed for common themes. Common themes will then be compared across all students, and between, students and their parents. This will provide insight into the differences and similarities between the student and parent’s perspectives. Data will then be compared to research on students with dual exceptionalities and best practices in their education.

**Limitations**

As with any research study, there are always limitations. As a group, students with dual exceptionalities make up a very small portion of the gifted population. This means that, while there is a lot of variety within this group of students, this study is relying on a very small sample of people. Second, this study relies on a convenience sample approach to obtaining participants. Those who choose to participate may not be representative of the entire population of students with dual exceptionalities. Third, this study is a multiple case study design. While case studies provide a wealth of information regarding the habits, practices, and beliefs of the participants, the small sample size makes it hard to generalize the findings to a larger population. However, because this case study will involve multiple types of students with dual exceptionalities it may carry a little more weight for generalizability. Finally, this study was conducted by a first-time researcher. A researcher with more experience would have a better understanding of the research process and the nuances of semi-structured interviews, therefore yielding more rich data.

**Summary**

*From the Inside Out: An in-depth look into the lives of students with dual exceptionalities,* will take a closer look at what it means to be a person with dual
exceptionalities. Unlike many other studies, this information will come straight from source. This study will provide information about their school experiences, their academic struggles and successes, and their social-emotional difficulties. This study will also provide insight into the parent’s perspective of their children’s academic and social needs. I wish to personally gain a better understanding of who these children really are. The field of gifted education desperately needs this information in order to better serve their unique needs. This is only the beginning.
Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Giftedness and Special Education: Where it all began

In 1921, a psychologist named Lewis Terman studied 1,528 children with IQ scores above 135 as tested by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test (Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2011). This was the first major study conducted that dealt with gifted children. This longitudinal study has been the foundation and catalyst for the ever-growing interest in gifted children and their education. While there was important research being conducted from that time on, it wasn’t until nearly 50 years later that the differences and academic needs of these children became of considerable importance.

The year 1972 was a monumental year for gifted education. It was during this year that awareness began to be raised about how much of a negative impact a lack of proper educational programming and support was having on gifted students. This movement toward studying, spreading awareness of, and implementing programs for the gifted was born out of the 1972 Marland definition of giftedness (Assouline, Nicpon & Huber, 2006). Sanctioned by the U.S. Commissioner of Education S.P. Marland, *Education of the Gifted and Talented* states that:

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differential educational programs and/or services beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and the society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination: 1) General intellectual ability 2)
Specific academic aptitude 3) Creative or productive thinking 4) Leadership ability 5) Visual and performing arts 6) Psychomotor ability(*) It can be assumed that utilization of these criteria for identification of the gifted and talented will encompass a minimum of 3% to 5% of the school population (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006)

It was around the same time that great change was beginning to happen in the field of Special Education as well. In the year 1975 the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was established. Now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA 2004), this act guaranteed that children with disabilities received Free Appropriate Public Education (Ed.gov, 2012).

Under IDEA 2004, 13 categories of disabilities are listed. They include autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, Intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech and language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (NICHCY, 2012). Students with any one, or a combination, of these disabilities are entitled to an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and receive special services as needed (Ed.gov, 2012; Fetzer, 2010). Students with AD/HD have the opportunity of being identified under the category of Other Health Impaired under certain conditions. For those students whose AD/HD does not affect their schooling enough for an Other Health Impaired Diagnosis, but still need accommodations, a 505 plan (similar to an IEP) may be instated under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 2011) (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2009). Because of the extensive nature of disabilities, students can exhibit a
range of symptoms. For example, visual impairment can range anywhere from partially blind, to blind in one eye, to completely blind. Assouline, Nicpon, and Huber (2006) note that, since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was instated, there has been an “overall increase of 28.4% in the number of students ages 6-21 receiving services under IDEA” (p.16)

**Dual Exceptionality**

For years the topics of giftedness and disabilities have been held mutually exclusive. It was previously thought that these “diagnoses” inherently did not belong together. However, in lieu of recent research within the last thirty years, something unique has been discovered: the comorbidity of giftedness and disabilities. People who possess such characteristics are known as dual exceptional. Reviewing the current literature on students with dual exceptionalities will provide insight into the characteristics and needs of this special population.

Although the term “dual exceptional” has often been used in the literature to describe gifted students with Specific Learning Disabilities, it can also be attributed to gifted students with any disability. As each student is unique, there is no set definition of dual exceptionality. However, the simplest definition is defined as a person who is gifted and has a disability (King, 2005; Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; McCoach, Kehle, Bray, & Siegle, 2001). As mentioned previously, a disability can be one of any of the thirteen disabilities classified under IDEA 2004. Assouline et al., (2006) define dual exceptionality as “gifted/talented in one or more areas while also possessing a learning, emotional, physical, sensory, and/or developmental disability.” Brody and Mills (1997) state that the federal definition of giftedness is broad and could potentially allow for the
inclusion of students with dual exceptionalities. Though this is so, there is currently no federal definition that specifically includes dual exceptional learners.

Within the field of dual exceptionality, there are three classifications that are mentioned repeatedly in the literature. First, there are students who are identified as gifted. These students most often have their disabilities go unnoticed because their gifts help them to compensate for the disability (King, 2005). Research shows however, that as academics become more difficult, the student’s giftedness is unable to completely compensate for the disability and school becomes harder (King, 2005; McCoach, Kehle, Bray, & Siegle, 2001). The second classification holds those who are not identified due to masking (King, 2005; Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006). Masking occurs when the student’s gifts and disability cancel each other out causing the student to perform at an average level. These students are, in essence, underachieving because their potential is higher than their achievement (King, 2005). The final classification mentioned in the literature is a student who is identified as both gifted and disabled. At first glance it may seem that these students may succeed however, these students have disabilities that are not noticed until the student begins to do poorly. This happens when the student is unable to continue compensating for the academic difficulties they are encountering. When the disability is diagnosed, attention, more often than not, is given to the disability at the expense of developing the student’s gifts (King, 2005; Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006). Due to the nature of this study, the focus will be on the last type of dual exceptional student; one that is identified both as gifted and as having a disability.

Many of the characteristics of students with dual exceptionalities are similar to those of solely gifted students. They can have high task-commitment, high interest in a
particular subject matter, good problem solving abilities, and an ability to reason abstractly (King, 2005). However, the characteristics that do differ significantly are not positive. For example, these students tend to exhibit frustration with school which leads to such things as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, misbehavior in the classroom, lack of organizational and study skills, negative feelings toward school, poor social skills, and shyness (King, 2005; Neihart, 2000; Trail, 2011).

There are three highly researched variations of dual exceptionality. Due to the high incidence of these forms of dual exceptionality and the availability of research regarding them, this study focuses on these three forms. The first, and most prevalent, is the gifted student with a specific learning disability. The second most common variation is the gifted student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Finally, gifted students with Autism Spectrum Disorder will be discussed.

**Gifted students with Learning Disabilities**

The most common form of dual exceptionality is the comorbidity of giftedness and specific learning disabilities known as GLD (gifted and learning disabled) (Nicpon, Allmon, Sieck & Stinson, 2011). According to the National Association for Gifted Children (2009), this occurs because students with learning disabilities make up approximately 50% of all students who have disabilities. Because of the prevalence of this type of dual exceptionality, GLD receives the most attention in research studies and theoretical papers on dual exceptionality (Lovett & Lewandowski, 2006; Hughes, 2011; Baum, 1989; Brody & Mills, 1997; McCoach, Kehle, Bray & Siegle, 2001; Tallent-Runnels & Sigler, 1995). Students with dual exceptionalities are identified as having superior academic ability while at the same time struggling to learn (King, 2005;
Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006). This definition is almost identically to the definitions, previously mentioned, about dual exceptionality as a whole. Although used as a definition for GT/LD, this definition can apply to many, if not all, variations of dual exceptional learners. Students with Specific Learning Disabilities are an extremely varied group of people. For example, Specific Learning Disabilities can include such things as dyslexia (difficulty with fluency or comprehension in reading), developmental aphasia (difficulty with expressive or receptive language as a result of developmental delay), and dyscalculia (difficulty learning or comprehending math) (Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler & Shevitz, 2006). Even within these categories there are numerous variations. This is important to note because much of the literature available focuses on the shared characteristics of GLD students instead of the differences between them.

**Gifted students with ADHD**

The second most studied form of dual exceptionality is gifted/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (G/ADHD) (Nicpon, Allmon, Sieck & Stinson, 2011). Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a syndrome, or group of behaviors, which typically occur together (Baum, Olenchak & Owens, 1998; Kauffmann, Kalbfleisch & Castellanos, 2000). ADHD is the most commonly diagnosed childhood disorder (Nicpon, Allmon, Sieck & Stinson, 2011; Assouline, Nicpon & Huber, 2006). In order to be diagnosed with ADHD, a person must exhibit six out of nine characteristics in the areas of hyperactivity/impulsivity, inattention, or both. These symptoms must occur for a period of longer than six months, be manifested in part or in whole before the age of 7, and must manifest themselves in more than one setting. There are three types of ADHD: a) predominantly inattentive, b) predominantly hyperactive/impulsive, and c)
combination (Webb et al., 2005; Baum, Olenchak & Owens, 1998; Kauffmann, Kalbfleisch & Castellanos, 2000; Webb & Latimer, 1993; Neihart, 2003; Weinfeld et al, 2006). Children with ADHD have difficulty maintaining attention, can be extremely distractible or impulsive, and have academic difficulty. While G/ADHD is the second most studied form of dual exceptionality, it is also the most misdiagnosed (Webb et al., 2005). Some of the symptoms of ADHD are synonymous with characteristics of gifted children. For example, gifted children often exhibit what Dabrowski, in his Theory of Positive Disintegration, calls overexcitabilities (O’Connor, 2002). One of these overexcitabilities is called the psychomotor overexcitability, which is a characterized as a surplus of energy. Both students with ADHD and gifted students can exhibit such a characteristic (Lind, 2001). Another example is inattention. The key to determining whether or not a student actually has ADHD is whether or not these characteristics persist in most situations or if these characteristics are made apparent due to inappropriate educational placement (Webb et al., 2005; Lind, 1996; Baum, Olenchak & Owens, 1998; Weinfeld et al., 2006).

Gifted students with ASD

Literature regarding gifted students with Autism Spectrum Disorder is the least prevalent of the three variations mentioned thus far. ASD is characterized by a delay and/or impairment in social and communicative skills (Weinfeld et al., 2006). Because it is a spectrum disorder, there are a range of intellectual, social and communication abilities among people with ASD. The two most common forms of ASD are Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome (Weinfeld et al., 2006). The marked difference between the two disabilities is that people with high functioning Asperger’s Syndrome do not usually
exhibit a developmental language delay. Although this is true, people with Autism and People with Asperger's Syndrome can experience difficulty with perseveration of actions/interests, difficulty with eye contact, difficulty reading and responding to nonverbal cues, etc. Many students with ASD also exhibit hypersensitivity to external stimuli (Neihart, 2000). According to Weinfeld et al. (2006), gifted students with ASD have difficulty "focusing on what's important, general[izing] knowledge, transitioning to different activities, [have difficulty with] time concepts, and [have] atypical/uneven development" (p. 23). Nicpon, Doobay and Assouline (2010) conducted a study, which found that parents of gifted students with ASD reported that their children had difficulty with everyday living tasks and interpersonal interaction. The students who participated in this study reported low levels of anxiety, which is not common in this population of students. The strengths of gifted students with ASD include such things as memory and the ability to focus intently for long periods of time.

Academic and emotional difficulties of students with dual exceptionalities

The academic and social difficulties of students with dual exceptionalities are often interwoven. In 2009, Assouline, Nicpon and Whiteman conducted a study in which the researchers assessed 77 gifted students with Specific Learning Disabilities in order to determine that these students were not meeting their academic potential. The researchers found that these students exhibited verbal skills scores that were significantly stronger than their nonverbal scores. Although this study was conducted specifically for gifted students with a Specific Learning Disorder, this type of finding is also synonymous with the characteristics of gifted students with Asperger's Syndrome found in the extant literature on this population (Weinfeld et al., 2006). It is important to note that not all
students with dual exceptionalities exhibit the same score pattern when being assessed. For example, Hughes (2011) states that this population of students often exhibits higher scores in the performance domain than they do in the verbal domain. Difficulty with nonverbal communication, along with other academic and social difficulties, can lead to inappropriate behavior, which can cause difficulties in their relationships with teachers and peers. With respect to academics, these students often have trouble reading and expressing their ideas through written communication, have difficulty with assignments that require multiple steps, lack organizational skills, and have difficulty with short-term memory (Assouline et al., 2009; Hughes, 2011; Trail, 201). Baum and Owen (2004) cite goal setting, self-regulation, hyperactivity, sensitivity to external stimuli and a lack of motivation as additional difficulties.

These students are often well aware that their potential somehow does not match their achievement. That is, like all gifted children, they hold high standards for themselves but, because of their disability, they are unable to meet these high standards. This leads to such problems as low self-esteem, depression, lack of motivation, and disruptive behavior (King, 2005). Research conducted on underachievement can also be applied to some students with dual exceptionalities. McCoach and Siegle (2003) provide a list of some of the negative characteristics of underachievers, which include low self-perception, negative attitudes toward school, and many of the other negative characteristics that students with dual exceptionalities face. According to Hughes (2011), these students often become extremely frustrated because of the discrepancy between their intellectual ability and performance ability.
Gifted Programs. These students need gifted programs that are geared to meet their intellectual needs while helping them to improve their difficulties. These students thrive best in an environment that allows them to do hands-on, real-world tasks. A 1988 study was released by Susan Baum showed how such a program could work. 7 elementary school students with dual exceptionalities (In this case they were gifted and with a learning disability) were chosen to participate in this pilot program. The program used Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad models in order to draw on the student’s interests and academic abilities while at the same time assist them in their areas of weakness (Baum, 1988). The Enrichment Triad model is composed of three types of enrichment. Type I activities are exploratory and meant for students to get a general understanding of their surroundings. Type II activities train the students in such things as critical thinking and problem solving skills. Type III activities allow students to become investigators of real world situations (Baum, 1988; Davis, Rimm & Siegle, 2010). Baum found that these students with dual exceptionalities made great gains in both academic and social-emotional skills when given the opportunity to participate in Type III activities.

Teacher Perceptions

Bianco and Leech (2010) tested 277 teachers on their ability to refer students to gifted education programs based on disability labels. Out of the total sample, fifty-two of the teachers were special education teachers, 195 were general education teachers, and 30 were gifted education teachers. The teachers were then split into three mixed groups, each containing special, general education and gifted education teachers. There was one control group and two experimental groups. In each experimental and control group, the teachers were given a vignette that described a student with gifted characteristics. Each
group was given the same base vignette, however the control group received only the base vignette, the first experimental group received a base vignette that included a line stating that the student had a learning disability, and the last experimental group received the base vignette with a line that stated that the student had an emotional/behavioral disorder. After reading the vignette, each teacher filled out a survey that asked them if they would recommend the child to gifted services. Those teachers who had the vignettes of students with disabilities were significantly less likely to refer students to gifted programs, with special education teachers being the least likely of all (Bianco & Leech, 2010). A study done by Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson (2010) showed that there are many other factors that also contribute to bias teacher referral patterns including age, gender, and interest area.

**Teacher bias.** Teacher bias has a profound effect on both the identification and the treatment of students with dual exceptionalities (Bianco & Leech, 2010; Minner, 1990; Hughes, 2011; Rinn & Nelson, 2009). Pre-service training and professional development are very important when working with this population of students (Bianco & Leech, 2010; Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994). Hansen & Feldhusen (1994) found that those teachers who were trained to work with gifted students were better able to teach them and create a positive learning environment. The same holds true for students with dual exceptionalities. In-service teachers should be required to complete training regarding the characteristics and education of gifted and students with dual exceptionalities. This will help them deal with the unique characteristics and needs of this population. A study conducted by Bangel, Moon, and Capobianco (2010) demonstrated the effects of training on pre-service teachers’ knowledge of giftedness and confidence in
teaching gifted students. Participating teachers were required to complete an online gifted education class as well as teach three nine-week Saturday enrichment sessions. The pre-service teachers had to submit lessons plans, were required to be evaluated, had to participate in online discussions, and had to be interviewed periodically. At the beginning of the study these pre-service teachers were required to rate their confidence level with teaching gifted students. At the end of the class and fieldwork, these teachers reported significantly higher confidence and knowledge and they were able to create lesson plans geared toward their high achieving Saturday enrichment students (Bangel, Moon, & Capobianco, 2010). This study, along with a study conducted by Chamberlin & Chamberlin (2010) provided supporting evidence for the need for pre-service coursework when dealing with special populations of students, including both gifted and students with dual exceptionalities. (Bangel, Moon, & Capobianco, 2010; Chamberlin & Chamberlin, 2010; NAGC, 2009). It is imperative to learn more about students with dual exceptionalities’ positive and negative interactions with their teachers, and the parents’ experiences interacting with teachers and administration.

**Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Relationships**

Along with their relationships with teachers, students with dual exceptionalities’ peer relationships are extremely important. As they become older, these students become more aware of the disparity that exists between their cognitive ability and their academic and social difficulties (Trail, 2011; Baum & Owen, 2004; Hughes, 2011). This can lead to social and emotional stress. Often times these students are unable to fit in with their peers because they are so extremely different from them. Not only do they not fit in with their general age peers, they also do not relate with their solely disabled or solely gifted peers.
This can cause social isolation, feelings of loneliness, and can even lead to suicidal thoughts (Trail, 2011). In studying the social and self-perceptions of dual exceptional adolescents, Barber & Mueller (2011), found that students with dual exceptionalities exhibit a lower self-perception than do their gifted and non-gifted peers. The extreme differences that students with dual exceptionalities face, cause them to adopt coping strategies that help them move more easily through life. This can include ignoring their gifts in order to fit in with a more socially acceptable crowd, finding students who have similar interests and abilities, or embracing their differences (Cross, 1997; Trail, 2011).

Another problem that students with dual exceptionalities may face is bullying. Because bullies single out people who are different and who they presume to be weaker, students with dual exceptionalities are often the target of either direct mistreatment or purposeful isolation (Trail, 2011). Trail (2011) states that these students often find their peers in adults because their interests and intellectual abilities don’t match their same age peers. It is important to know the difficulties that these students face in order for educators, counselors, and parents to better support their interpersonal and intrapersonal needs.

**Parental Resources and Support**

Parents also play an integral role in their child’s education, especially when that child is in need of special services. Baum and Owen (2004) state that parents are to be the student’s number one advocate. When it comes to working with schools to provide the best fit in academic and social emotional intervention, parents must be diligent. Because of their differences and struggles, students with dual exceptionalities need a great deal of support. Unfortunately, due to a lack of parental knowledge and support, students with
dual exceptionalities do not receive the needed support from their home environments (Barber & Mueller, 2011). In order for these students to thrive, parents must provide the students with academic help at home, provide their children with positive encouragement, and work directly with teachers when challenges arise (Baum & Owen, 2004). This type of support cannot happen unless parents understand their children’s unique characteristics and needs (Barber & Mueller, 2011).

Though parents are an integral part of the support system, they are not often mentioned in the literature on students with dual exceptionalities. This is a problem because parents are the first line of defense in helping these students to succeed in both the academic and social environments. In addition, there also isn’t much support available for the parents of students with dual exceptionalities in the form of parent groups and parent-oriented information. Parents of students with dual exceptionalities are also in dire need of resources, such as articles and books, in order to meet their children’s needs at home and support them in their academic careers. This study will survey the parent’s perspective of their child’s experiences and attain more in-depth information related to the challenges that parents face when working with schools and raising their dual exceptional children.

**Students with dual exceptionalities: The Purpose of the Study?**

Currently, most of the literature regarding students with dual exceptionalities focuses on identification and characteristics of, and services for gifted students. Most of the empirical research found was based on identification and teachers’ perceptions of dual exceptional student’s academic abilities. Although identification is an extremely important facet of dual exceptional research, I believe it is important to learn more about
what these students are experiencing every day. This type of information will not only provide support for the literature that is available, but provide a first-hand look at these students' weaknesses and strengths, their interactions with teachers and peers, and their academic difficulties. Parental support is also an important facet of dual exceptional research. There is currently a lack of information regarding parental involvement, resources for parents regarding their dual exceptional children, and their interactions with school personnel and their children. The purpose of this study is to capture a close up view of what life is like for students with dual exceptionalities, from perspective of both the student and the parent, in order to be better able to serve and support them.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the procedures that took place in order to bring this project together. According to Yin (1994), a case study approach to research is beneficial when answering “how” or “why” questions. This study looks at the academic and social-emotional characteristics of students with dual exceptionalities, their interactions with peers and teachers, the support and resources available to parents of these students. A qualitative multiple case study design was used in order to determine how the real life experiences of students with dual exceptionalities and their parents related to what the extant literature says about this population. The following questions guided the development and execution of this study: What experiences do students with dual exceptionalities have with academics? What types of behaviors do these children exhibit in school?, What types of interactions do these students, and parent, have with teachers and administrators?, What are the social implications of dual exceptionality?, and What information is available to parents regarding their children’s dual exceptionalities?

Participants

A convenience sample was used in order to find participants for this study. The College of William and Mary’s Gifted and Talented Center runs an annual Summer Program for Gifted Students through its Pre-Collegiate Programs division. This program is comprised of two sessions that run in July. Pre-Collegiate Programs also has access to the email addresses of people who have participated in past programs run by the Gifted and Talented Center. The goal of this multiple case study was to interview five to ten students and their parents using a semi-structured interview format. Yin (1994) explains
that the use of multiple case studies is similar to conducting multiple experiments. In his book, *Case Study Research; design and methods*, Yin states that, “the ability to conduct six or ten case studies, arranged effectively within a multiple-case design, is analogous to the ability to conduct six to ten experiments on related topics” (Yin, 1994). This type of cases study design must also be built upon a strong foundation found in the literature on the topic. Students from elementary school to high school were considered to participate in the study. As a final sample group, the grade levels ranged from 2nd to 12th and the ages ranged from 7-years-old to 17-years-old. A total of 12 children and 12 parents were interviewed.

Permission to email the Summer Enrichment Program list was obtained from the Director of Pre-Collegiate Programming, Dr. May Clinton. Once approval was received, an email was sent to all people who were on the Summer Program mailing list. This email was sent using an email address designated specifically for this study: 2Eresearch@gmail.com. Possible participants were asked if they were interested in having their dual exceptional child, and themselves, be interviewed as part of the study. Although official documentation was not required, the email did contain the following criteria that must be met by the student in order to participate. The student must:

- Be identified as gifted by their school district and have learning difficulties,
- Be identified as dual exceptionality their school district, OR
- Be identified as dual exceptional through testing/evaluation done outside of the school district

Parents who wished to participate sent a confirmation email and received further information regarding confidentiality, contact information, a more in depth look at the
nature of the study, and student and parent consent forms. The consent forms were sent back either electronically or collected in person at the interview. Of the parents who responded, most of their children were either gifted with a Specific Learning Disability (GLD or GT/LD), gifted with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (GT/ADHD), gifted with Autism Spectrum Disorder (GT/ASD), or they were gifted with a combination of any of the three previously mentioned disabilities. For the sake of privacy, any name used in this study has been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

**Materials**

A semi-structured interview design was used to gain information from participants for this study. This design allows the researcher with the freedom to elaborate on specific questions and to observe a participant’s mannerisms, body language, and tone of voice when answering the questions. This gives the researcher a more accurate picture of what the participant is trying to say. The questions for the interview were developed through research on the academic and social-emotional characteristics of students with dual exceptionalities, their interactions with peers and teachers, and the information available regarding parent interaction and resources. The thesis advisor and the IRB approved the interview protocol. According to Yin (1994) the use of interview protocol in a case study design improves the reliability of the findings.

There were two interview protocol used to complete this study: a student protocol containing 18 questions and a parent protocol containing 15 questions. Following are examples of questions from both the student and parent protocol:

**Student**

- Is your schoolwork challenging?
• How do you feel about your abilities? I.e. are you generally happy? Do you sometimes get frustrated in school etc.?

• Are your teachers supportive? Do they help you? Do they understand what you need in order to do well?

Parent
• Is there any information available to you about your child’s unique needs?

• Is your child challenged enough in school?

• Have you had any difficulty with the school regarding your child’s unique needs?

A complete copy of each protocol can be found in the appendix of this document.

Although a total of 12 children and 12 parents were interviewed, not all interviews were used. Interviews were dismissed if the participant did not provide enough information or if they were extreme outliers. Though they were not used, these interviews provided some valuable basic information. A total of 8 child and 8 parent interviews were used to complete this study.

Procedures

A multiple case study design was used to gain information for this study. Case studies are beneficial because they allow the researcher get a more elaborate look at their subjects. A multiple case study provides strong support for the hypothesis or research question(s) that are being asked by the researcher (Yin, 1994). Because a multiple case study approach is such an undertaking, Yin (1994) says that each case must have a specific purpose in order to “predict similar results.” It is the purpose of this study to use the multiple case study approach to do just that. In interviewing multiple children and parents the researcher will be able to compare real people with the extant literature on students with dual
exceptionalities and to see whether these characteristics and interactions hold true across multiple participants.

Once consent forms were received, each participant was contacted to set up a place and time for the interview to take place. Of the 8 sets of interviews that are included in this study, 2 of them took place over the phone, 1 was done as a video chat, and the remaining interviews were done in person. For the most part, children and parents were interviewed on separate days due to scheduling. All interviews took place over a period of about a month and a half during the months of August and September of 2011. All interviews, including the phone and Skype interview, were recorded using a voice recorder. Each participant was informed that they could stop or refuse to answer a question at any time during the interview. No identifying characteristics are used within this study and each participants name has been changed in order to protect their privacy.

Upon completion, a graduate student was hired to transcribe all of the interviews. This student signed a contract stating that all information was to be kept confidential and no information should be shared with anyone other than the researcher. For the complete document please see the Appendix D.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis techniques have been of particular concern for case study research designs. The techniques used to analyze data must be based upon the purpose and prospected generalizability of the study. The type of data analysis done will reflect on the internal validity or a study. According to Yin (1994) “internal validity is a concern only of causal (or explanatory) case studies, in which an investigator is trying to determine whether” or not one event causes another one. Although internal validity of a study is important, the
study at hand is not a causal study. Instead, this study is a comparison between existing literature on students with dual exceptionalities and the real life experiences of these students and their parents.

As may have been assumed, this study draws heavily upon the suggestions of Robert K. Yin in his book *Case Study Research: design and methods* (1994). In this book, Yin proposes two types of strategies for case study analysis. This study will follow the theoretical propositions strategy. With this strategy a case study is analyzed using pre-existing information, or categories, that come from the literature out of which the study was born. For example, in regards to this study, in reading in the extant literature it has been noted that students with dual exceptionalities have difficulty with goal setting. This would lead the researcher to develop a category for goal setting/planning. While reading through case study data (interviews in this case), the researcher will look for ways in which the students exhibit goal setting/planning abilities, or a lack thereof. Yin (1994) states that this approach to data analysis “helps to organize the entire case study and to define alternative explanations to be examined.” As will be seen in the results and discussion section of this document, some of the categories by which data were organized and analyzed include parental resources, interactions with peers, and academic difficulty/strengths. For the purpose of this study, the method of data analysis was modified in order to include emergent themes as they appeared.
Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis

Introduction

Students with dual exceptionalities are very much present in our school system today, yet they do not always receive the recognition and assistance they need. The purpose of this study was to learn more about these students academic and social/emotional lives from the perspective of the student as well as their parent. There were five overarching research questions that guided this study: What experiences do students with dual exceptionalities have with academics? What types of behaviors do these children exhibit in school?, What types of interactions do these students, and parent, have with teachers and administrators?, What are the social implications of dual exceptionality?, and What information is available to parents regarding their children’s dual exceptionalities?

The multiple case study approach used for this study yielded a great deal of important information that can be used to inform educators as well as those who work in close contact with these students.

Participant Demographics

A total of 12 students and their parents were asked to participate in this study. Table 1 shows the complete demographic information for each participant. As mentioned previously, the participants for this study were taken as a convenience sample with the help of an email listserv. The total sample included 6 female and 6 male students ages 7 through 17. Students were diagnosed with ADHD, Asperger's/Autism, and Learning disabilities, such as dyslexia and dysgraphia. A few of these students exhibited multiple disabilities including anxiety disorders and psychological disorders. ADHD was the most
common disability present among this sample. One mother was interviewed for each student. Students’ 11-years-pld through 17-years-old, who make up approximately three-fourths of the student participants, were better able to give more detailed information regarding their experiences as students with dual exceptionalities. One student possessed a physical disability, which was not within the scope of this study. Therefore, data from both the student and the parent were not used.

In order to participate in this study, students were required to meet the following criteria:

• Be identified as gifted by their school district and have learning difficulties,

• Be identified as dual exceptional by their school district,

**OR**

• Be identified as dual exceptional through testing/evaluation done outside of the school district

According to personal report of the students, as well as parents, all of the participants met these requirements.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

In order to get a closer look at these student’s experiences, the researcher asked questions about their strengths and weaknesses, their interactions with their teachers, and their peer relationships. Parents were asked similar questions along with questions regarding the struggles of raising a child with dual exceptionalities and the availability of resources relating to dual exceptional child. Both students and parents were asked to provide advice to educators on what they feel is the most important thing to know about students with dual exceptionalities.
Interviews were read and reread to determine which data related to the categories found in the literature as well as whether or not any themes emerged. Student and parent responses to questions were compared against each other and against the literature. It is the goal of this study that the following analysis will shed more light on the struggles and triumphs of this particular group of students. Each participant was provided with a number and a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. For transcripts of participant interviews see Appendix G.

**Patterns of Aptitude and Limitations**

**Aptitude.** When asked about their strengths students reported things such as computer programming and video game design, puzzles, creative writing, math, art, and problem solving. Students tended to lean more toward subject matter and interests while parents tended to respond more with things such as good auditory processing skills, phenomenal memory, good reader, high vocabulary, verbal fluency, spatial ability, and rapid acquisition of knowledge. Many of these students enjoyed reading. Anna, a young girl diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia, said, “I wasn’t going to forget that I liked to read just because I had a problem” (Anna, personal communication, August 28, 2011). Ted echoed this sentiment by saying, “I really enjoy reading...when I was in elementary school and middle school I was crazy about reading. I would read in the hallway. I’d carry a book around with me and read through the hallways, walking out of my peripheral vision” (Ted, personal communication, August 10, 2011). Other students enjoyed video games and the art of computer and video game design. Carrie said, “I’m going to move to Japan and work for Nintendo” (Carrie, personal communication, August 8, 2011). Max also had an interest in become a video game designer. Logan pointed out his visual-
spatial and problem solving abilities by saying, “I like seeing things destroyed and then I like building them back again” (Logan, personal communication, August 7, 2011). Many of the students were also interested in art such as Logan, who enjoyed art and animation, Carrie, who likes art because she has “room to be creative” (Carrie, personal communication, August 8, 2011), Gloria, who enjoys photography, and Macy.

**Limitations.** One of the greatest difficulties for these students was writing.

Malory said about her daughter Macy,

...she’ll have it set in her head and she’ll get to the second word and it’s the mechanics of getting it on the page, the sequential things that have to fall into place. Not to mention spelling. By the time she’s on the second word she’s forgotten (Malory, personal communication, August 11, 2011).

Shelly echoed this sentiment when she said, “…he [Seth] can’t get it on the paper fast enough and hold on to the thought long enough to get it down” (Shelly, personal communication, August 2, 2011). When writing, Seth seems to experience difficulty with his working memory. This problem differs from other students, such as Gloria, who have difficulty translating their ideas into written works. Gloria’s mom, Cora, said, “When she goes from here to here, from her brain to her hand, to write out something, it is less descriptive and less mature and less interesting than if she just goes from here to here (brain to paper). It’s pretty fascinating” (Cora, personal communication, August 4, 2011). Unlike Seth, she does not completely forget what she has decided to write, it simply comes across in a less mature, less detailed manner.

Although many of the students seemed to encounter writing difficulties, some of them actually enjoyed writing. For example, Carrie, Ted and Betty enjoy creative writing
and language arts. According to Gloria’s mom she has also received accolades for her writing in history. Ted said that he is good at speaking and writing.

Other students exhibited difficulty reading. Anna’s mom, Katherine, states, “She has trouble with spelling and reading out loud and understanding direction on exams (she relies heavily on contextual cues and with directions, there are not that many contextual cues)” (Katherine, personal communication, August 28, 2011).

Another difficulty that students encountered was following directions. Because some of these students are inattentive, it is difficult for them to follow oral or multistep instructions. Marcia said that when given a writing prompt in school her son, Max, “wrote a beautiful essay about something of his own imagining. He never heard the instruction…” (Marcia, personal communication, August 3, 2011). Other difficulties included reading, impulsivity (which will later be discussed in more detail), difficulty organizing thoughts, research, and sequential thinking. Although these difficulties were mentioned by many participants, they were not as detailed as the discussion of writing difficulties.

**Gifted Programming.** Most of the students in this study reported that their schools offered gifted programs. High school students reported that they were taking Honors or Advanced placement classes. Others were enrolled in International Baccalaureate Programs. There was mixed report regarding the topic of academic challenge. Some students were being sufficiently challenged, some were not being challenged at all and still others did not mention whether or not they were being academically challenged in their course work. Many of the students receive work that is the same as their non-gifted peers meaning that the academic challenge or differentiation
just isn’t there. Lani, Andy’s mom, discussed how her son would often receive the same worksheets as everyone else because the teachers did not properly differentiate. She said, “That was demoralizing for him and he would sometimes have behavior issues while he was doing that type of worksheet” (Lani, personal communication, August 6, 2011).

**Accommodations and Support.** Regarding accommodations and support, many of the parents had negative things to say. Jennifer says that the school did nothing to help her daughter in elementary school. For example, according to her Individualized Education Program (IEP), Carrie was supposed to have preferential seating in the front of the room. However, she was often seated in the back of the room, which caused her to become distracted. Jennifer has also found that Carrie is not receiving the needed support in high school either. Carrie has difficulty remembering to turn in homework assignments. Her IEP states that she must be asked for her homework at least three times. This has not been done and Carrie’s grades suffer because of it. Jennifer said that she “steps in when she needs to in terms of getting them to modify assignments” (Jennifer, personal communication, August 1, 2011). Other parents have expressed concerns that, although their children are receiving help, they are not really getting the support they need. Katherine stated, “last year the teachers were not good at remembering to provide her with the interventions that she needed” (Katherine, personal communication, August 28, 2011). However, her current school has provided her with all of the necessary accommodations. Lani expressed disappointment over Andy’s teacher’s assumptions about his abilities. She said, “The most difficult part for him is that, because he’s so smart, they make an assumption that he can just do stuff, but he actually does need a lot of direction…” (Lani, personal communication, August 6, 2011).” She went on to say that
...some of the worksheets that would come home when they would differentiate for him would be like 7th grade math, which he couldn’t do either...just because 2+2 is too easy doesn’t mean he’s ready for algebra...the kids get harder stuff to do but don’t get instruction to back it up.

Other difficulties included lack of differentiation in the classroom, unwillingness to modify assignments that are inappropriate, unhelpful punishments and a disregard for social-emotional issues.

There were a few parents who were successful when it came to getting their child the academic support that she needed. Overall, parents had the most difficulty getting accommodations for their children in elementary school than they did in middle school and high school.

Special Programs

Most of the students in this study participated in outside programs or competitions in order to showcase their gifts. These students participated in such programs as Odyssey of the Mind, Math Olympiads, Camp Invention, Lego League, Political Science Camp, Technology Competitions and Video Game Programming camps. Overall, these students seem to enjoy hands-on, real-world learning experiences. Ted, a 12th grade student with ADHD, talked about the social implications of special programs. When asked a question about his social life at school he said,

...judging by Facebook and talking to kids, it seems like they have more things going on socially than I do...my perspective on all that changed when I went to a political science camp this summer. About a hundred kids were accepted from the whole country, about six hundred, seven
hundred, kids applied and a hundred kids were accepted. I was very excited to go, very excited to be accepted. I got to be away from my parents for two weeks...when I was there I found that every single one of those hundred kids wanted to be there. That is completely different from high school, where those kids have to be there, where truants are against the law. But these kids applied, they didn’t have to be there. Every single one of these kids was similar to me, and everyone got along well. Everyone liked each other. Everyone was having fun together. There I felt appreciated. It was really great (Ted, personal communication, August 10, 2011).

Not all experiences with special programs have been positive. Lani has had an overwhelmingly negative experience attempting to get her son enrolled in special programs. She has tried to sign him up for multiple enrichment camps but he is not accepted because they say they don’t have the resources to accommodate his needs. She said,

It’s unfair because he qualifies for it the same as the other kids do and, to me, it’s just flat out discrimination. I think it’s bigotry and discrimination and fear, and a lot of times they hide behind budget...I mean, I would have paid a graduate student or an undergrad, anybody, to just be there as an aide, but they have to be willing to and they’re not willing to (Lani, personal communication, August 6, 2011).
She goes on to say, “Rather than no, I’d rather hear, ‘What can we do to make this work?’...Instead of, ‘I have concerns,’ the response I would hope for is, ‘Okay, what do we need to do to make this a success’” (Lani, personal communication, August 6, 2011).

Ted’s mother, Maggie, discussed the issue of his becoming very behind on schoolwork when he participates in different contests and programs. She said,

When my son participates in a three-day competition conference, missing three days of school can then rebound and it takes him two and a half or three weeks to make three days up, because everything else just compounds on those three days that he’s missed, and you’re always missing a couple pieces of pertinent information that then reflects a final grade (Maggie, personal communication, August 10, 2011).

Ted also remarked on this situation saying that it was often difficult to catch up.

**Behavior in School**

Among the student participants there was a wide variety of behavior issues in school. Some students would have emotional breakdowns due to high levels of frustration while other would exhibit negative behaviors due to boredom or confusion. For example, it has been reported numerous times that many of these students would be asked to do repetitive work or were forced to sit and wait while other students finished working. For example, one time, after Betty, a middle school student with Asperger’s syndrome, had finished her assignment early, she promptly took out her scissors and began cutting her shirt into ribbons. Not only does this speak to some of the behavior issues of students with dual exceptionalities, it also reveals the importance of appropriate instruction. Jennifer, Carrie’s mother, reported that she is known to tune out or read when she already
knew the material being taught. Carrie also experiences emotional breakdowns in school. Jennifer says,

Once it escalates and it gets into a full melt down or explosion, whatever you want to call it, then there’s no logic because her logic has gone out the window and you have to get her to calm down before you’re able to give her consequences (Jennifer, personal communication, August 1, 2011).

Another common behavior was impulsivity. Many of the students, from the youngest to the oldest, would act before they thought about what they were doing. This would lead them to get in trouble or it would strain peer relationships. When speaking of his ability to control his impulses Logan said, “It’s like an ant trying to stop an elephant” (Logan, personal communication, August 7, 2011). Justin said, “I don’t raise my hand. I’m very impulsive” (Justin, personal communication, August 23, 2011). He goes on to say, “I’m impulsive about being impulsive…I don’t think about not thinking” (Justin, personal communication, August 23, 2011). Some of the students, like Gloria, have not had any behavior issues in school.

Perceptions. The students in the study also divulged information about their feelings for school. Andy, a young boy with Autism, stated that he does not have a good time in school because he is unable to write about or talk about the things that interest him. Ted said he feels pressure to behave well because of all of the accommodations he receives. Many of the students expressed that they sometimes felt frustration in school but, in general, the school environment was not a negative place.
Teachers and Administrators

Perception. Lani reported that she has difficulty getting Andy’s needs met because some teachers are unwilling to work with her. She mentioned the fact that “the GT is even more difficult because she has made it quite clear she has no training in autism (Lani, personal communication, August 6, 2011). This teacher was aware of her lack of information and bias and yet was unwilling to make any changes. Maggie shed light on teacher bias related to expectations of these student abilities. When her son, Ted, was pulled out of classes for gifted programming, his general education teacher required him to make up the work that he missed. She stated that according to the general education teacher, “If you’re gifted you should be able to do the work that you’ve missed” (Maggie, personal communication, August 10, 2011). This teacher only looked at the student’s gifts and was unwilling to accommodate either his gifts or his learning difficulties.

On the other hand Logan’s mom stated, “…it took her [the child’s teacher] a very long time to realize that these difficulties were not hindering his abilities to learn more advanced work” (Mary, personal communication, August 7, 2011). Relatedly, Misty said, “I think teachers who see where he [Justin] is intellectually have a lot more tolerance than teachers who see where he struggles” (Misty, personal communication, August 23, 2011). She went on to say that, unfortunately, “Mostly teachers tell you about what’s wrong…in fourth grade it was bad enough. He only had one teacher that year and everything she had to say was negative” (Misty, personal communication, August 23, 2011). Marcia, Max’s mom, attempted to understand the reasons behind his teacher’s perceptions and actions. She said,
I can’t figure out if it’s because there are so many kids in the class with issues that they’re just…tired of dealing with it, or it was a personality thing, or they would forget that different kids had different issues (Marcia, personal communication, August 3, 2011).

Communication. Communication with teachers was often difficult for parents. According to some parents who participated in the study, this can be attributed to such things as lack of concern for student’s education, lack of knowledge or appropriate resources, or lack of time. Maggie said that communication was difficult because the school is so big and the teachers don’t have enough time. She went on to say that “…teachers are being pulled in [so] many directions that they don’t even have time to give the help to these gifted that they need” (Maggie, personal communication, August 10, 2011). This sentiment was echoed by a few other parent participants.

While many parents found it sometimes difficult to communication with their child’s teachers, often times there were teachers who were very willing to communicate. Although it may have been a long process, this communication opened up a door to discuss the student’s true needs and potential. As a student, Ted stated that he keeps a constant communication with his teachers. He said, “I send emails to them and talk to them in class, and some teachers really get that and others don’t” (Ted, personal communication, August 10, 2011). Mary said that her son’s 4th grade teacher became an advocate for him once she understood his true potential. Lena stated that her daughter’s middle school teachers were very receptive to her abilities, limitations, and needs because they had more experience working with a variety of different students. This is a
A lack of teacher training was mentioned by a few parents as the reason for negative interactions. Lani put it well when she said, “I think the main issue is training of general education and GT teachers. If you’re going to have an inclusive class, everyone needs to be on board and wanting to do that rather than seeing it as a pain” (Lani, personal communication, August 6, 2011). She also said, “if the general ed. teacher had training she would know how to handle it herself…but when they do professional development they send special education teachers to that kind of thing, not general ed. Teachers” (Lani, personal communication, August 6, 2011). Jennifer, Carrie’s mom, would like to start a disability awareness program for teachers in order to better educate them on the needs of both students with disabilities and those with dual exceptionalities.

**Interactions with students.** Student interactions with teachers were mostly positive. Students reported teachers as being nice, supportive, and helpful. Macy said, “They do whatever they can to make their students feel more comfortable” (Macy, personal communication, August 11, 2011). Some students reported that their teacher understood them, while others didn’t think their teachers understood their gifts and other were not sure. According to Cora, here daughter Gloria didn’t really have any issues with teachers, nor did she get her problems recognized easily, because she had a pleasant personality and never caused any trouble in school. Max, a high school student with ADHD, said that he had a negative interaction with a teacher but he believes it was because his ADHD caused him to act out. Logan said that some of his teachers have
trouble understanding his ADHD and giftedness. He said, “Sometimes I think some of them have trouble. Like the gifted teacher this year, she seemed to have a little bit of trouble with what I’m saying, like maybe no one understood my way of thought…” (Logan, personal communication, August 7, 2011). He also said that he butts heads with a lot of his teachers because he is very strong willed. However, he did have some good experiences with teachers. When speaking of his third grade teacher he said, “My third grade teacher, I liked her because she was the only one who could beat me in an argument” (Logan, personal communication, August 7, 2011). He also said that he liked her because she was good at explaining work to him.

Ted has also had both positive and negative encounters with teachers who have made a spectacle of him in class because he needed special accommodations (i.e. extra time on tests). For example, when she needed to move him to another room for a test, one teacher yelled out his name and kicked opened the door as he followed her out. Being a very mature young man he was quoted as saying “I think even the worst experiences I’ve had in classes have been offset by my joy for learning” (Ted, personal communication, August 10, 2012). Ted also described that he had the support of other school personnel. I’m lucky because I have guidance counselors and people there who care about me so we’re able to go and use the 504 plan to have and use the resources I have available to me to tailor the schedule to fit my need (Ted, personal communication, August 10, 2011).

He also went on to say that “I think teachers that are actually trying to teach; teaching is their priority, I get along with the most. The teachers who are just there for a job, sparks start to fly” (Ted, personal communication, August 10, 2012).
Peer Relationships and Social Interaction

Many of the students in this study had difficulty with social interaction and reading social cues. For example, Betty has difficulty with personal space while Justin has difficulty navigating the nuances of conversation such as when to talk and when to listen. Although some of the students expressed that they had a supportive peer base, many of the students expressed that they didn’t have many friends. Most of the students were not very outgoing, although they did have a few close friends. Carrie said, “I don’t have that many friends in school....a lot of kids tease me a lot” (Carrie, personal communication, August 8, 2011). Gloria, Anna, and Macy seem to not have any difficulty making or keeping friends while Betty said, “To make friends is hard, but keeping them is pretty easy” (Betty, personal communication, September, 2011). Some of the other students, such as Logan, echoed this sentiment.

Bullying. Many of the students in this study have dealt with, or are dealing with, nasty behavior from peers. Often times, these students are bullied because of their differences (Trail, 2011). This can lead to such things as isolation and low self-esteem. For example, Logan said “...it’s hard for me to make friends and therefore I’m like the one on the side so I get picked on” (Logan, personal communication, August 7, 2011). His mother Mary corroborated this by saying that she believed he was bullied because he talked a lot, which drew attention to him. Andy expressed that the kids in his class do not talk to him. He also doesn’t have any peers with similar interests. Ted mentioned that he encountered bullies in elementary school and middle school. He said, “...there were some bullies there and I think some low self-esteem in elementary school and middle school...I would get taken advantage of and stuff. It kind of sucked” (Ted, personal communication,
August 10, 2011).” When talking about Betty, Lena said that the bullies in her school “knew how to push her triggers…they knew how to get to her and she had her feelings hurt a whole lot” (Lena, personal communication, September, 2011). It got to the point where Betty had to move to a new school. Although many of these students did have difficulty with bullying, it was empowering to know that some of them have become comfortable with who they are. Cora said that her daughter Gloria, a high school student with dyslexia and mild inattentive ADD, doesn’t care what people thought of her.

### Awareness of Abilities

Not only did these students exhibit strengths and weaknesses similar to each other, other students with dual exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and gifted students, some of them were very much aware of their struggles and abilities. When speaking about his struggles, Justin said, “I’m impulsive about being impulsive…I don’t think about not thinking” (Justin, personal communication, August 23, 2011). Ted said, “I have a very bright mind…and I can do well…but I think that my progress has kind of been hindered by my ADHD” (Ted, personal communication, August 10, 2011). Many of these students have high expectations for themselves and yet, because of their disabilities, they cannot always reach them. When speaking about his peers who are not identified as gifted, Ted said, “….it’s a little frustrating that they’re not gifted but they can be higher than me…it’s frustrating because I’d like to perform higher, but sometimes I don’t” (Ted, personal communication, August 10, 2011).

Like Ted, many of the older students recognize that their abilities and expectations didn’t always match their performance. When Gloria thinks she should be able to do something, but has difficulty, she becomes overwhelmed and it is hard for her
to complete her assignments. Her mom said, “I think academically she recognizes that she does have a pretty good understanding of the world around her...I think she likes being thought of as bright...[but] she thinks she’s a little weaker in some things than she really is” (Cora, personal communication, August 4, 2011). Betty drove home the point by saying, “I think my brain is wired to think I should get this right away, and when I don’t I get upset (Betty, personal communication, September, 2011).”

As far as what the parents reported, many of them think that their children do have some understanding of their own abilities. Mary said, “I don’t think he [Logan] understands that his struggles are different from other peoples struggles, but he definitely understands that he can’t control some things” (Mary, personal communication, August 7, 2011). Malory said that, although her daughter is aware of her academic struggles, she is not aware of how deep they are. Seth’s mom, Shelly, said, “He knows he’s smart...he knows that he has challenges in moderating is own behavior...I think he is aware of it...I don’t think he dwells on it necessarily and I think that his self-esteem is rising which is helping to control the ADHD” (Shelly, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

Maggie talked about how Ted underestimates himself when she said,

I think the ADHD also has clouded his mind. He does not realize how bright and smart he really is. He doubts himself compared to others because he can take two AP courses at school in a year where his gifted peers can take five, and that drives him crazy...I think because of this ADD he does not recognize that he is good in so many ways. (Maggie, personal communication, August 10, 2011).
Availability of Resources

According to the responses from the parent interviews, information regarding their children’s exceptionalities is sorely lacking and what is available is often hard to come by. Misty said, “you can find information about one aspect of it, but it’s hard to get the whole picture together” (Misty, personal communication, August 23, 2011). Relatedly Marcia said that she didn’t see much that crossover between gifted literature and special education literature.

Parents also commented on the lack of support from the schools and a lack of people who can help find information. Even as an educator Lena found that the school did not help her locate resources or support. She thinks the only reason that her daughter has the support she needs is because she is an educator and she is fortunate enough to be able to communicate easily with her teachers as well as gain access to information. Andy’s mother, Lani, said,

No, it was a nightmare…there is really no one you can go to who will say, ‘Okay, here are the tests that need to be done, here is the kind of intervention that needs to happen. We’re also going to work with the psychiatrist because we need this medication, and we’re also going to work with the therapist because there are a lot of psychological issues going on as a result of the learning disability (Lani, personal communication, August 6, 2011).

These parents want resources to be readily available and for their school systems to support their children. For some parents, gathering information was not as difficult as others. However, Shelly made a good point when she brought up the idea of accessibility. She said,
I think there’s a pretty good amount of information out there…Unfortunately, it seems like you have to have memberships, or things like that, on certain websites to get at some of the information…as a parent, sometimes you can’t afford to have five different memberships to whatever gifted child magazine, but you want to try to get at the stuff. So I think that’s a little bit limiting (Shelly, personal communication, August 1, 2011).

**Advice for Educators**

Throughout the interview process parents and students were asked about different aspects of what it is like to raise and to be a student with dual exceptionalities. Participants were also given the opportunity to share their insight into what they think other people, especially educators, should know about being a person with dual exceptionalities. Gloria expressed that teachers should be more open minded and willing to work with students. They need to understand that the disabilities that these students have make learning a bit more difficult. Ted very powerfully echoed this sentiment also driving home that fact that students with dual exceptionalities should also be recognized for the work that they can do. He said,

Well I think I’d like teachers to know that I’m not a freeloader, that I tend to work hard, and that all the disabilities, medicines and plans, all that complicated crap that comes along with this ADHD…those aren’t cheating tools…those are put in place…so that I will have the closest experience and opportunities to…a gifted kid…without ADHD, and that I can work just as well as any other kids can, just given the right circumstances. They’ve got to know that kids with ADHD don’t always pick up on stuff, that they don’t always listen very well, that they are sort
of impulsive, and by no means does that mean that I am any less intelligent or less cool than anyone else. And that by no means [has] having ADHD...made me a different person. It does make me a different person, but it's not all I'm focused on it. I'm trying to look past it. It's a constant challenge for me, but I'm still a normal kid, you know? I'm still normal, still a pretty normal teenager, and I just have some little quirks (Ted, personal communication, August 10, 2011).

Parents also had some very poignant words that echoed how their children felt. Lena wants educators to know that students with dual exceptionalities are capable and, like all children, they may need academic support in order to reach their potential. She said,

While they may be smart and have lots of abilities...you have to take into account the fact that there are things that hinder them as well. I think a lot of times when educators see 'gifted' on the file folder they automatically think that kid is supposed to be perfect. Gifted is a way of thinking and a way of digging deeper into whatever the content ay be, and I think a lot of educators don’t understand that gifted does not equal perfect (Lena, personal communication, September, 2011).

Similarly, Cora pushes for equal and flexible evaluation, education, and support for students with dual exceptionalities. She states,

...we have, in our society, sort of this very limited...system for educating and evaluating...I think really trying to become more personalized and individualized with the education and the evaluation of these kids [would help]...it would be nice if we could expand that to accommodate all of these different approaches that kids have (Cora, personal communication, August 4, 2011).
Summary

Students with dual exceptionalities exhibit a wide range of unique characteristics and abilities. The participants in this study, both students and parents, were very open and honest with their academic strengths and limitations, as well as their positive and negative social interactions. Many of these students also expressed how they felt about/understood their dual exceptionality. This study provided a window into the thoughts and actions of these students, both positive and negative. It also shed light on the fact that parents crave and need appropriate and accessible resources. It is clear that these students want, and need, appropriate education support and challenge. They desire to be accepted and acknowledged for who they are and what they can do by both their teachers and their peers.
Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, Implications

The goal of this study was to gain first-hand knowledge on what it is like in school for students with dual exceptionalities. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview form by interviewing both the students and their parents. This provided data saturation and a deeper understanding of these students. There were five overarching research questions that guided this study: What experiences do students with dual exceptionalities have with academics? What types of behaviors do these children exhibit in school?, What types of interactions do these students, and parent, have with teachers and administrators?, What are the social implications of dual exceptionality?, and What information is available to parents regarding their children’s dual exceptionalities?

Academic Experiences of Students with Dual Exceptionalities

The first guiding question focused on student’s academic selves: What do they see as their strengths and weaknesses? According to the literature, students with dual exceptionalities exhibit a unique set of skills and difficulties that can be quite different from their age peers. These students deal daily with the fact that their learning difficulties are often in conflict with their gifts and strengths. After analyzing data from both student and parent interviews it was found that many of these students exhibit similar strengths and weaknesses, as well as interests.

Academic aptitude and limitations. Students with dual exceptionalities often exhibit some of the same strengths as their solely gifted peers. As mentioned previously, high task-commitment, intense interest in a specific area, the ability to reason abstractly and problem solve, being well versed in a particular subject area, and creativity are all
FROM THE INSIDE OUT: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK INTO
characteristics of students who are gifted as well as those with dual exceptionalities.
(King, 2005; Hughes, 2011, Baum and Owen, 2004). The students who participated in
this study reported having strengths in many of these areas. When asked about their
strengths, students reported things such as computer programming and video game
design, puzzles, creative writing, math, art, and problem solving. Students tended to lean
more toward subject matter and interests while parents tended to respond more with
things such as good auditory processing skills, phenomenal memory, good reader, high
vocabulary, verbal fluency, spatial ability, and rapid acquisition of knowledge. Parents
did mention some of the same things that their kids mentioned as well.

Although they can have extraordinary strengths, these students also have learning
difficulties. These students often exhibit a lack of organizational skills, inattention, slow
processing speed, and difficulties reading and writing (King, 2005; Baum & Owen, 2004;
Baum, 1989; Olenchak & Reis, 2002). The students in this study exhibited many of these
learning difficulties. One of the biggest problems was difficulty with writing. For the
most part, the difficulty did not lay in coming up with the ideas, but in getting them onto
the paper. Students in this study dealt with other executive functioning (LD.org, 2012)
difficulties such as planning, multi-tasking, and attention as a result of their disabilities.

**Importance of Gifted Programs.** The ability to participate in gifted programs
often provides these students with the academic enrichment and challenge they so
desperately need. While students are taking part in these programs the focus should be on
their strengths and on the accommodation of their needs rather than the remediation of
their deficits (Baum, Emerick, Herman & Dixon, 1989; Baum & Owen, 2004; Brody &
Mills, 1997). Like Lani, the mother of a young gifted boy with autism, emphasized,
gifted programs should challenge these students in order to keep them motivated and raise their self-esteem.

**Accommodations.** According to special education law, students with disabilities are required to have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), a legally binding document describing the learning and/or developmental objectives for the student (Fetzer, 2010). IEPs focus on the remediation of a student’s weaknesses and the accommodations that need to be provided in order for that student to be a successful student. As a legally binding document, the appropriate school personnel must implement an IEP. A similar document is a 504 plan. Although both documents are created to provide students with the appropriate accommodations, an IEP is a more detailed, specific document that is created for students who need specific special education services and have specific goals to meet. A 504 plan is not necessarily an educational document, but a civil rights document (Education Center).

As stated by the parent participants in this study, many of the students have either an IEP or a 504 plan. Many of the parents made a negative report regarding this issue. According to these parents students were not receiving the accommodations or the support that they were required to have as stated in their educational plans.

**Special Program.** Special programs play an important role in the lives of students with dual exceptionalities. These students thrive when they are able to participate in educational experiences that allow them to do hands-on, investigative learning. Giving these students a real world, complex problems along with support and structure, allows these students to succeed academically (Coleman, 2005). In order to better serve these students needs there have been many attempts at creating programs that appropriately
meet the academic, behavior, and social needs of this particular group of students (Baum, 1988; Nielsen & Higgins, 2005; Yssel, Margison, Cross & Merbler, 2005; Coleman, 2005).

Although it would be highly beneficial for these students to be placed in programs that specifically address the needs of students with dual exceptionalities, these types of programs are few and far between (Baum, 1988; Nielsen & Higgins, 2005; Yssel, Margison, Cross & Merbler, 2005; Coleman, 2005). Most of the students in this study participated in outside programs or competitions in order to showcase their gifts. These students participated in such programs as Odyssey of the Mind, Math Olympiads, Camp Invention, Lego League, Political Science Camp, Technology Competitions and Video Game Programming camps.

Expressions of Behavior

Students with dual exceptionalities often exhibit behavior that is outside of the norm (King, 2005; Baum & Owen, 2004). Behaviors can happen for a number of reasons. Many of these students act out when they became frustrated by the boring schoolwork or when they were confused by an assignment. Others exhibited misbehavior as a byproduct of their disabilities. These behaviors included such things as calling out and moving around in their seat or not sitting at all. Finally, other students exhibited behavior differences as a way to cope with their differences i.e., becoming the class clown.

Student and Parent Interaction with Teachers

The second guiding question asked about the student and parent’s positive and negative interactions with teachers. Another important theme that was found in both the literature and the participants’ responses was the theme of teacher interaction. Often
times there is teacher bias toward students with a disability label. Teachers have
preconceived notions about the way gifted students and or student with disabilities,
should behave, both academically and socially. This causes them not to view them the
way they actually are. In fact, these students are less likely to be chosen for gifted
education programs and/or receive appropriate academic enrichment due to this bias
(Bianco & Leech, 2010). The theme of teacher interaction is one in which the experience
of the student participants and the experiences of the parent participants diverge the most.
Overall, students reported having positive interactions with their teachers. It was also
stated numerous times that their teachers were helpful and supportive. On the other hand,
parents tended to have more negative experience with teachers and administrators. For
example, Lani said that, in her experience, “the GT is even more difficult because she has
made it quite clear she has no training in autism (Lani, personal communication, August
6, 2011). Other parents had difficulty getting in contact with teacher and/or had difficulty
getting them to understand their child’s unique needs and make the appropriate
accommodations. This could be due to differences in perspective and a lack of
information on the student’s part.

A teacher’s perception of students is often colored by a variety of different
experiences including coursework, their school support system, and their everyday
experience in the classroom. Often times students with dual exceptionalities do not fit the
mold of any of the students they have learned about or seen first-hand in their classrooms.
For this reason, many teachers are unsure how to deal with these students (Hansen &
Feldhusen, 1994). Analysis of both parent and student interviews revealed that
communication with both teachers and administrators is often difficult. According to
some parents, this can be attributed to any number of reasons including lack of concern for students’ education, lack of knowledge or appropriate resources, or lack of time.

Pre-service course work and ongoing teacher training are extremely important when dealing with such a special population of students (Bianco & Leech, 2010; Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994). Without this training, teachers are unprepared, and some may even be unwilling, to make appropriate accommodations or develop appropriately differentiated instruction for these students regarding both academic and social aspects of students with dual exceptionality. Although many of the parents hinted at teacher training, there were two parents who were big advocates for training all teachers to work with students with dual exceptionalities.

As mentioned previously, student’s interactions with teachers tended to lean toward the positive side for the most part. Students reported teachers as being nice, very supportive, and even helpful. Some students reported that their teacher understood them, while other didn’t think their teachers understood their gifts and others were not sure. Although most students felt this way, there were two boys who had poignant negative experiences with particular teachers in their schools. For example, Ted reported that some of his teachers were not sensitive to his needs or feelings. However, these boys had very positive experiences as well.

Social Interactions and Students with Dual Exceptionalities

The third guiding question explored the social interactions of students with dual exceptionalities. Participants were asked questions regarding both their positive and negative peer interactions. Peer relationships are a very important part of life, especially for students who feel different from the norm. As students with dual exceptionalities
become older, they become more aware of their academic and social differences and the differences between themselves and their same age peers (Trail, 2011; Baum & Owen, 2004; Hughes, 2011). These differences can often lead to stress and isolation. Many of the students in this study had difficulty with social interaction and reading social cues. All besides two students, who seemed to have a multitude of friends, had only a few close friends or no close friends. There were some students who were very sociable but who did not really understand the norms of social interaction.

An unfortunate side effect of social difficulty is bullying. Because of their differences, many of these students face bullying in their schools. For example, because he talks a lot and stands out, Logan has been the victim of bullying by his peers. This has happened to a few of the other participants including Betty, Carrie and Ted. Their differences made them the focus of taunting and isolation. These students are often the target of direct mistreatment or purposeful isolation (Trail, 2011). Many of the students in this study have dealt with, or are dealing with, nasty behavior from peers. Interestingly enough, the students who dealt with bullying the most were the ones who have impulsive type ADHD.

Availability of Information

The final guiding question focused on the availability and accessibility of information regarding the characteristics and needs of children with dual exceptionalities. Parents should be the number one advocates for their children and yet there are limited resources and information available to them regarding students with dual exceptionalities (Baum & Owen, 2004). This information is needed in order for parents to actively participate in their child’s learning. If they are knowledgeable, parents are better able to
advocate for accommodations, better able to interact with teachers, and better able to assist their children at home. According to the responses from the parent interviews, this information is sorely lacking and what is available is often hard to come by. The majority of parents found it difficult to locate information that took into account both their child’s disability and their gift and how they interacted with each other. Two parents in particular who were educators, though it wasn’t always easy, were able to better advocate for their children because they knew more of the ins and outs of the school system. Other parents spent years researching information and programs that could possibly help their children meet their potential.

**Awareness of Abilities and Limitations**

There were two themes that emerged beyond the scope of the original guiding research questions. The first one was the use of medication. Although this theme emerged in three student interviews and six parent interviews, it didn’t go beyond the statement that medication either helped or didn’t help. The second emergent theme that was quite interesting focused on the students’ awareness of their disabilities/gifts. According to the middle school and high school students, many of them had an awareness of their abilities. Most of the parents believed that their children had some understood both their strengths and their learning difficulties. However, many of them were not sure how much of an understanding their child had.

**Implications for the Field**

Research in the area of dual exceptionalities has grown considerably over the last 30 years. It is my hope that this study can add to the great work that is being done by educators and researchers around the world. This study has yielded many implications for
the field of gifted education as they pertain to students with dual exceptionalities. These children need more challenging work. It is not enough to simply attempt to remediate their needs. This must be done in the context of advanced placement and content. These students also need social support in the school environment. This can include such things as social skills classes, for students with more severe social needs, or simply allowing students to spend time with like-ability peers. These students will suffer intellectually, socially and emotionally if they are not given work that challenges their intellect. Placing these students in gifted programs is a start. However, students with dual exceptionalities need to be in classrooms, or in special programs that are tailored for their needs and designed to help them meet their potential as well as support them emotionally and socially.

This leads to another implication: the need for teacher training. Many of the teachers mentioned in this study were not trained to work with students with dual exceptionalities. This is not just specific to these students, but many students with dual exceptionalities. Training for all teachers (general education, special education, and gifted education) would cause these teachers to evaluate their biases, create an enriching environment, and be able to provide appropriate differentiation and accommodations. With appropriate training these teachers can join with parents and school administrators to become advocates for these children on a larger scale.

Finally, in order to help parents better support their children they need access to important information. Not only would having trained staff be a helpful resource to parents, but providing them with helpful referrals, links, and reading materials would ease their worry. Parents should not have to pay membership fees in order to access this
information. There should be a place specifically geared toward these parents that will inform them so that they can join with teachers to create the best learning environment for their children.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Students with dual exceptionalities are a growing area of concern for parents and educators alike. How do we identify them? How do we educate them? How do we help them to reach their full potential in all areas of their lives? First, more research needs to be done regarding appropriate educational placement and gifted programming for these students. We need to know more about what type of environment will help these students thrive. Second, educators and administrators need to know more about these student’s social and emotional struggles. It is important for researchers to find out more about bullying and negative social interactions among this special population of gifted students. Third, we must address the lack of information available to parents. How can we make this information more streamline and accessible? Parents are these student’s first advocates and they need to be informed. Fourth, there are many more types of students with dual exceptionalities than the ones featured in this study. It would be great to see more research on physical disabilities, hearing and visual impairment, and students with emotional difficulties such as defiance and depression. Fifth, a case study approach to researching these student’s experiences is extremely valuable. A lot more multiple and single case study research needs to be done. More importantly, this case study research should be triangulated with test scores, school records, and even teacher interviews in order to get a better picture of these students. Finally, more empirical studies need to be done on this population of students. This will not only add depth to the current body of
research, but also provide a means for generalizing to a greater population of students with dual exceptionalities. Of course, there are so many more avenues of research than have been mentioned here but every step counts.

**Conclusion**

The results from this study may be able to provide the researcher and reader with a first-hand account of the academic and peer experiences of students with dual exceptionalities. The overarching message of these students and their parents is equity and fairness. Overall, these students just want to be accepted for who they are, for both their strengths and their weakness. They want to be treated equally to other students and they want to be able to excel with the support of those around them. Although their parents may see their school experience from a different perspective, they want the same thing for their children. They want their children to receive the accommodations and support that they need and they want teachers and administrators to see their children for their intellectual gifts instead of their academic or social difficulties. It is the goal of educators and advocates to make sure that these students receive the support that they need. It is my hope that this study helped to tell another part of their story.
References


FROM THE INSIDE OUT: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK INTO
preparation and disability labels on gifted referrals. Teacher Education and
Special Education, 33(4), 319-334.
development: Field experiences with gifted students. Journal for the Education of
Coleman, M. R. (2005). Academic strategies that work for gifted students with
Journal of Education, 72(3&4)
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
2012/explore/view/
Hughes, C. E. (2011). Dual exceptional children: twice the challenges, twice the joys. In
J. A. Castellano (Ed). & A. D. Frazier's (Ed) Special Populations in Gifted
Education: Understanding our most able students from diverse backgrounds.153-


How States regulate and support programs and services for gifted and talented students. Washington, DC.


http://nichcy.org/disability/specific/ohi


Nicpon, M., Allmon, A. Sieck, B. & Stinson, R. (2011). Empirical investigation of twice-exceptionality: where have we been and where are we going? Gifted Child


### Table 1

**Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID Number</th>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Parent Name</th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age/Grade</th>
<th>Level of Schooling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Logan</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11/6th</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>Dyslexia &amp; Dysgraphia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9/4th</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8/3rd</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14/9th</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Macy</td>
<td>Malory</td>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11/6th</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Cerebral Palsy &amp; Psych Difficulties</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Unknown/High School</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13/8th</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Lani</td>
<td>Autism Spectrum</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7/2nd</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17/12th</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Asperger's, ADHD, Anxiety Disorders</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13/8th</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Misty</td>
<td>ADHD &amp; Dysgraphia</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11/6th</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>Dyslexia &amp; Mild Inattentive ADD</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14/9th</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A: IRB Approval

---------------------------
BASIC INFO
---------------------------

Title: From the Inside Out: An in-depth look into the lives of students with dual exceptionalities
Start Date: 2011-06-24
Year Number: 1
Years Total: 1
Campus: Main
Committee(s): EDIRC
Cc: Emails:

---------------------------
PI INFO
---------------------------

W&M UserID: cities
Full Name: Carol Tieso
Role: Faculty
Department: The Center for Gifted Education
Day/Work Phone: 757-221-2461
Ext:
Alternate Phone:

----------

W&M UserID: mssims
Full Name: Monique Sims
Role: Graduate Student
Department: The Center for Gifted Education
Day/Work Phone: 518-312-2230
Ext:
Alternate Phone:
Appendix B: Request for Participants

The College of
WILLIAM & MARY

School of Education
P.O. Box 8795
Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795
757-221-2166

From the Inside Out: An in-depth look into the lives of students with dual exceptionalities

Hello,

My name is Monique Sims and I work as a graduate assistant for the Center for Gifted Education. I am currently working on my Master's thesis in Gifted Education here at The College of William and Mary. I have chosen to focus on the experiences of gifted students with learning difficulties in life and school. I would also like to look at these experiences from the parent's perspective. Currently I am looking for volunteers who would be willing to participate in my research study. The study involves a two part interview: one involving the dual exceptional student and one involving the parent(s). The interviews should take no more than 30 minutes each.

Students who participate must meet the following criteria:

- Be identified as having gifts AND learning difficulties by their school district,
  OR
- Be identified as having gifts AND learning difficulties through testing/evaluation done outside of the school district

If you and your child are interested in participating, please send an email to 2Ereseach@gmail.com and I will forward a letter containing more information regarding the study and a consent form.

This research has been approved by the William and Mary Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions feel free to email Monique Sims at 2Ereseach@gmail.com.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate!

Monique Sims
M.A. Ed. Student
Gifted Education

Carol L. Tieso, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Gifted Education

College of William and Mary
GSH 256
P.O. Box 8705
Williamsburg, VA 23187
Phone (518)-312-2230
E-mail: 2Eresearch@gmail.com

SOE 3123
P.O. Box 8705
Williamsburg, VA 23187
Phone: (757) 221-2461
Email: cllties@wm.edu
Appendix C: Invitation to Participate

Invitation to Parents: Form for Participation in a Research Study (Interview)

Investigators: Monique Sims, Masters in Gifted Education, The College of William and Mary

Study Title: From the Inside Out: An in-depth look into the lives of students with dual exceptionalities

1. Invitation to Participate in a Research Study
   You and your child are invited to participate in this research study regarding the experiences of students with dual exceptionalities and their parents.

2. Purpose of the Research Study
   The purpose of this study is to learn more about the school experiences, academic difficulties and social-emotional struggles of students with dual exceptionalities as well as to learn more about these issues from the parent’s perspective. This study is also a fulfillment of the Master’s Thesis requirement for the Gifted Education Program.

3. Description of Procedures
   Participation in this study involves a one-on-one interview with the dual exceptional student and a one-on-one interview with the parent(s). Each interview should take 30 minutes for a total of an hour of your time.

4. Risks and Inconveniences
   There are no anticipated risks to participation. The only inconvenience is that the interview is in person. (Although an in person interview is preferred, please contact me at 2EResearch@gmail.com for another option)

5. Benefits
   The primary benefit is the opportunity to contribute to research about the experiences of students with dual exceptionalities, determine whether these experiences are supported by current research and to provide a greater understanding of who these students are and the difficulties they may face.

6. Confidentiality/Anonymity
   All interview data will be confidential; there will be NO identifying characteristics (i.e. names) presented in the final report. All paper documents will be coded using numbers after the interview takes place. The interviewer is the only person who will have access to student and parent names. The audio-tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked and secured location until the completion of the study.

7. Voluntary Participation
   You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There is no pressure to answer any of the interview questions. There are no penalties or
consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate. Results of the study will be made available to any participant upon request.

8. **Do You Have Any Questions?**

If you and your dual exceptional child would like to participate in this study please send a confirmation email to 2EResearch@gmail.com as soon as possible. Once I receive your confirmation I will send a consent form to your email address. Consent forms should be filled out and sent back as an email attachment. Before the interview begins, your child will be asked to sign an assent form, stating that (s)he is willing to participate in this study. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have about this study. If you have further questions about this study you may contact the researcher, Monique Sims at 518-312-2230 (email: mssims@email.wm.edu), the thesis advisor, Carol Tieso at 757-221-2461 (email: clties@wm.edu) or the IRP representative, Tom Ward at 757-221-2358 (email: tom.ward@email.wm.edu).

Thank you,

Monique Sims  
M.A. Ed. Student  
Gifted Education  
GSH 256  
P.O. Box 8705  
Williamsburg, VA 23187  
Phone (518)-312-2230

Carol L. Tieso, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor, Gifted Education  
College of William and Mary  
SOE 3123  
P.O. Box 8705  
Williamsburg, VA 23187  
Phone: (757) 221-2461
Appendix D: Consent/Assent Forms

From the Inside Out: An in-depth look into the lives of students with dual exceptionalities
Parental Consent for Participation

Participant’s Name:
Parent or Guardian Name:
Parent or Guardian E-Mail Address:

☐ By checking this box, I give consent for my child to participate in the interview with the researcher.
☐ By checking this box, I assent to being interviewed by the researcher.

To confirm your consent, please type out your full name and today’s date on the line below:

Digital Signature of Parent or Guardian (Date)

Please feel free to contact me at any time with any questions or concerns!

Monique Sims
M.A. Ed. Student
Education
Gifted Education
GSH 256
P.O. Box 8705
Williamsburg, VA 23187
Phone (518)-312-2230
E-mail: mssims@email.wm.edu

Carol L. Tieso, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Gifted Education
College of William and Mary
SOE 3123
P.O. Box 8705
Williamsburg, VA 23187
Phone: (757) 221-2461
Email: clties@wm.edu
Please attach this consent form to your personal e-mail and send to 2EResearch@gmail.com. You will receive a return e-mail with a request to set up an interview time along with a list of possible interview questions. Thank You!
Student Assent Form for Interview

Please read this statement and decide whether or not you want to participate in my study. I hope that your participation will give me a greater understanding of what it is like being a dual exceptional student. Thank you so much for your help!

You are invited to participate in my study that will look at your experiences as a dual exceptional student. I want to know what your experiences are in school, what you struggle with academically and what you have to say about the social and emotional aspect of being dual exceptional. If you decide to participate, you will attend an interview with me that will take approximately 30 minutes. All identifying characteristics (i.e. your name) will be kept confidential in the final report and I am the only one who will know any of this information. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop answering questions at any time without penalty.

I have read this statement and I agree to participate in this study.

________________________________________
Student Signature
Appendix E: Student Interview Protocol

Student Interview Protocol

Hi! My name is Monique and I am a graduate student at William and Mary. Thank you for helping me with my study. I am going to ask you some questions. If there are any questions that you don’t want to answer, let me know and we will move on to the next one. This interview should take about 30 minutes (depending on how much you want to tell me). This interview will be digitally recorded. I want to remind you that I won’t use your real name in my final report. Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, Let’s start:

1. Do you know why you were picked to be a part of my study?
2. Are you in the gifted program at your school? What is it like?
3. When did you realize that you were having difficulty in school?
4. Did you understand what was going on when you were identified with (disability)?
5. What sort of things do you struggle with in school?
6. What areas do you do well in?
7. What are your interests? Your favorite things to learn/study?
8. Do you like your classes?
9. Is your school work challenging?
10. How do you feel about your abilities? I.e. Are you generally happy? Do you sometimes get frustrated in school etc.?
11. Are your teachers supportive? Do they help you? Do they understand what you need in order to do well?
12. Have you had any bad experiences with teachers who didn’t understand/help you?
13. Do you think the school is helping you to succeed?
14. Do you get along well with your classmates?

15. Do you ever have issues (trouble) with your classmates?

16. Do you have any close friends at school? Outside of school? Can you tell me about them?

17. From your perspective, what is the hardest thing about being a person with (disability) who is also gifted?

18. What is the most important thing you want people to know about being a dual exceptional person/student?

Comments:
Appendix F: Parent Interview Protocol

Hello and thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study. I am going to ask you some questions. I want you to answer these questions to the best of your ability. If, at any point, you wish not to answer a question let me know and we will move on to the next one. This interview should take approximately 30 minutes depending upon how much information you would like to tell me. This interview will be digitally recorded for accuracy. I may also take notes during the interview. I want to remind you that all information regarding my research is confidential and that no real names will be used in my final report. Let’s begin:

1. When was your child identified as having a disability? Identified gifted?

2. What was your child like growing up? Before entering school?

3. What have your struggles been in raising a dual exceptional child?

4. What has your child’s school experience been like so far?

5. Has he/she exhibited any problems in class?

6. Has your child ever complained of difficulty in school?

7. Is your child challenged enough in school?

8. Do you communicate with your child’s teacher(s) about his or her needs?

9. Do his or her teachers understand what dual exceptionality is?

10. Have you had any difficulty with the school regarding your child’s unique needs?
11. What are your child’s interests? Is he or she able to explore these things in school?

12. What is your child’s social life like? Does he or she have many friends?

13. From your perspective, does your child understand the interaction between his/her disability and gifts? Does he/she understand his/her strengths and weaknesses?

14. Is there any information available to you about your child’s unique needs?

15. What is the most important thing you want people to know about dual exceptional children?

Comments:
Appendix G: Interviews

Interview 1A: Logan

Do you know why you’re here? Do you know why I’m interviewing you?

Because I’m dual exceptional?

Oh my goodness, you’re the first kid who knows what that is.

Well my mom went over it.

Well that’s good because not a lot of people know what that is, even parents don’t. So, are you in the gifted program in your school?

Yeah, I’m in the gifted program for fourth and fifth grade at Morse Grove, and then at my old school I was it for not all the time but for some of it.

And what kind of things did you do in that class?

We switch teachers around so at Morse Grove, the first teacher, she told us, “Do projects by certain dates,” and we had to do it by that date, and I always thought that was fun, because I like doing hands-on projects, and so I usually come home with like the biggest and most elaborate project ever, and I get a whole bunch of points for it. The newer one, she mostly just gives us problems and asks if we have any trouble, and says, “Oh, if you’re doing this wrong, you can do this better.” That was for fifth grade. So that was fifth grade.

Do you think your teachers have been helpful to you?

I think that the work that they give me is... I think that in fifth grade they really challenged me and I really was enjoying the work but... I liked the work, but I don’t really know what to say on the way they taught it to us. They didn’t really. They just gave out the work, and then later on after we did the work she was like, “Oh, you did this wrong or you did this right.” the next day.

And was that helpful to you? Did you like that teaching style?

I didn’t like it if they told me I did it wrong or right because she kind of didn’t tell me what to do, and I’m like, “How am I supposed to change that?” So they gave me something, but, you know, I’m still having trouble realizing that it can’t be formatted to fit my very need. It can’t be like, you’re in a separate room with me, and say, “Okay, what do you not understand about this? What do you understand about this?”

Okay. Do you like your classes overall?
Yeah. I really like [??], and they have it in SIGHTS math, if you’ve heard of it. I don’t like their videos on the smart board because when I like the work and, or it’s too easy, I usually do it right, but if it’s something I don’t really want to do it usually goes in one ear and out the other, or it’s something I already know or it’s the wrong teaching style or something I don’t like, it kind of goes in one ear and out the other.

Do you think before fifth grade, because you said fifth grade was challenging. Before fifth grade, was it challenging enough?

In the gifted class?

In any of your classes.

In regular classes? Actually, the work in the gifted class in fifth grade was challenging, and then I did something called Math Olympiads and it was really good because it was just high school things and it made it challenging, which is a good thing. All the other work is the normal things, and I remember I started when the EOGs, I think I really started noticing my ability so in third grade I liked how the work was done, but I only thought things I didn’t know were really challenging, or things I couldn’t pick up really fast, but the rest of it was easy probably. I mean, stuff that I knew.

What kind of things do you struggle with in school? What kind of things are hard for you?

In my new school?

Yeah.

I think it’s hard to get around the bullying in my new school and it’s probably because I’m trying to make some friends but it’s really hard because most of the kids there aren’t as nice as the kids at my old school, so it’s harder for me to make friends and therefore I’m like the one on the side, so I get picked on.

What about in your old school?

I had a lot of friends, but the only thing that stayed the same was my trouble listening and going, instead of, “Just a couple more minutes,” and my writing. I’ve always had trouble with my writing. Now it’s just I write sloppily. My kindergarten teacher used to say, “You have all these good ideas, you just can’t get them down fast enough.” So I’m trying to get my ideas down before the writing session ends. I don’t want to wait ‘til tomorrow because I might forget.

So what kind of difficulty do you have with writing?
I think it isn’t the ideas or the way I write. I think it’s just my handwriting. I write really sloppily. And I think it’s because I write fast, and I had writing, in third grade when I did cursive I write really slowly, like each letter counts, and every single one of my teachers said, “Luke, this is beautiful! If you would just write cursive all the time, I’m sure you would get great a four in everything!”

And why do you think you don’t write in cursive all the time?

I think it’s hard for me to remember all the cursive letters and I really don’t know. It just seems really confusing for me to learn something new, because I pick up on it really fast and then I like forget it because I don’t keep practicing it. My mom has tried to say, “Okay guys, you have to do a journal every day for the summer,” and then it ends up that I just do it in cursive for the first day and then I’m like, “Ah, whatever.” It turns into my regular journal. So I’m like, “I’m writing in it!” and I’m really doodling. I write a comic! That’s writing!

In school, what do you think your strongest areas are? So writing is not your strongest thing. What do you think your strongest area is?

I’d say with my teachers, most of my grades are good. I think I understand the reading and I can explain what I read really well because I don’t rush through it. In math, everything is pretty much easy that I already know, and then learning new stuff is pretty interesting for me. It’s explaining my work that I don’t like to do because sometimes I don’t know how to do it and then I don’t like doing it because I might not know how to explain some of it.

Is this when you’re explaining it in person or when you’re writing it down?

Just writing it regular and like math tests say, “Make sure to explain your work for this problem,” or the teacher says it, and I’m like, “Eh,” and then I just write “No!” I write “Why do I have to?” or something like that. And then around my friends, I think they like writing because I make it funny, and really the things I focus more on are reading and writing because I focus on what I write about. I think, “Will this make my friends laugh? Is this going to be good? Great?” and then for writing I get a four, but for handwriting I get a zero. And for reading I just read and read and read, and when I’m writing or reading really hard, I’m like, “Oh yes, this is going to be great!” and then they’re filing out the door to gym, and I just keep writing and I’m like, “Wait? Where is everybody? Wait for me!”

So you focus a lot when you’re reading?

And when I write really hard. It even gets a bit sloppy.

Are there any other subjects in school that you like the best?
I’m really good at Spanish, even though sometimes you could say I’m kind of disappointed if I don’t get a good score, because two of the kids in my class are from Mexico, so I take that into account and go, “Okay, yeah.” I also like just running outside and recess, and even if I’m not outside I like doing stuff with my friends. I like doing stuff with other people and I like building, doing a lot of hands-on activities. And I like science, hands-on the best, but usually we have a video, like BrainPop or something, instead of actually going out there and doing it. I remember in second grade we used to have these nature walks outside and I loved it! I loved second grade.

And you don’t do stuff like that anymore?

Well, it seems like they do more videos, and then we do it from the books, and I’m like, “Ugh.” And then we have homework on it, and I hate homework!

Why do you hate homework?

Probably because I don’t want to do it. I if I don’t want to do it I probably will do it worse, and then I have to explain it the next day. If I could just do homework in school and not have to have anything to do when I got home, I would do it. Sometimes I look at the first question and I do it on the bus sometimes because I just want free time to do what I want when I’m at home, even if I don’t have anything to do and I’m like, “Mom, I don’t have anything to do.” She’s like, “Go clean your room.” “No, no!”

So what do you like to do at home?

I usually like doing something with someone else, like playing [??? 12:18], soccer, or with my dad, or playing catch with my dad or brother, and then outside the neighborhood kids are playing street hockey. I just go out there and join them even if I’m not good. I like having a friend come over or going to a friend’s house and just going out there and talking to a friend or talking to my grandparents on the phone. I like doing stuff with other people, and I also like building stuff.

What kind of things do you like to build?

I’m not really good at building Legos, but I just like imagining different things, and then I like having races with Lego cars because they break, and then I like rebuilding them into different shapes, and then having them break. I built a go-cart with my grandfather a couple years ago on my birthday, and for some reason I just like seeing things be destroyed and then I like building them back again. And then they’re destroyed again, and I put them back again. It seems I have a joy in doing that.

So you were talking about some of your friends. Do the friends in your neighborhood go to the same school as you?
Yeah, but in my old neighborhood I had all of these friends that were my age, and my brother didn’t have any friends in the neighborhood. Well, he didn’t have many. And now it kind of switched when we moved. Now my brother has, like, literally there are seven other third graders in the neighborhood, and I only have one other fifth grader, and he doesn’t even go to my school.

So do you have any close friends at school?

Kind of, kind of not. There’s a couple kids, but the ones in my class are mostly sports kids, and I kind of am more of a kid that’s into art. I make movies at home, I animate stuff. My mom tries to get me type documents. I play my piano. I’m not really a sports person, and I’m not really competitive, so that’s kind of takes out some kids who are really competitive. But if I’ve known them for a long time it doesn’t really matter what they’re like.

Have you ever had a bad experience with a teacher? Like, a teacher who’s just not a very good teacher? Be honest!

Yeah, I have a couple.

Can you tell me about them?

Well I think it just started in first grade because, I don’t know if I don’t like school because of the experience in first grade. I just remember this really bad part. I was in the reading corner and I was reading, and the teacher, she was like, “Luke, your class is lining up.” It was the assistant teacher. I was like, “Oh, okay,” and I went over, and she was like, “Luke, go now.” And I’m like, and I walked away. And she took me by the arm and dragged me over to the teacher, and she’s like, “This kid gave me a look that said you’re not the boss of me!” And because I looked at her, I got in really big trouble! Sometimes, I think some of them have trouble. Like, the gifted teacher this year, she seemed to have a little bit of trouble with what I’m saying, like maybe no one understood my way of thought, like, “Can’t you see it’s all right here, plain!” And it isn’t, and they’re like, “It’s clear as mud!” and I’m like, “It’s so, so clear!” And I guess no one understands. I think my mom and dad really understand my way of doing my work, but some teachers didn’t really. They thought that when I come to someone that thinks that they have a way of doing it, and then I think of a different way of doing it, I think my ways right, and they think their way’s right. And then we kind of butt heads, and neither one of us is going to give up, but I eventually have to give up because it’s the respectful thing to do. It’s either that or go to the principal’s office. So I take their way of doing it. My third grade teacher, I liked her because she was the only one who could beat me in an argument. And I’m like, “Oh, I do it this way!” and she’s like, “Oh, Luke, you can do it this way too.” And I’m like, “Oh yeah!”
So you like arguing?

Well that’s what I need my arguing. It’s like, “No, you can do it this way,” and I’m like, “Oh yeah!” She really explained things to me a lot.

Do you think you think differently than other kids?

Actually, yeah, sometimes. It depends. Some kids are like completely, and I know I have special needs, but there’s this one girl, she’s just obsessed with pie. She said, “I went to Mars yesterday, and I went and saw a pie-eating cow!” and I’m like “....” And there are some kids that just creep ME out. Yeah, so I think they think a lot differently than me sometimes. Sometimes I’m like, “Exactly! Don’t you see? Is this the only person that has any brains in this room here?” And then they know exactly what I’m talking about.

Do you ever get frustrated when you’re trying to do something and you can’t focus?

Kind of. I get frustrated if I’m like doing something. Today we were at the driving range and my ball kept falling off my tee and I was like, “Err! Get on there!” And sometimes when I’m frustrated it makes me do things wrong and then I’m even more frustrated and then I’m in a bad mood and then it gets worse. Or when I’m frustrated I’m like, “Don’t say anything to me. Whatever you do, do not say ‘Come in for lunch’ because I’m really hot and tired.” And then it’s like, “Come in for lunch, Luke!” I’m like... But yeah, sometimes I can predict what they’re going to say next. I’m like, “Oh, I really hope they don’t say that.” And it just gets me really mad. And then they might, “Luke, are you” and in the middle of class I’m like, “Aw, man, she said that, and I didn’t want her to say it!” but at least I’m not embarrassed. It’s like, “Luke, are you feeling okay?” “Ahhh!” When I’m not focusing it just seems maybe harder to me. When I’m not focusing at school or any time? Any time. When I’m not focusing at school it makes me really feel bad because at the beginning I think it might have gotten worse because now he seems really annoyed and I’m like, “Work things out... HA” or something like that. And I might attack him by accident maybe or he says something and like really ticks me off. And I get into fights, so I feel like that’s being bad as an older brother. It’s really hard to control that. And it’s harder without my medicine, because then I’m not focusing on, “Well, do you think my little brother is going to get hurt if I throw him down the stairs? Do you think he will not like that?” and it’s kind of like, “Ah, I’m going to do this to him,” and the first thing that pops into my head. Then later on, like now, I’m like, “Oh, I feel like I’m being a bad brother.”

So you do things as soon as they pop into your head?

Oh yeah, a lot of times, and sometimes I just keep talking, and it’s like... and I think that’s why I’m getting bullied because I’m bad at comebacks. I’m really nice to people,
and I'm also bad at comebacks so the bullies keep picking on me for the reason that I'm bad at comebacks. They say like, something bad, and it takes me awhile to process, “Hmm, well maybe that... would be a good comeback.” But it’s hard for me to think because I’m on the spot, I’m like, [gasp] and other times I just always think of something and when I’m at camp I’m like, “Oh yeah!” And I think of good things on the spot.

You go to camp? What kind of camp do you go to?

I do golf camp, drawing camp, acting camp, comedy camp... I’ve done a whole bunch of camps. I’ve done the camps that have you doing everything, a whole bunch of stuff. And I did this thing, it’s kind of like a camp. It’s Odyssey of the Mind. Have you heard of it? I have.

It isn’t really like a camp, but this year mom and another mom were coach and the other mom kept being like, couldn’t understand what I was doing, like “We should draw outlines of all the things so we don’t lose our parts of our set!” and then she’s like, “Luke, what are you doing?” And then my mom told her, in a different way, and then I got into a really bad argument, and my mom was like, “This is what Luke was actually trying to do.” And she was like, “Oh, that’s a great idea! Everybody, let’s do this!” and I’m like, “You just stole my idea!”

What do you think is the most important thing that you would want me to know about students who are like you—dual exceptional? Because you have ADHD and you’re very gifted, right? You have a lot of talents.

I don’t think I’ve really seen any other kids that are special needs that aren’t in a separate class because nobody else tells. It’s not like they blurt it out. I’ve never really met one, because no one’s really told me besides if they’re in a special needs class. But to know about me... that I talk a lot, and it’s sometimes hard for me. I say the first thing that pops into my head, and it’s sometimes hard for me, sometimes I might need to get all that energy out, and then maybe do something. Because we’ve done all these systems and I’m really good at avoiding things. It’s like, “Where is Luke?” and I think, “Oh, they must still be mad at me.” So I rush off and then I hide in a certain spot, cover myself up to make it look like a clothes pile, and then don’t come out until they calm down. I can go around most things. When I’m put on the spot, especially if I’m getting bullied, it’s really hard for me because I just say the first thing that pops into my head. But then also I want to say something that doesn’t make me look like an idiot in front of them that will give them something else. So I have all these thoughts, going you don’t want them to... but you want to say something that makes them so that they won’t have anything else to say back at you. But you don’t want to say anything that will make you look like an idiot. What do other people say? When they do something stupid and there are these thoughts that keep colliding, all inside my head. And so I end up trying a good comeback
like, it usually might be too late because I have to think about it before hand, so I have to think of a new one unless I’ve already got one planned.

So what would you want your teachers to know to be able to help you better? If you could tell them anything to help them help you better, what would you tell them?

That do more hands-on things, and try more challenging works. What would be nice is that they come and they’re like, “Luke, are you failing in here? Are you doing well?” but I know they don’t have the time to do that, so it’s kind of hard to do that. You’re getting all blurry.

Am I still blurry? Yeah. Okay. Can you still hear me? Yeah, I think. Yeah. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

I think it’s really hard to make a good decision for me. Like, if I’m being put on the spot. Should I go on the high rollercoaster? I’m afraid of heights, but then it’s like my friends are doing it. And then it’s like, “Oh...” Or, “Do you want to go out on a [??? 26:30]?” “Oh, I’m in the middle of this.” And also what always gets me is like, “Okay, I’m going, you go inside now,” and I’m like, “Why?!” I always have to decide at the last second.

And that’s hard for you?

In the morning I’m always like, I hope I’m not having this for breakfast, and then I have that for breakfast. I’m like, “Ha ha.” It’s really hard for me sometimes when I get mad and someone says something that makes me more mad or when I have trouble focusing or something and I want to do the best I can to be the best person I can be, but sometimes it feels like I’m rising up in the ocean but there’s a big pound weight that’s like attached to my foot, and I’m going up but it’s kind of slow for me to process, and then it’s like, I know, say if I was in the ocean and then after I think, instead of the first thing, going up, I can go, “Oh, shark!” Bites off the weight. Something like that, after I process it, because I usually want to find the easiest way out, which would probably be going up. But then sometimes the best thing to do is to wait, but sometimes it might be too late for me because I might have already chosen the easy thing and I might... “Oh, I shouldn’t have said that,” in my head, and I’m like, “Dang, I wish that I would have said something else!” but then, it’s like the weight carries me down. I couldn’t get it off quick enough or something. But I always try to find a way. When I’m at home it seems harder for me to focus. I don’t know why. And I always try to take medicine around my friends to make the best impression I can, when I’m doing camp or I’m around other people, and that makes me really nervous, and sometimes it just has weird effects on me that usually I would be fine, but also it makes me kind of emotional.

What makes you emotional? Your medicine makes you emotional?
Well no, yes, and also when I don’t have it because it seems that I take things more seriously. If my brother says a joke, like, “Oh, yeah, you have this wrong,” and it really hurts my feelings, but if I didn’t I would just say something back that’s equally as harmful because we’re just joking around, but with my medicine it’s kind of like, “Oh, why did he say that?”

Do you think your medicine helps you control yourself better?

Yeah, because I’ve witnessed myself doing stuff and it’s almost like I can’t control myself even though I can’t. It’s like an ant trying to stop an elephant. Sometimes the elephant doesn’t want to go on the ant and goes in a different direction, but usually the ant gets squished.

I’m done with all my questions. Do you have any questions for me?

Yeah, one. Why are you interviewing kids that are dual exceptional? Why do you want to know more about that?

Because I have been reading a lot about it this past year and I read a lot about what people have to say about what you go through, but there’s not a lot from your perspective. So there’s not a lot that says what people who are actually dual exceptional think about their lives. So I want to know more about that so I can help you better.

Oh, that’s good. Are you like a doctor or someone who helps people that are dual exceptional?

I’m going to be a teacher.

Oh, that’s good for you then!

Yes, so I can learn more about you and I can be able to help you better, and that way, when I’m a teacher, that way I know, maybe they’re doing this because they might have ADHD, but they’re really smart so they can actually do this, and this thing is just standing in their way.

Yeah. I think it seems like some teachers have trouble understanding that, but other teachers, like my teacher this year, or teachers that are newer seem like they understand me more, but teachers who are older have the older way of seeing things and they do more hands-on, so I like their ways of teaching, but I also like the newer teachers because they understand me.

I’m trying to get a better understanding. So that’s why I interview the kids and the parents, because sometimes parents see things or know things that kids don’t know because kids don’t really remember things from when they’re two years old, right? But the parents do. So that’s why I’m doing it. Any other questions?
Good luck with teaching!

Thank you.

You’re welcome.
Interview IB: Mary

When was Logan identified with ADHD?

Officially he was in the second grade. So he would’ve been eight then, I guess. But we’ve known since he was two.

And what kind of symptoms did you see when he was two, around that time?

Well Logan talks constantly, so he just can’t seem to control the talking. It’s a constant stream of thought. He’s very impulsive. So when he was two it would be things like, “Be careful, you’re going to spill that water!” and so you all of a sudden dump it upside down. Very impulsive, and as soon as an idea comes into his head he reacts. When he was two. So it was very obvious at that time that that was kind of going on.

And once he got into school, how did that affect his schooling?

Well, he was a little bit more immature than other kids. He’s got a late summer birthday. His birthday is July 30th. So we had the option of either pushing him ahead and having him be the youngest in his class, or waiting and having him be the oldest in the class. So we decided to have him do a fives class which was like an extended preschool thing where they start learning school skills. He did that and then went on to kindergarten after that, so he’s actually the oldest in his class now. And that’s why we did that, because he was a little bit immature. He was impulsive, he had trouble sitting still, waiting for his turn, and because he’s so bright he would constantly want to shout out answers. He knew whatever it was he was asking, so he just wanted to jump out and he could not sit there and wait until someone else tried to figure it out. So we gave him a little more time.

When was he identified as gifted?

His kindergarten teacher recommended that. And part of it, I was wondering, was because he was older, so he had already attended this fives class, so of course he didn’t really learn anything in kindergarten. He’d already mastered all his skills and everything before he went in there. But emotionally that’s where he needed to be, so he went ahead and went through that class. But his kindergarten teacher had said, “Well, actually, if you put him in the grade he’s supposed to be in, he should be in the fifth grade.” She said he just had so much more than the other kids in the class and he can think ahead of where other kids can’t. They were in kindergarten, a little more basic, where he would sort of infer and imply things already, and his speech, and he talked like he was 40. So she put forth the paperwork and stuff and asked me to fill it out. So he was identified in kindergarten technically.

Okay, and what kind of strengths does he have?
Well, he’s very verbal, obviously. He speaks very well. He’s also very creative. He likes to do art, he likes to make up stories in his head, he likes to elaborate on things, and he’s always been into like imaginative play, things like that growing up, more than sports. He likes things were he can kind of go a step further. He’s good at games that require more strategy. Even when he was younger, there’s a game called “Rush Hour,” it’s got little cars. You know that game? So you’ve got to move the cars, and you look at how it’s supposed to look like when it’s finished, and you have to move the cars to try and get the limousine out or whatever, and he played it with my father and my father was trying to do it and he was like, “No no no, not like that, like this.” And he’d just move them all and be done. He got it very quickly. He’s very good at that kind of thing. He’s always been good at puzzles. He’s always been good at logic puzzles now, but when he was younger he did floor puzzles and things. So he’s very good at that. He’s a very strong reader, and he has been for a very long time. And the ADHD doesn’t seem to come into effect when he’s reading. His big thing with the ADHD is his lack of focus, but when he’s reading he can almost hyper-focus. He goes so deep into what he’s reading that the outside world gets completely shut down, so he’s able to pick up details and understand what the characters are saying and doing. He learns things very quickly. So if he doesn’t know a math a topic, teach it to him once and he’ll probably remember it always. He likes things like science because it’s something he hasn’t learned before. He likes things that are new and then he likes to apply them to what he already knows. So when we first had a family photo taken together and they had a certain camera set up, he could go, “Oh, I understand! You can take it from this camera and make it go to this film, and do this…” and he started applying all that information. It was like constant thought running through his head. It was like “This and then this and then this” and he kind of runs with it. So he’s very good at that kind of thing, applying things to new situations.

Do you think he’s being challenged enough in the class that he’s in?

Challenged enough? I don’t know about that. Probably not. It’s always been kind of a challenge to make sure the teacher understands that his disabilities and what comes across due to his disabilities has no effect on his intelligence. He writes really poorly, like physically his handwriting is very very difficult to read, and a lot of that is because he thinks so fast that he writes down really really quickly. It used to be that he made his letters incorrectly, or he would spell incorrectly, because he was trying so hard to get the words down before he lost his train of thought. And sometimes he has trouble just making something on a straight line. So if he’s like brainstorming something, if he’s working in a group on something, I’ve seen several of his papers will go right down the front, down the side, around, and then come back up here, and go back around… so he kind of has trouble keeping it on a linear pattern. So when a teacher sees that, they think, “Oh man, what’s wrong with this kid?” You know? They don’t understand that it’s
actually that he’s very smart and he’s coming up with many different solutions and a
different way of attacking it. He did a Math Olympiad program after school last year and
I had to grade the papers, but I could never tell what he wrote down or how he solved the
problem. I could only see the answer, because he had things all over the paper. So for a
teacher who didn’t have any experience with that, they would look at it and said, “I don’t
know how he’s coming up with this. Maybe he copied it from somebody.” They
wouldn’t understand that all that work was just his many steps of getting to an answer.

Do you think you have good communication going with his teacher?

Yes. I did. His fourth grade teacher—we switched schools, and I decided to not mention
anything about it because I knew that she had the paperwork that showed that he was
gifted and all that. She was a more experienced teacher and I didn’t say anything so she
kind of figured it out on her own, and that was a mistake. It took her a very long time to
realize that these difficulties were not hindering his abilities to learn more advanced
work. So finally I had to go in and talk to her. But his fifth grade teacher, she was a
brand new teacher, her first year, so I had a meeting with her at the very beginning, and
the gifted specialist came in and sat with her, and we went over everything and I typed
out a huge list of, these are the factors of ADHD that apply to him. These are the gifted
qualities that apply to him. And so they actually knew, because there’s a lot of range of
characteristics of both, so I kind of outlined it all and said, “You really need to push him.
You cannot accept something that’s sub-standard. You have to push him, because if you
don’t push him he’ll do what’s minimal.” And I had to go through many steps with that.
And so after that she did notice that and she did start pushing him to do more. She did
realize that if she just gave him a little bit of extra time on a math test, or made him sit
over to the side and let him finish it while everyone else was finished, gave him that extra
fifteen minutes or whatever, then he would get 100% on that test. So she started noticing,
okay, he needs a little bit more time to focus. If we give him a little more time, than he
can do it all right. So if she wanted to get an accurate idea of what she knew. After I
talked to her she kind of realized that and she was actually a big advocate for him after
that point when she realized what was going on. The gifted specialist tried to help me a
little bit. So Logan will be going into middle school next year. He’ll be starting sixth
grade and going into middle school, so they offer some advanced classes for middle
school, but in order to qualify for this pre-algebra that he can take, as a sixth grader they
take that IAAT test, it’s like a pre-algebra standardized test, and if you score a certain
score on this test that was the qualifying mark to get into pre-algebra. But, they will not
allow any accommodations on this test. Logan has accommodations because he has
ADHD and it’s not a matter of having trouble with the questions. He has trouble because
he can’t focus for that amount of time to take the test. So he ended up leaving tons of
them blank. He got 100% on every single one of his math tests in class, he go the highest
score in the entire school in Math Olympiads. If he doesn’t feel challenged, he starts to
doodle and he starts to not pay attention, so it's really kind of important to put him in a pre-algebra setting, or some kind of more advanced math setting, because he already knew the material, and he starts to get in trouble when he's not challenged. So I had to talk to the school district office about it. I had to go through several different channels to say, "What do you suggest that I do?" and they gave him the Iowa test of Basic Skills in sixth grade and seventh grade math. He took both of those tests as a fifth grader and scored in the high nineties, 98% or whatever, because he had twenty extra minutes on each one of those, the Iowa test allows. So it's not even time and a half, it's like time and a quarter or something, but he scored high enough, and because of that they allowed him to take pre-algebra. So there are certain things. You know, his teacher was willing to send in all his test records and scores in class, and the gifted teacher was the one who gave me the names of who to contact, so there were people who were able to help. I just had to know who to ask.

In elementary school, what was the class set-up like? Was he in a gifted class most of the time, or was he in general and went into a gifted class? How did that work?

He was in a regular school classroom, and then he would be pulled out by the gifted specialist or she would come in and work with a small group, but it was very rare. It was a couple times a month.

Oh wow, that's not very much. Has he ever complained of any difficulty to you? Any difficulty in school? Has he ever come to you and said, "I'm having trouble with this," or "I'm having trouble with my teachers?"

You mean as far as getting along with them, or like grades?

Academics, behavior problems, has he ever come to you and said anything about that?

No. The only time he said anything was the Spanish teacher. This year he had to write out paragraphs and things in Spanish and she made a point of saying to him, "You must have real problems with your writing like this." He was one of the highest Spanish speakers in his class, so I don't know why she would point out such a negative thing. I think that really embarrassed him and made him feel negative about himself. But that was the only time that that's happened. Before that his teachers have always seemed to understand what was going on.

What are some of his interests outside of school?

He's interested in running. He's in a running group. He's pretty fast. He likes art. He just did a theater camp this last week and he played Merlin in King Arthur's quest. So he likes to be up in front of people pretending for a show. He likes to read. He does read a lot. He likes to create things. He's a trash collector. He picks up every junky thing he
finds laying around. He likes to make it into something. So he likes to do that kind of thing. He likes to invent and discover. He’s a good swimmer, and he’s good at tennis, but he feels a little self-conscious about his athletic skills, so he prefers things that are not athletic.

Sorry, I paused because the screen jumbled for a second. What is his social life like in school?

He has a few friends. This year, in fifth grade, things were a little difficult. He’s only been in this school for two years because we moved, so he had to transfer to a new school within the district. So fourth and fifth grade were tough. He got bullied a bunch this year which was a new experience for us. He talks a lot, and so it often draws attention to him, and so a lot of times anybody who’s looking for attention or wanting to pick on somebody, he would stand out because he talks a lot. That’s kind of a different thing. Sometimes, he’s still learning social skills and how to fit in with a group of kids, especially when they’re all talking about sports and he doesn’t know as much about it. But just trying the give and take, listen and contribute. He’s still learning that, so social things have been a little harder. So I’m hoping that next year when he’s with more kids in middle school it’ll be a little easier.

From your perspective do you think he understands the interaction between his ADHD and his giftedness? Do you think he knows that he struggles with these things and these are things he needs to work on?

I don’t think he understands that his struggles are different from other people’s struggles, but he definitely understands that he can’t control some things. He gets frustrated very easily if people don’t understand what he’s saying to you, whether he’s talking or he’s writing, he’s like, “What do you mean you don’t understand? I did it this way!” You know, he tries to explain it but he gets frustrated very easily with that. I don’t think he understands that that’s not clear, that the writing and the process that he went to is not clear. I think that’s something more unique to someone of his abilities, so that makes it a little difficult. I think that he also knows that he’s a little more sensitive and emotional than some of the other kids. I also think that sometimes understands things and understands things very very quickly, and since it’s very hard for him to focus in a certain area, he becomes distracted and does other things and zones out and doesn’t pay attention to what the teacher’s doing or saying, so he has to kind of catch up afterwards. Certain things like that, I don’t think he understands that it’s because he’s ADD and can’t focus on it, or whatever the situation is. Sometimes when he’s talking to a friend he’ll just ramble and ramble and he doesn’t realize that the conversation should have been over five minutes ago. He’s still talking about it, and so like if he tells a joke and one thing is funny, he’ll do fifteen more just like it just because he thinks it was funny the first time,
but it kind of loses it a bit. So he doesn’t understand that, you know, a little bit. The social skills kind of stuff.

What is he like at home?

He tests authority a lot. He’s very argumentative. He likes to push buttons, test boundaries. He does not like it when people make decisions for him, which can be frustrating sometimes because it takes him so long to focus on things, like in the morning when he first wakes up, things are a little slower, he has a terrible time getting dressed, brushing his teeth, coming downstairs. So I try to pick his breakfast for him and make his breakfast for him and he doesn’t like that because whatever I choose is the wrong thing. He’s very opinionated and likes to stick to his opinions. He likes for things to be on his terms, which they obviously can’t. He has a brother, and obviously sometimes things have to be a family decision, or somebody else has things to do. When he was little, the fact that he was smart and could think of things very quickly was kind of a bad thing. Once when he was two and a half, maybe three, he was going to brush his teeth and he didn’t want to brush his teeth because he was playing right now, so he went and took his toothbrush and flushed it down the toilet. Stuff like that, where normal kids just throw a fit or just did what their mom said and gone in and brushed their teeth and gone back to playing. But he didn’t like to be interrupted, it wasn’t in his schedule, it wasn’t in his plans, he didn’t like it, so he tried to outsmart me and do me one better, “I can’t brush my teeth if I don’t have a toothbrush.” So that kind of thing. It makes it very challenging.

When you were first noticing when you were younger his ADHD and his gifted characteristics, when you were doing research, did you feel like there was enough information available to you?

Yes. I do think so. My husband is a pediatrician, so I quizzed him a lot. I think he probably learned more from our experiences than he learned in medical school. There were a lot of books that I found. We finally did get him psychologically evaluated in second grade in order to prove the ADHD part of it. They recommended several books that they felt were better to follow along with. The trouble was nothing was exactly like I was experiencing because a lot of times kids who have ADHD also have other symptoms attached to them or other conditions attached to them and it’s a little bit harder. A lot of them struggle in school. A lot of them, dyslexia is tied in to it, and I didn’t have those issues because he’s very gifted and a lot of times he could accommodate for some of the things he was having trouble with. That made it difficult. So that was a little harder. So there were some books, and I did look at those books a lot and try to get some information about what to do, but knowing how to handle it was very difficult. Even the psychologist that we saw then, he’d say, “Have you tried sticker charts?” Oh my gosh, about fifty years ago. I’ve tried eighty things since then. Because his focus changed so
quickly, behavior modifications didn’t last for very long. Reward systems, even if it was automatic like I could stop what I was doing and hand him a popsicle stick, something concrete in his hands, “Look, you earned this and you get so many if you do this.” Potty training, people use M&Ms and stuff like that. He had nothing to do with that. Nothing worked because it all had to be under his terms. It had to be what he wanted to do. So things like sticker charts and modifications didn’t work. It lost its appeal very quickly.

Do you think a lot of the information you had was specifically on ADHD and specifically on giftedness, or was there any in the middle about people who have ADHD and are gifted?

No. It was either ADHD, like I said, most of those had other situations. I’m an elementary school teacher and I took a gifted course, so I had some background and some pamphlets and information and books that I needed for that class, so I had information about both, but neither one was a perfect fit for him because he was a combination of the two.

My last question for you is, what do you think is the most important thing that you would want me to know about these types of students?

The most difficult thing has been trying to get him what he needs. If you had somebody who didn’t have as much experience in the education system... I mean, I work as an interventionist in an elementary school. And I’ve been a teacher, full-time classroom teacher. So I have enough knowledge of what happens in the system to try to know who to ask. It’s still been hard for me because I have to kind of fish neck my way through these things and ask certain people certain things, gather information so that I have a person ready to go be an advocate for my child. If you did not know anything, I think it would be very very difficult to get them what they need, especially for somebody who has trouble focusing in class. The ADHD part itself is a challenge, trying to navigate a path for him there, but also to be gifted on top of it, to prove to them that he needs some challenging work. He can sit there and he can do this material and if you don’t, it’s a waste of ability. It’s a waste of what he can do. And it’s also going to be a disservice to him because he doesn’t pay attention, he doodles, he’s going to get in trouble, you know, and go completely the opposite way. So if you don’t have someone in your corner who’s willing to put forth the effort, it’s not going to happen. And that’s a shame. When I had to go through and get him these extra tests to get him into the pre-algebra class for sixth grade, I said, “I don’t understand. There has to have been other children that this has applied to.” And the gifted specialist said, “There are! There have been many of them, but they didn’t know what to do and their parents didn’t have the time or energy to work with the system to get it panned out.” So they just coasted through and they didn’t take any of these advanced classes in high school because they couldn’t take them starting in middle school. Because they didn’t have the time or know how to do it, their kid kind of
got left out. That’s too bad. It’s really a shame, especially for someone like Logan who’s tested on psychological evaluations in the genius range. That’s a waste of ability. You have a really smart kid here, and if you’re not going to give him these different things to apply to life and help him to get better at things, then it’s just going to be a waste. So sometimes you have to work with the system to get it to work out, and I think that’s too bad. It needs to be a little easier for people who don’t have a background in education to make this work.

Well, that’s good. Anything else you’d like to add?

I don’t think so! It’s been a struggle. I’m sure it has for everyone else too, so I’m glad that you’re doing this and I’m anxious to see what you find out.
Hi! My name is Monique and I am a graduate student at William and Mary. Thank you for helping me with my study. I am going to ask you some questions. If there are any questions that you don’t want to answer, let me know and we will move on to the next one. This interview should take about 30 minutes (depending on how much you want to tell me). This interview will be digitally recorded. I want to remind you that I won’t use your real name in my final report. Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, Let’s start:

19. Do you know why you were picked to be a part of my study?
Because I have dyslexia, and I am a gifted child.

20. Are you in the gifted program at your school? What is it like?
My whole school is gifted. It is called Sycamore school for gifted and talented students. We start from 3 years old until 8th grade. My school is really nice. It is high quality because it is helpful even for kids with dyslexia because they let you do special things like type your assignments.

21. When did you realize that you were having difficulty in school?
Well, I did not realize it. My mom took me to a psychologist, and we did puzzles and other activities, and we realized that I have dyslexia.

22. Did you understand what was going on when you were identified with (disability)?
Yes.

23. What sort of things do you struggle with in school?
Spelling. Reading out loud. I like to read out loud, but I do not like reading chapter books out loud to people. Sometimes I lose my place.

24. What areas do you do well in?
I do well in social studies and reading.

25. What are your interests? Your favorite things to learn/study?
Social studies and literature. I like these things because ever since I was a little kid I loved to read even though I had dyslexia. I wasn’t going to forget that I liked to read just because I had a problem. In social studies, I like learning about history and pioneers because I like knowing what it was like in the olden days.

26. Do you like your classes?
Yes. We have field trips. We do a lot of cool things like experiments and other things that public schools have never done.

27. Is your school work challenging?
Sometimes. Not really.

28. How do you feel about your abilities? I.e. Are you generally happy? Do you sometimes get frustrated in school etc.?
Sometimes I get frustrated in school, but I am generally really happy. I get frustrated because it is hard when you don’t want to type something, but you have to.

29. Are your teachers supportive? Do they help you? Do they understand what you need in order to do well?
Yes. My teachers are always letting me type every single thing. Even if it is just a tiny thing. My teachers are very supportive. On tests they give them to me orally (except in math).

30. Have you had any bad experiences with teachers who didn’t understand/help you?
Not really.

31. Do you think the school is helping you to succeed?
Yes.

32. Do you get along well with your classmates?
Oh yeah.
33. Do you ever have issues (trouble) with your classmates?

Not really.

34. Do you have any close friends at school? Outside of school? Can you tell me about them?

Yes. Sarah and Annika and Anusha and Kaitlyn and Nicolas and Richard. They are nice and caring. They know that I have dyslexia and are supportive. They do not tell anyone that I have dyslexia because I don’t like people knowing. I have friends outside of school. Taylor and Lilia and Anna and Helen. My friends outside of school are supportive and nice also.

35. From your perspective, what is the hardest thing about being a person with (disability) who is also gifted?

Sometimes people expect too much of you. Like sometimes people suspect that you can do all of these great things just because you are gifted. Sometimes they do not understand you are not perfect. This happens sometimes at school. Sometimes you need to say “I don’t know.” Once my friend didn’t know the answer, and she asked me, and I didn’t know, and she said “but you are gifted,” and I said “just because you are gifted doesn’t mean you know every single thing in the world.”

36. What is the most important thing you want people to know about being a dual exceptional person/student?

Just because I have dyslexia doesn’t mean I am different from other kids. It’s not a contagious disease.

Comments:
Interview 2B: Katherine

Parent Interview Protocol

Hello and thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study. I am going to ask you some questions. I want you to answer these questions to the best of your ability. If, at any point, you wish not to answer a question let me know and we will move on to the next one. This interview should take approximately 30 minutes depending upon how much information you would like to tell me. This interview will be digitally recorded for accuracy. I may also take notes during the interview. I want to remind you that all information regarding my research is confidential and that no real names will be used in my final report. Let’s begin:

16. When was your child identified as having a disability? Identified gifted?

She was identified as gifted at age 4 and as having dysgraphia and dyslexia in 2nd grade (age 7).

17. What was your child like growing up? Before entering school?

She loved to hear stories. She has a very good auditory memory. She also liked to be read to for hours at a time. She could easily memorize words on the page. By age 2 she had at least 50 words memorized. We thought she was going to be an early reader because of this. She was good at working puzzles. By age three she could do 100 piece puzzles. She liked to draw. She always had difficulties pronouncing some words (still does), but she was a very verbal child. Her problem solving skills are well developed.

18. What have your struggles been in raising a dual exceptional child?
Knowing how much help to give and how much to expect her to do on her own. For example, it is easier for me to be a scribe for her school work, but should I make her type it all out herself? How much is helping her out and how much is coddling her?

19. What has your child’s school experience been like so far?

Actually, her school experiences have been so good so far. She goes to an independent school for gifted children (all have a 130 or above IQ on an individually administered IQ test. The school provides both an accelerated and enriched program. They are very willing to give her every accommodation she needs to be successful. She types all of her work. She has her exams administered orally. They constantly check for understanding of her assignments, etc. It is a real team between home and school. We feel very lucky not to follow the red tape of the public school system.

20. Has he/she exhibited any problems in class?

Yes, she has trouble with spelling and reading out loud and understanding directions on exams (she relies heavily on contextual cues, and with directions, there are not that many contextual cues).

21. Has your child ever complained of difficulty in school?

No.

22. Is your child challenged enough in school?

Yes, definitely.
23. Do you communicate with your child’s teacher(s) about his or her needs?

Yes, I met with the principal as well as her two classroom teachers with a list of strengths and areas of difficulty and strategies for success.

24. Do his or her teachers understand what dual exceptionality is?

Yes. They both have a license in gifted education.

25. Have you had any difficulty with the school regarding your child’s unique needs?

Not this year. Last year the teachers were not good at remembering to provide her with the interventions that she needed. She was too “good” of a student to remind them, and her performance suffered accordingly.

26. What are your child’s interests? Is he or she able to explore these things in school?

She is very interested in history. She likes learning about people and relationships and different cultures. She has had many opportunities to do independent study projects to explore those interests.

27. What is your child’s social life like? Does he or she have many friends?

She has a lot of friends both in school and out of school. She is very active and has great social skills. She has no difficulty making friends.

28. From your perspective, does your child understand the interaction between his/her disability and gifts? Does he/she understand his/her strengths and weaknesses?
I don’t think she really understands the interaction between disability and gifts, but we are working on that. She doesn’t know all of her weaknesses. For example, she knows she has trouble with spelling, but she does not know that she has difficulty with grammar, writing, etc.

29. Is there any information available to you about your child’s unique needs?

Yes. We belong to the dyslexia institute in our state, and they are great at providing information.

30. What is the most important thing you want people to know about dual exceptional children?

Comments:

Think of them as gifted first and as having a learning disability second.
Interview 3A: Seth

Do you know why I picked you to be a part of this study?

No

Okay, well I picked you because you have ADHD. Do you know what that is?

No

Well, ADHD is something that you have that causes you not to be able to concentrate in class and to have a lot of activity. Do you experience those things in your class?

I have some medicine.

You have some medicine for it. So does the medicine help?

Yes, sometimes.

Sometimes?

Well, for a limited time (for a limited time?)

What about other times when it doesn’t help?

Other times when it doesn’t help I sometimes fall asleep.

You fall asleep? In class?

No. Well when I didn’t have it in class... when I had it... over the summer when it didn’t work I fell asleep.

Oh, so it stopped working over the summer?

Or I went crazy.

So you fell asleep or you went crazy. What did you do when you went crazy?

I just, I couldn’t stop dancing.
Do you think you’re a good dancer?

I’m not that good a dancer.

I also picked you, not only because you ADHD, but you’re also gifted.

I already know that I’m gifted.

I know, I’m just telling you, that’s why I picked you.

Cuz I’m in REACH.

You’re in REACH. Can you tell me what REACH is?

REACH...well, this is my first year so I practically don’t know a lot about it.

Because you’ve only been there for a week?

I haven’t been there at all.

Oh, so today is your first day of school?

Last week was the first day of school but I haven’t been to EXTEND yet.

What do you think it’s going to be like?

I think it’s going to be awesome I hope.

You hope? Have you ever been in any other gifted classes?

PEP.

What’s PEP?

PEP is like you learn different languages.

Like what kind of languages.

English...well, I mean, Spanish, French, maybe this year my sister will learn maybe Italian.
So, can you tell me what school is like for you? Maybe not this year since you’ve only been for one week but before.

Before it was great.

Did you have any problems in school? I want to answer as honestly as possible.

A few.

Like what?

I had the problem of getting tired too much near the end of the year and going to sleep.

In class?

In class.

What would your teachers do?

They would just wake me up.

Did you have any trouble with the academic part of school?

Yes, a little bit with science.

What’s wrong with science?

Because I used too much water for an experiment and too much that it overflowed.

Then what happened?

Then I had to pour out a little bit then we used gobstoppers for our experiment.

What about in any other classes. Did you have any trouble in math?

No (No?), I had a little trouble in social studies.

Why?
Because I was too much scribbling

Too much scribbling? Why were you scribbling?

Actually that was writing.

Oh, for writing. In social studies or in English?

Just in English.

So, do you have trouble in writing?

Yeah, I’m not a good writer.

And what parts of writing do you have trouble with? Coming up with ideas?

Coming up with ideas…rarely coming up with ideas

Rarely coming up with ideas?

Usually.

So you usually can’t come up with an idea?

Usually…some…I rarely can’t but usually can.

Oh, you usually can. What about the actual writing part? Is that hard?

Yes, I’m not a good writer.

So, your handwriting is not very good?

I’m really good at cursive.

So you’re really good at cursive but not good at writing?

…Mumbles…

What do you think is the thing that your best at in school?
Math

Math? Why?

I’m (Face this so I can hear you) very good at doing math problems and regrouping (regrouping? Your very good at regrouping?) Yeah, and subtracting.

Not many kids are good at regrouping so that’s pretty good. What about your teachers? Have you gotten along with your teachers?

Yes.

All of them?

I only have one, two.

Do you think they helped you?

They do sometimes help me

They sometimes help you? What about the other times?

The other times I have to do it alone.

You have to do it alone? Have you ever had any bad experiences with your teachers?

No (No?)

Do you think they understand that sometimes you fall asleep or go a little crazy?

I don’t go crazy in school (oh, not in school?)

What about before you took medication?

Before I took medication I couldn’t concentrate.

So in the summer you like to dance when you don’t have medication and in school you can’t concentrate. What happens when you can’t concentrate?
Can’t concentrate means I get kind of floppy and then I get a warning and if I get another warning I get a card pulled.

Does that happen a lot in school?

I haven’t gotten a card pulled for all year just yet.

For this year?

Yeah.

What about before…in second grade?

Second grade …I forgot to do something so I had to be sent to the office to do it. And I had to do two of that thing

Did it happen a lot?

No (No) it only happened once

SO do you think your teachers understood that sometimes you couldn’t concentrate?

Sort of.

And do you think they understand that you are gifted…that you are smart and really good at math?

Yeah.

And do they help you with that? Do they give you more challenging work do you think?

We each get the same thing.

Everyone gets the same thing? So do you think it was hard enough or challenging enough for you?

Good.

Good? On a good level you think, in all your classes?
What about friends in school? Can you tell me about that?

I have friends but only a few in my class. A lot of my friends are in Mr. Gibson.

Have you ever had any problems with kids in your class?

Yes cuz one of my friends named Michael, he almost got a card pulled to yellow.

What’s yellow?

Yellow is a call home.

Oh, okay, and how is that a problem with you?

I had no problems.

Oh, you had no problems but he did?

Don’t pop that.

Okay.

But, have you had any problems with kids in your class?

No...yeah, uh No.

And you think you get along well with most of them? Hmm?

I’ve had no problem. I’ve had a problem with only one.

Okay, can you tell me about that?

And her name was Hailey and she...we were about to play...me and Kendle were about to play a game but she just said by by.

And that’s the only problem you’ve had?

Yeah (I laugh). Then he didn’t do it.
And do you think that when you couldn’t pay attention in class did you distract other kids?

No.

No... you only distracted yourself?

I only got distracted... just like I'm distracted by this bag.

I know you’re very distracted by that bag.

Hey, it’s stuck to my face!

Don’t do that, I want you to be able to breath.

I cannnnn!

Okay, can you tell me about home? What’s home like?

Home is cool.

Home is cool? Do you ever have any problems at home?

Yes, sometimes our family room gets messy.

Do you make it messy?

Sometimes.

Sometimes? Do you get along with your sister?

Yeah.

All the time?

Sometimes

What about when you dancing crazy in the summer all the time?

Not all the time. Really no.
Can you tell me what is the hardest part in school about having ADHD and being gifted...what do you think?

Hardest part is might be (mumbles)

Huh?

Nothing...nothing.

What?

I'll just talk into this..

Okay, the hardest part is? You might have to think a little bit about this one.

Hardest part of school is reading stuff.

Why is the hardest part of school reading stuff?

I'm not a big reader but I'm good at my weird school books.

What are your weird school books?

It's a chapter book series.

So do you not like reading?

I don't like reading but I like reading the...my weird school collection.

Why do you like those ones?

Because they're really weird and I'm a weird kid.

Sometimes weird is cool.

Yeah.

Weird is fun.
Yeah.

What is the most important thing you would want me to know or your teachers to know about you? You who has ADHD and who is very good at math and who doesn’t like reading. What would you like them to know?

Don’t give me very hard books.

Anything else?

And...one more thing. I want you to know that...to not give...anything, that’s all.

Are you sure? Nothing else?

Nothing else.

Do you have any questions for me?

Yes, why are there so many questions?

Because I want to know about your school and I want to know about your friends at school and I want to know about home and I want to know about how you feel about school.

And you want to know about me.

Hmmm and I want to know about you. I interviewed a lot of kids.

Is that it?

Yup.

Okay.
Interview 3B: Shelly

So, can you please state the age and grade of your son.

He is 8 years old and he is entering third grade

Okay, and can you tell me the disabilities that he’s been diagnosed with?

He has an ADHD diagnosis and really that’s all

Can you tell me his area of, where his gifts lie?

His gifts lie in the high IQ and outstanding memory. He is very mathematically gifted. I would say he is not a calculator but he picks it up quite quickly without a lot of instruction or anything like that. He has had a speech delay, I would call it. It was something he... at the school level he doesn’t get diagnosed with any speech problem but he does have a delay and difficulty with pragmatic speech.

Okay, when was he identified as having ADHD?

When he was about 5.

Was that by an outside…

By an outside psychologist. He got through kindergarten without any medication with occasional behavior challenges. He was immature in some ways and would have outbursts of energy or speech that was very inappropriate at the time during a kindergarten classroom setting. So, he... that’s when we started with the Connor Scale with the teacher I guess and went by way of further diagnosis with the psychologist.

And would those behaviors appear at home as well (yes) or just in the school setting?

What about giftedness. When was he identified for that in school?

He was picked out in kindergarten

Oh, okay, so both at the same time (we both laugh)

Pretty much

So... you said he had some behavioral problems. What has his school life been like since he was diagnosed? Or even before then?

His school life’s been really good because the teachers and the administration are outstanding, I think, where he goes to school. It’s a very caring environment it’s a very...”we want to promote the students greatest success” type of environment... so even
though it is a public school setting they have been very cooperative in giving, within reasonable limits, to him and to the other students. He, his school experience has been better since he has been on medication because it helps him concentrate. Kind of takes away that urge to call out or body energy that might not be appropriate at the time...it at least tones it down. SO, its helped him to be more successful in a peer to peer experience and teacher to student experience. His experience has been good because he has been able to go to gifted types of programs too which helps him break up..

So, is he being challenged?

He is being challenged. His teachers continue to be good about finding ways to try and challenge him. Letting him do extra study and different study than what the group might be doing at times so that 1) they can be relieved from the pressure of having to entertain him or challenge him further and (2) knowing that he has already got the material that they may be covering. So they try to do a good job of balancing him needing to interact as a group and as a participant with the class in general but to give him these relief points to build or do his own thing.

So, you said that you've had a good time with the teachers that he has. Has it been in all grade levels that you have had support from the teachers?

Yes, I knew going into it that I would need to be an active participant and I actually went into the current school setting in kindergarten without really giving them any background on him just to see where is he in relation to the rest of the world? What do they see if you just kind of let him go and do it? So that’s what we did for the first probably half of kindergarten. Then we started being more involved and talking about what needed to happen for him to be more successful and for the class in general to be that much more successful and moderate his behavior and stuff. That started their interaction and they have been cooperative really at every level. It’s August 1st now so I know that I am going to have my annual chat with the vice principal to say hey, remember this kid in the class with him, if you can avoid it kind of thing. They are open to that because its only one kid— it’s not like he can’t get along with everybody. You know, just to kind of chat again and I think he tends to get assigned to one of the best teachers at each level because we interact with them because he needs to be challenged and some of the better teachers tend to find the ways to challenge him.

So, what is his social life like? Has he had any social difficulties, from your perspective?

Yeah, I think he is socially unusual. When we first sought help and started the process of better understanding any kind of disabilities or what his situation is I saw a lot of Asperger’s tendencies for him. I knew he didn’t have full blown Asperger’s but every time you read a little blurb about Asperger’s kids I though hmm that could be my son...hmm that could be my son you know those similarities stuck out to me and so I asked the psychologist to be sensitive to that and make sure that what she was looking at would evaluate him for that. She did go through that process and determined that he is not. She understood the similarities, the tendencies that he has towards that but she didn’t
agree that a full diagnosis of that was necessary or would be accurate. He only a few close friends. He is not the life of the party type of thing, he doesn’t get as many attachments but he does have friends. He doesn’t really pick up on the social cues sometimes, that another person could give off. He understands sarcasm now. He understands some of the speech things because he’s learned them. I always thought his speech was memorized. Even as a little kid you’d say to you want a cookie or an apple? He’d say apple. If you’d say do you want an apple or a cookie? He’d say cookie. It didn’t really matter to him that much. He would say everything because he memorized it but I still believe that all of his speech is memorized. He’s’ got more and more things to pull from now and he can connect them a little quicker and a little more fluently and a little more accurately than he used to but I still think it’s all memorized. Now he tries things out at times still at 8 years old and I go mmm that’s not the right place for that buddy…you know it’s just one of those things. But, you know, I’d say how was your day at school and he’d say yes. He knew I was asking him a question but…I still think he has challenges with the why…Why did you do that? Why did anyone else do that? He still doesn’t understand the social interaction between folks sometimes even in his own situation.

When he comes home and he talks about school is it generally a positive thing? Has he, himself expressed any difficulties?

No, he generally says positive things about school. There are times when something unusual could happen on the playground or something and that will kind of throw him into tilt for some of the rest of the day or it takes him a little while to get back on track but generally speaking he says good things about school. I kind of have to pry it out of him what they did and that type of school

Oh that’s normal for kids. It only gets worse…what did you do today? Nothing (both laugh). Okay, so what are his interests? What are the things that he focuses on?

He likes baseball. It’s a sport that’s good for him because the competition isn’t too close. Football, basketball, soccer. They are a little too much of the competitor trying to stop them from doing something so baseball is a decent distant between people. He likes country music right now. He’s very much been doing music type of stuff so I like to get him into a little bit more music if I can and he likes computer games. He likes playing poker on the computer and race car on the PlayStation and stuff.

Have you ever seen him really focused on something? Anything like that?

Yes, he will ask for computer probably more than anything but I don’t see him fixing on things as much as he used to. He knew his letters and their sounds before he was 2 and you know you thought it was probably with the music part of the game type thing but he knew those sounds the letters made…it was even surprising to me that he knew that at that point. So, he sued to fixate and get as many facts as he could and hold on to him. Actually he doesn’t seem to do that as much now, I don’t know if it’s because he has become more social so that is not overriding his personality as much as it did before.
How was he like growing up? Raising a child with these exceptionalities what were some of the challenges and positives?

Some of the challenges were the speech not coming along as fast. At 18 months he should have had 10 things that he consistently said for things. It didn’t have to be the right word but he consistently used he and that’s when we knew we had a problem. We had maybe 5. He can say anything but he doesn’t reach for the bottle and say the same thing every time or he doesn’t reach for the toy and say the same thing every time. He didn’t speak that much in a way and being the first child I didn’t know as much about what they should or shouldn’t be doing at that point but he wasn’t exactly quit but he just didn’t spontaneously speech. He repeated things a lot. That was one of them. I never sat down. The having to touch anything and everything you pretty much had to be up even in your own house where things may not be breakable all the time or whatever but I never sat down. He was just very busy going from one thing from the next to the next. Wanted to touch it, wanted to just memorize what he could out of pretty much anything. Then the speech part was the not being able to get an answer to a question type of thing. I felt like I didn’t know what was going on in his head. I knew that his brain was going a mile a minute but I didn’t know what about. He would always look around and you knew he was looking up and memorizing everything everywhere. Kindergarten, goes in within the first week of school he knew everyone’s names and date of birth from the little birthday thing posted on the wall...He hadn’t been there 3 days and he knew all that. Other kids just don’t bother to take in that level of information and that’s the type of thing he thrived on early. So, it was hard to connect emotionally and to try to be more typical in the social aspect and social setting. Things were very facts. We need the facts. That’s what I want! Type of thing.

So, in school how’s his problem solving skills?

They’re pretty good. He can...give him the information and tell him to solve the problem, he can. He has a harder time with the why did that character in the story do what...the empathy and understanding somebody else’s perspective. He has a very hard time with that still but as far as here’s and issue here’s a problem solve it, he can kind of do that. He’s pretty good at that.

You said he has trouble with the why of language but how does that translate with his reading. Does he have issues with reading comprehension or is he okay with that?

He...this is part of the thing that I’m still trying to figure out because he’s not wanting to do a lot of reading for me at home in the summer time so I’m trying to get him to but he’s...right now he’s very resistant to that. He seems to be able to read the stuff in school and comprehend enough and throw back enough to answer that okay. So I think he can do that reading comprehension. But when it really comes to “Why do you think that the character did that?” That’s where he has a hard time. So, I think his reading comprehension is fine when he allows himself to take the time to soak it in.
Connecting with the characters

The taking it to the next level, that tends to be his issues.

And how is his writing.

His writing. He hates writing. No, I mean, there…and I don’t know what you call this, but he has an intense challenge to write anything. He can have the idea and know the sentence and he can’t get it on the paper fast enough and hold on to the thought long enough to get it down. I don’t know what you call that. If it’s an attention deficit thing or…? But it is physically hard…it is physically exhausting for him to write. So, his writing has gotten better this year because we’ve done a specialist therapy for it…a rhythmic writing type of thing where he has learned cursive which helps him to have a little bit more fluency in keeping with the word and the thought and the whole thing and getting it down on paper, but he still hates it (Okay). It’s really…there is something with his brain connections that is not happening and I don’t know exactly what you call that.

So, It’s just the physical act of writing that he hates or is it the getting the ideas together?

It’s both, I think he can get the ideas together but he knows he’s physically got to get it on the paper and he knows that he hates that. Then it drains him so if I let him type, like he had a read and write assignment ever week…this is second grade…and this was the thing, the most challenging thing and the times I let him type it…because it was a computer and it interests him more and the way he could touch the letters and have it go. That was better. That was not the pencil dragging on the paper which, for him, is just a real challenge. It’s almost to the point that I feel really bad for him because I think he just honestly isn’t trying to be difficult it’s just that tiresome him.

That sounds very familiar (you have heard this! That’s great because as a parent you think “am I the only one that has to wrestle my child to get this stupid assignment done.” It’s just, I know that you can do it.)

It’s actually hard when you know that they have the idea in their head, it’s just not coming out.

Yeah, it’s a challenge. It’s hard to understand because I can put a lot of rewards and stuff on the table and it’s still not necessarily enough to get him over that hump.

From your perspective, how does he understand his exceptionalities? How does he understand his ADHD and his giftedness? From what you see or he’s said or you think?

He knows he’s smart. He knows he learns (knows?) a lot of stuff. He knows that he has challenges in moderating his own behavior. He’s just old enough now that I ask him about his medication and feel like I get a good answer from “how does this make you feel. Do you think it helps you maybe not wiggle as much? Do you think it maybe helps
you make better choices?" and he’ll acknowledge it, yes, that it does. And I try to ask him you know do you feel like you made a good choice? And that type of thing...and I think he understands that he has challenges always making a good choice or getting in front of his own energy and to stop what might not be appropriate at that moment. So I think he is aware of it. He is aware of it...I don’t think he dwells on it necessarily and I think that his self-esteem is rising which is helping to control the ADHD I think. His maturity, self-esteem...kind of things like that are coming along for him so it’s less of a challenge for him.

So was his self-esteem something that was low for him in previous years?

His father and I divorced. His father left at 5. I think that there were definitely self-esteem issues from that and now having a stable father figure in the house I can already see in both my kids that its having an impact. So, you know, that’s a hard part to quantify sometimes when it really comes to all of this but I can see that changing. I can see that he still has a sincere issue of ADHD and that he just can’t control it sometimes but it’s coming along and I think it’s less intense than it was.

Has he ever done , like I know you did SEP, are there any other kind of programs that he’s done that have helped him in his...that have acknowledged his strengths and weaknesses?

He’s in the gifted program through the school which they call it PEP which was one afternoon a week that they traveled to a different school, are completely surrounded by gifted kids, and have an outstanding gifted teacher. So he’s had that and...that’s what he’s pretty much had. I don’t think there’ve been any other specific for a program.

So that program is only once a week?

Once a week almost all year at the school system. They want us to get like four sessions in at kindergarten but once they hit first grade it pretty much starts at the beginning of the year.

So now he’s in the general education classroom.

Most of the time he’s in the general ed...and this coming year he should go to the gifted, now they call it REACH, for a full day every week so the time period is longer. He managed to not do well on the standard...the Stanford Achievement test so we had to appeal and have to do further testing in order to make sure he gets to go this year which, for him, I think his academic year is going to be a complete disaster if he doesn’t get to go to the gifted program because...on the T test which are actually harder than the Stanford, he did fine on. Clearly gifted no question I don’t know if he just had a bad day on the Stanford...I think he was probably board out of his mind so the ADHD has been the impediment type of thing to his giftedness at this point so we have to test in a couple weeks.
Relating back to academics, what is his processing speed? Does he finish his test on time?

Oh yeah. His 504 would, I think, allow him to have extra time if he really needed it but it’s a matter of... I don’t think there was any questions or issues with him finishing. He finishes early (Oh, okay). And probably, I’m not sure, somebody said something about the Stanford might be where you have to wait for everyone else to go on to the next thing and the next thing so I can just imagine that he probably sped through it and got bored out of his mind waiting for the next thing... you know.

Has he taken, the other two tests that he has taken as well, were those group standardized tests or individual?

I think they were done at the gifted group. I think the first two, which are actually more difficulty, were tested in the gifted environment and the other was done at the general school level.

So, in a room full of kids?

Yes, all of them were probably in a room full of kids but one was in the gifted setting where he’s got it turned on because he is enjoying himself and he likes it and one was back at the home school so to speak where, yeah it’s okay, but it’s just not as stimulated all the time.

Has he ever had any individual testing?

Yeah, when the psychologist did his overall testing (that’s the one that you sent me?) mmmhm. That’s where he got the high IQ by way of the WISC evaluation. I don’t know what 130 means but somebody said it was high (both laugh).

That’s pretty good... Higher than me!

I’m sure probably higher than me to. So, as far as going back to those challenges of raising someone like this, it’s hard to keep up sometimes. Although it probably would have been worse if he was like why this, why that, why this, why that. At least he is just soaking up information as fast as I can throw it at him but since he has has had such a problem with why that wasn’t his approach. Yeah, to try and stay ahead of him in the homework I feel like is going to be a challenge after a while.

Once he gets to middle school maybe...

I went to William and Mary so I think. You know (laughs) I did okay in my academic life so you know...

But once you get far away from it, it’s like I don’t ever remember learning this (laughs)
It’s gonna be a challenge.

So did you find, when he was being diagnosed with ADHD and when he was being tested for giftedness, that there was enough information out there for you to look at or enough support? Enough places to find research? To figure out what was going on?

(Thinks) There could have been more. I think that I was very fortunate to have the resources that I had especially as close to home as I had them. A good pediatrician who referred us to a good psychologist who...he made one referral in Richmond and one locally. We went with the local one and....yeah, I think it was very fortunate to find that resource and not...I don’t know if I’ve got the one in a million or if there are more of them out there...if there is more of that resource. So, like I said there probably could be more but I was pleased to find as many as I did.

Did you find a lot of research on just ADHD and Giftedness or did you find any information readily available on dual exceptional children?

Really when I started looking for it I was looking more of Asperger’s...Asperger’s and ADHD because that’s where I thought I was starting with my son but then you find more...I think there’s a pretty good amount of information out there. There is, unfortunately, it seems like you have to have members or things like that on certain websites to get at some of the information because as a parent sometimes you can’t afford to have five different memberships to whatever gifted child magazine but you want to try to get at the stuff. So I think that’s a little bit limiting. I would love it if the program here had more resources to do more what I see as outreach to the parents that might have gifted students. I sat for Terry Cross’s speech (Tracy?), Tracy Cross’s talk over...I don’t even know why a girlfriend of mine knew it was happening but she said you really should and I said yeah your right. Maybe the psychologist might have put me on to it? So I talked to that but getting any of his time is very difficult so I kind of felt like..you know, this is what I need to know more about and so it would be great to have people like that maybe a little more readily accessible or maybe I’m not aware of how to get in there.

My last question is: If you had to talk to educators or other parents....what do you want them to know about this area? About students with dual exceptionalities? What would you want me to know?

Well, dual exceptional is..I heard it for the first time with an educator type friend who had mentioned yeah my son is like this..yeah dual exceptional. I guess I never thought of it that way. It’s just like with anything, you can’t judge a book by their cover. If you have a tall kid people expect him to be real smart and kind of advanced and mature type person because their bigger than there age and sometimes you’re like no...they are still 6 type of thing. You know, when you have a high IQ child who is doing academically so well be understanding that socially that’s the part that they may be struggling with. Just because they’re excelling in one end doesn’t mean that they are all the way around on that level type of thing so to have some patience with the social end of it because an overdeveloped one side usually means that something is not as developed (laughs). So, you know...I
think people are pretty good but you know my son can spit off so many facts about things...well why are you even thinking about them at 5 or 6 years old but when you ask him how he’s doing he couldn’t give you the right answer because he didn’t understand the questions. Just to know that there’s just...the spectrum can be so wide within one child. I had no idea until I had my son (both laugh).

Okay, well that was the last question. Anything else you would like to say?

No, I hope that the outcome of your research can help the parents like me who may not even be parents yet. Because some of the challenges are things that I had no idea about but...
Interview 4A: Max

Okay, so let's start. Do you know why I picked you for this study?

Yeah, because I have ADD, right?

Yes, and, you have been identified as gifted. And so my study is on students with dual exceptionalities. Have you ever heard that term before?

I have not.

It basically means that it's a student or a person with any kind of disability like a learning disability or ADHD who's also labeled as gifted. So it just means basically they have two kind of end of the spectrum. So are you in the gifted program at your school?

I believe so, yes.

So what kind of program is that?

Well we have an IB track, which is International Baccalaureate.

Okay, and what's it like? What kind of classes do you take there?

It's really just the honors classes. Because I'm only taking freshman classes, they're the pre-IB classes. But they focus on a lot of, like, connecting studies together and taking more of an international basis.

Okay. And this is just a high school program, right, the International Baccalaureate? Or is it middle school as well?

Yes. They have a middle years program but the main IB is in the high schools.

Did you do the middle years program?

I didn't.

So when were you identified with ADHD?

I believe it was about middle time of last school year, so that was about February.

Okay, so recently. And before that, did you have any difficulties in school, any things that you struggled with?

Well, my family, or my mom at least, had always thought that I had ADD and I kind of agreed with her. We had some testing a few years ago but I didn't come out positive until we came back and did it again.
So why did you decide to have the testing done again?

I still had a few problems, especially in my math class. Some of the problems did go away. I would forget a lot of things. I wouldn’t be able to pay attention as well and recall things.

Were you able to easily follow directions, or was that something that was difficult too?

No, I can follow directions pretty well.

So you said you struggled with... sorry, can you repeat that one more time? What were things you struggled with?

Recalling things that had been said in class, and doing assignments.

So those are the things you struggled with. What areas are your strengths in?

The actual solving of the problems wasn’t so hard as long as I remembered the mechanics of how to solve it.

Do you like your classes that you’re taking or that you have taken in the past, since it’s the summer time now. Have you enjoyed those classes?

Yes.

Okay, and how are the teachers? Are they supportive of the things that you need?

They were very helpful and understanding of the ADD.

Do they understand that you... how would I say this? So they understood that you had ADD, but did they also understand your strengths, and were they able to help you with those?

I don’t think they ever went specifically in that direction, but...

And this is all from your perspective, so I don’t know what they were thinking, but from what you could gather. So thank you. Do you think the school in general was helpful for you? The program that you’re in?

Yes.

Okay, and were you being challenged? Are you being challenged enough in your classes?

Yes.
What kinds of things are you interested in, maybe inside of school, the subjects you’re interested in, or outside of school?

I’m very interested in computers, specifically video games and the design process behind video games. I hope to be a professional level designer.

And so you spend a lot of time doing that kind of stuff?

Yes.

The next question is, it seems like you’ve had pretty positive experiences in school, but have you had any negative experiences?

Not particularly. I had one teacher that I didn’t really like, but I think that was partially because I created a few problems I thought were stemming from the ADD.

What kinds of problems do you think that you were creating?

I had a really hard time in eighth grade, two years ago, to remember to turn stuff in on time.

Okay. How do you, in general with school, do you think you’re ADD is still affecting the way that you think, the way that you problem solve, the way that you process information?

Somewhat. I do think I’ve always been ADD so I don’t really have anything to… sorry, I’m having a mind block. To compare it to, but the medicine definitely helps and I’m remembering things and processing information a little better now.

Oh, I lost my place. One second here. Okay, so, before you said you’re processing information better now. So before you were taking the medication, was there any kind of frustration? Or was it just something you didn’t realize, since you’ve always had ADD, you didn’t have anything to compare it to. So was there any kind of frustration in learning?

A little frustration, but it was few and far between.

Let’s see. Do you get along well with your classmates?

Yes.

And have you ever had any kinds of issues or trouble with any of them?

No.

Do you have any close friends in school or outside of school?
Yes.

When it comes to making friends, is it something that’s easy for you, or something that’s a little bit difficult?

It depends on the crowd. If they’re interested in the same things I am it’s very easy. If not, it’s a little harder, but I can still make friends.

I would guess that it’s pretty much the same for everyone. So do you have a lot of friends that are also interested in computers and video games?

Yes. Most of my closest friends are very interested in both those.

From your perspective, what do you think is the hardest thing about being a person who is gifted and who also has ADD? If there even is a hard thing.

I don’t really know. Just the problems that stem from the ADD before I took my meds, I guess.

I have one more question for you, and that’s, what do you think is the most important thing that you want people to know about kids like you, with ADD who are gifted, or with any kind of learning difficulties?

I think that if people take the right medication for their kind of disorder then it shouldn’t really affect them that much, but it’s still present and maybe for people to be a little patient.

Thank you.

No problem.

Do you have any questions?

None come to mind.

Okay, thanks!
Interview 4B: Marcia

Just for the purposes of making sure I have all accurate information, can you state the age and grade level of Max, please?

Yeah, he is a rising tenth grader and he will be fifteen on September 8th.

Can you tell me the difficulty or the disability he has been diagnosed with?

He has been diagnosed with ADHD, inattentive type.

We’ll start the real questioning now.

Hold on just a second, I’m going to turn up my volume.

Sorry, I have to sit a little bit away from the phone because I’m on the other side of the microphone here. When was he identified with having ADHD, or ADD?

It’s a little bit of a long, boring story but I think the first time we had an understanding from, for instance, his teachers... well, okay. Actually, he was just going into fourth grade. It’s kind of funny. I’ll tell you the story because it may be interesting to you. Max has been sort of spacey or whatever, and we happened to be sitting in a pediatrician’s office waiting for the doctor to come in for something else, like I cold, and we’re reading on some pamphlet in there about ADHD. It had these ten symptoms, and Max was reading it, and he said, “Mom, this sounds like me.” And I read it and I said, “It does sound like you!” So we started a conversation with the doctor that day, and he was really dismissive of it. All he said was, “Does he has friends?” And I said, “Yeah he’s got friends.” “Oh, he doesn’t have ADHD then.” But I spoke to his teachers. They had noticed certain things. And then his next year teacher, they did a writing prompt where she read. She said to them, “I’m doing a writing prompt and you’re going to write this writing prompt with all oral directions.” And then she read the writing prompt. Well he wrote a beautiful essay about something of his own imagining. He never heard the instruction, he never heard the prompt, you know? So that’s when we had him tested for the first time. I took him in and I said, I don’t know if he has ADHD, so I’d like to have him tested. But I sensed then that these people kind of thirsted on having a diagnosis. They had Coke and all this really high sugary stuff in their snack room, and I said, “If you’re working with kids who have ADHD, why is all this in here?” And they said, “We want the ADHD to come out more.” I thought, “I’m in the wrong place.” I mean, I don’t know, I just want a truthful answer here. So the results of that testing, I thought, gave me what they thought I wanted to hear, which was “It looks like it could be, but we’re not sure.” I go to the school and say, “Okay, here’s our results. I don’t have an actual diagnosis.” They said, “He’s an okay student. He’s making “As” and “Bs.” We don’t think he needs any classroom accommodations. We don’t think there’s a problem.” So
that’s how we proceeded until middle school. In middle school I saw he ought to be taking more responsibility and things got more complicated, more teachers, more deadlines. Everything was separating rather than having one teacher. It really became apparent that this was more than he could manage. We had kind of a tough time. It was really like, “Why can’t you step it up?” It was a very personal sort of thing. When we got to high school, I actually found someone who does, well, I was having a real kind of struggle, and I went to see somebody. I went to see a professional, and that person said to me, “Why don’t you contact these people?” So I contacted an executive coach and after the first time he met with Max he said, “He has ADHD, right?” and I said, “I think so, but nobody can tell me.” So I had him retested again, and it was clear from the second testing that the numbers... the discrepancy apparently between his IQ number and his working memory number is so disparate that less than one percent of the population has that much of a discrepancy. So working memory and executive functioning are very challenging for him, but he’s very bright. He’s been in the GT program since third grade. He was in honors classes through middle school. He’s still in honors classes through high school, which is now called a pre-IB, International Baccalaureate, which is similar to an AP program. It’s just a different. AP goes straight up. If you’re good in math, you can go straight up to the tippy top. This is more of an interdisciplinary type of instruction where you’re relating concepts from history and science and math and so forth.

Yeah, he was telling me a little bit about that, how it was interdisciplinary. Oh, did you have something else?

I feel like I’m dragging this on a long time.

Oh no, I love hearing all this information. But it’s just hard to tell because I can’t see you, so I don’t know if you’re just thinking or if you’re done talking.

Basically once we got the diagnosis then we went directly to the school and he has some classroom accommodations.

What kind of accommodations does he have?

They are, if he arranges with his teacher ahead of time he can have extra time for testing, being able to have something like a stress ball or something, not tapping your pencil, but something quiet that he can do physically to sort of relieve the emotions, and... I’m trying to think what the other ones were. It sounded to me like we have these accommodations but apparently they go away if you don’t use them. So every year you’re evaluated and if he’s never asked for more time for a test, then that accommodation may not be given to you the next year. So it’s something that you either use it or lose it, is my understanding. Okay, I think that’s all I have to tell you.
Okay, thanks. So what kind of struggles was he or is he having in class that especially alerted you or him even to the fact that he had ADD?

The main thing was just an inability to keep track—what is the homework, when is it due. And even though his working memory is probably his biggest challenge, I couldn’t get him to write anything down in the daily planner which every student has one of these, they’re given them. So that was really frustrating, I’m sure for both of us. I was very emailing teachers and getting regular progress reports and everything and it just got to the point where I couldn’t figure it out, because you talk to other mothers with sons of this age and they say the same thing, “Oh, he forgets to turn it in, it’s in his backpack, he can’t keep track of anything,” so I didn’t know how much of it was just sort of adolescent boy versus, do we really have a problem here? So it really wasn’t until this executive coach arrived and said, “It’s clear, it’s obvious, and you need to do something about it.”

Has he ever complained of having any difficulty in school, or is this something the teachers would tell you, “Oh, he hasn’t been turning in his homework?”

No, it was just those things, you know. We’d get an interim report and he’d be flunking, and so how that happened, you hear from the teacher, so many assignments were not turned in. And I think that prior to getting on medication, it just started to be like a snowball, so one thing would fall behind and then the things are still progressing and if you’re behind on work, it’s really hard to catch up. It kind of became, I think his reaction became one of frustration and “Forget it, I’m not going to do it.” It sort of became an avoidance type of thing.

Were you easily able to communicate with his teachers, or was there kind of a road block in the way?

Well, I found it difficult to communicate with some teachers, especially since we didn’t know. Okay, so compared to having a diagnosis for real, in middle school I met… this goes back a little bit. In elementary school, I was very involved with the school, so the principal knew me personally and said, “You know, he doesn’t have an IEP or whatever they call it, these special accommodations, but you should meet with all of his teachers at the beginning of every year of middle school and let them know and give them a copy of his report and so forth.” So I did that, seventh and eighth grade, but because I didn’t have an actual diagnosis, when I communicated with the teachers all I could say was, “Well, he has these issues, and I’d like to have some accommodations like sitting in front of the room, close to the teacher and away from any chatty or distracting kids.” That’s a big one. They were very accommodating for that, but when it became frustrating for them because he either couldn’t remember, or he wasn’t turning stuff in, and then he sort of was trying to fly under the radar and not make eye contact and stuff like that. That’s I feel like when I sensed from the teachers that they were getting a little frustrated with the
whole thing. They were a little bit... I wouldn’t say anybody was completely uncooperative, but some were more than others.

And do you think they understood that even though he was gifted, his ADD was affecting him in a way that was hindering his learning?

I don’t know. I can’t figure out if it’s because there are so many kids in the classroom with issues that they’re just like tired of dealing with it, or it was a personality thing, or they would forget that different kids had different issues. I can’t say. And then of course you’ve got the whole middle school age, which is challenging in and of itself. So I can understand the teacher’s point of view of just kind of rolling their eyes and saying, “Oh my gosh.”

So now that he does have the ADD diagnosis, is the school accommodating to him?

Yes. I found that my interactions with teachers are a lot easier, and maybe because it was all out in the open, there were no gray areas, so I could say with some authority, “He has this diagnosis,” and they could on their side, they now have a mandate that they have to accommodate the student, so we’re working with a very clear understanding which makes it easier. And they have been really accommodating to me. I felt that these high school teachers were much more accommodating than the middle school teachers.

Do you think he’s being challenged enough in his classes?

I do, some of them more than others. He’s had excellent teachers, and I’ve also noticed that for him, having male teachers, he seems to respond to them a little better, and I don’t know if it’s because of the way they speak, you know, if it’s the depth of their voice or the way they form their sentences, but he seems to really like his male teachers.

Oh no, I forgot the question I was going to ask. Well, I’ll remember and move on to the next one. What are his... Oh, I remember the question! In the classes that he does particularly well in, what are his symptoms of ADD like? He told me that he’s on medication now... Yes, he’s much better now. Are his symptoms pretty even through all of his classes, or are they more even in some than others?

Well, the two classes that I guess he struggles the most in this year were Spanish and he was taking and Algebra II honors class as a ninth grader, so he’s a couple years ahead of what some of his peers would be as far as math is concerned. So those were the two most challenging classes for him. My guess is it probably goes back to the memory issue.

What are his areas of strength? His strongest areas?

Well, he seems to really enjoy history this year. He’s a very good writer, I think. And he’s insightful, so I think English is very strong for him too. He likes math, for him he
really pushes on math, science, and he’s very interested in computer games and design and things, that’s what he would like to do professionally.

Yeah, he was telling me he likes computers and he wants to get into professional video game designing, so I thought that was kind of interesting.

Like probably many many fifteen year old boys, but…

This is true. So what is his social life like in school, maybe even from when he was younger to now. Has it evolved?

Yes. You know, I don’t think he’s ever had any trouble making friends. He’s always had a group of four or five guys that he pals around with and some of them are still… he’s had some of these friends since they were in elementary school together, and new friends that he’s made. I think some of the stratification goes on as early as middle school where I hate to say it but you kind of have this group that clicks together, this group and that group, and he said to me, “Mom, I’m hanging with the nerds.” I said, “Well, you know, that’s fine. We come from a long line of nerds.” So he does tend to pal around with other guys who are kind of into computers or into some of the things that he’s interested in. He does play sports, so he’s not just completely focused on one thing, but as far as being very involved in a social life at high school, I wouldn’t say… he’s not the guy who’s going out for every sport and doing every activity and so forth. He has a couple that he really likes, and he has a group of friends.

Do you know if he’s ever had any difficulty with any peers in his class because of his ADD? Or is it more just affecting his learning?

I think perhaps it has had an effect, especially prior to the medication, because I think sometimes it could be annoying to other people, even just the activity and the conversation and the volume and so forth.

From your perspective, does he understand the interaction between his ADD and his giftedness? He told me that it was something that he’s always had, even though he obviously hasn’t been diagnosed with it his whole learning career, but it’s something he’s always had so he hasn’t really had anything to compare it to, but does he understand the interaction between those two things?

That’s a good question. I’m going to think about that for a second. I don’t know. It’s interesting because recently I have been quite open about this because people were asking me, “How’s Max doing in high school?” and I said, “You know, I finally got the ADD diagnosed, so we’re making steps to make some things work out.” And as soon as I was really open about that, I kind of found that other people were either asking me about their situation or said, “Oh yeah, my kid too.” I was amazed how many responses I got like
that. So I know other kids who are different as far as their interests and activities and so forth that have ADHD, and that he’s been friends with in the past and so forth. So I’m not sure if the geekiness has to do with ADHD or if it’s just… and you know, if you looked at him, he’s really a nice looking, sociable kid, but I just think that the way he’s interested in sort of these areas of computers and we call it geekiness because in our area here, you’re at UVA so you know, being a geek is kind of cool. You don’t want to be a dummy. Good student. And so that’s a good thing. So I don’t know if geek necessarily has a bad connotation. And one other footnote here is, after I started mention to some parents, “Just to let you know, Max’s got ADHD”, and occasionally he’d go to these friends’ houses and they would stay up all night playing video games, so they’d bring a Red Bull, and I’m thinking “Oh my god, do they know what they’re in for?” So I alert the parents that this is a situation, and the parents would say, “Oh yeah, my kid’s got it too.” So looking at his group of friends, I would say definitely some of them also have ADHD, and I think some of them have been diagnosed and some may not have been.

Are his other friends that he has also labeled as gifted?

Yes. Very bright kids.

What is Max like at home?

I would say he’s very cooperative. He’s… I don’t know. I think he’s great to have around. Sometimes I have to sort of encourage him to get on to certain tasks or get together with friends outside of… a lot of times they get together on Skype and they’re playing video games on Skype and that’s how they’re sociable. So I say, “Okay, you know what, maybe face-to-face. You can get together all in the same place.” Which they do. So I would say he’s a nice kid to have around, and I have to say since he is on medication, the level of stress has just gone way down for everybody.

You talked about the manifestations of his ADD. When did you first notice his giftedness? Even before he was labeled, did you see any signs of it?

He’s a very imaginative kind of kid. He always has this hilarious sense of humor. He’s not really hyperactive but he always has a bit of a higher level and I figured again, boy energy. But we would sit down to play board games, our family, and someone else would be thinking about their next move, and he would just be talking or moving or singing, and we would say, “Be quiet, Max, be quiet, stop, be quiet be quiet be quiet!” He didn’t realize, I think, that he was doing it, that it would be annoying. So those were signs, and just, if I said to him, “I need you to go upstairs, make your bed, and put your laundry away, and then come back,” so four instructions, that would be like a circuit breaker. That would just blow the circuits. So I realized it was hard for him to take oral directions, it was hard for him to focus on more than one direction at a time. Are you there? Yeah, I’m here. And so there were these things that I just found, what’s going
on? Why can’t he function? Again, I would ask other moms, and they’d be like, “Oh yeah, my kid’s the same way, blah blah blah.”

Did you see any of his strengths coming out at home? I think you said he was identified in the gifted program in third grade, did you say?

I’m sorry, did you just ask how I knew about his giftedness or his ADHD?

Giftedness, but I’m glad you talked about ADHD because that was good information.

I think I’m a little ADHD too sometimes. Okay, so going back to giftedness. You know, he was always really curious as a young kid. He knew all the dinosaurs by name. He was imaginative and creative with all of the things that he enjoyed doing, and play, and of course we had a computer available to them so he would just do all kinds of educational stuff and everything on computers. He was in elementary school, and in our area kindergarten, first, and second everyone’s together, and third grade they’re tested and teacher recommendations and so forth for this gifted talented track. And I figured just watching him, I thought, there was a magnet school within our district that focused on arts and science and I thought, this might be a really good fit for him. I think he needs a little more. I said to his teacher at the time, “I’m thinking of doing this, what do you think? Because I just sense that he needs a little more.” And his teacher said, “Actually, I’m recommending him for the GT program. Which kind of surprised me, in a way, because Max has an older sister who’s just about a year and a half older, and she’s also gifted. You know, she’s a very bright young woman as well, and it was clear to me from the beginning with her because she was so motivated. If the bar was a certain level, she was trying to get there plus plus, and Max was always really bright but I never felt the same drive from him, so I thought, well, you know, if motivation is part of this I’m not quite sure. I’m not sure about that. But everyone else around said, “Oh yeah, definitely, he should be in the GT program.” And he’s done very well in it. I think he would have been very bored otherwise.

I have two more questions for you. The next one is, do you find that there’s any information available on this type of student, a dual exceptional student who is gifted and also has ADD?

You know, it’s funny, because I don’t see a lot of crossover between these two sectors. There’s a lot of information about these gifted and talented type students, and there’s a lot of information about ADHD, but I don’t really see too many things that address those in one person. Even though there are obviously a lot of people out there who fit this criteria, fit this place. In fact, okay, I’m going to tell you another boring story. In high school, when I realized that I needed to have him tested for ADHD, we had to meet with a counselor because he was in the middle of the first semester and he was flunking a couple of classes, so my husband and I went to speak to the counselor and her answer
was, just put him in regular level classes. And I knew that was not the answer, but that was the only thing she could come up with. So I hated to go over her head, but I went to the head of counseling and said, “Look, here’s the numbers. Here’s where his IQ is at, and here’s where his working memory is at. If he’s in a regular class, he’s going to be so distracted. He’s not going to learn anything.” And she was the one who said, “Okay. The answer you got was not the right answer.” So I’m even finding that dealing with counselors at school, they don’t know how to place some of these kids.

So luckily you found the one counselor who was able to help you. Has there been anyone else who has sort of keyed you into more information, or has it just been a game of cat and mouse trying to find this information?

Okay, so I have to say I tried to explore myself, and maybe I haven’t looked hard enough. So that could be that I haven’t either.

Yeah, I find even now, because for my study I have to do a literature review, and there isn’t really a whole lot of information available, and especially there’s not a whole lot of information available for parents. So the last question is, what do you think is the most important thing for people to know about these students?

That’s a really good question also. The first thing that comes to mind I think has to do with expectations in the classroom. So if everybody is supposed to follow these particular things in this particular order and sit in this particular way and be able to get the information all in one way, and I think there’s probably a lot of stuff out there that has talked about different kinds of learners. So you might have a visual learner, you might have an oral learner, you might have a kinetic learner, and so forth. So really the teacher probably has a way of addressing the material without just writing it up on the board and that’s it. So I think that being aware that these kids learn a little differently, that they may not be able to sit still, that they may not be able to… I don’t know, there’s part of me that’s maybe making excuses here, but I guess just being aware that if you think you’ve gotten the information across you may not really have gotten it across. But that’s also the responsibility of the student to develop coping mechanisms so that they can talk to their teachers and they are getting any extra help that they need and not just saying, “Oh, well, I’ll just get past this test and get on with the next thing,” rather than really developing skills. And that’s been a little bit of my challenge as a parent is trying to know what mechanisms we need to have in place at home. For instance, right now we have a whiteboard above Max’s desk with Monday through Sunday on it and every day he writes in assignments. Then we have a big calendar so he has deadlines as far as projects and so forth so he can actually see it, big, and it’s in front of him. And as much as I’d like to be able to back off as a parent and as he gets older he needs to take on more responsibility, I do still have to be involved. And that would be helpful to me as a parent.
for information basically on how to help him develop coping skills and how for me to disengage so that he’s more independent.

Is there anything else you’d like to add?

Nothing’s coming, I’m sorry. I hope this was helpful. I feel like I’ve been talking and talking.
Interview 5A: Macy

Do you know why I’m interviewing you?

No.

I’m interviewing you because I want to know more about children who have gifts, who are strong in one area, and who also struggle with certain things. And your mom told me that you have dyslexia and you have trouble with reading and sometimes writing, but that you’re really smart in other things. So that’s why I’m interviewing you.

Okay.

Are you in the gifted program at your school?

I don’t know. Am I at the gifted program at my school? I don’t know if we have one.

Can you tell me a little bit about your teachers?

I don’t know.

Do they help you in class? Are they not very helpful?

Oh, yeah, they’re very very helpful. They do whatever they can to make their students feel more comfortable.

Whenever you have trouble in class, are they able to help you with that?

Yeah, either that or I go home and my parents help me.

Okay. And what kind of trouble do you have in class?

Maybe I sit on my feet. And when I have to write things I have trouble with that sometimes.

And what kind of things in class do you think you do really well at?

Probably math and science and history.

Are those your favorite things in school?

Yeah, I like art too.

And your mom tells me that you’re really good at writing, or coming up with ideas. Is that true? Do you think that you are supported by your school in general? Do you think the people in your school are pretty supportive?

Yeah. They’re very supportive.
And what about your friends? Do you have friends at school?

Yeah, I have a lot of friends and they’re all really gifted too.

Oh, okay. Have you ever had any problems with any of the kids in your school?

Not really. The first two, yes. The next years, so.

Okay, why do you think you had problems the first two years?

Well, there was a kid who wasn’t very pleasant.

Oh, what did they do?

Well, he just I guess had some problems and we just weren’t able to handle being around him that much.

So was he ever mean to you, or just in general a problem in the class?

Just in general.

And what kinds of things do you like to do outside of school?

I like to play on my computer, put puzzles together in my spare time, and my favorite is to do horseback.

And in school have you ever gotten frustrated when you couldn’t do something?

Not so much. My teachers usually help me work it out.

What about at home, when you have homework?

Then either I throw pillows around or my parents help me.

You throw pillows around?

Yeah.

Does that help you calm down?

Yeah.

Have you ever had a bad experience with a teacher who wasn’t very helpful?

No, not really. Most of my teachers are very nice.

That’s good! And what do you think is the hardest thing about being someone who is gifted but who also has some learning difficulties?
The hardest part is trying to probably do something that most of the other kids are doing fine at and you’re kind of having a little bit of trouble at it.

And does that make you upset, or do you just try harder, or what kind of feelings do you have when that happens?

I just try to work through it as best I can. I just tell myself that it’s okay, just take it easy and I’ll get through it somehow.

And do you think your schoolwork is challenging enough?

Yeah, it’s challenging enough.

I just have one more question for you. What is the most important thing that you want me or teachers or anyone who is working with someone like you to know about you? It’s a thinking question.

Probably that I am very bright and smart and I love being able to go to school and stuff.

And what would you say about students who are bright and like going to school and are gifted but who also have learning difficulties? Is there any advice that you would want to tell teachers or that you want to tell me?

Probably talk to your parents about it and ask them to help you as well.
Interview 5B: Malory

Can you tell me the age and the grade level of your daughter?

My daughter is eleven and a half and she’s going into sixth grade.

When was she identified as having a learning disability, and can you tell me a little bit about that?

Sure. We got a call from her kindergarten teacher the second week of school. She had been at Crayport which is a big private school in the Midwest. A little more to the point. And she had actually been in her preschool. I was very surprised to get the call. They were concerned because they had trouble reading. And essentially their message to me was, most of the other children in the class, and it was a very bright class, were reading, and Macy was among the brightest, and yet not reading. And it wasn’t so much the fact that she wasn’t reading at the beginning of kindergarten that was concerning them, it was that she was so very bright in so many ways that it was kind of a flag to them, something was off. At the time I thought they were crazy. I thought, “It’s the beginning of kindergarten. She’ll be reading soon. I’m not worried about it.” But then as things progressed it became clear that they were right.

So when was she actually identified with a learning disability?

We moved between her kindergarten year and her first grade year and in kindergarten there was a reading specialist who worked with her. They didn’t come out and say there were learning disabilities, but they clearly suspected them. So when we moved we put her into a Montessori school and I had her assessed formally for the first time toward the end of first grade, and that came back with very clear learning disabilities.

Is it just reading that she’s struggling with, or is there anything else she’s struggling with?

She showed up with just a whole bunch of things. She was adopted internationally, and she spent her first tenth months in an orphanage, and it was… there was actually an American who worked there around the time my daughter was there, and she’s written a book about it and it was similar to kind of a concentration camp situation. She was literally starved almost to death. And so her learning disabilities… basically everyone who’s worked with her thinks they were kind of induced. She probably was not born with these issues. They were created by malnutrition and neglect. Where was I going with that? I’m sorry.

I was asking what other things she struggles with. We talked a little bit about her reading.
So I ended up taking her to be part of a study in a children’s hospital in Detroit. There’s a study where they do basically every educational evaluation on the face of the earth. They do the WISC, they do the WRAT, they do everything. And so they’re doing it as part of a study of children who have been institutionalized in their infancies. And they’re also doing brain scans as well. We were actually there again last week doing a follow up because they wanted to see her again because she had done so well. They started following her when she was about ten months old. She actually came home with some strange neurological things going on. She was tongue thrusting at ten months which normally babies would do long before that. She wasn’t able to sit up. No muscle coordination at all. She had some really scary issues. And so a neurologist started following her at a very young age. They didn’t, and I’m kind of glad they didn’t, tell me how serious it was. Which is a good thing, because I think I was sold on the idea that she could achieve anything. So I’m glad they didn’t really tell me how worried they were. Okay, so we returned to Children’s Hospital at the beginning of her second grade year and had her assessed there and that’s where the picture became very clear. So she has essentially dyslexia. She has very very low working memory. She has sequencing problems as well, so things like long division are a bear for her. Writing is very very difficult for her because she is very fluent orally and then she goes to write, like a paragraph at school, so she goes to write it down, and she’ll have it set in her head, and she’ll get to the second word and it’s the mechanics of getting it on the page, the sequential things that have to fall into place. Not to mention spelling. By the time she’s on the second word she’s forgotten. And it drives her crazy. So one of the accommodations we have is when she has assignments she dictates them. She’s actually able to get her thoughts out and on paper, but she doesn’t have to deal with all those sequencing pieces that all have to come together.

So does she have an aide in the classroom?

She does not, actually. In the end, I actually ended up co-founding a school here. My background is in private schools. So I ended up co-founding a school here in Winchester where she goes to school, and the class sizes are very small, you know, six to eight kids in a class. She’s had great teachers who have allowed her to express all her gifts but also have accommodations along that the way that let her get out of her own way.

So when was she identified as gifted?

That second grade test. She had the first test in first grade, and the woman came back and said her verbal IQ is like, 150. And then some of her functional scores were in the 80s. And her working memory I think was like 55.

55? Wow.
Yeah, I mean, literally, one score was double another. And obviously as you well know that’s how you identify a learning disabled kid, is that gap. But it was extraordinarily huge.

So she in class has difficulty with the division and the writing, but she’s extremely good at verbal fluency. Is she gifted in any other areas?

She’s very verbally gifted and she also has some visual gifts. I’m not really sure what I would call them. I’m sure you know. I…yeah. I should have looked at her testing before I picked up the phone to talk to you. But when she was six years old she was able to do a 1000 piece puzzle in a matter of hours.

Wow! These kids I interview…

Yeah, and that’s part of why we got fooled is that she did have learning disabilities because the things she does, the things she can do are so extraordinary and so above and beyond what kids her age can do. What I didn’t realize, someone explained to me later, yes, a 1000 piece puzzle, she’s great at it, but it’s not sequential. You can do a 1000 piece puzzle in any order you choose. So yes, she has these incredible visual gifts, and she has almost a photographic memory. So she’ll come into a room, and she could do this since she was like two years old. Sometimes I would, like a room with blocks in it and all sorts of things, and sometimes I’d test her. I would move something, and she would walk into the room and immediately, “Oh, you got another candlestick.” She had a perfect map of every room in our house in her head, so if I moved something she would notice and comment on it. So I think, you know, I’m not sure what you would call that.

Do you think that’s part of her visual ability, that she just sees something and remembers it? Yes. Does that happen with auditory things too?

She has not had a lot of trouble with auditory things. She has a great memory for what is said to her as well. She actually spends an enormous number of hours on YouTube, which is awful, but she does things like, you know, she’s reading a book at school, and they read novels at school, we don’t use textbooks at our school for reading, they read really good children’s literature. So they’re reading a novel at school and she will come home and she will YouTube, maybe they will mention, you know, they constructed a garage, and she will watch five YouTubes about how you make a garage. And she will know all about it. She’s like almost encyclopedic in her knowledge of things, but most of it’s not from reading. Although she does read for pleasure now, and she reads New York Times bestsellers. I mean, she reads some really heavy stuff, really slowly. It can take her two months to finish one.

In school, how is her relationship with her teachers?
That’s an interesting question. You know, when she was in preschool, they adored her, absolutely adored her. When she got into elementary school, she has posttraumatic stress disorder, just to complicate matters further, so she’s got this whole giftedness thing, then she’s got the learning disabilities, and then she’s got PTSD, which means she’s kind of super aware. So when she was in preschool and the teachers, they would have a class of twenty kids, and they would be having a conversation. There was one conversation that happened at Halloween, I remember it very vividly, when she was three years old. The two teachers were standing together and the kids all came in in their outfits and one of them had a big gun as part of the outfit. And they had sent home a letter specifically saying not to have any weapons. So here comes this kid with this big plastic gun affixed to his outfit. And so the two teachers are whispering to each other across the room, all the way across this huge room, and they’re whispering, “Oh my gosh, I can’t believe it, that these parents let this child come in like this.” And Macy yells across the room, “Yeah, I know! My mother hates weapons! I can’t believe they let him bring it either!” The teachers were like, “I can’t believe you heard that.” So she was hyper-aroused for a long long time. And while that was cute in preschool, she was very mobile, moving around the classroom, and she had impulse control issues as well. It wasn’t that she didn’t know it was the wrong thing to do. I sort of described it as, most people have an idea and they think, that’s a bad idea, and they don’t do it. She would have an idea, they would do it, and then she would be like, “Oh my god, I’m in a lot of trouble.” When she was starting into fifth grade, the summer between fourth and fifth grade, we found a medication called Panex that’s sometimes used with children who have some of these issues and it just calms them. It was originally developed for blood pressure patients. It calms the whole body. And that was like a miracle drug for her. I mean, what is missing in her prefrontal lobe, in terms of impulse control, it has helped her tremendously. Just by slowing her down, just a notch, so that she has a minute to have an idea and then think about it—do I really want to do this? And when she started sixth grade, everyone said to me, “Your kid! She’s amazing!” And so a lot of the difficulty she had with teachers, gone. And I have to say, she’s still very bright, very bubbly, and funny, and it hasn’t suppressed her personality. It just slowed her down to a normal person’s pace. And you know, we really struggled, we did so many therapies with her when she was young. We did sensory integration therapy, we did talk therapy, we did trauma therapy. All these therapies. I was really opposed to medication, but I got to say, when you don’t have any prefrontal lobes, this is really helpful.

So do you think her teachers understand that she’s gifted and she has these difficulties, or do you think they only see one side of it? And this is like now and in the past, do you think they’ve had difficulties understanding her difficulties and her gifts?

She had one teacher in the first grade who clearly just saw her as a pain. She’s just a pain in the neck to this particular teacher. But once she started at the school that I created,
which is third grade, the teachers very clearly liked her. But they were frustrated, because she couldn’t sit down. If she was nervous, she would be wandering around the classroom, you know, not creating huge disruptions, but it’s difficult when you’ve got a kid that just can’t focus. So yes, they definitely saw that she was very bright, and they also saw that she had learning issues. Once we made the change in medications, I think she was calmer and they were able to see how very bright she is and really help her capitalize on that.

Do you think you have an open communication with her teachers?

Oh yeah. They’re wonderful.

And do you think she’s being challenged enough in school? In the past and now, is she being challenged enough?

Absolutely. Okay. Yeah, absolutely. Most of the kids who go to this school are very very bright kids. Most of them, just on the basis of their scores, on the head, most of them would qualify for your program at William and Mary.

[FIRE ALARM] Sorry about that. They’re cooking downstairs. Has she ever to you complained of difficulty in school? I know you said she has the reading difficulty, but has she come to you and said, “I’m frustrated, I’m having these troubles in school.”

She has not complained about school. She was in two different Montessori programs when we first moved here, and I have to say, I don’t know if you’re familiar with Winchester. No I’m not. Winchester is at the top of the Shenandoah valley and there’s a city here but it’s still fairly rural and very white, and she’s Chinese. It’s very white, and there aren’t a lot of educational options here. The public school here, for example, there are 500 kids in the public school where she would have gone. And there are no Asian people here, in her school, at all. And there were no adopted children either. So that wasn’t even an option for us. So we sent her to two different Montessori schools, but those weren’t really good fits for her at all. You know, my thing with Montessori schools is they don’t do a very good job when kids do have learning disabilities. Because the kids have so much leeway to kind of guide their learning, they just guide them away from doing the thing they don’t want to do. So, I don’t think she was very happy there, but she also wasn’t very frustrated, because she did what she felt like doing and they were fine with that. And meanwhile I kept calling and saying, “She needs more help,” and they were like, “Oh, she’ll outgrow it.” No she won’t. So that was kind of difficult. But once she got to our school, during the day she was very happy. First she would have projects, and we don’t assign a lot of actual homework, because there’s not a lot of research to support it for elementary students, but when she would have projects at home, she would flip out. Her frustration was just unbelievable.
What would happen? How would she exhibit her frustration?

She would usually lie in her bed screaming.

Okay. So I’m sure that was a hard time.

You know, she wasn’t yelling, and she wasn’t yelling at me, she was just screaming. Like, “I don’t want to do this, I don’t want to do this. Can’t you make this go away.”

Do you think that her schools have helped to meet her needs?

Yes. Yeah. But you know, the way the school is constructed, parents are kind of required to play a big role, and so she has been very supported by her parents and by her school. I’ll go ahead and tell you, too, she’s going into sixth grade, and we just bought her a Mac. My husband is in Italy researching voice detect programs so that she can take charge of her writing. And she writes on her own in school. It’s not that she can’t write. It’s just difficult.

I’ve heard of “Dragon Naturally Speaking.” Yes. I was just looking into it for transcription for my interviews, and I hear that one’s good.

Yeah, that’s actually what my husband was looking into, so we’re thinking that that might be something that works for her. Because our goal, as I’m sure is the goal of every school, is to allow her to tell us what she knows, not spend a whole lot of time identifying what she doesn’t know or what she can’t do.

I mean, this sounds like a pretty good school. Thank you. And six kids in a class, that’s very ideal.

Well you should come visit. We would love to have you.

Well thank you! I would love to visit. How far would that be from Williamsburg, Virginia?

We’re in the top of Virginia, so it’d be like three and a half hours, three hours.

Not too far. Yeah. What is her social life like at school and outside of school?

She’s very popular. It’s a very small school, but kids like her, and call her for play dates. She’s invited to everything. People are happy to see her. The kids are very happy to see her.

Has she ever had any issues with other kids in the classroom?

Yes. In the year before we found [tennis??] for her. I would say she was really seen as the class clown, because she’s so verbal, and so she would cover for her PTSD or
nervousness or difficulty in writing or math, whatever the challenge was at the moment. When she gets going she’s like Jim Carey. She’s hilarious. And the adults are kind of laughing too, because she’s really funny. So she would kind of get this routine, and for a while she was seen as someone who was funny but not serious. She’s really turned that around in the last year. Really no one sees her that way at all anymore.

What kind of things is she interested in outside of school and inside of school?

She likes puzzles. The only issue with that is we have issues finding, you know, twenty billion piece puzzles. She likes puzzles. She loves horseback. And she’s a very talented writer. Her teacher was just telling me the other day that she doesn’t know any other children her age who are as good with the animals, and really getting the best out of animals, as she is. So she’s really good at horseback. She’s been taking modern dance, and she’s really enjoying that. She likes puzzles, she likes to do horseback, she likes modern dance, she’s very artistic. She’s left handed.

Has she ever tried the 3D puzzles?

You know, we haven’t, but I’m sure she would enjoy that. I’m sure you know this, like so many dyslexics, she’s able to see three dimensional objects and turn them around in her head, which of course doesn’t serve you very well when you’ve got [can’t understand—24:30] and flip them around in space. She would probably love that. We actually have not tried 3D puzzles but I’m sure she wouldn’t have any trouble. She also builds things in her spare time.

What was she like growing up? Now this question is focusing on home. What was she like at home growing up, up until now?

She has always been very loving. She’s a very sweet kid. She’s incredibly loyal. She’s the kid where if she ever says something negative about another child, I really do pay attention, because she says negative things so rarely. She’s just very very loyal and very forgiving, and kind. She’s not always kind to her little sister, but you know, that’s kind of the job of the big sister. She’s very sweet to us. You know, she goes through her adolescent door slamming like every adolescent. [can’t understand—25:40] like a principal, so, you know. I don’t find any of that real shocking. You know, you’re not going to break my door, they’re wood, so its’ fine. But basically she’s lovely. Before she went on medication the impulse control problem was really challenging. What’s so hard is she would do things and then, usually a child does something and you try to talk to them about why it’s wrong. We’d have these ridiculous conversations because she knew it. She knew it was wrong. And I knew she had brain damage and that was why. Brain damage isn’t quite the right word, you work precariously to make sure the brain develops properly. I knew that but it’s still so... day after day after day, a child just does one kind of dumb thing after another. That’s hard.
Yeah, especially if she does it and then thinks about it afterward. How do you deal with that? Because most times kids think about it, they know it’s wrong, and then they do it anyway.

Yeah, exactly. It wasn’t that she was immoral. And I should say, that was one of the harder things too, other parents not getting that she has a serious brain problem. There was a period there where they just thought she was a bad kid, and I was like, she knows right from wrong, and she wants to do the right thing. It’s like a brain glitch. There’s not a lot she can do about this. There actually became a point where I stopped punishing her. No punishment at all. She would do something and I would say, “You shouldn’t have done that,” and she would say, “I know.” Yeah, because I really realized there’s no cause. She can’t. And she knows it’s wrong. The consequence x thing that punishment is supposed to teach, she already knew. She already knew all that. She just, you know. She just needed a little break to think about things before she did them. And she just grew up tremendously, once we got her that break.

Do you think that, from your perspective, I know you can’t see inside of her head, but you do think she understands the play between her gifts and her learning disability?

To some extent yes. I think there’s also a self-protective piece where it’s probably not her own best interest to be informed as to how serious this is, in part because I think it’s that self-fulfilling prophecy problem. So she knows she has dyslexia. She knows that it took her forever to learn to read. We told her that. We talk about it very openly because what we’ve learned in family therapy around her post-traumatic stress thing is anything a family keeps secret is toxic. So if you don’t talk about it then there’s something wrong with it. So we talk about, “Oh, what a hard time you had learning to read, and then we finally figured it out.” What we figured out, by the way, is she had no phonemic awareness at all. Oh, okay. None. And in fact, the guy who tested her last week came back and said, “I have never tested a child as interesting as that one. It’s like, she has no phonemic awareness at all, and yet her vocabulary is like twelfth grade. How does she do that?!” We’re like, “Yeah, we know. We ask ourselves that also.” So what we finally figured out is she was better off doing sight words only. Her reading took off. And basically what I told her was, “Just take a picture of the word with your mind camera, and I’ll say the right word.” And so we started reading, and any word she didn’t know, at first it was like every other word, I would fill in the right word. She wouldn’t even try. I would fill in the word so that she heard the correct word associated with the right picture of the word. And that’s how she learned to read. And she knows. We put her through one program after another. Oh my god, we did Sylvan, we did the Montessori program, we did [Cratlan’s??] reading program, and they all came back phonemic awareness. And once we realized that she couldn’t do that, that’s why her brain just isn’t there. And we went on to sight words and it worked much better. So she’s aware that she has issues. I
don’t think she’s aware of how deep they are, and I don’t think she needs to be at this point.

About her phonemic awareness, is that still how she learns reading with sight words?

She uses sight words frequently. She’ll be lying in bed next to me and the two of us will be reading and she will frequently stop me and say, “What does this say?” And I’ll tell her and go back to my reading. She also has an incredible ability to figure things out from context, although when she reads aloud sometimes it’s funny because she’ll substitute words that are actually better than what the author wrote. You know, it makes you laugh, and I’ve learned to just let it go because it’s so fun.

I just have two more questions and they’re going to switch a bit to focus on you. Did you find that when you were discovering she was having all these issues, was there enough information available to you, and enough resources available?

No. It was a nightmare. Do you want me to say more about that? Yes, say as much as you can about that. I have found that having a child who is both gifted and has learning disabilities is... my mother, let me just back up a second, my mother was in danger of a massive stroke about fourteen years ago. And I discovered that my role as her daughter, in terms of her care, was to kind of act as the meta-doctor. So we would go to the neurologist, we would go to this one, that one, the other one, and I would collect all this data and then I would make decision based on what I hoped was a global view of her health situation. But there was really no doctor who would do that for me, and there really needed to be a doctor. There needed to be someone who was controlling the whole thing and was getting all the information. And I don’t care, I’m not an M.D. But there really wasn’t anyone. Even her primary care wasn’t particularly interested. And I find that there’s a similar sort of disconnect in terms of the kids who are learning disabled in general, and kids who are learning disabled and gifted, oh my god. There is really no one you can go to who will say, “Okay, here are the tests that need to be done, here is the kind of intervention that needs to happen. We’re also going to work with the psychiatrist because we need this medication, and we’re also going to work with a therapist because there are a lot of psychological issues going on as a result of the learning disability.” There’s nobody who coordinates all that so that it makes sense and as a matter of fact, my experience with the public schools in this area, because I’ve had a number of friends who’ve been down this road, which is another reason we didn’t even try. The public schools here have learning disabled programs and the kids in those programs are not gifted. And she would be ready to skin herself before the end of the first week. So there are learning disabled programs, and apparently in the public schools learning disabled is a code for, you know, on the lower end of the IQ spectrum, and you have your gifted programs, but in order to function in the gifted programs you can’t have any learning
disabilities. Because there’s really no program for that. And the gifted program at our local public school, the gifted program is one hour a week.

Yeah, that’s what I find is a lot of times the programs are once a week, maybe twice a week, but I mean, that’s not enough, especially not enough support for someone who has a disability and who’s gifted.

Right. It’s just like, your hour is not going to help my child. Given the fact that my husband and I have [??? 35:27] and given the fact that in this area, there is no reasonable priced secular private school, there are a whole lot of high-end [??? 35:38] and then there are a whole lot of religious based schools, but if you’re just looking for a straightforward, you know, a really solid [??? 35:48], you can’t find it. And there also, I mean, very very conservative religious. So we ended up starting our own school.

Well that’s good. You don’t really hear that very often.

No, you don’t.

I just want to say I apologize if you hear beeping because someone is trying to call me again.

Yeah, you know, my husband’s been trying to call me while I’ve been talking to you, so I’m having the same problem.

Did you try looking on the internet? Did you find there were any resources there?

Did I try looking where?

The internet.

Oh yeah. Oh my god, yeah. I have to say, because when Macy came home from China, her muscle tone, she had very very low muscle tone, I told you she had the tongue thrusting, she didn’t eat solid foods until she was a year old… you know, she had some really really serious things right from the beginning, so I started reading brain research right away, reading about post-traumatic stress and what that did to the baby brain, and my husband quit his job for a year to stay home with her, and then I got pregnant and so he went back to work and I stayed home with both our daughters, and I have been home ever since. And the first two years, the reason I stayed home was Macy. I mean, we’re doing all this research, and then doing everything for her from what I was learning. So I kind of did a bachelor’s degree in brain issues, having to do with trauma.

My last question for you is, what do you think you would want me to know is the most important thing about children like Macy?
I think you have to find a way to help them recognize and deal with their problems while also recognizing and celebrating their giftedness. And finding that balance is really hard.

Do you have anything else to add?

No, I think that’ll probably do it. I know I babbled on forever. So can you tell me about your research?
Hi! My name is Monique and I am a graduate student at William and Mary. Thank you for helping me with my study. I am going to ask you some questions. If there are any questions that you don’t want to answer, let me know and we will move on to the next one. This interview should take about 30 minutes (depending on how much you want to tell me). This interview will be digitally recorded. I want to remind you that I won’t use your real name in my final report. Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, Let’s start:

1. Do you know why you were picked to be a part of my study? I do, because I have special needs and am considered by some to be “gifted”.
2. Are you in the gifted program at your school? What is it like? I am in a gifted program at school. I attend the International Baccalaureate program at John Randolph Tucker high school.
3. When did you realize that you were having difficulty in school? I have always had difficulty in school because of my Cerebral Palsy.
4. Did you understand what was going on when you were identified with (disability)? I did not understand my CP, I thought I was a “normal” kid like everyone else.
5. What sort of things do you struggle with in school? I struggle with physical activities such as stairs and carrying my backpack. I also struggle with quantitative concepts: mathematics and sciences.
6. What areas do you do well in? I excel intellectually in creative subjects such as English.
7. What are your interests? Your favorite things to learn/study? My interests in school are language arts (English and Spanish). Outside of school I study social justice and theology.

8. Do you like your classes? I do like my classes very much.

9. Is your school work challenging? My school work is enjoyably difficult. I get bored easily, so the stimulation is appreciated.

10. How do you feel about your abilities? I.e. Are you generally happy? Do you sometimes get frustrated in school etc.? I get considerably frustrated in school because of my physical disabilities; it’s no longer easy to convince myself I’m normal. My peer group is supportive but I am still hard on myself.

11. Are your teachers supportive? Do they help you? Do they understand what you need in order to do well? My teachers are very supportive, especially my PE coach. He modifies activities to fit my needs and takes my disability into account when assessing me.

12. Have you had any bad experiences with teachers who didn’t understand/help you? Yes. Some of my teachers have “helped” me too much, to the extent that I wasn’t prompted to excel.

13. Do you think the school is helping you to succeed? My school is doing an excellent job in helping me succeed.

14. Do you get along well with your classmates? My peers and I are like family. They are amazing people who support me completely.

15. Do you ever have issues (trouble) with your classmates? Nope. We get along like peanut butter and jelly.

16. Do you have any close friends at school? Outside of school? Can you tell me about them? I do have a close friend at school. I have a hard time making friends so our camaraderie is little short of earth shattering. My best friend is outside of school, whom I met in a hospital to which I was committed for an
eating disorder. We share everything with each other. She is truly amazing; my disability doesn’t faze her at all.

17. From your perspective, what is the hardest thing about being a person with (disability) who is also gifted? I am deeply frustrated by being underestimated. I am still a vibrant individual capable of changing the world. Our disabilities don’t define us.

18. What is the most important thing you want people to know about being a dual exceptional person/student? I want people to know that we are all beautiful. It doesn’t matter how smart or athletic (or not, in my case) we are all gifted in unique ways. We have stories to tell.

Comments: None.
Interview 6B: Rachel

Parent Interview Protocol

Hello and thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study. I am going to ask you some questions. I want you to answer these questions to the best of your ability. If, at any point, you wish not to answer a question let me know and we will move on to the next one. This interview should take approximately 30 minutes depending upon how much information you would like to tell me. This interview will be digitally recorded for accuracy. I may also take notes during the interview. I want to remind you that all information regarding my research is confidential and that no real names will be used in my final report. Let’s begin:

1. When was your child identified as having a disability? Identified gifted?

   a. She was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy at 10 mos.; however, it was suspected prior to that time. The term “gifted” was not really used in the Montessori environment (she attended school there through 7th grade), and so she was not labeled as such when growing up. I still prefer not to label her. (or my son).

2. What was your child like growing up? Before entering school?

   a. Very shy, quiet, and unsure of herself. Often, I still see this in her. She remains self-conscious and slow to make friends.

3. What have your struggles been in raising a dual exceptional child?
a. Often, people see her for her “disability” and assume that’s all she is. They stop there rather than looking beyond to discover the amazing girl she truly is.

b. I’ve struggled most of all with Insurance companies who “hold all the cards” and are able to decline doctors’ orders for surgery, medical equipment, medication, therapy, etc.

c. I’ve had a bit of a challenge comforting her when she grew old enough to realize that she was differently abled, and that she couldn’t do all the things the other children could do. She began to notice other children staring at her, etc. That was hard, because it made my heart ache.

4. What has your child’s school experience been like so far?

a. While in Montessori, it was fairly smooth; however, once transitioning to public school, she’s had difficulties with the red tape while accessing the “rights” and then managing to navigate the system.

5. Has he/she exhibited any problems in class?

a. Yes. (see below).

6. Has your child ever complained of difficulty in school?
a. Yes. She’s had difficulty keeping up in classes, trouble carrying her back
pack and lunch box. She can’t get on/off the school bus. She has trouble
navigating the crowded sidewalks and stairs during class changes...

7. Is your child challenged enough in school?

a. Yes. Finally. Thankfully, she’s in the IB program now and is academically
challenged in most of her classes now.

8. Do you communicate with your child’s teacher(s) about his or her needs?

a. Absolutely. Her teachers, guidance counselor, administrators… I want to
ensure that everyone who has contact with her knows the deal.

9. Do his or her teachers understand what dual exceptionality is?

a. I have no idea. Good question.

10. Have you had any difficulty with the school regarding your child’s unique needs?

a. Yes. For the most part, they’ve been accommodating, but there have been
some snags along the way as well.

11. What are your child’s interests? Is he or she able to explore these things in
school?

a. She is a reader and writer. She’s a phenomenal writer, in fact. Sadly, with
the IB schedule, there’s no flexibility for electives, and virtually no time
for extracurricular. She has been able to work her writing in to her special projects though.

12. What is your child’s social life like? Does he or she have many friends?
   a. Very quiet. She has made one friend at school, and a couple in her Youth Group. She also has a few long distance friends from the hospital.

13. From your perspective, does your child understand the interaction between his/her disability and gifts?
   a. I don’t believe she sees herself as gifted in any way. Up until a few years ago, she didn’t really see herself as having a disability either.

Does he/she understand his/her strengths and weaknesses?
   b. She is painfully aware of her weaknesses. Strengths? Good luck convincing her she has any.

14. Is there any information available to you about your child’s unique needs?
   a. There is plenty of information available about her cerebral palsy; however, her additional needs that have just surfaced in the past year, including the anorexia, self-mutilation, DID (she can’t be diagnosed until 18, but she’s being treated for it), and depression… well, these concerns have such a disparate selection of information that it’s difficult to know what to trust.
15. What is the most important thing you want people to know about dual exceptional children?

Comments: They are children. They are beautiful, special, unique children who deserve the same love and respect as every other child. They have as much, if not more, to offer this world as any other child will, so please close your eyes, open your hearts and get to know them. When the day comes that it is our turn to judge our fellow man, we should start with ourselves, and save judging our precious children for last.
Interview 7A: Betty

Do you know why I asked you to be part of my study?

Because I’m dual exceptional and you have to do a report?

Yes, and do you know what dual exceptional means?

Because I’m dubbed gifted and I have a disability like Asperger’s.

Okay. Could you tell me about school? About your class right now?

I’m in two high school classes, Spanish and Geometry. Geometry so far is kind of easy and kind of hard, and Spanish is easy for right now but I’m worried about the quiz I’m going to have to take next week.

And the rest of the classes are middle school classes? (Yes.) And do you think that you’re being challenged enough in your classes?

Regular classes for middle school sometimes, but sometimes not, and then most of the high school classes pretty much always.

And how are your teachers in your classes?

Well some of them are very strict, like every year I get at least one very strict teacher, and most of the rest of them are really nice. But the strict teachers scare me and I’m not good with strict people.

How do you react with strict people?

I just be quiet and do my work so I don’t get in trouble.

Do you think you have a good relationship with your teachers? (Mmhmm.) And do you think they understand that you have Asperger’s and that you’re gifted?

Maybe a little. I’m not exactly sure.

What things do you think you do very well in school? That could be academic things or behaviors...what do you think you do well?

Once I make friends I can talk to them pretty easily, but before I make friends it’s really hard to talk to people. In school I do some subjects easier than others, like math sometimes is easy but sometimes is really really hard. And science I really like because it’s pretty easy for me. Social studies is pretty easy too. What else do I have? Language arts is kind of easy too.

What things do you think you struggle with?
Math and I think that’s it.

In your class, or in school in general, what is your relationship like with your classmates?

Pretty good.

Have you ever had any problems with them?

No, not so far. I started at a new school this year.

What about in the past? Have you ever had any trouble with your classmates?

Sometimes. Some of them are really really hard to deal with.

Why?

Because they’re just annoying, and I don’t deal with annoying people very well.

How do you react to annoying people?

Be like, “Stop talking, I’m trying to work!”

Besides your classmates being annoying, because I’ve dealt with a lot of annoying people too, have you had any other issues with your classmates?

No.

What about friends at school?

I don’t have too many issues with my friends.

Do you think it’s easy for you to make friends, or hard?

To make friends is hard, but keeping them is pretty easy.

Why do you think it’s hard to make them?

Because I don’t like talking to new people very much.

Why not?

They scare me.

Have you ever had any bad experiences in school?

With the strict teachers, yes, and sometimes I get really really upset when I can’t figure something out, like right away. I don’t know why, I just get really really upset because I think my brain is wired to think I should get this right away, and when I don’t I get upset.
What happens when you get upset?
I start crying or I just can’t do the work and I just stop.
Does this happen a lot in school?
Just normally in math.
What does the teacher do?
Nothing.
How long do you think it takes you to get back on track?
Maybe sometimes like five minutes.
Are you good at getting yourself back on track?
Sometimes, but sometimes not. It kind of depends.
Back before this year in school, have you been frustrated a lot?
Yes.
About how many times a day would you say you’ve been frustrated in school?
A day?
Or a week? It’s not every day?
Almost every day, like two or three times a week.
You have Asperger’s, and do you understand what that is?
It’s like some autistic disease.
Not disease, but just a disability, right? What do you think are your characteristics of that that you have that may be different from other people?
It’s hard to make friends and I get really frustrated sometimes and I get very emotional very easily.
This might be a tough question, your mom might know this one better, but how do you understand your Asperger’s and your giftedness together? How do they interact?
Thinking question, I know.
Most of the times I just forget that I have Asperger’s, like for five months I forgot that I had Asperger’s and I was trying to remember what disability I had and I was like, what is it called? It starts with an “A,” what is it? I finally remembered, but it took a while.

Now we’re going to shift gears a little bit to talk about outside of school. What do you like to do outside of school?

I like to play video games and watch TV and read books.

Do you have any one thing that you really like doing?

It’s between reading and playing video games. I can’t decide right now.

What kinds of books do you like to read?

Action books, mystery books…like there’s these book series that I really like called The Hunger Games, and this other series Maximum Ride, and there’s Daniel X, and there’s this one series by this guy named Sunonymous Bosch, which is another way to say anonymous, it’s really funny. And the narrator, he’s one of the main characters; he really likes chocolate and cheese.

Did you know that they’re making a movie out of The Hunger Games? (Yeah.) I’ve never read the books, but I saw the movie posters and I was like, “Oh, that looks like an interesting thing.” I meant to look that up.

I hear about it, but I’ve never seen the poster or anything. My friends keep telling me, “Oh, there’s this lady that’s playing Katniss,” and then there’s this guy from another movie that’s playing Gale, and some other guy from that movie “Bridge to Terabithia,” he bleached his hair to dye it blonde.

The main character?

Yeah, the guy. He bleached his hair to dye it blonde, and he’s playing Peeta. And I’m on team Peeta, like other people are on team Gale.

I haven’t read it yet.

My whole family’s on team Gale, and I’m the only one here on Peeta.

So you have siblings?

I have one sister.

And how do you get along with her?
Not very well. Like, it’s a little bit of a roller coaster, like some days it’s pretty good, but most of the time it’s really down.

Yeah, I think that’s a requirement for being sisters. Do you like doing other things outside of school with your friends?

I don’t get to hang out with my friends very often. I just don’t get to hang out with them because I’d rather be doing something else or we just don’t have time because we don’t try to make appointments most of the time.

Do you do any summer camps or clubs or anything outside of school?

Well one time I did this thing called Camp Invention where you do all this stuff like for smart people but not necessarily just for smart people, but you do all these things. Like, one time I went, my mom was doing this thing, what are they called? Rube Goldberg machines, the chain reaction ones, those are my favorite. And we had to make our own and I was really cool and we did all these cool activities, like one place you were stranded on an island and you had to make a rocket. It was really really cool.

And Lego League.

And I did Lego League in elementary school. And I did chess club for like one year.

What do you think is the hardest thing about being a person who has a disability and who’s also smart?

Well the problem is you’re so sensitive, no one else knows what’s wrong with you, and they peg you out as the weirdo sometimes.

And has that happened a lot?

Just sometimes.

Is it kids in your class, you think?

Yeah, most of the time.

Do they say stuff to you?

No, I think they think it.

My last question is, what do you think is the most important thing for teachers and me to know about students with dual exceptionalities like yourself?

Well, that they’re very sensitive sometimes. And other times school can be really really hard, and other times it can be really really easy, but you have to treat people who are
doubly gifted or whatever pretty gingerly because if you push one of the wrong button they can go off pretty bad sometimes.

Anything else?

No.

Do you have any questions for me?

No.

She also has ADHD, so I don’t know if you want to ask her questions related to that.

So how do you think your ADHD impacts your school?

Oh gosh. I’ll have to sit cross legged. I’ll take off my flip flops and I’ll sit cross legged in my desk, and it helps me think a little better. And other times I’ll be tapping the table, trying to figure it out, hitting my pencil against my head, and it just makes me really hyperactive sometimes.

Do your teachers understand that? Do they help you, or do they think, “What is she doing?”

They don’t normally notice. I just do little small things They don’t really care if you put your feet up on your desk, like other people do it too.

Do you think all your teachers don’t really care? They’re okay with it?

Yeah, I think so.

And does it ever get in the way of your learning?

My ADHD? Not normally.

Has it ever in the past?

Sometimes.

What did that look like?

I get really really frustrated and I cry most of the time.

So you think your ADHD and your Asperger’s syndrome make you very sensitive.

Yeah, it’s hard to tell which is which.

They’re all working together? (Yeah.) How do you think that affects your friendships and your relationships with your classmates?
Well at my old school everyone was used to me getting upset so easily. They were like, “Oh, she’s fine, she’s just being herself,” but now that I’m at a new school they’re like, “What’s wrong with her?” because they don’t know about it.

And how does that make you feel?

I don’t really care.

Now do you have any more questions for me?

No.
Interview 7B: Lena

Can you tell me the name, age, and grade level of your child?

Yes. Betty. Do you want last names? (No.) She's 13 and she's in eighth grade.

And can you tell me the disability that she's been diagnosed with? Can you tell me about that process?

Yes. She has been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, ADHD, as well as an anxiety disorder. The anxiety disorder was noted and diagnosed when she was three. The autism was noticed at her two-year-old checkup, but because of the inconsistencies in the behaviors we were seeing, we couldn't nail down where on the spectrum she was. Then when puberty hit, certain things started to manifest themselves more strongly and we were able to isolate it to the Asperger's part of the spectrum. Her ADHD was always. From the minute she was born we could tell that there was lots of activity there, so for you to see her sitting here and participating in this way, you don't know how long and hard it's been. Her ADHD became more of a problem once she got into the third, fourth, and fifth grade levels because the content increases. She was always advanced. She started reading very early. She was reading on a 4th grade level in kindergarten. However, the teachers did not really know what to do with her academics because she was so far advanced. There were a lot of problems in the primary years, kindergarten through second grade, just keeping her busy and finding appropriate materials. When she was in second grade she tested reading on a twelfth grade level. So content-wise it was difficult to find books that were appropriate to her reading level but also appropriate to her age level. We saw a big decline when she was in primary school. Decline in interests, decline in motivation, a decline in her reading level. Things just went down, and part of it we think was due to the fact that she did have ADHD, she was very active. I mean, she slept fifteen minutes at a time and she didn't sleep through the night 'til she was halfway through kindergarten. Yeah. So, because of that, I don't think her teachers had a true understanding of how to deal with a student who has ADHD but is also talented. She got mistreated a lot.

By her teachers?

Yes. She probably doesn't remember it that way, which is good. I'm glad she doesn't. But we remember it that way and had multiple conferences. The gifted teachers would come in and participate in the conferences with us and nothing would change in the classroom. The administrators would participate in the conferences and again nothing would change in the classroom, and she was often isolated and punished because she was just active and wanted to know more. But we saw, like I said, a decrease in that in the primary years. In third grade we sort of made sure she had a really really good teacher who would understand her disabilities. Even though we talked to her teachers about it in
the primary levels, they weren't as responsive as I think they could have been. And her third and fourth grade year were phenomenal. They were really really great, the teachers understood and worked with her. She did show lots of ADHD behaviors, because up to that points she wasn’t on medication, because she was already on medication for her anxiety disorder. Starting at three years old she was put on medication and we didn’t feel like we wanted to add another that young. So in third grade her teacher knew lots of different strategies. We’d been teaching her replacement behaviors since she was three. We’d been modeling good and bad behaviors. But then the Asperger’s stuff started to come in more. Since the time she was little there were always Asperger’s characteristics—sensitivity to light and sound, sensitivity to touch, texture. The socks had to be just perfect or we couldn’t leave the house. They had to be lined up just right. There were tactile things that she refused to do. She wouldn’t get her hands dirty for the longest time, wouldn’t get dirty at all for the longest time, wouldn’t make eye contact with people she didn’t know, wouldn’t talk on the phone, that was a phobia, still is… we’re working on that. So there were all of these behaviors that were very high verbally. She didn’t demonstrate it as much here for you because I think she’s a little bit nervous, but generally her verbal ability comes through more when she’s comfortable with people. We saw all these things. We’ve seen all these things all the way through. Fourth grade, we did put her on ADHD medication. We felt like it was the right time, and it made a huge difference because she was always getting in trouble in class. She was always missing information, and not because she was trying to be mean, or trying to be disrespectful. It’s just she was so impulsive, and she would see something and it would just trigger something else, another interest, a memory, a connection, and it did cause problems with her developing friendships.

When was she identified as gifted in school?

In kindergarten. She wasn’t identified then. She was brought before the committee and we felt like maybe some of her knowledge and her ability was due to the fact that she had an enriched environment at home because we did lots of things with her and read all the time, you know, and she was interested so we just followed her interests as well. So we wanted to make sure that that didn’t kind of level out once the content started getting heavy. So she was put in the talent pool. Are you familiar with the talent pool? (Yes.) That lasted until fourth grade, so she was officially identified in fourth grade, but she received gifted services from kindergarten.

What was the program set up like? Was it pull in or full time?

It was pull out once a week with in-class differentiation. The county we live in is a fully inclusive model, and so the classroom is heterogeneous and differentiation is the expectation within the regular classroom.
And do you think those expectations were being met in the regular classroom?

No.

In what ways do you think her education has suffered because of that?

She was made, for example in first grade she was reading well above the rest of the students and comprehending and had the fluency, had the math concepts down and the math information. The first week of school the teacher was giving out a worksheet and telling kids to put the name and date and getting ready to read the directions and Betty had it finished by the time the rest of the kids had their name on the paper. So, the teacher said, “You just sit there and behave and be quiet while the rest of the kids finish.” So she decided to do a little experiment and see how long it would take to empty her glue bottle into her neighbor’s crayon box.

I did?

So that was one of the calls we got. Another time because she was told to sit there and be still at six and not given an alternate activity to do, she took her scissors and her brand new shirt and cut into ribbons, both sides. It was things like that all the time. I even offered, “I will put together an activity bag and hang it on the back of her chair and she can pull it out when she finishes her class work.” I understand that she needs to learn to be a student. She needs to learn to sit. But she’s showing you she already knows this information. Socially she’s very immature. And that comes in connection with the Asperger’s. And so we weren’t even considering grade skipping because it wouldn’t have been emotionally or socially the thing for her. So it wasn’t until third grade when she got appropriate activities and appropriate differentiation in the classroom, and then fourth grade she did as well. Not so much in fifth grade. Lots of worksheets and sit and be quiet and do that, more and more and more, rather than alternate or different, and then in middle school we noticed a difference. The teachers really made an effort to notice her abilities but also recognize her disabilities and work with us and work with her to give her opportunities to take time out if she needed. That was when we finally got a 504 put into place.

And do you think the teachers in middle school—are they trained to deal with these things, or you just think they were receptive to it?

I think they were receptive, but I also think their experience has learnt itself to recognizing what certain kids need and working to make sure they help meet the needs of those kids. Now, while her academics and her teachers were good in middle school, the social aspect really really started to break down. She was bullied a lot. She was an easy target because the kids knew she was going to cry. They knew how to push her triggers. And I’m not trying to upset you by saying this. I know you know all this. But they knew
how to get to her. And she had her feelings hurt a whole lot, and you know it hurt our feelings too, and we couldn’t be there to protect her, and we had to teach her tools and strategies to help her protect herself. And sometimes that was easy to do, and sometimes it was hard, depending on mood, or if she was tired. If she’s tired, you might as well forget it. The frustration level is very high. Or I guess frustration level, the threshold, would be low.

What about friendships in school?

She had some really good friends. Once they got to middle school some of them started being unkind to her and wanting to separate themselves from her and that really hurt her feelings. And the reason she transferred schools is because all of the bullying and the difficulties that… and she was really depressed, would wear the same clothes all the time, and the teachers wouldn’t intervene. I don’t know that it’s they didn’t intervene or didn’t notice it as much as that there were so many kids it was hard to supervise. Because most of the bullying happened in the lunch room, in the hallways, at the lockers.

Did she ever come home and complain about anything? (Mmhmm.) And what would she say?

I don’t know that she complained as much as reported and wanted to know what to do, because Betty knows, she read a college local book on Asperger’s syndrome when she was identified. We gave it to her and said, “If you would like to read this, you may do so.” Because I read it first to make sure that it was… and she read it and after she read it, I think you read it in like one or two nights, and she came to me and said, “I understand now.” We also gave the same book to her sister, who’s also very intelligent, and she read it and said, “I can understand my sister so much better now, and why she does these things and why she feels this way.” So we’ve talked to her for years about it’s not a disability, it’s a different ability, is what we like to refer to it as. Because to me, she hears things and sees things in a way that I don’t, and she feels things in a way that I don’t. And so to us it’s just a different ability.

That’s something I’m learning more and more interviewing people, that it’s just different, it’s not wrong.

Exactly. I mean, we think it’s pretty cool that she has Asperger’s, because one characteristic of that is that she’s pretty smart. And so hey, you’re pretty smart. And that’s going to take you far in life. But we have to also understand and recognize that there are tools that she needs and strategies that she needs that her peers don’t need because she doesn’t understand or have those in place. Social cues, still learning about those, and personal space.

What kind of issues are there with those?
Personal space, especially in crowded, busy areas. If there’s a friend there or someone she feels comfortable with, she’ll invade their personal space and get very very close because that’s what makes her feel comfortable. But it sometimes makes the peer feel uncomfortable, and she’s still learning how to recognize those signs. And there’s nothing wrong with that, and it’s all okay. And like I told you before, this is something God gave you for a reason, and he probably wants you to help somebody down the line, and you can’t help somebody if you don’t know how it feels, and so you should be very proud that God chose you. Really. We’re really proud too that God thought enough of you to say, “Hey, this is the kid that I want doing some important things later on.” And it might be tough right now, but she’s got a counselor to help with the social aspects, as well as some of the issues from last year.

How often does she go?

She started once a week, then went to twice a month, and now we’re every three weeks.

Is that something in her 504 plan?

No, that’s something we pursued. Because we saw that there were some things that weren’t getting better that were getting worse, and we wanted for her to have someone that she could go to and talk to and say anything she wanted to and not feel like she was being judged, or that mom was going to get mad, or mom was going to get upset. Sometimes when she tells me things it hurts me and I do get upset, and I try not to, and I try to be brave and strong, but sometimes she doesn’t want to hear my advice or what I think, she just wants to get it off her chest, and I totally respect that.

And do you think, from your perspective, that she understands her autism or her Asperger’s, anxiety, ADHD, and giftedness, and how they’re all working together?

I think so. I think she understands that sometimes she sees things in a different way, or interprets literature, for example, in a way that her peers don’t. She can see more of the depth and complexity as opposed to where most of her classmates will see the surface meaning, and so sometimes that makes her stand out a little bit from her peers because she’s able to see more beyond the literal meaning. But I think she understands that and has gotten to the point… I’m really proud of her, because if you had seen her a few years ago, just the progress that she’s made and the understandings that she’s developed. Like she said earlier, I don’t really care what they think. And so that’s a big step, and she recognizes that you know, I have this ability to explain what I see in literature, or what patterns I see in math, and that’s okay, and that might help someone else who’s sitting there listening, too. So I think she does understand it for the most part, and we have worked with her most recently on self-advocacy. Because it was really hard for her if she didn’t understand something to approach the teacher or raise her hand and say, “I don’t understand,” because so many things come naturally easy to her, that when she didn’t
understand instantly she would just automatically shut down, and cry, and get upset and get frustrated. And that’s getting better, because she’s starting to ask for help. That’s one of the things we put in her 504 plan is for the teachers to prompt her if she looks like she’s confused or like she needs a little bit. And part of the reason she doesn’t like math or think she’s good at math is because that’s where her high level of anxiety is. She’s been identified just in language arts and in our county we only identify in language arts and math. She qualified for math, but because her anxiety is in that area, my husband and I chose not to give her that label so that it just wouldn’t add any undue stress.

Strengths are in language arts, reading... how’s writing?

She’s a good writer. She’s a very good writer. She doesn’t like it. And I think she’s got some occupational issues, like, for example, she didn’t learn to tie her shoes until she was in sixth grade, and that’s not because she didn’t try, it was physically hard for her. The tactile was hard for her.

It’s still hard.

It’s still hard, yeah. And there are lots of things that require a grip or a certain type of hand motion or whatever that are difficult for her.

Unlike video games. I’m very very very good at video games. Because it helps distract me, and so does TV. Whenever I’m sad TV helps me feel better, and so does video games. It’s like the ADHD helps me focus really well and my fingers move.

But we’ve had to work with her on lots of social things like making eye contact when you speak to someone, speaking back. For a while she didn’t understand why people would say, “How are you?” In her brain it was like, “Don’t I look fine?”

That’s something I love about people with Asperger’s and autism. It’s like, “Shouldn’t you know this?” or “Why do these things matter?” It’s really interesting. That’s why I look at it as something that’s just different, it’s not...

That’s pretty much what I said today. My friend Morgan, we were at the lunch table, and the three of us, it was like “Hey, you guys are being really quiet today.” And I’m like, “I’m always quiet.”

Why don’t you know that, yeah. But that’s been a challenge for her to understand and relate to peers because in her way of thinking, wasn’t it obvious? And that doesn’t always come across friendly or whatever. When she was in kindergarten I had a post-it note that I put on her mirror that said, “Friendly faces and friendly voices and friendly words,” because she would have trouble interacting and communicating with her peers, because she expected that they knew the things that she knew, and they didn’t always know. And developmentally they’re doing one thing while she’s reading a fourth grade
textbook and wanting to talk about it with her peers. But then at the same time we have age appropriate activities. So it’s kind of this big jumble, and I think that her intellectual level and her developmental level were in contrast, and they’re still kind of in contrast, and I think that makes it difficult for kids who are dual exceptional. It really does. And it makes it difficult for people who work with them because they don’t understand that.

Sometimes the developmental level because of a disability can be lower than it would be, because gifted kids struggle with that too, but it makes it a little more difficult.

As an educator, it’s my duty to educate other teachers even on these different abilities, because I don’t think there’s an understanding. And we’re such high stakes testing right now in the state of Virginia that teachers show more concern with getting everyone to pass the SOL than I think they are truly meeting the needs of each individual student. And I know it’s hard, I did it for years in the classroom myself, it is hard.

What about areas of weakness in the academic sense?

I would say writing is difficult for her and even her handwriting is still a little juvenile. But not in regards to composing, just in regards to occupational kinds of things. I would say a weakness too is, I don’t know if it’s a weakness or just lack of understanding, but if she knows something she’ll just proudly state it and be like, “What’s wrong with you people, why don’t you know it?” You know? I mean she doesn’t use those exact words, but I mean I walked in her Spanish class today and she had this kind of look on her face. And we’ve talked lots about body language, and it’s still not quite there. But this look on her face that was like, “What’s the matter with you guys? Don’t you get this?” So still trying to understand and have that empathy and that patience.

Lots of times I don’t even notice. I didn’t even notice today.

That’s true. There’s a lot of things she doesn’t even notice she’s doing, especially when she’s got ADHD, she’s like, “I did that?” And it could be five seconds before, and she was still puzzled that she’d even done that because she was so active, her mind was so busy, and that mind is constantly going, so much to the point that getting to sleep at night is hard for her. We’ve had to do some medication just to help that so she could get a good night’s sleep, and that’s getting better (Yeah), but there’s lots of worry. I always worry. About everything. For weeks. Years. And there’s some obsessive tendencies.

The medication for ADHD, when did she start taking that?

Fourth grade.

And is it still helping?
Yes. And she notices it too. It’s interesting that if for some reason she misses a dose, and she doesn’t usually, but the first couple weeks she took it she was like, “Wow, this medicine’s really helping!” She noticed it and recognized the changes and how it helps her function better.

Are there other students with dual exceptionalities in the school that she can relate to?

Not in eighth grade, no. We do have two twice exceptionals in sixth grade, however, and I work with them. But she’s the only dual exceptional in her grade.

There might have been at Christiansburg.

There might have been, but I don’t think so. And you have to understand, our community’s not as large as some of the inner city places.

Where are you from?

We’re from Montgomery county.

How far is that from here?

It’s about four and a half hours from here.

You drove all the way down here?! Thank you!

Well I told you, this is our subject. This is really really important to me, and I really want to see some good research out there, and I would love to see Dr. Cross do some more with this. You know, he has that social emotional piece. I’d like to see him merge those two, because it’s such an important topic, and not only as a mom I’m passionate about it, but as an educator I’m passionate about it. I see the misunderstandings that teachers have. We’re very fortunate at this school because one of her teachers has an autistic son, and talks about him often in team meetings and different things with the other teachers, and so that was one of the reasons I transferred her to this school, because those teachers have a true understanding of what autism is, and the different characteristics and behaviors that accompany it, and they know lots of strategies and ways of dealing with those different behaviors. And they also follow the 504 plan to the T. At her other school I don’t even think they knew she had a 504 plan unless there was an issue and I called and reminded them.

It seems like teachers can sometimes be very lax about IEPs and 504 plans. I don’t understand that.

I don’t understand it either because when I was in the classroom... it’s a law! It’s a law! And I’ve had to say that to teachers before. This is a law. You have to do this. And it’s not that I was trying to be mean or rude, but you have to advocate for your kid. No one
else is going to. And sometimes those services don’t happen unless you get in there. And I have a kid that’s dual exceptional now, low socioeconomic, and mom and dad are uneducated, don’t know how to help him, but at the same time I have to be his advocate and educate them on their rights because I think a lot of times parents don’t know enough about what they should do to enhance their own child’s education.

Do you think there’s an open communication between you and her teachers?

This year. And in sixth grade I did. In seventh grade...

Fourth grade.

Fourth grade I taught her part of the year myself.

Fourth grade was one of my best years ever. We did all this stuff like we built toothpick bridges and we did Romeo and Juliet the play, because we all finished the math book really early, and it was really really fun. And after school the people who were second load, Mr. Coxen, he had these swords, they were wooden swords, and we each got to sword fight with them for a while, except this one kid broke one of them so we had to stop.

That was her team partner. There was a lot of curriculum compacting, there were a lot of tiered assignments as necessary, there was a lot of pre-assessment, and there was accelerated learning in her classroom and I think that’s why she remembers that grade so much because there wasn’t a lot of skill practice that wasn’t needed. And in seventh grade I was saying that I didn’t think her teachers were that in tune to her needs because I went in for a 504 meeting and one of the teachers said, “How long is this going to take because I have other things to do.” I was very frustrated and I expressed my frustration, and that if she didn’t have time for my child then I wasn’t sure why she was doing that particular job because right now was my child’s time and she needed to respect that. And so I’ve run into that as a parent. Now her algebra teacher last year was fabulous and even stayed after school with her a couple times when she recognized that Betty was getting frustrated or nervous, and when Betty gets nervous she completely shuts down and she actually physically cannot do the work. And so her algebra teacher was really good to help her out with that.

And now, you said the communication is good now. What does that look like—meetings, or phone calls, or emails?

Yes. We had a meeting last week. They updated me on everything that was going on. But I guess I’m a little fortunate in that I work there too, and so that’s a little different, I know. But from what I’ve seen, how they work with other children who have different abilities, whatever that may be, there are constant open lines of communication. There’s
FROM THE INSIDE OUT: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK INTO

email, there’s personal notes that have been written. Email’s the basic form of communication, I think. They catch me in the hall all the time and are always telling me something good. “Betty got up and read a poem today” or whatever had happened and, “We were so proud of Betty, she got upset but she pulled herself together very quickly.” And I think maturation is helping with that a little bit, but I also think the fact that they’re just understanding, and I think she recognizes that and recognizes that they’re willing to work with her, whereas other times that frustrated her too that the person wasn’t willing to give her a break, give her a chance.

Switching gears, what are her interests outside of school?

What she told you. Her interests are very limited even though we have tried so hard to do different things.

I do love puzzles. They are very fun.

And she’ very visual-spatial. She’s got that verbal-linguistic part down. We don’t have any bodily-kinesthetic at all. She trips going up the steps… (Me too!) There’s not a lot of that. Athletics are something that’s out, even though we tried different things.

I’m getting better, though.

She is. It’s just not an interest because she doesn’t enjoy it, and that’s okay. She’s a member of Girl Scouts, and she really enjoys scouting.

I love Girl Scouts. I have all my friends from other classes except for this one girl who used to be nice to me but now she’s not nice to me even though she’s one of the most popular girls in my grade level, she’s always been in my grade level, she’s always been nice to me. One of my best friends. [crying]

It’s okay. You know. They’re really her true feelings, and unfortunately everyone goes through those kind of things. But like we’ve talked about, you just feel that hurt a lot more than most people, and it takes longer for you to understand and get over those things. And that’s okay. It’s okay. But not a lot of interest involve out-of-doors. She has some phobias of outside, bees for example.

I hate bees. My friends used to make fun of me because I was afraid of bees.

So outdoor things not as much. We’ve tried kayaking and she does enjoy that. And swimming.

Don’t worry, I hate bugs. I’m afraid of bees and spiders and worms and caterpillars. (See?) Anything that crawls.
It’s not that big a deal. I mean all kinds of people are. But I think she sees me and I grew up with three brothers, so you could not show fear. They can smell it. So for me, I had to choke it all down and be tough, and I think she sees me like that and thinks she’s supposed to be like that, but she doesn’t have to be. She’s her own person. That’s hard for her to understand. So not as many outside interests, but I think that’s part of the Asperger’s too. She prefers to be by herself or with people she’s very very comfortable.

And what about inside of the house, with family members. How does she behave, get along?

She’s got some typical behaviors for a kid her age. If she’s reading a book she’ll just start talking through stuff and have a conversation with herself about what’s happening in the book, and we all just sort of shake our head because we know that’s just normal.

I’m talking to you guys, but not one specific person!

You’re not, that’s not always true. And she used to sing, all the time, about everything. What she was learning in school, books, she would make her own songs. She’s kind of gotten away from that.

I remember in fifth grade this guy Peyton, he bet me that I couldn’t go like a single day without singing something. I couldn’t.

Me neither!

Yeah, she couldn’t go like five minutes. And that’s okay, that’s pretty neat. She does have, at home, a very strong sense of justice versus injustice.

Oh yeah, in sixth grade when they gave us awards and I always used to say, “That’s not fair!” and they gave me the future judge award.

She has a very strong sense of that, especially when it relates to her sister. But I think at home she and her sister have a typical relationship. It’s best friends/worst enemies depending on the minute. They’re three years apart and her sister is mature for her age. Too mature.

And physically as well.

Is she younger?

Yes, she’s three years younger. But she’s physically mature as well as intellectually mature.

And she always makes fun of me because I like to act like a kid because I like to enjoy but she likes to act like a jerk which is really stupid.
Well, not necessarily, that’s just what she thinks. But we have talked about - you don’t need to grow up too fast. But, you know, I think she has typical behavior. She does like to read a lot, and we think that’s great. Sometimes we do have to pull her away from the TV and say you should read now.

Second to last question, which might be a lengthy one.

I'm sorry, am I talking too much?

No! It’s good information. They’re pretty important questions. When she was younger, and even up until now, when you were noticing the symptoms or characteristics of Asperger’s and ADHD, was there enough information available to you?

No. The school did not provide me with any information. I had to seek it out myself. And I think that she’s successful as she is and as far as she is at this point, and I don’t mean this in an arrogant way, but I think she’s this way because I’m an educator and I knew the replacement behaviors and I knew the strategies and I knew ways that I could support her, but I also knew where to search for the resources. I never received that support or that assistance, even though I asked, and still to this day I’m still doing my own research and my own investigating and my own questioning. I cornered Dr. Cross last year at one of the gifted conventions down here at William and Mary and talked to him for a long time about some of the social/emotional concerns that I had, and he was a big help actually, a really big help. I had read a ton of his stuff.

It’s interesting when people talk about him, because I see him every day, and he’s so down-to-earth.

He is, and I love to hear him talk about his own kids, because I’m like, “Oh, I’m right there with you, buddy!” about some of those things, and I just think he’s a really really neat person and able to understand, you know? I forgot where I was going with that.

Research and resources.

Oh yeah. And I think a big part of the reason we don’t have a lot of resources is funding, and even though I live in the middle of two university towns, Virginia Tech and Radford university, I don’t know if you’ve heard of either one of those...

I haven’t heard of Radford.

Yeah. And Virginia Tech’s a big research area. I think people are more concerned with not necessarily researching and building on the impact of adolescents and early years and intervention as much as they are on the learning disability side of it, the slower end.

So was a lot of research you found just about the disability portion, or were there things you found about being dual exceptional?
No, I've not been able to find much about dual exceptional. That's why when I received the William and Mary email about the study I jumped all over it, because I want more to be out there, and I'm willing to do anything that I can to help. Because no, you don't see very much. I haven't seen very much, and what you do see is very surface. I doesn't really go into ways to support the child or the parents or the teachers as much as I'd like to see.

I think that's a next step for this area, would be that.

Yeah, there's tons of books and articles and information about learning disabilities, low socioeconomics, those students below the poverty line, how to help them succeed, motivation, at risk, but there's not a whole lot. And there's a lot on gifted education, but there's not a lot on those two borders.

Yeah, especially research studies. I have to find a lot of peer reviewed things, and there's just... there's a lot of opinion pieces and research pieces but not a lot of the things I need.

It'd be interesting to come up with some sort of survey, or some form that you could actually develop some data, that you could put numbers on it, because people tend to sometimes pay more attention to numbers than they do to words.

Yeah, the only problem is I'm horrible at statistics. Maybe if I got a PhD.

There you go.

The last question, which is the same question I asked her, is what is the most important thing you want educators and myself to know about students with dual exceptionalities, either in particular students with Asperger's, ADHD, and gifted, or all of them in general? (Wow.) This is a thinking question.

That's tough, because there's so many things. I think I would have to agree with Betty though to recognize that students who are dual exceptional, while they may be smart and have lots of abilities, at the same time you have to take into account the fact that there are things that hinder them as well. I think a lot of times when educators see “gifted” on the file folder, they automatically think that kid is supposed to be perfect, get hundreds on all their tests, you know, not be a problem in class, always have the right answer, and that's not true. Gifted is a way of thinking, and a way of digging deeper into whatever the content may be, and I think a lot of educators don't understand that gifted does not equal perfect. Gifted does not always equal one hundred percent right, and especially those students that do have those exceptionalities that sometimes need that extra nurturing. They just need the extra understanding. So I think I agree with her on that. But I think educators too need knowledge. And so many times their classrooms are crowded, resources are limited, and that gifted kid is going to get it, so they're not going to worry
about them, and they’re not going to differentiate for their needs, when really they need it just as much as anybody else. And for dual exceptional kids, they need it four times as much, because they really have barriers to their learning and you have to break down those barriers in order for them to be successful.

Is there anything else you would like to add about anything?

I wanted to tell you about a few experiences I had. I had this friend named Jacob, and during fourth grade when we had free time during class, okay Mr. Coxen, he had this pair of binoculars, and we always pretended we were on a spy mission, and I was the spy, and he was the lookout. So we used the binoculars and he looked at Mr. Coxen, and I was really very careful and I walked in to his desk, and I invented this thing called moose ears, and I just did that over his head, and it was really funny and everyone laughed. And then this other time, there was this girl in class, I don’t remember this name, she made Mr. Coxen really mad which is really saying something because he like never gets mad, and he threw a marker at a fish tank and it bounced off and hit this other guy in the head. It was really funny. And then in first grade, I never liked my first grade teacher, I have like one memory of her though. I really really had to go to the bathroom, and she would not let me go until I finished doing my thing on the computer. And she was really really mean. And my second grade teacher, she didn't like me very much either. Kindergarten was a bit easier, though, because I think my teacher was nicer.

The first grade teacher actually was asked to leave after her first grade year, not just because of her but because of other situations.

Some people should choose not to teach.

Amen. Yeah, I don’t know what that had to do with all this, but okay, those were good stories.

Anything else?

No. Thank you for taking the time to do this study, though.

Thank you.
Interview 8A: Andy

Do you have any questions before I start?

Well, have you heard of the Paleozoic and protozoic fossils? That’s the kind of stuff that lived before the dinosaurs. The thing that’s on my shirt here is Aldonia. I have a really cool blog with that kind of stuff on it. The URL is lifebeforethedinosaurs.com, all one word.

Do you want to answer some questions now that Monique has for you?

You already started answering one of them. What kind of stuff do you like to do?

Well, I like to read science books about fossils. I like looking up different kinds of things on the internet like different kinds of fossils.

Like dinosaurs?

Not really. I don’t really like dinosaurs.

Oh, okay. See, I would have thought you would like dinosaurs. You don’t?

And I don’t really like mammals.

So what do you like?

Well, what I like is usually fish and invertebrates.

From now, or...?

Just any kind of fish or any kind of invertebrate. And, you know, I mainly don’t like amphibians and reptiles, but there are some cool prehistoric amphibians and prehistoric reptiles.

And so you know a lot about that stuff?

I know a lot more about fish and invertebrates than I do about fish and reptiles and that kind of stuff.

What’s on your blog?

I have some different kinds of fossils I post on my blog from the Paleozoic and protozoic eras. Those are the eras before the dinosaurs. And what I’m going to post today is Serpula [spells out]. It’s still alive and it’s been alive since the Paleozoic.

Is it a fish?
It’s a kind of serpulic worm. Serpulic worms are like tube worms, I mean worms that live in tubes.

What do you do in school? Do you like school? (No.) No? Why not?
‘Cause I don’t get to do anything I like there, usually.

What kind of stuff do you get to do there?

Preschool stuff. Well I’m not saying I’m not always in preschool, I’m just saying all we do is preschool stuff.

And you don’t like any of that?

The only thing I really like is going to Ms. Waldrup’s class.

Why, what do you do there?

More advanced stuff.

Like what?

Math and maybe some science. I mainly like the science.

Do you get to study the things you like in science?

Not usually.

What kind of stuff are you studying in science usually then?

More of the physics than the biology.

Yeah, I was never much good at physics. We’re actually in the physics building right now. Do you like math?

Well I don’t really like arithmetic, that kind of math. I don’t care for that.

Why not?

Well I would like hard arithmetic. I would like that, but I don’t like it to be easy.

So it’s not hard enough. What about writing? Do you like writing?

No. Well, I like writing if I am writing names of things I like.

Otherwise you don’t like it?

What about when you wrote your Young Author book this year?
FROM THE INSIDE OUT: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK INTO

I liked that because that was about stuff I like.

So what did you have to do?

What was it about?

It was about arthropods. If you don’t know what an arthropod is, arthropods are like bugs and they’ve been around since the Cambrian period. Until the Devonian, what they were dinocarids, eurypterids, trilobites...

I’ve heard of all these names, but I don’t know much about them.

You’ve heard of a dinocarid?

I’ve heard of trilobites and some of the other ones.

Have you heard of any eurypterids?

I know I learned about them, but I just don’t remember much.

Do you know what any kinds of trilobites are?

No, do you know?

Well, I know a lot of kinds of trilobites. There’s agnostids, like neuroia, and condolopaigia agnostic and paggettia. Agnostids are trilobites with two globe-like sections. Most of them don’t have eyes.

Do they walk or crawl?

Some of them crawl and some of them fold their shells like this and do this to swim. Then there’s facopids like facops. There is redops. There is calemeen. There’s walicerops. Walicerops have this weird trident thing sticking out of its head.

I don’t think I’ve ever seen one of those.

Well, the facopids are trilobites with large glabellas. The glabella is like the middle cheek of the trilobite.

You have a good memory.

Now there’s the proatids, the last trilobites, that lived from the Cambrian to the Pronian. There are talathena, carlenies, and there’s keropygies, there’s pseudofalipsia, there’s falipsia, there is cafeo...did I already mention falipsia?

That’s a good name.
Well I can just tell you some trilobites. There’s opegeveralia, olanoities, valcuracania...there’s lacouras, there is psychopige, there’s prictolithus... there’s psychopige.

You already said that one.

No, I didn’t say psychopige.

Oh, psychopige? That’s different than psychopige?

Yeah.

I didn’t know. I thought it sounded like the same one.

Oh yeah, there’s isotelias, a very large trilobite, there’s teratacis, also very large. There’s paradaxities, there is yuonassis...

And do you study this in school?

No.

This is all stuff you learned outside of school?

Yeah.

How do you learn it?

Oh, there’s talipalty. Well, I learned it in books and on the internet.

And is this all stuff you wrote about in your book?

On your blog.

Yeah, on my blog. Well, most of this. I haven’t written about a lot of trilobites.

You did that one guy.

Oh yeah, there’s elrathea. There’s something called a quadrops. It’s got this weird thing on the front of its head, kind of this thing. There’s aspus, there’s neoaspus.

Are there other things you like besides prehistoric creatures?

Oh yeah, the trilobites and then some of the euyripterides are carydonis, jakeropterous, megaraptus, megarapiti, there’s mixoperous, there’s hipertuperous. Oh, there’s syndia, there’s eurypterious, there’s carcinasoma, there is the dinocards, there is anamalcarids, there’s anamalua, there’s pandalurian, carimaculla, opbinea, myoscellus...let me think.
Why don’t you let Monique get to her next question? I think you answered a lot about the first one. That’s everything you like, and she was asking if you like school, and what kind of stuff you study in school. And I think you might have answered that, right?

Physics, science I’m rarely studying, there’s arithmetic, there’s reading and writing.

Does Mrs. Waldrup’s really teach you physics?

Well sometimes physics, sort of science.

Can you think of an example?

I think in Ms. Denton’s class for a while we were learning force, movement, and energy.

That’s general ed. What about Mrs. Waldrup’s, that’s GT. What do you do in her class? A lot of math, or science, or reading?

Mostly math.

Do you like your teachers?

They’re kind of nice.

And does the GT teacher, Mrs. Waldrup, help you in class when you need help?

Yeah.

And what about your other teacher?

Yeah, she’s nice.

Do you get along with the kids in your class?

Well I usually don’t have too many friends in school.

What about outside of school?

Most of the friends I have are at home. My brother can sometimes be my friend but a lot of times that’s not true. Well, my brother calls me names, especially stupid, and dummy head.

How old is he?

Five. And he also says that the prehistoric creatures I like are made up.

Why do you think he says that?

He wants to make me mad.
Well I think that’s what brothers are for.

What are the good things about your brother?

Almost every second of his life he’s making [lip smacking] that yucky noise. And I don’t like that, it’s kind of annoying. Most people would probably think that’s gross.

And he does that all the time?

Yep, all the time.

Do you think he does it to bother you?

I don’t even notice it very often, so it’s because it bothers you that you notice it. I think he just does it sometimes.

I think he just does it. I don’t think he does it to bother me. I don’t think anyone knows why he does it.

What about the good things? What about the friend part, when he’s your friend? What kind of stuff do you do that’s fun?

What we usually do together when we’re on each other’s side is not really very good because there was one time when what we did is: we were in the bathroom upstairs in our house and we were peeing in the trash. Ewe. Well this is all gross. We were peeing in the trash and we also put some soap and toothpaste in the trash and we were getting the kitty litter everywhere and then we dumped the trash into the laundry basket. That was very very naughty.

And did you get in trouble for that?

Yes, big trouble.

But that’s not the only kind of stuff you do with your bother. That was one incident. But you guys do some fun stuff.

Well usually when we’re on each other’s side we usually talk about poop and pee and barf.

Do you have other friends?

I really love Laptop. She’s my cat. She’s a gray tabby. She’s about 12 years old, almost 13. She’s a very old cat.

In school do you have other friends?

In school my friend is Spencer.
And what class is he in?

He’s going to be in second grade next year just like me. I hope he’s in the same class.

Is he in your GT class?

Regular.

And what kind of stuff do you guys do together?

We find arthropods at recess.

So he likes the same stuff you do? (Yeah.) Do you talk about it a lot?

Yeah, but we usually talk about bugs, insects or arthropods.

And do you have a good time in school or do you have trouble sometimes?

I have many bad times in school.

Like what? Can you name a few?

I don’t really like the work.

What kind of work do you not like?

I don’t like arithmetic, reading, and writing.

So just science? What about history?

I haven’t been studying any history.

They probably call it social studies. Do you have any trouble with your classmates, or do you think you get along pretty well?

I get along pretty well.

Do you have any troubles with your teachers?

Not really.

So pretty good? Even though you don’t like many of the things, you’re getting along pretty well in school?

Usually when I’m writing about stuff, I can’t do it and I get in trouble.

Is it hard, do you think?
It’s hard because I really don’t know what I have to write. It’s stuff that’s kind of hard for me.

This is in your regular class, with Mrs. Denton. So when you get a writing assignment, what happens? All the kids in the class are doing it?

Yeah, except for me. I’m not really good at that stuff.

How come?

Because it’s not about stuff that I know about and that I like.

Does Mrs. Denton ever try to help you?

It’s not about stuff that I know about and that I like. A lot of times it’s about hard stuff and the sort of stuff that I don’t really know for sure. Stuff I never…

Does Mrs. Denton help you?

She helps me.

She does? How does she do that? I thought she did something else this year, or maybe Mrs. Sink did, if you weren’t getting your work done. What would happen?

I would get prompted.

And then what would happen if you got too many prompts?

I would not get science box.

What’s science box?

It is something I get with some books and some stuff I like in it if I don’t get any prompts.

And who’s Mrs. Sink?

She’s a substitute.

No, she’s a helper. A teacher’s aide.

And do you have to do a lot of writing in your GT class with Mrs. Waldrup’s?

Well mainly I don’t do writing assignments in Mrs. Waldrup’s class.

What do you do in Mrs. Waldrup’s class? Do you have to do speaking assignments in Mrs. Waldrup’s class?
No, that’s Mrs. Williams.

Who’s Mrs. Williams?

She’s special ed. That’s where he does social skills and stuff. But what do you do in Mrs. Waldrup’s’ class? When you go in there, does she talk to you, or do you guys do an activity?

I wrote down your teacher’s names so I can remember them.

Teacher’s names… There was another helper teacher, Mrs. Mason.

Who helped you in Mrs. Waldrup’s class a lot of the time, though?

Mrs. Waldrups

Somebody else. A fifth grader. Do you remember what her name is? …Libby?

No, that wasn’t in the classes.

Oh, when did you work with Libby?

During quiet time.

Is Mrs. Walrups class a big class or a small class?

There’s a lot of people that go to Mrs. Waldrup’s’ class but they don’t all go at the same time.

When you’re there how many kids are there?

I don’t remember.

Like five or ten?

Ten than less, I’m guessing.

And when you go to see Mrs. Williams, what kind of things do you do in her class?

Social studies

No, social… you learn about what? What kind of activities do you do with her?

Speech.

Yeah. And are you the only one there or are there other kids there?
There are two other kids there at the time. There’s probably like hundreds of kids that actually go to Mrs. Williams’ class, but there are only two other kids there when I am there. There is Jaden and Abby.

And what do you guys do?

Speech.

Do you talk to Jaden and Abby or do you just talk to Mrs. Williams?

We talk to each other sometimes. It’s usually just Mrs. Williams.

What kind of things do you talk about? Does she tell you certain things you have to say?

No. It’s just the talking for people that I need to work on in school usually, not at home. At home I’m fine talking to people, but at school not really.

Why do you think you’re not good at talking to people in school?

I usually talk to my friends. Not people I don’t really know.

And you think you don’t really know the kids at school?

Most of them I don’t know.

And do they ever try to talk to you? The people in your class?

Not really, not that I remember.

So, at home, what do you like to do? Anything else besides making your blog? Do you like to research anything else, or play sports?

I don’t like sports.

Do you like to read about anything else? There have been other things you’ve been interested in before your current prehistoric thing. There were other things you used to be really really interested in that you still kind of like.

I can tell you the phases I used to have. First I had the produce section. I don’t know why but I was really really interested in the produce section. Every time we went to the grocery store if I didn’t go to the produce section I screamed and cried and screamed and cried.

What would you do when you were there?
I would always get one item from the produce section and one time I got an avocado, which was really really bad because by the time we got home the avocado had squashed all over me. Usually I got lemons. What was after that?

After that I think was balloons.

Oh yeah, then there was balloons.

How old were you then?

Two. I loved balloons. Especially ball balloons.

Yeah, with pictures of footballs and basketballs and soccer balls on them. Or shaped like footballs and basketballs and soccer balls.

Yeah, and every time we went to Ukpops, which is not around anymore, now it’s Martins, well what I did is I screamed and cried if I couldn’t get a balloon there. And then, after the interest in ball balloons, I had an interest in balls.

They were at the same time, around two, yeah.

I don’t really know anything about that obsession.

No, that was just something you were into. I think it was the first word you said, “ball.”

Why wasn’t the first word I said balloon?

I think you liked balls. Round circle-y things is what you liked. But what about after balloons? You liked airplanes…

Oh yeah, airplanes. I loved airplanes. Then I think it was plants and flowers, then deep sea creatures and insects.

Yep, that’s pretty much the whole line-up, and now it’s pre-dinosaur creatures.

And how long have you liked pre-dinosaur creatures for?

I can’t remember.

You started your blog in May.

I think what sparked that is that I found out about something which is the ancestor of arthropods. It’s called dianiacactaformous.

And that’s when you started liking them?

That’s when I started liking prehistoric creatures.
When did you first hear about them? Did you read about them?

Well when I first heard about dianiacactaformous, when I was looking at pictures of extinct arthropods on the iPad.

And then you saw something and you found out what it was, and it was dianiacactaformous...

Well some of the other things I like are wiwaxia, hallucigenia, opibennia, microdictian, aldonia, there is merella, duncalospious, shendahenasparafly... I think it’s actually pronounced shendehendeparlesy...

Have you ever met anyone who likes prehistoric creatures as much as you do?

Not really.

So you have answered all of my questions. Do you have any questions for me?

What are some of the fossils you’ve heard of besides dinosaurs and pterosaurs and marine reptiles?

I do not remember.

See, not a lot of people know about these things, right?

I remember learning about them!

There’s also prehistoric cephalopods, like pravetocerus, cosmocerus, gastreocerus, boscicocerus, nibonides... nibonides looks like the shell, a big mass of tube and then its got the squid head sticking out. There is litowides, toniocerus, gamerocerus, there’s endocerus...

I have a lot to learn.

Luckily there’s the blog!

There is pachydiscus, there is sperula, which is still alive today. It’s been around since the Myocene. There is coocatoothus. It looks like a giant squid from the late cretaceous period. There is neohebbilides. That’s a belemnite. There’s belemnitella, another belemnite.

What do you think is going to happen when school starts and you’re not going to be able to talk about your things all day? You’re going to have to do some other stuff.

I’m not going to be happy.

You’re not? Is it hard to do that? Do you like talking about these things?
I like talking about prehistoric creatures, but I don’t really like talking about things I don’t like.

Do you think you’ll get a chance to tell your class about things you like? Have you ever gotten to do that before, like show and tell?

I’ve done something at show and tell. A few things. There was a time when I had my shirt with the halucigenia on it, that was a couple times, then the animacarous shirt, then there was a shirt that had [like twelve different pre-historic creatures].

Are these all separate shirts?

No, all of those were one shirt. And then there was the one where I had the model of duncaloscius. Duncaloscius teri, I think it was. I don’t know what kind of species of animalicarious was on that shirt that only had animalicarious. Did you know that there’s a lot of insects that have five eyes?

I did not know that.

Well, bees do, cicadas do, and there’s a couple others that have five eyes. Then there’s the opibinus regalus, which is a Cambrian creature with a fan tail. It looks like a stubby millipede with a fan tail and lobes along the side. Some people think it had legs, some people think it didn’t have legs. It had a long solid tube, very maneuverable, with a tooth claw at the end. It had five eyes that look like mushrooms on the top of its head, then there was the thing that protruded from under its head then it had a pineapple mouth facing backwards so it would kind of put the food in under its head kind of like this. That’s what it would kind of do. It was about two and a half inches long. It was an opibinid dinocarid. Opinids include myoscolids. Myoscolids look like opibinia with these things on the side of its head which look like elbow macaroni and it has two eyes that look like mushrooms. They’re from the Cambrian period.

Do you want to ask Monique if she has any more questions for you?

Do you have any more questions for me.

I do not.
Interview 8B: Lani

Can you state the age and grade level of your son?

He is 7 and he is just about to start second grade.

Can you tell me about when he was identified as having autism and when he was identified as gifted?

We knew that he was very very smart. He started to talk when he was ten months old. He was very smart, we could tell, but also there were some differences. We knew prior to age two, because I had done some internet research, based on some of the things he did like reversing pronouns. He would say “you want some milk” rather than “I want some milk.” So I googled that and it said autism, and I said, “Wow, that’s weird.” So I asked my pediatrician when he was two at his well-visit and she said, “Most two year olds don’t even use pronouns. Don’t worry about it, you’re being too nervous.” But then we knew because we had some issues in preschool and so I made an appointment, but it took almost a year to get an evaluation. We got in a little earlier because we were on a cancellation list, so it was right around age three that he got the actual diagnosis. The original diagnosis was autism/high functioning autism/Asperger’s. He sort of thought, “It’s autism. It’s going to look like Asperger’s as he grows because he’s so verbal, but it’s not mild.” Some of the issues are more profound than what you see in some kids with Asperger’s. But he has the very advanced verbal abilities and intellectual abilities. He kind of straddles. So did that answer the question?

Yes. When was he identified as gifted?

Officially by the school in kindergarten. He started a special ed. preschool at his school when he was four, and the teacher there was excellent and helped him. She was taking him up to third grade for math and science and different things just to see what he could do, and she really pushed for the identification. They don’t really do it in kindergarten, but he did and he received some sort of assist in kindergarten.

What are his classes like now? Do you think he’s being challenged enough in them?

No. I think the problem is that it’s either too hard or too easy. The most difficult part for him is that because he’s so smart, they make an assumption that he can just do stuff, but he actually does need a lot of direction in some ways even though he has the capability to, for example, do a math book problem. Sometimes they take for granted certain things, like he might really need the basic steps explained to him, like “What you’re trying to do is take this number and add this number to it to get a third number.” Very basic, and he’ll go “Oh oh oh.” He needs to be able to understand what he’s actually working on. Like a writing assignment. If they give him a blank piece of paper and say,
“Write about what you did this weekend,” that’s really hard for him because he needs starting sentences and that sort of thing if it’s not something that’s facts. So a lot of work that way is too hard. Even though the assignment itself isn’t too difficult, but the approach is not appropriate for him when he’s in general ed. The GT is even more difficult because she has made it quite clear she has no training in autism.

So what are the things that are too easy for him?

They did a ton of worksheets this year. The stack is probably a foot high by the end of the year. I had to have thrown some away but I wish I hadn’t because I would have bound it together. A lot of worksheets of things that he had mastered probably as a three-year-old. Some of the stuff, they give out the worksheets when they’re getting in the classroom in the morning, or there are certain times when they’re doing so-called seatwork, and that was very very very boring for him because it was a lot of cutting and pasting, for example, and you’d have to cut out the letters “sh” and glue them to the shell, and that was really very basic for him, yet he had to do it every single day. That was demoralizing for him, and he would sometimes have behavior issues while he was doing that type of worksheet.

Was this in both classes?

No, general ed. Mainly a lot of worksheets and a lot of writing. Those were the most difficult times for him. The worksheets required him to sit still doing really boring work that was previously mastered and the writing assignments were more about difficulty planning what you’re going to say and writing it down, especially if it’s about an abstract thing. It was very difficult to help him understand an abstract thing like, “Write about my family.” He can say, “I have a mom, I have a dad, I have a cat, I have a brother, I have a dog,” but elaborating on it is difficult for him and I don’t think they were sure how to help him with that.

Yeah, I noticed even with questioning him that you have to be a little more specific with some questions.

Exactly, and sometimes maybe examples of what they’re trying to do, or starter sentences. It almost seems like there could be practice: Here’s what you’re going to write, but some of it is already printed on the page. “I have ___ brothers. I have ___ sisters.” And then work from there into trying to create it on your own.

Are his teachers helpful with him? Do they understand his needs?

I would say no. It’s difficult and very frustrating when you have 23 kids in a class and you have budget cuts. And I don’t even know if that has anything to do with it, but there isn’t enough support. I think the main issue is training of general ed. and GT teachers. If
you’re going to have an inclusive class, everyone needs to be on board and wanting to do that, rather than seeing it as a pain. It is difficult when you have 23 kids and three with special needs. Even if you have a paraprofessional in the classroom, three kids is a lot for one para, and then there’s 20 other kids. So I think that partly what we ran into was a lot of rigidity. Because they have so many kids in the class, everyone has to do this at the same time, sit down and do this, and not a lot of flexibility. Well you know what, he already knows how to do this, he doesn’t need to do this, why don’t we do that. The GT classroom was right across the hall, and it could have been more integrated into the day, but I think it’s very set up. Like, this is the time you’re over there, and this is the time you’re here, and when you’re here, you’re doing this, this, and this. If you’re having difficulty, they tried a lot of what’s called “response cost,” where you have so many chances and if you blow it you lose something. This was in general ed. We fought all year to reverse that so that it would be the opposite, where you get so many points and you earn something. Otherwise, every day was depressing for him. It’s like being at work all week and them saying, “You’re not going to get your paycheck at the end of the week if you do that one more time. If you get up and get one more cup of coffee, you lose your paycheck.” So you’d be very stressed out. That kind of approach wouldn’t work for anybody. So we fought to have that switched around. It was a big battle.

And did it work?

It worked more or less, but it was a long struggle, and we’ll see what happens this year. We’re trying to look for a less punitive approach, because they’re very punitive there. Not that we’re against consequences and things, but there’s just definitely a lot of punishment that we’re thinking was causing greater stress. He always loses weight during the school year and becomes very anxious, and then in the summertime gains weight back and is happier. So we’re trying to reduce the stress that we felt was created by the constant threat of punishment.

How’s your communication with his teachers? Is it an open relationship?

Not really. The school is very afraid of lawsuits, and we feel that this taints the communication because the teachers are told not to email parents, not to respond to parents. That’s my understanding, anyway. They don’t want anything in writing. So if I say, “Hey, I heard such-and-such happened today and I’m just curious what happened and why and if there’s anything I can do.” I’ll get no response. Sometimes I’ll get a phone call instead of an email, saying “It was fine, it was no big deal.” Lots of blowing off concerns. My understanding is that the reason they don’t write back is because they don’t want to say, “This happened and this happened and blah blah blah,” because they’re afraid of anything coming back to bite them or whatever. You can definitely feel it as a parent, that they aren’t comfortable sharing what’s really happening because they’re afraid of getting parents angry or getting in a legal situation, even though of course we
would never threaten that or anything like that. At least in our experience, as soon as you start asking too many questions, they make the assumption that you’re problematic. And so that stops your open communication.

Has he ever had any behavioral trouble in school?

Yeah, quite a bit. Usually it’s related to boredom and to confusion, like sometimes where he didn’t really understand what he was supposed to be doing but they felt he did, and he wasn’t getting enough guidance on particular assignments. When he’d be confused, he’s not always that great at saying, “Excuse me, but I don’t really understand what I’m supposed to be writing.” Sometimes he’ll start acting really silly. That’s mainly what he does, overly silly behavior that is disruptive. Perseverating on particular words that he’ll repeat over and over happened this year, and that caused a lot of disruption and a lot of anger. The teacher got angry and the principal got angry. We were fighting to have them be a little more flexible on that. Like if something like that happens, anger and punishment isn’t going to change it because it’s an anxiety-based behavior and you have to look for the cause of it instead of trying to stop it. So they did the FBA, but I found out later that it’s best to have that done by an outside individual, but they didn’t. They used their school psychologist to take all the data and do all the observations for the FBA so we could figure out the source of the behaviors and help, rather than just punish the behaviors at the end. We’re not helping, not teaching the right way to do things. It was a fear based kind of approach.

Do you find he has more problems in the general ed. compared to the GT class, or is it the same?

They’re both, and it’s partly because there’s no aide and no para in GT, and the GT teacher doesn’t have any experience and is a little hesitant to deal with autism, unfortunately. So the problem there is the same kind of thing. It’s the inability to adjust the curriculum and the instruction to suit the individual. Differentiated instruction to change the approach for individual students, if needed. Because not all kids you can say, “Come over here and build a robot out of these Legos.” Because some kids might not know where to begin. “Can I build an arthropod robot? Does it have to be a human robot?” You know, all that might be in his head, whereas another kid might just go over and slap something together. So the problems in GT are that the assumptions are made, because of the testing that he’s tested into this class, but the performance doesn’t always meet. It does in some ways, but in other ways he has difficulty.

Does he have an IEP? (Yes.) And what kind of accommodations does he get?

They offer very very little, and it’s a battle that’s ongoing. He had a para in kindergarten that they took away in first grade, basically. They said they didn’t, but they did. It’s very vague in the IEP, it just says that he’ll have paraprofessional support in the classroom,
but it doesn’t say he will have his very own individual one-on-one. They can interpret it any way they want. So one year, in kindergarten, they decided he definitely needed it, and then that went so well. That’s the common problem. Because that year went well, they took it away. “Oh, okay, everything’s fine now.” When the reason everything went well was because he had the para. So this year we had a lot more problems with disruptive behavior. Like I said, silly behavior and perseverating, vocalizing and repeating words. And that was in GT and general ed.

Does the IEP say he’ll have a paraprofessional only in the general ed. classroom?

Yes. We’ve asked. It doesn’t say that in there. It says “as needed,” basically. It’s very vague. So we’ve asked why the para isn’t going to GT with him. We’re still fighting that battle. Because if he doesn’t have his own, that para is doing something else during that time, so the supports are weak. They don’t want the child to become dependent on the aide, but the argument is, maybe think about that in third grade… it just seems like it was pulled too early. Nobody wants dependence. There’s different research on it. Some things say it doesn’t actually help at all to have a para, it’s counterproductive, and some things say they got to have the para. So that’s the only real support. There’s stuff in the IEP about taking breaks and that kind of thing, but it’s very difficult for the teachers to do, apparently, because they’re trying to go places and do this and that, and if you have three kids and one para and you have one child that needs to take a break or go somewhere else, who’s going to take him? One time there was an incident in the classroom and it turned into kind of a big deal. I said, “Why didn’t you call in Mrs. Williams,” the sped. teacher, and they said, “Oh, she had class, she couldn’t come.” So there are times where their hands are tied, they don’t know what they can do. If the general ed. teacher had training, she would know how to handle it herself. It’s not rocket science. There are some practical things that could be done that the teacher could learn. Paula Kluth, who’s probably the best autism inclusion person in the country, has been in Richmond twice in the last few years, but when they do professional development they send special ed. teachers to that kind of thing, not general ed. teachers. I think it should be the other way around, because the special ed. teachers already know this stuff. They already learned it. It doesn’t hurt for them to go get to see Paula Kluth, because she’s awesome, but the general ed. teachers don’t have a clue most of the time. Some of them are very very very resistant to it, and will tell you so. They didn’t become special ed. teachers, they don’t want to do it, it’s not in their job description.

That’s interesting because if it’s written in the IEP, then they have to provide those services, but they’re not.

The IEP is vague, and it gives them leeway. It says “as needed,” and they can say, “We didn’t feel like he needed a break at that time.” My understanding is that when you have a great teacher, like his preschool teacher who was great, the IEP was vague because she
was smarter than we were. She knew more, and it was better to have her make decisions on her own rather than say, "He must go here at this time." She was able to just see what she felt was needed and gauge what he needed when and how, because she was very very good. She also only had five kids in the class, so that helps.

Has he ever complained about difficulty in school to you?

No. Not about academics at all.

What about behavior or anything?

There were several incidents last year where he was basically getting into trouble a lot. He didn’t understand it, it didn’t seem fair. Basically, he was getting into trouble for things that were probably beyond his control, so he didn’t understand how he got where he was in this punishment cycle. It seemed confusing to him, I think.

What are his areas of strength in school?

He has no academic weaknesses whatsoever. He says he doesn’t like reading, but his reading is very good. He’s very good at spelling, at least at the first grade level. I have friends who were drilling their kids every day, but we just went over them quickly the day before the spelling test. He didn’t require much. He’s good at reading and he’s good at math, but again, math is one of those really strange things, because you can give someone 2+2=4. They had worksheets every day like that, which were so babyish for him. They may have been appropriate for some of the kids. But then some of the worksheets that would come home when they would differentiate for him would be like 7th grade math, which he couldn’t do either. So they would say, “We tried,” rather than understanding that there’s got to be a middle ground. Just because 2+2=4 is too easy doesn’t mean he’s ready for algebra. He probably is, but he needs instruction. I think that’s a problem a lot of GT people talk about. The kids get harder stuff to do, but don’t get instruction to back it up. They just get, “You can do this while everyone else is doing this,” but no one is teaching them or working with them. That’s definitely what happened to him. Someone would come over and try to assist him with it, but he didn’t get a lesson taught on it. It was just “Here, do this.” It’s either too easy or too hard. That’s definitely my problem with math.

And on the testing for gifted and talented, what areas did he do well on?

He was 99th percentile on everything except reading, which was 95th percentile, because he was in kindergarten. His reading had only just started. He wasn’t reading before kindergarten.

He seems like he has a great memory.
He has an excellent memory, he really does. That’s probably why he’s good at spelling and all that stuff. He definitely has a visual memory, with pictures and stuff. He sees it in his mind, and that’s why he can describe to you all those creatures, and even the names, because I think he sees the word in his mind’s eye. That’s why he can remember a lot of stuff.

I know we’ve talked about this, but can you just tell me some of his interests?

Yeah, we definitely ran down the interests. He definitely cycles through things. That’s been since infancy. He’ll become very very very interested in a subject and exhaust it, really learn everything about it, and eat, sleep, everything. Usually something about that will trigger the next thing. It’s like dominoes. So the first was balls, and then were balloons, which were round, but also floated, and then flying part, well now there were airplanes, and they flew. Then I guess for some reason, that’s totally different, he got interested in plants and flowers. When he was two and three he was amazing. He could go in a garden and tell you what everything was. It was mind blowing. I think he’s forgotten most of that stuff, though, because he sort of got interested in algae and stuff, as plants, and that got him into the deep sea. He’s never interested in stuff other kids are interested in, though. It’s not sharks and dinosaurs. It’s the deep sea creatures that no one’s ever heard of, like temopterids and polykete worms and stuff, and then not dinosaurs, but everything before dinosaurs. He’s absolutely against dinosaurs. So there’s always something standing in the way. But those are his interests. He doesn’t like to watch movies, doesn’t do sports, doesn’t play. He loves the water, he loves to go to the pool and swim, and go to the ocean and dig around for creatures and stuff.

What is his social life like in school?

There’s none. They do a little bit. They’re not very sophisticated with their social skills because it’s kind of a new thing, in a way, so there’s not much.

Mom, I’m very very very bored. Oh yeah, would you go get my book about fossils?

I know, I should have brought your book. Actually, I do have something for you. If you sit down quietly, I’ll give it to you. There’s not a lot. He had the one that he really really liked, but I don’t think he’s going to be into him this year, I don’t know. It’s very concerning. But that was a child who was more interested in doing things other kids were doing, but was very nice to him because he happened to have an autistic sister, so he’s sympathetic and understanding. He knew how to bridge that a little bit. But he’s more trying to go play soccer with everybody. So it’s very tricky, but he might be in a different school this year. I’m not sure.

Do you think the speech and social skills training that he’s getting in his special education classroom is helping?
Not really. Interestingly, the special ed. teacher went on maternity leave this year and they got a sub, and I guess since she was a sub, instead of trying to continue what the regular one had been doing, they just gave her a totally different thing to do, which was the book *Super flex*. That was great. It was the best thing that happened all year. They do a lot of identifying emotions and stuff, but they usually do it in a very basic way, like looking at pictures. He can do that. He can look and say, “That’s sad, that’s happy, that’s angry.” That’s not hard. What’s hard is identifying your own feelings and why you’re having them, like frustration or anger or loneliness or these kind of these. *Super flex* has these superhero characters, and it’s a speech/language pathologist that wrote different superheroes that have different attributes that are sort of like your demons in a way. Like glass man, who falls apart when the smallest thing happens. Those kind of characters. That really was effective, I think, because one of the issues in social skills is there’s no curriculum or text in it. They say everyone is different in it, but I say they all have the same core deficit in it, and I wish they would just work more from a text rather than on the fly, because it seems to be more repetitive if it’s just, “We’re going to work on having conversations today.” That could just go on for years because it’s not specific enough. I know they take data, but I think it would help to follow a book, to say, “We already did the first chapter, and let’s review these emotions, and now we’re going to learn these ones.” I think that would be more effective than just a lesson plan where we try to communicate or talk or share information about our weekend. It seems very ineffective to me.

So what is he like at home?

At home he really is busy with his stuff. He definitely loves it. We have to try to limit it, because he would do it day and night if he could, reading the internet about these creatures, and reading books about these creatures. Like I said, he doesn’t like to watch TV or movies, but he does like documentaries, and always has. So he watches documentaries on these prehistoric things, but he does a lot of reading and a lot of interning, looking up pictures and printing out pictures. That’s pretty much the gist of it.

Have you ever had any difficulty with him at home?

Yeah, the difficulty is that he gets so focused on this stuff that he doesn’t want to stop it and do something else. He gets very resistant sometimes. When we have to go to the grocery store he does not want to go. It’s hard to make sure he’s warned in advance, to say, “You have ten minutes left.” We have a visual timer that I’m supposed to use more than I do, to say, “In five minutes you’re going to stop doing this highly desired activity to go do something you really hate, going to the grocery store.” So those are the biggest issues. And then, as he described, he trashed a room in the house. I was asleep. It was very early in the morning, I was still asleep, and I heard them laughing. It was like 6:30
in the morning, and I thought, “They’re playing, that’s nice.” But then I heard the toilet flush, and I thought, “That can’t be good.” So I got up, but you know, after fifteen minutes they had done a lot of damage. It’s almost like a silliness combined with impulsive behavior combined with perseveration, like maybe he could see something on TV or hear something about someone putting shaving cream on a dog, and I’d have to hide all the shaving cream. The ideas get planted, and sometimes he can’t get them out of his head. So those kind of behaviors. But it was more difficult when he was younger. The older he gets the better it is.

You’re talking about things I think are funny. See, shaving cream on a dog!

See, I shouldn’t have even said! Don’t put shaving cream on the dog. Sit down.

I will.

See, now this is going to happen. He’ll probably talk about this for two weeks. I shouldn’t have said it. But that’s the behavior stuff. And he needs to do more than just this one thing that he likes to do, but it’s a struggle to get him to do other things. He’ll do activities, go to the pool and do this and that, but socially it’s very difficult. We don’t have any relatives here, all my brothers live up North. It would be awesome to live there, because your family is stuck with you, and Art has cousins and stuff he could hang out with, but unfortunately they’re far away. It’s tough, because that aspect is important, but it’s totally missing.

From your perspective, do you think he understands his autism and his difficulties and his strengths?

I think he does. I think in an age appropriate way he does. We got him a book called *Cats Have Asperger’s Syndrome* because he loves cats. That has a lot of very basic information for kids in it, and he knew that he was different from other kids. That’s why we ended up getting him the book and telling him about it. We struggled about when to explain it, because it’s hard to explain, but he was glad because he felt different and it helped him understand that he really was and it wasn’t all in his mind and stuff.

Has there been enough information to you available from what you’ve been researching?

I think there’s a lot of information available if you know the right places to look. There are not a lot of resources locally. Like I wish there were even private social skills groups that were good, but there aren’t really. But finding information, if you know where to look, is pretty easy. Sometimes that can be frustrating, because I found out tons of things that could be great, like different activities that could be great or classes that could be great, or things that could be done in school. So I provide the information to the school, but they don’t do it, and they don’t read the stuff I give them because they’re busy or they
FROM THE INSIDE OUT: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK INTO

don’t want to deal with it. It’s kind of a double edged sword. Because of the internet, you can find all sorts of cool stuff, but it’s all in like California. It doesn’t do me any good.

Do you think a lot of the stuff was just about autism or just about giftedness, or did you find some stuff in the middle?

It’s very difficult to find stuff. When you find something about giftedness, it mainly applies to my son, just the straight up giftedness. However, some of those kids are interested in all subjects. They want to go do these math problems and do a play, so that’s a little bit different. Those kids have other challenges. But the difficulty in Asperger’s syndrome is a lot of these kids have a very strong focus and it’s difficult to pull them out into other subjects. One of the things to try, for example, is when you’re doing a word problem in math, to make it about prehistoric creatures, instead of trains or whatever. Instead of, “The train left the station,” you could say “The animacarous swam through the Cambrian sea at this speed,” or whatever. But that requires somebody. It’s extra time. It’s the same work, but it’s a lot more difficult for a kid who has a very specific focus to let go of that, whereas your average GT kid is happy to. Art has always been interested in novelty. That’s one of the reasons we saw his giftedness. Most kids with autism are very rigid, but he’s always been interested to go new places. He’ll try any new food. He wants to see different things. He always has. He wants to experience new things all the time. But once he’s done it, sometimes he’s over it. That’s why he doesn’t want to go to the grocery store. He’s not apprehensive about doing new and different things. That’s more of a gifted quality, this interest in seeing absolutely everything. He may not end up loving it, but he wants to see it and know about it, what is that over there. But it’s hard to find information on the twice-identified because most people are in the same boat that we are. The people that I’ve talked to or been on message boards online or whatever are saying, “Yeah, that’s what we’re dealing with.” The kids don’t fit in either spot, and it requires somebody who understands both. And maybe a smaller class size. This is not really a popular opinion, but in New York they do a thing called the ASD Nest program in the New York public school system. I don’t know if it’s been successful or not, but it’s mixed with gifted Asperger’s and typical gifted in a small group. The classroom is set up with standing desks and different types of OT-type things that might help. All the kids can use them, but it’s set up. Skip the special ed., and skip the general ed., and just combine them in this room, but you can have like ten kids. So you can have differentiated instruction for all of them, and they’re all at some degree of giftedness, so you’re doing more advanced work, but you’re differentiating because they have some kids on the spectrum and some who aren’t. That to me seems like a great idea, so I’m curious. I think they’ve been doing it for a while in New York, so I’m curious to see how great it is, or if it’s made any whatever. But to me that seems smarter than struggling with- half the time you’re over here in this room, and
half the time you’re over here in this room, and they don’t really come together. Even if you push in, which they claim to do but they don’t really do because it’s easier to pull out, so they pull out for everything. To me it would be smarter to stay in one room and have a regular class. But everyone’s been pushing away from that, and they’ve spent the last 25 years trying to have inclusion together in one room, but teachers really hate it I think. I know there are some that embrace it, but they’re not the ones we’re dealing with. Because you have to be like a happy hippy teacher for that. Someone who’s like, “Let’s all be different!” which would be awesome. But unfortunately our experience is that it’s much more, “Let’s all do the same thing and sit in one place and do this and do this,” and there’s not enough, “Wee! Everyone’s different! Let’s love everyone!” That would be best case scenario, and since that doesn’t really exist, inclusion to me is almost a negative because you’re not getting the positive things you’re supposed to get if the teacher’s negative about it. The kids and their parents are feeling like their child’s education is being disrupted by this kid or this kid, so it almost causes more stress. I think there are some parents like me that are starting to say, “Can’t we try a totally different approach with a separate class?” They’re not going to do it. But I would sign up for it, if they had a pilot thing where they do a separate class like the ASD Nest thing in New York where you’ve got smaller kids and it’s self-contained but there are typical kids in the class. So the benefit for the typical kids would be that it’s GT, it’s all advanced instruction at their level. And the advantage for the ASD kids would be that they get differentiated instruction at the level they’re working at, which would be a GT level in this case, and also interaction with typical peers.

Do you think there’s enough parent support for you? You said you’ve been on message boards, but do you think there’s been enough?

Not locally. The biggest, absolutely most difficult thing about parent support is that a lot of the parents are…

Why did you give this to me?

Because you did a great job! You can show Monique real quick.

This is called the Keagraculus. It’s our own ancestor. It’s about two inches long from the Cambrian period, 500 million years old.

Does it glow in the dark?

It looks like it does kind of.

Well it probably didn’t. There’s one thing, it didn’t glow in the dark from the Cambrian period. It’s called lilaxia. Well it looks kind of like, have you heard of a sea mouse? They were kind of like these… you’ve definitely heard of a computer mouse, right? It
looked like hairy computer mouses and it lived in the ocean. Lilaxia looks like one of those except it has twelve glowing spines on top of it. They kind of went like this.

Can I finish my questions and you can sit down with your thingamajigger? The problem is these kids are so different. Like every kid with special needs is different. The rest of the kids, your typical children, they’re all different too but there are some things that are the same in all of them. Like you could probably go to any class and find five kids that play soccer, for example. And you could go to that class and take those five kids, even if they don’t know each other, and take them out with a soccer ball. So that could be your next door neighbor, for example. But it’s harder when you have a kid that’s just so different that he doesn’t really fit in even with other kids on the spectrum. So even if I meet another mom and we get along great, both our kids are on the spectrum, our kids probably won’t play with each other, because they don’t really play, and maybe they like totally different things, and so even if you find parents who totally know what you’re going through and what you’re dealing with and can be a great support, it’s still not really a social experience because these kids really aren’t very social, at least at this age, so it’s a struggle. Especially because I have friends with typical kids, of course, and my child doesn’t really play with them. They don’t really want to hang out. There’s just a lot of differences and division in the autism community. It’s a big struggle in particular in biomedical intervention, which I don’t do. I mean, I’m interested in evidence based and science based practices. But a lot of people, I would say almost 90% of the parents I meet, do biomedical intervention with their kids, which is a sort of Jenny McCarthy sort of thing where you have special diets and mega doses of vitamins and sometimes you’re giving them industrial culators which is a poison they give them because they think... There’s a lot of really harsh things that they do that there’s no evidence behind. It’s like a cult, almost. So that’s one huge group in the autism community, and I would say, where I am in Richmond, it’s a big part of it because the Autism Society of America pushes it. They’re very big on it. So it’s big in our area because a lot of people have been told about it from this group. They have support groups there and they introduce people to these ideas that are sketchy, I think. It’s based on the idea that there’s something wrong with the child, the child is poisoned or... and they aren’t. But a lot of people think that, and so they give them these medicines and mega doses and all this crazy stuff to try to fix them. To me that just seems like a negative and weird bad approach to somebody who’s different. You got to go with it and embrace it. So that makes it even harder socially, or even with support and different activities that go on in the autism community because it’s a highly charged environment of the people who are involved in that kind of stuff, which is a pretty big majority where I am, and the people who are really not. But any group you go to, that’s what they’ll all be talking about, and so it’s hard to even have unity in the autism community because there’s this huge rift.
What’s the most important thing you want me or educators or other people to know about students who are twice identified, whether with autism and gifted or just in general?

The most important thing is that there needs to be a place for these kids. They’re excluded from everything. Everything. Because they can’t go into, say, a camp. We had this experience with the William and Mary gifted camp this summer. We tried to sign him up, but they won’t take him. The problem is there’s stuff set up for typical children, there’s stuff set up for kids with autism who have more profound needs, and there’s literally nothing for someone in between. Especially if you were gifted and have autism, you’re out in the cold because what you need is something like the William and Mary gifted camp that they do, and if they can’t accommodate your child’s needs, then he can’t participate. And it’s unfair because he qualifies for it, the same as the other kids do, and to me it’s just flat out discrimination. I think it’s just bigotry and discrimination and fear, and a lot of times they hide behind budget. They claim it’s budget, when it’s not budget. There was a science camp in Richmond, for example, that I inquired about through a private school, and they “had concerns” and pretty much said no when he would have no problem with the subject matter, would have no problem with the activities. It was just a week, five days, but he might have required a little extra redirection or assistance or reminders to sit back down or this kind of thing, but the response I got from William and Mary was, “We’re not the public schools, we don’t have a budget for that.” They didn’t say, “We won’t take him,” but they said, “We don’t have any budget to give special supports to a child with Asperger’s syndrome.” And my argument is, you have a ton of graduate students. Are you kidding me, that you can’t get a graduate student to come and for a camp that just goes on for a couple weeks or whatever to volunteer or participate? Or the parent will pay. I mean, I would have paid a graduate student or an undergrad, anybody, to just be there as an aide, but they have to be willing to, and they’re not willing to. They are not willing to, and I wrote and inquired about that to the director saying, “Hey, have you thought about including these children, because they qualify. Why are they being excluded?”

Is this for SEP? (Yeah.) Okay, because I worked with Dr. Kim.

Yeah. Dr. Kim actually emailed me back, and I was going to call her and I never got a chance to, but this is basically what I was going to discuss. I think it would be really really smart. I mean William and Mary would be in the New York Times. This enrichment program would get press all over the country if what they tried was a pilot program where they said, “You know what, we’re going to take a percentage of kids who qualify,” and what I said in my email is, I’m not saying take kids who don’t qualify. No, I’m saying these are kids who get the same test scores as these other kids. Why are they not there? They’re different, they come from a totally different place, they might be acting different, they might be something you’re not used to, but that doesn’t mean that
they aren't qualified to do this. So, I suggested a pilot program would get you national press. It would be a big deal because these kids are there.

I think it’s a good idea.

Some of these kids are really quite brilliant, but if they’re excluded from every activity, what are you supposed to do? And they are. They’re excluded from almost everything. And in some cases a parent can pay for an aide, but it’s hard to even find an aide. So a school that had such a program, a gifted camp or enrichment program, that thought about it in advance and said, “We’re going to give undergrads or education students or whoever to participate this summer for a credit or maybe for money even.” Seriously, parents would pay for it. It would be a great thing for the students to learn, to see these kids at work and see how they interact with the other children, see the upsides and the downsides and what can be tweaked and changed. It can be a real lab for understanding how GT can work with twice identified kids. So that would be something that is my biggest thorn in my side, is that there’s bigotry, flat out bigotry. People just say no. You can’t. It doesn’t matter, I don’t care, I don’t care how smart he is, I don’t care how verbal he is, you can’t. Sight unseen. In preschool we had a lot of trouble. One preschool kicked him out. I tried to call a Montessori preschool and a private very expensive one that I couldn’t afford anyway, but I called and said, “Hey, this is his deal. He’s really really smart, blah blah blah,” and she just said no. She flat out said no, sight unseen. “We can’t have kids with Asperger’s here, because they don’t work well with groups, and all kids in Montessori need to work as a team, and we’ve tried it in the past and it doesn’t work,” and you know, it’s kind of shocking when you hear that because you don’t think that somebody would really say that. You don’t think somebody would say, “No, you can’t come here, you’re not allowed to, because you’re different.” And I’ve heard it again and again. I’ve heard it so many times. So we’ve created our own camps. I’ve hired individual separate people to do it, but it lacks the social element completely, so there’s no possibility for him to interact with other gifted kids, to possibly make a friend or meet them, because he’s not allowed to any that I’ve found so far, camps or programs. So that would be my biggest thrust is that there needs to be... the disability rights community has got to kick it up a notch because it’s not fair. It’s not fair to say you can’t do this when you’re perfectly qualified to do it. It’s really ridiculous to me. So that and training. Training for general and GT teachers to understand that it’s not scary, it really isn’t. It’s totally doable, and it’s just a matter of learning some tricks of the trade, and then having back up, because you know, they have a whole school full of principals, and special ed. teachers, and occupational therapists, and speech therapists, and so you’re not alone. So that, to me, it’s more about the biggest issue has been opportunity. What is he going to be able to do this year, for example. Will he be able to go up to another grade to do science? Probably not. He probably won’t, because they don’t want to deal with it. Some schools do that. It depends where you live. But it would require an aide to go with
him and take him out of his classroom, and they don’t like to do it. You can’t really grade
skip because you’re already emotionally immature, and that makes it complicated when
you go with older kids. But that would be my main… that’s the reason we drove down
here to be part of your project, because that to me is the most important thing, that these
kids need to stop being discriminated against in programs. A program should not say no.
When I contact W&M and say, “Hey, here’s my son, here’s his test scores, 99th percentile
across the board, but he’s Asperger’s, can he come?” Rather than no, I’d rather hear,
“What can we do to make this work?” And same with the other camp I contacted this
summer. Instead of, “I have concerns,” the response I would hope for is, “Okay, what do
we need to do to make this a success?” A positive approach, rather than, “I don’t want to
go there, I’m not going to deal with it, it’s going to be a pain,” whatever’s going through
their minds. Which all may be true, that it’s going to be a chore, but to work with the
parents and say, “What do we need to do make this work?” or “We’d love to have him,
and what will make it a success for him?” would make it a much more positive and
reasonable and inclusive approach than just to say no, which they do. It’s definitely
something that oddly you’re allowed to do now, just say no.

Do you have anything else to add or any questions for me?

No. I think that’s everything. That’s really the gist of my... it’s really very difficult that
they don’t get to fit in anywhere.
Interview 9A: Ted

Let us begin. Do you know why I’m interviewing you?

From the email you said you were interviewing students with dual exceptionalities and I take that to mean gifted kids with learning disabilities, so I guess I figure I qualify for that.

You do. Can you tell me a bit about school? What is school like for you? I know that’s a very general question.

School’s a challenge. I do pretty well. I’ve been told that I’m a gifted kid, I have a very bright mind and things and I can do well, and I have been doing well, but I think that my progress has kind of been hindered by my ADHD. So with ADHD, it makes it a little challenging because I get more distracted than other kids do. I’ve taken medicine for a while and all the medicine, all the distractions from the ADHD, everything affects the way it works for me, and depending on which courses I’ve taken and the amount of work, it affects how I do it. So if it has a lot of research, that’s tough. A huge amount of information, a big research project, I’m not so good with. With day-to-day... we also found that with my ADHD and I guess sometimes from being distracted with all the work, [???] we found out that less classes are better for me. I put more study halls into my schedule, and school for me has been a work in progress to find out which schedule fits best. I’m lucky because I have guidance counselors and people there who care about me, so we’re able to go and use the 504 plan I have and use the resources I have available to me to tailor the schedule to fit my needs. School for me is kind of like a compromise. It’s a mix of the best classes and teachers that would fit me to best ensure success. So yeah, school’s a challenge but it’s something I don’t dread. I enjoy learning, and I’m excited to go back. I’m definitely excited to move on to college too.

Has there ever been a time in your school career that you have not wanted to go to school because of the things you struggle with, or do you think you’ve always liked going to school?

You mean like a particular subject, or?

Anything. Is there any class that you dreaded going to or has there been a time where you just thought, “I don’t want to go to school anymore,” or has it just been, in general, that you like learning and going to school?

I enjoy learning. I think even the worst experiences I’ve had in classes have been offset by my joy for learning. I think classes I’ve least enjoyed ever were probably some math classes. I can do math, but it’s just not my favorite subject, which is kind of with a lot of kids. But math, and Spanish also. I just didn’t get Spanish, or computer science either. I
was not good at memorizing the languages and things. But I’ve wanted to give other
languages a try, but I think the closest I’ve ever come to dreading school was just not
enjoying those classes.

What things in school do you like the best? What things are you the best at?

I really enjoy reading. English classes and history and social studies. When I was in
elementary school and middle school I was crazy about reading. I would read in the
hallway. I’d carry a book around with me and read through the hallways, walking out of
my peripheral vision. That’s changed in high school because I’ve gotten involved in
many more activities and different things. I don’t read as much, which I’m not exactly
proud of, but I still like to read. So yeah, I like reading and writing. But with reading,
writing is simple, and thinking is also similar. I love to think and write. One of the
things I love to get, my favorite course I took was contemporary topics, which is all a
writing and speaking class. I’m good at writing and speaking, and I usually kill those
assignments. I like writing, and people say I have a talent for writing, that I can really
put my words together creatively and put images in peoples’ minds, and I really enjoy
doing some creative writing and stuff or describing, writing in general.

Sorry, if I cut you off, just let me know, because it’s hard to tell.

Okay, so favorite things in school would be speaking, writing, history, English.

It’s kind of hard to tell if people are done when you can’t see them. I hate that. Now I
forgot my question. I remember now. Do you think your schoolwork now is challenging
enough for you, or do you find that any classes for you are not as challenging as they
could be?

I think it’s challenging enough. At some points I’ve questioned whether I should be
taking an AP English class instead of regular English class, because some of the stuff we
do in regular English class, I find it [?????? 7:24]. One of my teachers just kept
mispronouncing words left and right, and that really frustrates me, and I found that some
of the stuff we were doing... she tried to give some historical context one time, and it was
completely wrong. I think it was a typo, but I kind of flipped out and groaned, “What’s
your problem, man?” With that experience, I definitely feel like I’m a little out of place
in some English classes, and I feel they are a little lower level for me, with experiences
like that, and experiences like trying not to answer every question. But what my parents
and my psychiatrist have worked out is to try to take only one weighted class per
semester, that’s what my parents say. I’ve always wanted to try two, but I’m not sure. I
guess we’ll see how the year goes. I feel like social studies classes are definitely a
challenge for me, but one that I can take on and do well with. Math classes, I’m fine with
math. I have been content with the workload I have there. It’s just the regular college-
prep stuff. I don’t have any weighted math courses. At my high school, it is a more
rigorous high school than other high schools, so although the workload is challenging and it’s more rigorous than other schools, I know it’ll prepare me better for college, and you’ve got to do the work some time, so I think it’s good that I’m getting that. But yeah, but at some points I’ve wondered, should I be in AP with other kids instead of regular college prep.

Would you try it in AP English next year, this coming year?

I think in a perfect world I would do that, but I have other things going on with my life and I’m not sure I can do AP English. See, I’m also taking honors biology and sociology this year in addition to an AP elective course I want to take, AP comparative politics, another social studies course that I’m excited to take. So I think if I weren’t doing college applications, sprinting with the track, possibly another history project... You’re very busy. And [???] board of honor, and whatever else might happen, I would take AP English, but ... no.

So in class, we’ve talked a little bit about the things you like and the things you’re strong at. What are the things that are difficult for you?

Chemistry is tough, and I think I would say math too. And I’ve worked hard with writing assignments too. I can write creatively well, I can handle that fine, but with large research projects, it’s hard to assemble my thoughts into organized everything. The ADHD gets really ambushed me here. I remember sophomore year I was doing this large assignment, over a two month long project, and I worked so hard on it and I ended up failing it because I just ended up failing, and with the amount of effort I put in it should have been a “A+,” but I ended up failing it. So I mean, I think I have some trouble organizing my thoughts, organizing large parts of research, and I’ve gotten some papers back saying, “What’s the point of this paper? Why are you writing this?” So sometimes I think I miss the point on some papers, but I think that’s mainly the analytical papers. The summarizes and responses kind of thing, but I’m good with creative writing. But math, chemistry. Math was tough, but I had a good teacher with that who really helped me. I’m sorry to say that I did get bored at the end of the year. I think they kind of tricked me into math class because I knew I wasn’t going to go on to do calculus, and I was in pre-calculus at that time, and I just... I mean, it was sort of like, “When are we going to use this stuff in the world?” I mean, I knew I wasn’t going to go on to be a math major or something, but I just had to follow through to the end of the year anyway, and it was especially disheartening when you found that the class average for the final was a 70%, 71%, excuse me, 1% higher, because apparently the math department at my school decided to make all the math finals super tough. I went to the teacher and talked to her and she said, “Yeah, they were college level tests.” Okay, well we’re in high school, so they potentially gave us harder tests, which I failed mine, I got a 64 on it, so I was just trying to point home that math was not going to be my major. With math, it was a
challenge but I did have support from my teacher, so for the most part I did pretty well. I was able to carry around a 90, 92 in there. Chemistry was tough because, like history or English class which follows a natural progression through time, chemistry was sort of like a large system with many different methods and I’m just analyzing things, and I wasn’t a big fan of it, I didn’t see where it was going, and the class and the teacher weren’t structured enough so I was kind of blindly going through a maze.

Do you think in general your teachers are supportive of you? Do they understand what you need to succeed?

Yeah. I would definitely agree with that. Some teachers want to help their students succeed, some teachers may sort of miss the point sometimes. I know some. I was in an electronics class, taking an elective and I thought I might like electronics and it turned out I didn’t really. I didn’t enjoy all the theory at all, which was mainly the whole class. I thought we were going to be doing hands on stuff, but no, it was mostly theory and tests, which I didn’t really get. For the most part my teachers are supportive of my needs and supportive of my testing skill, my extra time on tests, my 504 plan. But some of them I sort of have to fight, argue with, in order to get stuff. I’m not very good at listening sometimes, so a teacher will get annoyed with me, that I don’t listen. I’ve had one teacher say, “You don’t listen very well, do you?” I’m like, “Well no, I don’t, I have ADHD, come on now.” And some of the teachers are distracted by other things. There’s one teacher that’s distracted by [???? 16:25], they just mess around in class, and the other teacher, she was a bio teacher but she just had other priorities before her, like her soccer team or running random errands or doing reenactments. She was involved with so much more than her own class. I think teachers that are actually trying to teach, teaching is their priority, I get along with the most. The teachers who are just there for a job, sparks start to fly.

Have you ever had a bad experience with a teacher?

Yes. Like I said, with teachers whose priorities aren’t really their students, I’m in constant contact with my teachers, and the trend throughout my high school in order for me to have success, I maintain a communication with my teachers. I send emails to them and talk to them in class, and some teachers really get that and others don’t. I’ve had arguments with teachers saying something, because at that point in school, which was supposed to be some, we’ll call them beginnings of arguments, some conflicts with teachers, in missing school. You know, all kids want to miss school, all kids want to get out on field Teds and that sort of thing, but I always have to be extra careful and make sure. I really haven’t had an excellent experience in missing school so far because when I miss school I miss tons of class and I don’t know what’s going on, so when we have a pop quiz when I get back or something, it’s like, okay, I don’t want to take the quiz, I wasn’t here, but the one teacher ended up making the quiz extra credit or something and I
refused to take the quiz because I wasn’t there, and she wouldn’t tell anyone it was going to be extra credit. Big misunderstanding there. And another misunderstanding was extra time with tests and midterms, finals. So I was taking one midterm with another group of students and there was a misunderstanding of which location I was supposed to go and instead of the teacher coming over to me privately and saying, whispering in my ear or something, “Hey, you’ve got to go to a different room so you get extra time,” I ended up getting moved to a different room later or something? Anyway, she karate kicked the door down and was like, “Yo, Ted, let’s go!” and took me to a different room and kind of yelled my name out in front of the whole class. Everyone thought I was cheating on the test or something, I was getting attention or something, I don’t know. But there are definitely some teachers who could have shown better discretion in situations. Usually with teachers I try to hold my ground, I try to hold my side. I do not go out of my way to make them intentionally angry. If I ever do, like sometimes I’m out of class, but I try not to, it’s hard when you’re asking teachers for help and you have all this 504 plans and stuff, and you’re making an impression at the beginning of the year, for getting help and receiving aid, and then you go around and mess around in class and be rude to the teacher, and say, “Oh, I’m not getting this stuff.” Well that’s almost a no-brainer, you’re not getting it because you’re messing around. So because I have all this stuff set up for me, it’s expected that I not mess around, so it’s almost like a little more pressure than other kids. But that’s fine, I understand that. I have a choice, I can do well or not do well, and so I choose to do well and that comes with it, so I have responsibilities. Yeah, what was the question? Having conflicts with teachers, was that the question?

Yeah. But I mean, you’re giving me good information, so whatever you want to talk about is fine.

I remember at one point junior year I went to a state conference, a state-level competition for TSA, technology student’s association. It’s a tech. ed. club, sort of a niche. So I did some events at the state level, so we went away for about three days, and stayed at a conference center and when we got back I didn’t have all my homework. I had to make up a bunch of tests, quizzes, and essays, and I didn’t get the last one finished until probably at least a month and a half or two months later, which, I guess that was in late March, and I guess late May I was finally finishing up stuff. So I feel a couple things there, because I missed days that we were studying it, so making them up was tough because you’re trying to learn new information while you’re trying to learn information that you should have learned three or four week ago. Missing time in school was a challenge. I think a solution would be to do it ahead of time, but I hope that doesn’t happen again and I hope I can handle it better next time it does.

How do you feel about being gifted and having ADHD? Does it cause frustration? How do you feel about your ability to do things?
Well, being gifted to me is sort of like you’re, being gifted means you’re [??? 23:11], and I guess being gifted means that you have extra gifts and extra something intellectually that others don’t. I guess maybe an extra little spark that others don’t, or an extra big spark for that matter, and being gifted means you’re enrolled in special interest, and you receive gifted support, but it’s sort of vague what gifted means. To have a disease like diabetes, you have certain symptoms or this or that, but being gifted is like having symptoms. I guess you just have a little more spark of creativity or spark of something. And I guess your gifted kids... when we would go into S.I., we were set apart from other kids. We were kind of like an exclusive club of extra smart kids, and other kids who aren’t in gifted programs, I think, are a little jealous that they’re not in it too. But I think being gifted means, like I said, that extra spark of creativity or talent or something, and so with that talent, with that extra little spark, you’re almost expected. I’ve noticed kids who aren’t in SI, they kind of assume that kids in SI are smarter, and therefore have better grades. Well that’s not always the case, because you can have an autistic kid who is gifted, but the autistic kid probably most likely will not be able to function or take as high-level classes as other kids do because he’s got autism and the symptoms prevent him from doing that, so that assumption from other kids is pretty wrong. Also, gifted kids can have ADHD, like me, and actually I understand that’s sort of common, so kids assume gifted kids are smarter, gifted kids should have higher class ranks, gifted kids should get better grades. And I sort of expect something like that from me too. I know I’m better than the average kid, so I expect good grades. I know that achieving like 98s overall, that’d be nice, but it just hasn’t happened, so what I expect from myself, my goal, is to get 94, 95, 96 average. But I know what’s frustrating to me is being friends who are gifted, the kids who aren’t gifted but who intellectually have strengths and their intelligence is just up there, so they’re getting the high grades. They’re taking the advanced AP classes, three, four, five AP classes, and doing well with this. Now, I’m friends with many of them and I can have conversations with them, carry a good, thoughtful, insightful conversation with them, but I am not taking three, four AP classes. I do not have that extra high class rank. And that sort of frustrates me because I talk to these friends, and, “Oh, yeah, AP, AP, what are you taking?” “I’m doing one AP class.” It’s almost worse than them, and so it’s a little frustrating that they’re not gifted but they can be higher than me. But I also have ADHD, you know, so I guess that holds me back. I wish I were up there too. I know that some kids who aren’t gifted, like for example I’m on the track team and the stereotype for track is there’s a bunch of jocks, kids aren’t smart there. Well some kids are, some kids aren’t, and I have learned that it’s sort of strange to note that some kids who are more athletic, who focus more athletically, can have just as good grades as I can, but they’re not gifted like me. I wouldn’t expect them to carry on conversations like, let’s discuss politics, or let’s discuss the rights of so-and-so, where I can find myself having a conversation with someone about that. It’s frustrating because I’d like to perform higher, but sometimes I don’t. I’d like to perform
higher, but I guess when it comes to crunch time sometimes you don’t always perform as well, and I guess ADHD holds me back some.

Can you tell me a little about your social life in school, when you were younger and now?

Well, right now, what I’m looking forward to in my education is college, where I can start brand new and somewhere where there will be kids like me. In high school, there are kids from all sides and perspectives, and I have friends, but I don’t have a close-knit… I do and I don’t. I have them all as a friendship, but I’m not getting called up every day from friends. I’m not getting texts from people, but high school sort of frustrates me because I think I have a reputation in high school as being sort of weird. But the people who know me best, they like me for me and they don’t think I’m weird. You can have some think you’re weird. So I mean, I guess I’m not always invited to sorts of things like parties, like, “Let’s go hang out,” “Let’s go to the football game,” “Let’s go eat,” “Oh, we didn’t invite Ted.” “I’ll just stay home and eat a PB&J by myself, you go to Red Robin.” You know, that’s happened many times before, and it’s frustrating because you don’t want to try too hard, you don’t want to do this and that. It would be nice to just hang out with people. So it’s a little frustrating to me, but it’s a little better than elementary school. Elementary school, there was some bullies there, and I think some low self-esteem in elementary school and middle school or something, because there would be bullies and I would get taken advantage of and stuff. It kind of sucked. In elementary school, I never had that close-knit type of friendship with kids, but recently, this summer, I guess in my high school and elementary and middle school years so far, I have found friendships. I think I found a good group to hang out with, but I’m not getting those phone calls every day. I’m not hanging out with the kids every weekend. I have to make the plans for myself on Friday. It’s sort of rare that I can get invited to go somewhere. I’m not a social outcast, but it’s just… that’s my perspective on things. I’m not someone else, I can’t have their perspective, so I don’t know how other kids are or what their life is like, but judging by Facebook and talking to kids, it seems like they have more things going on socially than I do. But when I went, my perspective on all that changed when I went to a political science camp this summer. About a hundred kids were accepted from the whole country, about six hundred, seven hundred kids applied and a hundred kids were accepted. I was very excited to go, very excited to be accepted. I got to be away from my parents for two weeks. And when I was there, I found that every single one of those hundred kids wanted to be there. That is completely different from high school, where those kids have to be there, where truants are against the law. But these kids applied, they didn’t have to be there. Every single one of these kids was similar to me, and everyone got along well. Everyone liked each other. Everyone was having fun together. There I felt appreciated. It was really great. I think one of my best memories was just sitting… we went to Philly one day and we were eating in a tavern and I was just sitting there chilling with people and it felt really great to
be surrounded by people who really genuinely liked you. Like in high school, people’s heads get so big in high school. It was such an interesting difference from the congressional academy from high school. As my friend and I said from St. Louis, he’s from St. Louis and I’m from here, and he said, “I think we experienced some college friendships.” And I really can’t wait to get to college because I know I will be in a place where there will be kids, there will be people, who will be similar to me, and they’ll want to be there. They don’t have to be there, but they’ll want to be there. It’ll be tough. I have three or four really good friends here in high school. It’ll be tough leaving them, especially one of them that I think I’ve had since first or second grade, but overall I can’t wait to get through senior year to college.

Well, college is fun, so good luck with that. I enjoy it. Do you think that your social life is affected by your ADHD, or just that you have different interests from the other kids?

Yeah. I think it’s affected both. Yes, my social life I would say is affected by my ADHD. You know, attention hyperactive… oh my gosh, I just forget what ADHD stands for.

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Yes. Well, I think there’s a couple kinds of ADHD. There’s inattentive and…

There’s inattentive, hyperactive, and combination.

Yeah. I have the both. With having the both, inattention and hyperactive, and I think I’ve been classified as severely inattentive, which is great. I’ve also been told I’m impulsive. It’s a deadly experience. Like I remember one night I was at a football game, just hanging out with some people, and I think my friend was trying to covertly talk to a girl or something, and I knew that girl had another boyfriend or something. I think the guy was just trying to talk to her secretly or something. I just didn’t put the facts together. Like in some situations, I just don’t put the obvious facts together. And I shouted out something stupid, and I was like, “Oh, crap, why did I say that?” You know, impulsivity. My impulsiveness, not impulsivity, that’s not a word. My impulsiveness really… you got to really be aware of what I’m doing. Same with at work. At work, I unload boxes. I work at warehouse, and we unload trucks, the boxes from trucks and put them on skids. And you always got to be thinking of, like yesterday when we had the different types of boxes that have to go on skids, and listening, and I don’t listen very well, so when the guys talk about where to put the 14 inches here, seven inches here, red 17, blue 17, different colors and stuff, I don’t always listen. Some of the other people are dealing with a dumb person by the way they act, so that frustrates me too. So ADHD, yes, it affects my social interactions, making me more impulsive and less able to listen and pick up social clues.
This is going to sound really strange, but I’m going to ask you a question, and then I want you to keep talking, but I have to answer the door. I have to go answer the door because someone just knocked on the door, but if you have anything else to say you’re being recorded so you can keep talking. I’ll be right back.

I think I might actually become a hermit and live by myself in a cave where my ADHD will not hinder my social interactions. That seems like the best option for me, and I’m scoping out a place in the Adirondacks as soon as I finish college.

I’m back. Okay. I don’t know what you were talking about, but I’m back. I have one more question, and it is: What is the most important thing you’d want me, and teachers and different people who work with students like you, what do you want me to know is the most important thing about you, about students who are dual exceptional? It’s a thinking question.

Well I think I’d like teachers to know that I’m not a freeloader, that I tend to work hard, and that all the disabilities, medicines and plans, all that complicated crap that comes along with this ADHD is that those aren’t cheating tools. That those are intended, those are put in place, those are enacted so that I will have the closest experience and opportunities to a kid, a gifted kid I guess, without ADHD, and that I can work just as well as any other kids can, just given the right circumstances. They’ve got to know that kids with ADHD don’t always pick up on stuff, that don’t always listen very well, that are sort of impulsive, and by no means does that mean that I am any less intelligent or less cool than anyone else. And that by no means having ADHD has that made me a different person. It does make me a different person, but it’s not all I’m focused on it. I’m trying to look past it. It’s a constant challenge for me, but I’m still a normal kid, you know? I’m still normal, still a pretty normal teenager, and I just have some little quirks.

Do you have anything else to add before I turn off the recorder?

Can I ask you a question?

Yeah, one sec.
Interview 9B: Maggie

Can you start by stating the age and grade level of your son?

Yes. My son is seventeen years old. He’s going to be a senior in high school.

Okay, and can you tell me about when he was identified with ADHD?

About fifth grade.

Fifth grade? And what about when he was identified as gifted?

Kindergarten.

Okay, so gifted was first. And what kind of habits or behaviors did you see that told you that maybe he would have ADHD?

I first began noticing the inattention part. I would always need to keep redirecting him to the types of things that he needed to get done. I guess specifically when a friend would come over to have him go outside to play, it would take him more time than usual to get his stuff together to get back out the door. So he would be distracted by other things going up the steps. He would be distracted by something in his room before he would pull his shoes or get his baseball mitt, to the point where I was going up with him to get him stuff to get back out the door. I would say that was about eight years old.

How did this affect him in his classroom?

If there’s a lecture going on, he won’t always hear all the information that’s being told to him out loud. Even if he’s not grasping everything at once, he’s going to miss parts of oral instructions. Back in elementary if he did not have extreme focus he was going to miss directions on how to take the test.

Did he ever have any behavioral issues related to his ADHD in school?

No. No, he was always a pretty well behaved kid.

And were they able to accommodate for him missing information because he wasn’t paying attention?

No, it was really unfortunate happenings along the way. Because he’s gifted, his gifted program was a pull-out program, and a couple of his teachers would say, “If you’re gifted, you should be able to do the work that you’ve missed.”

Is that something that happens, or happened, often?
It did. It happened for a full year in fourth grade. In third grade we had a wonderful teacher. Second grade he probably had some of the hyperactivity coming out and he was disciplined for some of that instead of redirecting. Looking back, I’m very frustrated that it was a seasoned teacher that didn’t know how to redirect. She just made… she sent him out in the hallway. So there again, he was being made an example instead of redirected.

And did that happen a lot with that teacher?

I don’t know. [??? 5:50] Yeah, it did. And I was trying to figure a whole lot of it out and it was only second grade, so no idea that he had hyperactivity at that point. He’s a boy between two girls. He actually is a mild boy, so I really thought that with a seasoned teacher he would have been in good friends, but no. He should not have been sent out of the room. I think he should have been told right and wrong, discussed right and wrong.

What do his teachers now do?

Currently in high school we have some of the same types of situations. My son now has accommodations to have extended time on his testing, and one made a spectacle of him again and will say openly to him, “Do you need more time?” in front of a whole classroom. We’ve asked repeatedly, “Could we be a little more discreet? Could we be discreet about his needs?” Because he does have the intelligence, and he should be allowed to have more time if his brain function needs a little more time to get his message across, and they will sometimes openly pull him up in front of the class. This particular teacher put his biology test in some kind of manila envelope and stapled it nineteen times for him to go take it in the principal’s office, and that was done in front of the whole classroom. Wow. So my son has had to rise above it, keep his head high, and know that he is deserving of a better approach.

And now does he have any teachers that are exceptional toward him, that are accommodating and helpful, that he talks about?

He does. He has his one gifted support teacher that really does understand him, and she has high energy as well. I think the other high energy people understand everyone else’s high energy people. She is just a ball of fire and gets so much done in her life. Truly, truly glad to have her in his life. But she’s not a core subject teacher. He does have other passions. He has a passion for history and enjoys that teacher as well. He gets along with I’d say 95% of teachers everywhere because he is an interesting kid.

Now do you have an open communication with his teachers? Are they willing to communicate with you about things he needs, now and in the past?

No, it’s not that open because we go to a big school and everyone’s time is [???]. At the point where he’s an eleventh grader and a twelfth grader, parents have to step back and
let the kids guide what’s going on. I have to watch what’s going on around him and then I have to make phone calls and alert them to some of the situations that are going on. When my son participates in a three-day competition conference, missing three days of school can then rebound and it takes him two and a half or three weeks to make three days up, because everything else just compounds on those three days that he’s missed, and you’re always missing a couple pieces of pertinent information that then reflects a final grade.

And how does that affect his final grades?

It usually brings it down. It usually brings it down one letter grade. He always aims for “As” and he can do “A” work, but he needs more seconds in his day.

What is his social life like in school?

In elementary, slim, slim meaning few friends. High school, it’s been good. It’s been good. He’s got a good twenty or so to choose from, but no best friend.

What do you think the difference is between elementary and high school in his social life? Why does he now have more friends?

I think everyone’s maturity. Not his own, not only his own. I think we gave him all the resources we could here at home to be happy with himself and happy with his own interests. But I think it’s everyone else’s maturity too to understand that we all have differences.

Do you think in elementary school, did his ADHD impact his social life at all?

Yes, I do. I think his inattention definitely did, because it was probably taking him more time to process little innuendos going on around him.

And do you think in school he is being challenged enough in his classes right now?

Yes I do.

Okay, that’s good. Related to school, and outside of school, I know you mentioned history, what are his strong interest areas?

Okay. History, writing, soccer, football, carpentry, scouting, camping…

Is there ever anything that he becomes extremely focused on?

No. No, he’s pretty well-rounded. If I can throw back into elementary, he liked Legos and reading, as well as soccer, he always liked. Though he wasn’t a geek. Hiking, biking, camping, Legos…
Academically, what are his weakest areas? Are there any besides the inattention? And what are his strongest areas?

Weakest areas... mundane tasks. Things like raking leaves. It’s not going to go well. He’s going to go off and daydream. I think it’s because the leaves are going to keep coming down. What’s the point? No, this is not a good use of my time. Strengths: reading, absorbing/retention. I think the ADHD also has clouded his mind. He does not realize how bright and smart he really is. He doubts himself compared to others because he can take two AP courses at school in a year where his gifted peers can take five, and that drives him crazy. He just cannot super-task, he can only multitask. He cannot super-task like his other gifted peers. And what he retains is mammoth.

Could you tell me a little bit about the conferences he goes to? How many conferences we go to? What kinds of conferences does he go to?

Oh, when he goes away for three days? They’re always [???] student technology association. He has won Regionals, States, and was entered in the Nationals for extemporaneous topics. Speeches, building, he has won for carpentry, and design. He was on a team where they built to-scale kitchen design and architectural design projects. Let me think.

Sorry for the beeping noise. Someone keeps trying to call me. Oh, okay. It’ll be done soon.

Still going on special interests, we’ll go to museum-based programs, track and field, he’ll have early release to attend his track competitions. He does hurdles. He does them well, he’s usually about third place. So they’re all building experiences that he goes to. It’s a competition-based experience or a gifted learning conference that he’ll go to.

When he was younger and you were noticing the characteristics of ADHD and giftedness, did you think there was enough information available to you to help you figure out what was going on?

No, I do not. Absolutely not. I’ve asked, “Can he have a mentor?” I don’t have any other family around here, around me, so it was all on me and my husband trying, figuring it out, researching, helping, advising, redirecting, searching for information to understand what it would be like to be gifted and ADHD. I know he can’t be the only one out there. They would ask us, “What special accommodations do you want for him?” and we had no idea. Oh my gosh, thank you for asking this. I would go in for an IEP meeting, Individualized Education Plan meeting, and I would come in and I’d walk in and be surrounded by seven other professionals in education who had doctorates, and myself, and I’m not a teacher. I had no idea they were going to be attending. I felt as if I needed my own advocate on my side, and I was told, “Nonsense. You should make him go to
bed at a certain time, and why don’t you get him up earlier. You should have more of a
regimen in your life.” Which I feel is nonsense. And they said, “He should only be
given an hour and a half to do his homework every evening, and you should sit him down
in the chair right away,” and I said, “No, he’s already sitting himself in the chair as soon
as he gets home from school, and he needs a balance in his life, and I’m not going to
continually have him be overstressed, to always be working, working, working, working,
working. Everyone gets some breathing time.” They would have him miss
recess to get some of his work done, and I did not know how much that was impacting
peer friendships. Because he was gifted, he never got any ADHD services all through
elementary and middle school. The only ADHD services he was getting was mom and
dad helping him to redirect. That’s unfortunate. Yeah, it is. It’s very unfortunate. But
he’s had a great… mom and dad care a whole lot to get him there.

My last kind of big question is, what is the most important thing that you would want me
to know about students like this, like your son?

They are overly sensitive and they care and they just want to do well. His heartbreaking
phrase to me would be, “I just want to be like everybody else.” I would say to him, “You
are. You are like everyone else.” That’s it.

Is there anything else you would like to add about him or any of the other things we’ve
discussed previously?

Yes. Along the way, I don’t even remember who told me… it had to have been a
psychologist along the way. I’ve been very fortunate in that we, my husband and I, really
looked out for my son, and I went and sought professional diagnosis for him. The school
district still does not really give him all the services he should have had early on.

Even with his IEP they still don’t help him, or those things are not written into the IEP?

Even with his IEP. They would say, “We don’t know what else to do for him.” And I
would say, “Can he have support services?” in elementary and middle school. I have
found he’s a night person, he works better at night, and his brain would refocus around
9:00 at night and it would go to eleven or twelve. This kid has stayed up every night of
his life until at least midnight and then can barely be pulled out of bed to get to school in
the morning. I’ve been very fortunate to be a stay-at-home mom. If he would forget
things, I would bring them in during his lunch period and hand them off to him so it
wouldn’t embarrass him. He was medicated from fifth grade through tenth grade and
eleventh grade we decided together that correct medicine wasn’t giving him everything
he needed. They were trying to put him on more stimulant based medicine, which only
brought out anger and frustration in him, and we eliminated medicine for him in eleventh
grade. I thought he would have been on medicine for life, and he’s not, and he did very
well. He maintained his “A/B” status in eleventh grade. He is a happy kid, and he is very lucky that he is an achieving, competitive kid. What was your main question there?

If you had anything else to share. And that’s interesting because a lot of time in the interviews that I have, the parents would talk about how there wasn’t really any support available, but how they tried to help support the kids, and the kids will also say that too, so I think that’s a common thing that’s pretty important, that at least if the school’s aren’t helping the parents are trying to figure things out. I mean, the school should be helping, but at least the kids have that support there at home.

The teachers have a whole classroom, and repeated years of kids, and there are many kids who are ADD. There should be more balance and understanding for them. The intensity level that my kids are working for, he can’t do anything more in his life. There’s just… he barely has down time. There’s no real down time in his life. And you can’t help but be a parent that gets absorbed into it if you care.

Well do you have any questions for me?

I wish there was more information about the executive functioning. Seventh grade, we were told that his executive functioning skills were not the same as his peers, and yet I still don’t know much more about it. Knowing that the gifted student on the bell curve is just as close to having other issues as someone who has learning disabilities. There’s not enough acknowledgement of that in the world, that their sensitivity issues and their needs are just as great as someone who has slow learning levels. It’s frustrating that there is no budget in Pennsylvania for that. It’s very frustrating that they’re not encouraging and acknowledging the kids in school right now. For elementary and middle school kids, they have decreased the number of children that are in the special interest program. I think it’s all due to budget, because it’s another expense for the school district, and that would include teacher support and we have a school district of… we have a high school campus of over 3,000 kids, and that’s 9th through 12th. In elementary, they’re making the gifted teacher run to five schools. The middle school teacher, I think they go between two schools, and there’s not enough collaboration between what one middle school does and another middle school does. They’re not joining the services together, they’re almost like separate school districts, but they’re one school district. If you’ve got 18 kids going on a field Ted, why can’t you bring in the other school and get it in with 30? Or the teachers are being pulled in too many directions that they don’t even have time to give the help to these gifted that they need. Here my son is, gifted and ADD, going into his senior year, and he’s doubting himself on what colleges to apply to and does not know what subject, what major to choose. I think because of this ADD he does not recognize that he is good in so many ways. Because he can only get a high “B” in math, he doesn’t feel that he is worthy to consider a math major. That’s unfortunate. Because he cannot get to the superior level, he doesn’t feel that he should focus on that.
Is that something that he’s interested in, math?

No, that’s why he’s going to English.

I’ve asked all my questions, but if you have any more questions for me later, you can send them to me in email.
Interview 10A: Carrie

Any questions?

Won’t it be tough transcribing it?

Yes it will. It will take a long time.

So are you going to type it into the computer or what?

Mmhmm. What I do is I’ll listen to it, then I have to pause, then I have to type. Then I have to listen, pause, type. Then I have to go back.

I can help!

I have a lot of stuff to do.

Well I could help transcribe mine!

Well you know what you can do to help? Not talk very fast. But not too slow either. Because some people talk really fast.

What do you mean, like, “Hello I’m Carrie?”

Exactly. Because I won’t be able to understand that. Okay.

I can’t even talk right when I try to talk fast.

Well that’s good, see? I’ll be able to transcribe what you just said. That was a good pace. So do you know why I’m interviewing you?

To get more information on students with dual exceptionalities?

You are the second student who has said that word! Do you know what it means?

It means that I have two sort of... it’s hard to explain for me. I can’t explain it, but I know what it means.

Okay, that’s fine. So are you in the gifted program at your school?

Are you in the gifted program? SIGHTS?

SIGHTS? Yes.

So what kind of stuff do you do there?
Well, I’m in SIGHTS English class and we do all sorts of stuff, and we especially have these tests that we do, but first we get a sheet of words. They’re like prefixes and suffixes, you know, root words. They’re often in Greek or Latin.

And what do you do with them?

We have to memorize them and their meaning.

And what else do you do in that class?

And we take a test later. What else we do? We studied some famous authors.

Do you get to do a lot of writing?

Yeah.

Do you like writing?

We had to do a lot of reports too.

What kind of reports?

Like, stories we read. We did a whole section on Edgar Allen Poe.

Did you like that?

Yeah.

I think I only know one poem by Edgar Allen Poe. Probably the one that everyone else knows.

The Raven?

Yep. Did you study anything else by him?

Yes. We actually saw a little video sort of a thing where there were scenes put to one of his poems. It was The Pit and the Pendulum.

I think I’ve heard of that one but I don’t think I’ve ever read it.

And there was another one. It’s hard to remember some of the names. We did this awhile back.

How long ago? Was it this past year?

Yes, but it wasn’t anywhere near the end. But they were good poems. One was about murder, and one person had been, the lady had been strangled with one hand and shove
up a chimney. But there didn’t seem to be any way that a murderer could get in or out. It turned out to be like an orangutan or something.

An orangutan strangled her?

An orangutan or gorilla or something like that that had gotten loose from someone.

Was this in the English class that you studied that?

Yes. That was one of Edgar Allen Poe’s poems.

I don’t think I’ve heard of that.

That wasn’t nearly the whole story.

Are you in any other SIGHTS programs at your school, or just English?

Well, sort of. If you count being a grade ahead in math class.

I do count that. Can you tell me about it?

Yes. Last year in seventh grade, because I’m going into eighth grade, I was in eighth grade math. Because in fifth grade I took a placement test and I think I answered like some algebra questions or something that like.

Was it hard?

Not really. And I got put into seventh grade math when I got into sixth grade. Completely skipped sixth grade math.

Is math easy or hard for you, do you think? Do you like it?

I like it. I like art class too though.

What kind of things do you do in art?

All sorts of things. Our art teacher gives us specific projects to do, but they’re not completely specific. We still have room to be creative. So for example, we did this paper mache thing based on, what artist was it? There was this artist, he did these carvings of animals and people and stuff, and stuff out of copper and that sort of stuff. They were like really thin. I forget his name.

I don’t know.

Well, we were basing our paper mache sculptures on his style, which was like the really thin and tall sort of style, so I did a camel. You could choose what sort of animal you wanted to do. I did a camel with two humps, and the tail broke off.
How did that happen?

Because I couldn’t get the tail to stay on because it was just a long strand of newspaper. Mr. Peters said it was okay though. He said I could always put something like a piece of string there later. So I painted the camel that sort of sandy color that camels are.

Do you get to take art every year?

Yes.

So in your math class and in your English class do you think it’s tough enough for you, or do you think it’s too easy, or too hard?

I think it’s just right.

Just right? Well that’s good. And do you like your teachers?

Yes.

What are they like? Can you tell me?

The Mrs. Davidson can be a bit hard on me sometimes.

Why?

Because, well, she doesn’t really seem to believe about my sensory problems and that sort of stuff. She seems to think that it’s all, like I made it up or something, or my parents made it up.

She thinks you made it up? So how does she act around you?

Well, she’s pretty nice usually, but then if something happens with me with any of that stuff, she doesn’t believe me. She thinks I’m just acting up on purpose.

Can you give me an example of a time that happened?

Like if it’s really noisy and I curl up in a ball with my hands over my ears. If she finds out about it she’ll get angry at me.

Does that happen with any of your other teachers?

Well, Mrs. Pacello, my SIGHTS English teacher, is a bit strict, but just regular teacher sort of strict, not like Mrs. Davidson.

Do you think she understands your sensory problems and everything? Do you think she understands that?
I don’t know. It’s hard to tell with her.

Why?

She doesn’t give much away about herself. Besides that she really likes fashion, and English.

And this is Mrs…?

And has a husband and a dog. Yeah, because it’s the wallpaper on her laptop which is used on the projector.

Oh, okay. So she didn’t even tell you that? She just saw it on the background.

Everyone’s seen it.

What about Mrs. Pacello when she was kind of angry with you when you kept forgetting your lunchbox? To bring it to English?

Oh yeah. Earlier in the year I kept forgetting to bring my lunchbox to class.

And what happened?

Mrs. Pacello finally wouldn’t let me go and get it.

She wouldn’t?

So what happened after that? How did you eat lunch if she wouldn’t let you go get it?

I was starving so I ran down and got it anyway. Because I was starving.

And then what did she do?

She was angry with me and sent me to the principal’s office. But I’m supposed to be able to eat lunch.

What else has she told you that got you angry and you yelled at her?

I didn’t yell at her.

She said she wouldn’t let you eat lunch if you did it again.

No, it was that, no, I needed to get my stake. I accidentally forgot my lunchbox again and then she didn’t let me.

You didn’t tell me that part.

Remember? No, you didn’t remember that part.
I just remember when she wrote a referral…

No! Mom.

Because you yelled at her, saying “Mom will get upset with you if you don’t let me eat my lunch” or something.

No, I said, “Mom would be upset with me if I didn’t get to eat my lunch,” and she gave me a referral.

That was the same day?

No, that was when she wasn’t letting me get my lunch box.

So it happened more than one time?

No, it happened one time.

But she wasn’t going to let you have your lunchbox.

Yeah.

Oh, I didn’t know that part. Okay.

Have you had any other bad experiences with your teachers? Besides that one?

I don’t think so. It’s hard to remember stuff like this. I guess my mind just tries to erase it as much as possible.

Well what about good experiences?

The time capsule.

What’s that?

There was a time capsule that was buried in 2000 in front of the flag pole and they dug it up in 2010.

What was in there?

There was newspaper and some…what was it? I forget.

A shirt… athletic shirt, I think.

And the newspaper was titled, like, this was when the computer crash that was supposed to be at the end of 2000.

Y2K, yeah. I was twelve years old.
Yeah, there was an article and it said that it didn’t happen, pretty much.

Yeah, it definitely didn’t happen. I clearly remember it not happening. Okay. So, in school, you said you liked English and math, right? Yeah. What do you struggle with in school?

P.E.

P.E.? Why?

Because I’m not very good at that sort of thing. I can’t do push-ups at all.

What about in your academic classes, like science and history and all those things? Do you struggle with any of that stuff?

What about remembering to turn in homework? Stuff like that?

Yeah, I forget to turn in my homework sometimes.

And what happens when that happens?

Then it gets turned in late eventually.

And do you get points off for that?

Yes.

And does this happen a lot?

Yeah. Right, mom? I don’t really count them. I don’t count them, is what I’m saying.

Okay. Do you ever get frustrated in school? Or angry?

It’s always too loud in the lunchroom for me. On louder days it can drive me crazy. So the teachers let me go to their rooms sometimes or go to the guidance office to eat lunch to get some peace and quiet, not as a punishment. Just to get some peace and quiet.

Do you do that every day?

Not every day.

Do you remember the question I just asked you? Because I think I forgot it.

Nope. I don’t remember.

It’s right here! I should have written it down. You can just keep talking.

Also I don’t have that many friends in school.
Why do you think that is?
I don’t know, and a lot of kids tease me a lot.

All the time, do you think? In your class, or just in general?

In school. Though I do have a few friends.

Can you tell me about them?

Alex, she’s going to another school, fortunately nearby, and my other friend who I met in March this year, she’s moved to North Carolina, because her parents were divorced and she’s staying with her dad and her dad went to North Carolina. And she was from Florida actually. So she misses her friends in Florida and she said she misses me too and I miss her.

So she’s from Florida and then came to Virginia and now she’s in North Carolina. Okay. What kind of things do you do with your friends?

[Long pause.]

Are you sad thinking about Julie?

Yeah.

The one that moved to North Carolina.

She called me just yesterday or the day before.

A couple days ago.

And told me that what was supposed to be just a summer vacation in North Carolina her dad turned into a house for at least six months and she’ll probably stay there always if they don’t go back to Florida.

Well you can write her letters, right?

At least she’ll be visiting every now and then to see her mom, and she said she’ll visit me when she does.

Tell her what kinds of things you do with Alex.

I play video games with my friends, I talk with them, I do stuff like Bay Blades with them...

What’s Bay Blades?
Have you seen any advertisements on T.V.? They’re like tops made out of metal and plastic.

Sounds vaguely familiar.

They actually used to be manga or something like that a long time ago. Manga or anime or something, a long time ago. Not a long long time ago. But then it stopped or something and now there’s been like a revival of the series or whatever. Okay, Bay Blades are these plastic and metal tops. And you launch them into a stadium and they’re like spinning really really fast, and they bang into each other and stuff and whichever one is still spinning at the end wins. The person with that one wins.

So do you win a lot?

No. Alex wins usually. But it’s still fun.

So is it just luck, or?

Of course, I only have two Bay Blades and she has a whole bunch. And since they come in multiple parts they can be put together different ways repeatedly. You can make mixes or different Bay Blades, so you can pretty much customize them however you want and that’ll affect how well they do and stuff. Like, there are attack type ones, they’re the ones that go all over the place to hit the other one, and there are stamina ones that they can spin for a really long time, sort of like to tire the opponent out.

So can you use more than one at one time, or only one at a time?

It’s generally one at a time.

What other stuff are you interested in doing?

I mean, because you have to use two hands just to launch one, so it’d be sort of hard to do two.

Oh, okay. How big is it?

It’s about this big in terms of diameter. And from this tall to this tall. Depends on the parts used. Some could make it taller or shorter, depending on their parts.

So what other things are you interested in doing?

Well, artwork. And I like insects.

Insects? Why?

I’m not afraid of spiders, but I wouldn’t pick up a black widow or a brown recluse.
Yeah, I wouldn’t pick those up either. I wouldn’t pick up anything.

Because they’re not aggressive, but they’ll bite if they’re afraid.

Yeah, and they’re poisonous.

Yeah, venomous, that is. Poisonous is when you eat something it’ll kill you or make you sick.

I did not know that.

Venomous is when something, for example, bites your or stings you or something.

I learn something new every day. I did not know that.

When Carrie was four she used to say she wanted to be an entomologist, studying all kinds of bugs. Tell her what your current goal is now?

I’m going to move to Japan and work for Nintendo.

Really? So you like making video games?

Yeah.

So at your video game camp what kind of games did you make?

I made a two player game. No one else actually made one of those and succeeded at the two player thing.

Is it hard?

Making it two player?

Well making any kind of games.

Yeah, it’s pretty difficult. Mine wasn’t perfect, that’s for sure. Though none of them are.

How long does it take to make one?

It depends on how complex it is. Mine was just sort of a beginning level sort of thing. A smart sort of thing.

You made different kinds, didn’t you?

Not really. Those didn’t get finished.

You have to tell her about the ones you started, too.
No, I’m going to tell her about the first one, first. It was a two player racing game. You controlled these little things that looked like a motorcycle combined with a unicycle. You only had limited amount of characters and those fit best for a racing game. They were called cycles. And I added a face. Eyes and a mouth, you know. Oh, and you could program Xbox 360 controllers for the controls or the keyboard, so I did it for two Xbox 360 controllers. So I just set it so that the buttons pressed on the player one remote would only affect the red cycle and the ones on the player two remote would affect the blue one. And you could press the L trigger to create a bunch of rocks that make your opponent’s cycle go sort of swervy-ish. Not completely out of control, but somewhat. You could press R to shoot a missile, which wouldn’t actually hurt your opponent, but it could be used to destroy certain obstacles in the race. Because you and your opponent are invulnerable to anything. You can’t take damage of any sort. And you could press B to shoot stunning blips which would stun your opponent for a short amount of time. You have to be facing the opponent to do it so you can’t keep driving in the race while still stunning your opponent because then you can either stay still or be shooting stunning blips at your opponent or keep going and not shoot stunning blips at your opponent. Of course you could always go backwards and shoot them but that doesn’t really help you very much, going backwards. And you could use the X and Y buttons to pick up and set down your opponent, so you could pick up your opponent, drive around a bit, and then set it down, supposedly further back.

But then wouldn’t you be further back?

Yes, but if you surprised them with it, you could pick them up, set them down, surprise them, and drive off, putting some rocks down along the way. Though if you get hit by one of your stunning blips, which they can still shoot while they’ve been picked up. If you get hit with one of those while you’re holding your opponent your opponent will automatically be set down.

How long do you get stunned for?

Just a second or so. But every second counts, you know.

That’s true.

And also the stunning would be really useful if you were behind your opponent because you could keep going forward and stun them at the same time. If you wanted to help you could get the lead somewhat.

But then when they’re un-stunned then they can stun you and then they can get the lead.

And the rocks are pretty much useless if the opponent is in front of you, but if they’re behind you it keeps them from getting too close. Okay, can I tell you about some of the
obstacles I placed there? First there was this short hill, and then at the top there were lava pits. The lava doesn’t hurt you. As I said, you’re invulnerable, but the pits are a little hard to get out of. You have to keep jumping and trying to figure out the spot where you can get out of the pit from. Oh, and the whole time you’re in there the character has a speech bubble coming out saying, “Hot! Hot hot hot hot!”

And you programmed all this?

Yes. And then after the hill, it goes back down, there are two cannons that will shoot stunning blips at you. You can actually pick up the cannons, though it’s a bit hard to carry them. And after the cannons there’s another hill. This one gets steeper the higher you get, so near the top you have to zigzag once you get up it, sort of like in real life if you were in a bike or something going up a steep hill. And at the top of the hill, oh by the way, the landscape is yellow and scarlet at the beginning, like the flora and the ground and hills and all that. Though there aren’t any walls.

So are you inside or outside?

You’re outside. You just can’t fall off. The whole thing is like spinning in mid-air, but you can’t fall off. And you can’t see anything below or above. And the sky is set to be the black-and-white style. It gets lighter the higher up you look and darker the lower down you look. Okay. So once you get up that steep hill the terrain changes to lush green grass, and then there’s this sort of extreme thing that has sand beside it. The sand is just a terrain style. It doesn’t actually slow you down. You have to go into the water and go through the water to be able to keep going in the race. And it’s sort of hard to see your character through the water though, so that can be tricky. Once you get out, the grass is sort of not as healthy looking, a duller sort of green, and then there’s ice, snow and ice terrain. And the steep is ‘til the edge. You can get up it but you just have to find the right spots to go through. And at the top of that hill, once you get to the top of there, you go up it and there’s a cliff, and you have to go down the cliff.

You have to go down the cliff?

You very much go over the edge of the cliff. You don’t get hurt, though. But there is an invisible thing at one spot that’s actually pretty much in the center of the area. Say the cliff ranged from here to here, and then there was just nothing on the sides, so the little thing would be right in here. And if you hit it, you get launched into the air.

Is that good or bad?

It’s good because you can get ahead of your opponent quite a ways. Though it won’t necessarily make you win. A bit further on, and by the way it’s ice and snow terrain to the end, but further on there’s an invisible enemy that shoots stun to upset you. You can
kill this one. Not really kill it, destroy it more. It’s sort of like one of those little things
that shoot stuff. You know, that little turret sort of thing that will turn and shoot it at you.
Except it turns toward you when it sees you and shoots little stunning blips.

Is it invisible?

Yeah, it’s invisible.

Then how are you supposed to defeat it?

You can see where the blips are coming from. And you can always jump over it.
Though that’s a bit tricky with all the stunning blips coming from it. But the way to
defeat it is you have to keep shooting missiles at it, so that can take a while unless you
have the other player with you.

But you’re trying to beat the other player, right?

Yes, but you might find that neither of you can manage to jump over it in which case you
would both have to destroy it to progress. So after that enemy, which is completely
blocking the path since the path nearer is down and the enemies like right there, then, by
the way the enemy can hide in the ground temporarily. I set it so it does that when you
get too close or when it’s shot. And then after a few seconds it comes back up. So after
that there’s the stars. You’re supposed to make it to the glowing star. You bump the star,
though, a text box pops up saying, “It’s a fake? Maybe the real one is hidden around here
somewhere.” And you press A, and that gets rid of the text box. And if you look closely
you’ll see that that star wasn’t golden, it was orange.

It’s recording everything, but if you’re whispering…

Don’t transcribe it.

I won’t be able to hear what you’re whispering anyway.

So there’s a sort of a really tight bunch of trees to the northwest corner. It would be
northwest if you’re facing forward. And the trees are white like there’s snow on them,
though they actually look sort of gray, because of the program. Not the best graphics.
Though if there had been a better graphics card, the instructor said that we would be able
to get better graphics, but there wasn’t a better graphics card in the laptops. So I had to
go with light grayish colored trees. And the golden star might be in that, in the patch of
trees, but it’s not. But if it was you’d have to shoot all the trees with missiles to destroy
them. It could be in the tower, which is sort of the tower nearby, which is surrounded by
red and blue rocks. Oh by the way, rocks of your opponents color are the only ones that
make you go swervy. I set it so that there are two and only red rocks affect the blue cycle
and only blue rocks affect the red cycle. The red cycle makes the red rocks and the blue
cycle makes the blue rocks. Okay, so the tower is surrounded by red and blue rocks, so the star could be inside the tower in which case you’d have to make your way through the rocks which make you go all swervy and shoot down the tower. But you can’t just shoot it from a distance because the rocks are blocking it. You’d have to shoot every single one of the rocks first if you wanted to shoot it from a distance. But it’s not in the tower.

Where is it?

The tower’s all sneaky quick place. It could be in the little hut that’s nearby.

But is it in the little hut?

Nope. You would have to shoot down the hut, which is also a takeaway. And now, somewhere sort of in the center in the back, there is a hill. Now because of the blueish icy environment, it’s sort of hard to see the blue water on top of the hill. Blue water like a little hole filled with water that’s on top of the hill. But if you see it and go into it, a message pops up saying, either red team or blue team, whichever one went in the hole, because the golden star is in the hole.

Oh. The hole you cannot see.

Unless you look closely. You can see it if you look closely. But the water blends in so much to the icy blueish environment.

So how long does it take to finish the game?

Well this is the game I was working on for the whole week.

If you’re playing it, how long does it take to get to the end?

It depends on how good you are at it.

Okay.

Another game I started to make was an educational game. It was called, “Find It: An Educational Game.” I couldn’t think of a better title.

What are you trying to find?

Whatever object the little hovering guy called a Koru tells you to find. You control the Koru and he’ll say, “Find red.” And that’s in red. And there are three apples. One’s blue, one’s black, and one’s red. If you touch the blue or black apples, it makes a sound like “...” but if you touch the red one it makes a sound like a coin, you know, like from the Mario games? No, not like that. No, not like that.

A more exciting sound than the other one.
Yeah. And the apples disappear. Then it’ll say, “Find star.” Of course, whoever’s playing this would probably be so young that they’ll need a parent’s help to read it, but... And the text is the color the star is, just to give it a little hint, just in case.

This is the one you didn’t finish it?

This is the one I didn’t finish. But...

When did you first become interested in it?

But, hey hey hey! I wasn’t finished speaking. And if they find the star, there’s a point where it goes to the next stage, but if they touch the ball, it’s a soccer ball, but it’s shaped like a sphere, or the coin, or the hard, it makes a “...” sound again. The next level, the objects are supposed to disappear, and you want it to come down, but instead the objects don’t disappear. A duplicate of them just comes down. I couldn’t figure out why it made duplicates of those instead of the objects I wanted. Because they were supposed to find the fish, and there was a fish, a turtle, and a boat and a plane. You’re supposed to find the fish. But it didn’t work out, and the instructors couldn’t figure out why it didn’t work out either. Actually, how the objects came down is there were four invisible Korus floating up above the field. You can’t see them, you can’t kill them in any way, and they can’t move, but when they hear the coin they’re supposed to make the next objects. And they’re also supposed to get rid of the objects from round two. The apples won’t be there. They either vanish or eat themselves. I forget which I programmed them to do. But either way it looks the same. It doesn’t actually show them being munching up. They just disappear either way.

It’s complicated.

So they’re supposed to drop the object. So, unfortunately, instead of making the star, the coin, the ball and the coin vanish and putting the new objects in, they just make duplicates of the star and the heart and stuff. So I spent awhile trying to figure it out and I couldn’t. And another one I made, it was like a volcano type game. You have to get to the top of the volcano and rescue the Koru at the top. You rescue the Koru by touching it. You have to get to the top of the volcano first. I didn’t really get very far on this game. I only got most of the landscaping done and then the programming working, but there was this big dark mountain of lava and once you get up there’s a hole with the lava in it. And there’s lava at the bottom, too, and there’s going to be lava on the way up. I didn’t manage to put that in yet, I didn’t get a chance. Okay, but the lava, if you touch any lava at all, you lose one health point.

How many do you get to begin with?
You get like either ten or fifty, I haven’t decided. Because if you’re in the lava, it’ll continue until you get out, so if you didn’t realize you were losing health at first, you could end up dying straight away. Because it would be like, -1, -1, -1, -1, -1, -1, -1, -1, -1, then you’re dead. So I think it should start at fifty.

So that’s just if you’re going to be in the lava for a long time.

By mistake. There is a way to get around the lava. There’s always a way. But if you don’t time your actions just right, you might land in the lava. And there is some land that will like get covered up by the lava as the lava flows, gets covered and then uncovered. It doesn’t hurt you when the lava’s not on it, but when the lava’s on it you’re taking damage. And I’ve been trying to think of some more obstacles I can put there, but I’m not sure.

Can I ask you a couple more questions?

Sure. Wait, also! I was trying to make a level sort of based on Sonic, you know, the roll-y old ones. But each time I hit the enemy, I mean got shot by the enemy and died, got shot with the little blips, the blips are like energy balls, by the way, small energy balls. If I died by getting shot by the blips, the whole Koru game lab thing would crash.

Wow, why?

No clue. No one ever found out. But in the end they just had me use missiles instead of blips. Which, in my opinion, I don’t think looked as good, but I never got very far on the game anyway. Oh, and if my health went low and I bumped into the enemy, which also makes me take damage, then I would die and it would reset like it was supposed to, reset so I was back at the beginning like it was supposed to, but if I died by being shot by the blips, the whole thing would crash.

Carrie, let Monique ask you the last question, okay?

Yes.

A couple more questions and then I’ll be done. So, when you get frustrated in school, what happens?

You can tell her.

You know why I ask these questions? I want to learn more.

I don’t really remember. I don’t know why.

Sometimes you get frustrated because you can’t do something.

No, she asked what happens when I get frustrated.
Often you yell out and try to demand attention from the teachers to tell you what to do.

No, not demand attention!

Okay, well that’s what fifth grade teachers told us.

That’s not true!

That you’d raise your voice or you’d lay down on the floor crying like a tantrum thing, and then...

Maybe in second grade.

No, fifth grade. They couldn’t get you to move from the room, and it would take more people to come and get you....

No! And I certainly don’t do that in middle school, that’s for sure.

So what do you do? Do you think you can handle it better than you could when you were in second grade?

Yes. I was in second grade then.

That’s true. Do you get frustrated a lot, or do you think it’s something that doesn’t happen too much?

I don’t keep track of it. I didn’t know I was going to be interviewed.

Okay. Do you feel any different from any of the other students in your school or in your classes? Is that a yes? Okay. And how do you feel about that? Okay. I don’t want to make you feel bad.

I’m sorry you can’t record a nod or a shrug...

Well that’s why I asked you and then said yes. But yeah, I don’t want to make you feel bad. I just want to know some information. That way I know how to help students who may be struggling with the same things. And the last question is...

Are you going to remember to put my nod and my shrug there?

Well that’s why when I asked the question and you nodded I said, “Yes.” So I’ll remember. So she nodded yes, and she shrugged. There you go. Now I’ll remember. What would you want me to know, or your teachers to know, about you? Maybe about the things that you struggle with, like the different noises when you get frustrated.

I also don’t like it if lights are too bright.
Okay. So what do you think is the most important thing?

And I don’t like people pulling my hair, including like if it’s pulls from being combed or being washed, and I don’t like people touching my back. Patting me on the back or touching me on the back. Which mom seems to forget all too often.

Anything else?

Is there anything you would tell your teachers about remembering to turn in homework, class work, or anything? Carrie told me while she was at nature camp she told some of the kids she has trouble with names and faces, so that if she forgets who they are, that’s just something she has problems with or something. So they can try to understand that.

Okay. So, to be more understanding of you? Well now I can’t tell if you’re nodding or shrugging.

Is this making you uncomfortable to talk about this kind of stuff, Carrie? Please answer. Yes or no? Or are you just tired?

Because if it is, we don’t have to talk about it anymore.

Are you tired? We were having blood pressure problems earlier today. We ended up going to the urgent care. She missed a camp this morning, Lego Robotics camp, and they gave her a drip. I think she might have been dehydrated.

What? What? What? What was that? Oh, I was falling asleep! I’m getting tired. What were you saying?

Well do you have anything else to tell me?

I was telling her you were having low blood pressure problems.

Well don’t transcribe that! Oh, I just said it.

Do you have anything else to tell me? About school, or about you?

What you would like teachers to understand about you or know about you that would help them understand?

That’s hard to say. I don’t know, this is a really important question for you and I’d answer it if I could, but…

It’s okay.

Think about it, and we can always send Monique an email, okay?

I’m sorry I’ve been so little help.
No, you’ve been a lot of help for my research. And, I learned a lot about video games! And I learned something about venom versus poison. So I learned three times more stuff than I normally do. But I’m going to turn this off now, okay?
Interview 10B: Jennifer

I talked to Carrie last night about this last night and she said, “Oh, I think that’s good that she’s doing that.”

I’m glad, because I’ve had a few responses to emails that were the students that really wanted to participate. So first I’m going to ask you to state the age and grade level of your child.

Age 13, female, you want names too? Sure. Carrie, and going into eighth grade.

And you can tell me the disabilities that she’s been diagnosed with?

Sure. Asperger’s, ADHD, anxiety and mood disorders, and sensory integration disorder. And then she’s found to be gifted.

Okay. So the first question is, when was your child identified as having a learning disability, or any kind of disability?

Officially in third grade, ADHD. And then it was around the middle of fourth grade we discovered Asperger’s. And then it wasn’t until fifth grade that we officially informed the school, because at first the psychiatrist was saying, “Don’t tell them that,” because they’ll call her autistic and she won’t get the level of academic that she needs. But then were finding you don’t get services you need until you say the exact diagnosis.

And what about identification as gifted?

Early on she was put in gifted classes in first or second grade, but she was in there and they were pulling out certain kids, and then fourth grade all of a sudden nothing. We were told they don’t have a gifted program for fourth graders, and that was odd. And then in fifth grade they had two pull-out programs for math and English, I believe, and they didn’t put her in there. And we were asking about it, and they said that she didn’t score well. Well, I got two different stories. Officially in writing, I only got the one story. We were told that... one of the directors, no, the special ed. teacher at Rocking house elementary school, no, the gifted teacher, not the special ed. teacher, told me that she had no problems with Carrie being in her class, she knew she should be there, but she doesn’t have an aide in the class and without an aide, an assistant, she can’t have her in there. Because if Carrie’s late to class, which she often can be, and if she doesn’t have the materials she needs and has to go get them, she’ll be late, because the class moves fast and it would hold the class back and that if Carrie has any kind of behavioral problems she would be removed from the class immediately and they wouldn’t have time to handle any of that stuff.

And they couldn’t provide her with an aide?
Basically they didn’t have one available. So went I went to the director of giftedness at the district level, I was told, she doesn’t have the requirements you need to have to get into gifted class. One of them was one of the tests you have to take. So I went back over all those things and she said one of them was incomplete, and they scored it anyway. Because she didn’t have time to finish it. And they scored it anyway, and then with the grades and everything else she was up there, but they said that. Oh, so the director told me, “If I can find an aide, we’ll see about getting her in there.” But they couldn’t find an aide and all of a sudden the story changed that she had to have these three requirements. Well they knew that before and weren’t going to hold it against her, because they knew she should be in there.

So at this time she was already in special education?

Yes. She’s been in there for a while. This was in fifth grade. And then, so we were getting angry because we felt she should be in there, at least for reading and writing because everyone says that writing, creative writing, is her true area of giftedness. But they were having some behavioral problems with her, and they were trying to say it was all E.D., emotionally disabled, emotionally disturbed back then but now it’s emotionally disabled, and they would not, the teachers were not accepting the fact that this was her Asperger’s. Neither would the school psychologist. She kept saying these behaviors are not... they just don’t see the Asperger’s in Carrie, they see E.D. They see willful disobedience. Whereas when I took her to get an independent educational evaluation, educational inactive psychological, they said basically they agreed with the schools’ testing evaluations, the grades and scores, but they said their interpretation of the scores was totally off and her low processing speed level, like ninth percentile and twelfth percentile, compared to her GAI of 96th percentile, GAI is general academic intellect, they said that the difference in that was just because she had ADHD and she would get distracted when she was taking tests, and she chose to not change her method and speed up on the timed test. What was interesting, though, because they tested her in third grade and fifth grade, almost exactly the same scores. Not very different. Processing speed when up from like ninth to twelfth percentile or something like that. Math fluency went from second percentile to something right around there. But then they knew that, I didn’t bring the scores with me, in fact I have these graphed out I can show you some time. When we had Pete Bright look at these, with special education, and because he was looking at it saying, they use discrepancies, anyone with these discrepancies would have these frustrations and have behavior problems.

Because it’s a very large discrepancy.

It was five standard deviations. And we, anyway the local psychologist, private psychologist, was saying that all of these symptoms should have pointed the school to Asperger’s or to do further testing way back in third grade when they had those two
scores way out of whack compared to other ones, and they didn’t, and then it took two years before we were finally officially being diagnosed with Asperger’s, and that could have been diagnosed earlier possibly.

So what has it been like in sixth and seventh grade?

In sixth grade, they said she should be in gifted program, but in the middle of fifth grade she had gotten physically aggressive, which she had done in third grade too and they had to physically restrain her a few times, but the teachers were really good working with her and made leaps and bounds. Fourth grade none of that happened, pulling out of resources for her, it was totally just, “Here, you get candy if you behave well,” and these two teachers were clueless how to handle her or help her. And the other teachers working on social skills, anger management, trying to calm your anxiety, things like that, but these two teachers weren’t doing any of that. And by the time she got to fifth grade that teacher was older and didn’t know much about it either until a new person came and she was there, and stuff was going on, and anyway, at one point Carrie got suspended, and that was before this. She got physically aggressive. Oh, she had gotten physically aggressive because they had taken some books away and put them on the teacher’s desk. After school that day she went back to get the books from the teacher’s desk because the teacher didn’t give them to her after class. She was having this problem. We found out later that she was sitting in the back of the room. Her IEP said she should have preferential seating to reduce distractions. We found out they were putting her in the back of the room in almost all her classes, so that her distraction would be reduced for everybody else, but she wouldn’t be distracting other people. Well, when she sits in the back...

She’s distracting herself!

She’s looking at a book, or reading under her desk, she’s drawing, she even would have her book open. My husband went and observed twice and she was sitting in the side of the room and he thought, “Oh!” She was getting in trouble for doing some origami folding stuff the class before, and this class the teacher said to get out her book, so she got out her textbook, and started working. Twenty minutes, thirty minutes had gone by, and the teacher walked by and said, “Carrie! You’re supposed to be doing…” and she was drawing. She had been drawing the whole time. Jim, my husband, thought, well, she’s working, this is good! But she’s over there drawing.

But the teacher hadn’t checked.

The teacher hadn’t checked it. So then she was constantly getting complaints, we were getting complaints, about her coming into class, drawing, reading, or doing origami, missing the instruction, the review and instruction, given out individual material, wouldn’t know what to do with it, and then she would get frustrated, and complain, and
get in a panic because she didn’t know what to do with it. “You haven’t taught this, how are we supposed to know this?!” And she tells us, “At the beginning of class, Mom, they do review, and I know it. I don’t need to review it.” What we kept trying to stress to her is, “While you’re reviewing, they’re going to start adding in little extra things.” So eventually they moved her to the front of the classroom, with some IEP meetings, they got her to the front of the classroom, so that improved somewhat. But then she had gotten on some drug changes, mediation changes, and was homebound for a week coming off her meds, and then another week coming off her other meds, because she was having these tic problems where she was throwing her head back and hurting her neck and stuff, so the psychiatrist thought that she was having, first they thought she was having a reaction to the Aderol or Vivantz, one of those she was on, and then they took her off that, then they took her off Abilify which she’d been on to kind of calm down obsessions, and she has some OCD-type behaviors, and anyway, coming off that she got way hyper and got more defiant, and we finally ended up having to take her in because we were having to restrain her several times a day, sit and hold her down, keeping her from throwing stuff, kicking, biting, whatever. We finally had to take her in to the hospital at VCU, mental hospital for kids, and when she was in there, when she came back from there, the school had said, “She needs to go to an ED classroom.”

Solely ED?

Solely ED, in a different school, in the middle of fifth grade. And we disagreed with that because the psychologist we had had said that ED methods of punishment and managing behavior problems will not work on Carrie. They will often exasperate the problem. So here we are having a psychologist saying, “No ED,” ED methods of discipline are not effective with her, will make things worse, and now they’re trying to put her in an ED classroom. And then so we fought back so she wasn’t moved into there. Eventually she got put back in the mental hospital again for a few days, and when she came back, they said, “We think she needs to have a shortened school day.” So we said, “Okay, we agree with that.” We think she was getting stressed out in the class that she was in. By the end of the school day, they would be telling me, for instance, we got an email a couple days before she was put in the self-contained classroom, got an email from the teacher toward the end of the day, saying, “She’s brought a toy in, and she’s holding it and holding it and won’t let go of the toy and she’s got her head down refusing to do her work.” And we said, that’s a sign of being overstimulated and she needs to chill out. She’s doing that probably because she needs to be removed from the classroom or be allowed to go somewhere quiet and chill out for a while. Well then they finally wrote back, we’re getting emails saying, “She’s going better, blah blah blah,” and then we’re getting emails about, there was an outburst or something and we couldn’t remove her from the classroom because she refused to leave because she was upset. So that happened numerous times where she would throw herself on the floor yelling, screaming, because
she didn’t know what to do with materials, something like that, and then they had a hard
time getting her out of the classroom, so she was being disruptive to the other kids and
their learning. So she was spending a lot of time out in time outs, out in the hallway.

Losing a lot of instructional time.

Instructional time... so anyway, they finally decided they were going to put her in for two
hours a day in the self-contained classroom and smaller settings, probably be calmer for
her. Well, one hour that day was centers, where you go to the library, P.E., media, all
that stuff. So she’s only getting one hour of instruction. So I was having to be the liaison
between all the homework stuff and stuff coming home. Eventually, so she was in there
one day, had a referral during the day, was in that classroom, very structured. Oh, the
day before she went to self-contained, she was in the principal’s office, they had her sit
out in the hall, she was allowed to read Harry Potter the whole day. She loves to read.
That’s not going to work.

That’s not a punishment.

Then they put her in self-contained, lot of structure, whole lot of structure, lot of rules.
She’s coming in three quarters into the year, in like April. She’s coming into this
classroom, got a referral by the end of the day. Again, she’d gone to science class, going
out of the self-contained to regular general ed. for science and math and coming back in
for other things. She had gone out, come back, had geography to do. The teacher gave
her geography homework and she said, “No!” and threw it in the trash. She made her
pull it out of the trash can. She finally got it out of the trash can and then crawled under
the table and wouldn’t get out. So we’re getting... I guess we didn’t get a phone call
then. We hear later that she was under the table and couldn’t get her out and she had
gotten a referral because she shoved a table and chair on one of the teachers in the
classroom and it bumped them. Later, the next day, we get a call about ten in the
morning, nine in the morning. School started at 8:30, so about 10:00, an hour and a half
in the day. “You’ve got to come quickly.” So I go over there. All the kids are out of
their classroom, moved to a different classroom. She’s sitting there. The room looks like
a train hit it. She had turned everything upside-down, had bitten the vice principal. They
were chasing her to try to restrain her and she bit him. So he found out later, oh, and in
the meantime, I had been reading up on a lot about Asperger’s, giftedness, totally getting
into all this, doing research, because we were trying to fight this going into an ED
classroom in a different school and all that, and my husband was unemployed at the time
so he was doing a lot of research and getting online and doing all kinds of stuff too. So at
this point I realized that we had learned about this bell curve thing for Asperger’s and
some autistic curves that when they’re advancing into a meltdown or explosion that
you’ve got to try to get them to calm down before it escalates. Once it escalates and it
gets into a full melt-down or explosion, whatever you want to call it, then there’s no logic
because her logic has gone out the window and you have to get her to calm down before you’re able to give her consequences or discuss what’s been going on or teach her anything valuable. And if you’re doing it on the way down, it can send it right back up again. You’ve got to let her go all the way down, and then when she’s calmed down, you can go back and talk about the situation, because she’s more teachable then, she’s usually wanting forgiveness then and feels bad about what happened, those kinds of things. So we had been pointing that out to them, and here they were. I go into the room and I’m sitting down with Carrie and she’s crying, I’m holding her, they had already gotten her to re-state what had happened to her, and I was surprised at that, and they were trying to get her to tell me what had happened, and she was embarrassed, with her head down in my lap, not wanting to talk. Finally I just said, “I’m really glad she was able to tell y’all what happened. That’s enough for now. She’ll tell me another time, and we don’t need to go over this right now.” And the teachers were livid, and the principal. They thought, no, she needs to calm down. I need to get her home.” Well, they suspended her for three days. Oh, she wasn’t on half-days then, she was on full days then. And when they suspended her then brought her back, they said she needed to go on the partial days. That’ when they put her in for two hours a day. That’s what it was. Still the self-contained. So she’d go to self-contained for an hour, go to centers for an hour, come home. Eventually it took until the last week of school to get her back in school full time.

And can you just repeat again what year this was?

Fifth grade.

Fifth grade, okay.

So she was gradually getting back to school. The whole time during fifth grade, we were told, when we couldn’t get her in the gifted classroom because there was no aide, they were arranging it to have a William and Mary graduate student come and give her private classes every other week. Never happened. I went and I complained, I went and inquired, I went, and they said, “Oh, well, she’s getting a differentiated education plan, a DEP, and the teachers in their general ed. classrooms will be giving her extra work and more creative work, gifted work, going along with the gifted teacher.” I never got a report. I started reading about that, reviewing it. I should have gotten a report mid-semester and at the end of the semester, so I asked about that. It took finally getting a report mid-summer after fifth grade to get a report.

Just one report.

It was on the first semester, nothing on the second semester. There was nothing in there. Basically they did nothing. So all this was complained about to Tonoa middle school. They knew she should be in the gifted program also. She was making 600s on reading
SOLs, and high-passing like 590-somehtings on the other ones she was taking. Not that that’s the only marker for giftedness, but. So in sixth grade they put her in, because she had been in self-contained at Rocking house the last year, the last part of the year, few months, they put her in self-contained again so that she would move out of there to go to two classes, math and English, or math and science, something like that, outside, and then come back in. That was working great. She had a great special ed. teacher that year who was very, best we’ve ever had, very much an advocate for the child, and very much understood Carrie’s ADHD and her Asperger’s and was able to work with her very well. Used timers. Timers work like a charm. Other teachers were refusing to use timers in elementary school. They get holding the gifted English program as a little dangling thing, “If you do better at this, if you behave, you get to go in there, if you behave, do this and this...” Well eventually, in seventh grade, they put her in SIGHTS English, but they still kept threatening to kick her out of there because she didn’t want to do the work. But she made it through, and this coming year they’re going to put her in the history and the English gifted program, SIGHTS class. In sixth grade also she got really sick and was out homebound for many months, and we were having to get homebound teaching and all that. She had that going on too, so she was out of school more than she was in school sixth grade. They think she had rheumatic fever and it caused this [??? 22:28] distorted movements happening, very scary, and then she got pneumonia. Movement stopped, came back, and then she couldn’t walk, couldn’t fix her balance, and she had to use a walker and a wheelchair, got weak...long story. This past year she made it to school, absent more times than you’d like, but got through pretty well. Still the teachers were saying, none of them seem to think she has a processing disorder.

Even with her slow processing speed?

Of course. And the fifth grade teacher... My son has a processing disorder. He has ADHD. I just don’t see slow processing in Carrie at all. This was when they were all fighting, trying to get her out to this other school.

So in general would you say that your interactions with teachers have been good?

Much better.

Much better now?

Especially this past year. Middle school is better, and most of the teachers will email me directly and let me know things. The special ed. teacher, they switched her to a different case manager, which we were upset with because we really liked that first year teacher, but this one has been pretty good. She’s pretty consistent and fairly firm with Carrie. Still using candy to bribe her with, but... She steps in when she needs to with the teachers in terms of getting them to modify assignments, because Carrie hates to do review work and repetitious work. It had gotten where she’s allowed to use the computer to do most
of her keyboarding, typing, wording, test-taking too sometimes, because she gets tired writing. The problem is, this past year, she’s gotten to the point where she wants to go over and work on Pixel. Spriting, they call it. Pixel is for your animation, and you change colors and all that, or she’ll go in and go on the internet and start going on Pokémon sites.

Instead of writing?

Yeah, instead of doing research she’s supposed to be doing. So that’s a problem. I’ve suggested getting the Alpha Smarts.

What’s that?

It’s a word-processing computer-like thing that only does word-processing.

Oh, I get it.

It only shows you like three sentences. In the one that she had that she finally gave to us it was hard to type and some of the keys would stick and stuff. It was a pain, you couldn’t type fast on it, so it was a real bother, but they said they’d try to find her a better working one.

So is she being challenged enough in her classes now?

Well she knows in the English class, it was interesting, because in the gifted English class we were told, “Oh, you’re going to love this class because it’s a lot of creative writing and you really like to do creative writing.” They didn’t really do much creative writing at all. They did a lot of hard reading. Extremely hard, advanced reading. I was amazed. And having to do reports on a lot, and they were given questions and had to answer these questions, and use full sentences where you restate the question and answer it and give examples, which is all good practice, but Carrie hates doing that, and she would refuse to do that sometimes, and I’m thinking, okay, where’s the creative writing projects in this class? Because there weren’t any. A few times, twice maybe, they had to write something like a letter from someone else’s point of view, so that was a creative thing, but a lot of this was just answering questions related to the reading that they’ve been doing, and I would say, this is not her doing the creative writing that we were told would be in here. So she was kind of turned off by that. She realizes that in the regular English class they were reading much easier stories and it wasn’t her level of reading, and she was getting a lot more out of the SIGHTS even though it was harder, because she had to do a lot more work. And so she agreed she should be in that class, and wanted to be in it and was excited that she was going to be in SIGHTS history, and she loves history for some reason I don’t… I don’t like history very much.

Yeah, I don’t understand that either.
Memorizing dates, and... now that I’m an adult and living in colonial places and things the history comes up and I think, why didn’t I listen to more about history so I could remember some of this stuff.

I vaguely remember learning about this...

But she gets into it and she likes it, so that’s good for her. She’s a really good reader, and so she has a really advanced vocabulary, and I think that’s partly where people realize, to hear her speak, when she communicates directly, she’s not your typical Asperger’s girl, because she’s very outgoing and she will come up to you and start talking right away in a room of strangers. So when people test her, they’re usually amazed by that and they say, “Oh, she doesn’t have any pragmatic language problems” or this and that, but when you get her in with a group of kids, and she starts communicating, you do see the language problems. We finally got her in social skills group class at a local OT/speech therapy place, but it was only a few sessions and then they stopped for summer. But Carrie’s finally sort of realizing why she should be in there.

So she’s slowly sort of realizing?

I think that having the vocabulary is amazing and people realize how smart she is by some of the questions she’s asking and digging into things, but it also gets tiring because she’s asking questions and pushing the limits on everything, and that gets tiring as a teacher or a parent. Because of the high vocabulary and the fact that she’s so outgoing to start with, people think, “She doesn’t have a processing problem” or “she doesn’t have any kind of disability.” And so they don’t understand when she doesn’t quite get something that has to do with social skills or relationships between people or things like that. They don’t realize that or they think, sometimes you’ll think... We were in Disney World one time and I realized, she didn’t get that. Something that should have been obvious. Like, “She didn’t get that, what we were just talking about,” and she’s asking questions and my husband’s thinking “...” and I’m like, “Jim, she really didn’t get that. She’s clueless on that.” And he went and explained it and she was okay. So thinking about just driving over here today about common sense, and I’m thinking, I had a roommate in college, she was a graduate student and I was an undergraduate. She had no common sense. I couldn’t understand how someone could have zero common sense practically, or that’s what it seemed like, very little common sense. Very nice girl, pretty smart, but no common sense. Didn’t put two and two together on a basic level. And I got to thinking, I wonder if that had something to with Asperger’s or something where you’re not noticing the social things around you, you’re not picking up these cues, and that’s probably part of what we consider common sense. It just makes sense how that does or this reacts to that or something, and I don’t know. I’ve been thinking about that. I know sometimes the teachers will think she’s just trying to get away with something but she doesn’t really understand something.
So do her teachers understand her dual exceptionality? Do they understand about her ADHD and Asperger’s and how that works with her giftedness, or are they just completely not understanding?

That I don’t know, because this SIGHTS teacher seems to be very intolerant of certain things. For instance, she threatened Carrie with not allowing her to eat lunch the next day or the next time she left her lunch bag in her locker. She’s supposed to bring it with her to English class and then they go as a class to the lunch room, and we have her take her lunch most days of the week, not every day, and she would forget to bring it to class and had to go back and get it. Well, they go right by her locker on the way to the lunchroom, but this teacher got upset and told her she would not and so Carrie started yelling, “My mother will be angry at you if you don’t let me eat my lunch!” and the teacher got mad that she was yelling at her and said something to her, and then Carrie got more angry, so she got a referral for yelling at this teacher and talking back at her. Well I got furious when I heard that she had been told she wouldn’t be allowed to eat. And so I got to looking online and looking into that, and that’s a big no-no.

Yeah, you can’t do that.

So I went to the principal, and wrote a letter, and the principal wrote back saying they were going to talk to Carrie about that. Turns out she didn’t get a referral, she got a reprimand, but they told me it was a referral, but I never got a referral notice. It was a reprimand notice or something, but I thought it was a referral until later when they corrected me on it. So anyway, I told the principal, Carrie should get an apology from the teacher for telling her she would not be allowed to have her lunch because that scared Carrie and made her upset. If she hadn’t been told that, she probably wouldn’t have yelled back at the teacher. But no, they didn’t see that at all. They didn’t do anything about that. And I don’t know, to me, it’s like, they say, “We got her notes listed in her locker door. It’s in her planner.” Well if she doesn’t remember to look at her planner or look at the locker list to see what to bring to each class, it won’t do any good. For a while they had someone going with her to her locker, making sure she had everything. So there was stuff going on with that. But this teacher would… also, we’re trying to encourage social skills and things but then Carrie would say, “I don’t want to do this with a group, I want to do this by myself.” And the teacher would say, “You know, that will give you more work to do, because if you did it in a group you would have a third of the project to do.” “That’s okay.” And they let her do it. Didn’t modify the assignment at all, sent her home… Later we’re finding out about this and it was supposed to have been a group project, and she had the whole thing to do by herself, so we wrote and asked about this. “Well she insisted on it being an individual project” and blab blah blah… part of her IEP is to improve social skills, and part of it is supposed to be doing group work and encouraging her and guiding her in how to work with groups. So that wasn’t happening much.
So how is she socially?

And then they... I wrote back and made sure it was very clear and, “Please just answer the rule. You’ve got to do it. And someone needs to be overseeing that she and the group are communicating properly and reacting the right way so she can be guided if she’s not acting the right way. Socially, she says she has a lot of good friends. She’s been making progress a lot this past year with that. But when she says she has a best friend, it’s a best friend in Mississippi that she sees twice a year, do they write each other or call each other in between visits? No. And the other girl in Mississippi, her “best friend,” certainly has other friends that are much closer friends than Carrie. They used to get along really well. I think now the other girl has gotten mature a lot faster than Carrie has, but she still is nice to Carrie and wants to be with her some and stuff, but Carrie is clueless on really what a true best friend is. But she’ll say she has lots of friends, but they’re more like acquaintances, the kids behind the house, there are twins behind the house that are a grade younger that’ll go over and play sometimes. They’re friends, but they don’t call her over to invite her over. Every now and then they would come over, but otherwise it’s Carrie inviting them over or inviting them to do something. They’re usually happy to come over. She’s only been invited to about two birthday parties. Never to a sleepover. We’ve had sleepovers and invited people to our house. She finally made a friend last year in middle school, and the girl ended up having to go to the new school when they opened the new school. We do get them together from time to time. She just spent four days with her this summer while her mom was out of town, and that girl’s been very good for her. She’s kind of an outcast herself, and she says so. It’s interesting because they both like Pokémon, they both will still do dress-up now again even at thirteen, and do some kid stuff, yet this other girl is very mature, very well developed in terms of body and everything, and has hormones for boys and stuff, but still likes to do some of the other stuff like Carrie likes to do. And Carrie is clueless about the boy thing and hormone thing. She knows about it, but it’s not affecting her at all. But she has... she met another girl in math class who had just moved there from Florida. They both like Pokémon.

So Pokémon is her big thing?

If someone likes Pokémon, she’s right there with her. If they don’t like Pokémon, “Oh,” goes to the next person. Won’t even listen to them. So we’re working on that. She just went to nature camp for two weeks. A lot of people were coming up to her. Really the first hour we were there, she met these two little girls, from Williamsburg actually. Very inclusive. She was including them, recognizing their faces and names and I thought, “Wow, this is great! I feel so good about this.” At the end of the session, one she was hugging but almost kind of ignoring. “Carrie, don’t you see she’s got tears in her eyes because she’s going to miss everybody!” I said, “You guys won’t miss each other. You can get together.” And that made the girl feel better, she said, “Yeah, I can have you
come over, we can go swimming together or whatever!” But then all these other kids were saying, “Bye Carrie! Bye Carrie!” wanting to come give her a hug, and she said, “Who are you?” or “What’s your name?” Here we go again. One girl was like, “Mary!” and Carrie’s looking at her face like, “Oh yeah, Mary! Blah blah blah, Pokémon!” and then she knew who she was, the one little girl who liked Pokémon, and she’s like, “See mom? There are other people who really like Pokémon too!” And this little girl really liked Carrie but Carrie didn’t even know her name. But once she said her name then she realized, “Oh, that’s who that is,” she knew. But she still has a big problem connecting faces with names, and letting that connect. And that’s… people will, “We’ve been in the same class.” One girl said, “I’ve been in your major class!” So they’d been in the same class every other day, three hours together, every other day, doing stuff together, and she didn’t remember the girl’s name, and this girl was kind of hurt that she didn’t remember her name. “I was in your major class, remember?” And once she pointed it out, Carrie remembered everything, but…

So, from your perspective, how do you think she understands her exceptionalities?

She understands a little bit. She knows that Asperger’s, like she knows that the founder of Pokémon, I don’t know his name, she’ll tell you his name. Japanese guy.

I don’t remember but I think he died recently.

I don’t know. I’m sure she knows that if he did.

She’d tell you.

Anyway, he had Asperger’s. And she knows certain famous people with Asperger’s and she knows that there are a lot of pros that come with Asperger’s like creativeness and things like that, but then she knows that there are things that are more of a struggle for her. But she’s also very very bright, and she knows how to pull strings and try to get her way for a lot of stuff, so that’s difficult for teachers and parents to know, when is this truly a disability problem and when is this just Carrie being smart and knowing how to play the game or whatever to get her way.

So there’s two more questions.

That’s how I can see teachers having a difficult time with that too unless they know more about understanding the Asperger’s part of it and the ADHD part of it.

So what is she like at home?

Easily gets frustrated. Easily… we’re trying to get her to calm down. She’s gotten physically aggressive once this year and that’s calmed down again, and getting her to calm down before we’ll have the discussion further and things like that. She’s still pretty
obsessive over video games and Pokémon and everything. And we have to limit the amount of video games she can play because that gets her overstimulated and it tends to make her a little more aggressive and defiant when she does too much of that.

And when you were realizing that she had these disabilities and that she’s gifted, did you find much information or support for yourself? Like support groups or just information for dual exceptional kids?

What’s interesting is when I went to the gifted program here at William and Mary her first summer, I think it was, one of the mothers, I was talking to her about Carrie, and they were talking about their child, and they said something about, “Have you heard of Asperger’s?” and I had never heard the word. So I went home and looked it up. I thought, “Well, maybe, yes, no, yes, no, maybe, I don’t know.” Then I mentioned it to a psychiatrist, “No, she doesn’t have any form of autism, no no no.” Well, within a year, he’s going, “I think it’s Asperger’s, mom!” and he said, “Girls are very different from boys.” But when I read about the difference between the girls and the boys, she’s definitely not the wallflower, quiet, hold it in, the anxiety in type. She’s more, let it out. Although we’ve done the test, the neuro-mapping EEG or QEG or whatever it is, brain mapping.

I haven’t heard of that.

They hook up the electrodes and print out all this stuff and it shows you what parts of the brain are connecting to which parts of the brain at rest and with your eyes open doing things. And it shows when you get agitated it pointed out specifically that she’s overworking in her frontal lobes, so the executive skills are trying to overwork, trying their best to work and make things together. So she’s really having to work hard, way more than the normal... you know what z scores are? She was something about three levels out or two levels out, way out there, dark red, overworking from average, and then dark blue was way underworking or not working at all. And when she gets stressed out, whether it be physical, mental, emotional, environmental, any kind of stress, when it’s bothering her, to a certain level her brain, especially when it gets up there, her brains shuts down. The communications that were supposed to be happening back in here are not there, and it explains why she’s irrational and she can’t be logical when she gets upset. And there’s the bell curve. I thought, “Wow, that’s really interesting.” So we were doing neuro-therapy with her for a while, neuro-feedback. She was sick in January, February, so we had to stop that for a while, then we were getting busy with all this other stuff, and we haven’t done it this summer. We have to assess whether we’re going to go back again, because it was way down in Newport News. But anyway, the brain mapping was very interesting to see and how that correlated with the processing speed and when you get stressed out. He said, “She has a lot of anxiety.” Carrie doesn’t think she has a lot of anxiety. She’ll tell the counselors at school, that when we see signs of being more
anxious like when she starts picking scabs and picking things in her head and doing fidgeting things or doing stuff like this where she’s doing it more and more, we know something’s bothering her, something’s causing tension and more stress, and we need to calm down or find out what’s going on. And we found out she was being hassled at school some, and that she reported it right away. Then we found out there’s someone else who hassles her now and then but not that big a deal, and she tries to ignore them, but this other one’s right in science class and they threatened to kill her or hurt her or something, and that got her really upset. And so they were called to the office eventually and talked to, and the teachers were alerted to keep an eye out in class. She would never work with him as a partner in that class and stuff like that. But most of the time we ask her, “Is there anybody bullying you at school? Is there anything like that?” and she’ll say, “No, no, no.” “Anything bothering you at school?” She’ll say “No!” but then she’s not wanting to go to school that day. Or she’s complaining about being sick or has a stomachache. The psychologist that we have now that had done the IE said, and the pediatrician also, says they think a lot of these elements she has to do with psychological, from anxiety. She’s somehow putting it on herself or something else is bringing it on her and she’s bringing it on herself. She’s getting stomachaches and these stomach problems and headaches, even sore throats, even rashes, they think she can bring on herself. Not on purpose, but it’s happening.

So do you find that you’re receiving support from her school? From the teachers and administration?

Not in terms of helping... like, we’ve tried to get OT to work with her, a psychologist to work with her to help reduce stress, things like that, and they’ll say, the guidance counselor said, “I brought her into the office. She says nothing’s bothering her.” So they let her go. But then we still see the picking going on and some of the stuff that’s usually a sign of high stress or something bothering her, and then she’s still missing school and things. But she’ll say she loves school. She’ll say she wishes she could be there if her stomach wasn’t hurting or something, or we do the Tums and the Gas-X and all those kinds of things, but...

Her behavior shows something different?

Different. And I can’t get the school to help out with any of that, to like, “Why don’t you take her out and give her some?” Originally we had it, in fifth grade we finally got it in her IEP that she was going to have regular sensory breaks throughout the day. That you take her out, let her do some sensory play or whatever it is she was wanting, prickly things or whatever, noise things or whatever, and help to calm her down. Or let her take a walk somewhere and come back in. Go out and catch bees in the garden. She likes to do that, and then she gets stung. Then bring her back in. They don’t do it. But then they’ll complain when she gets escalated, and... like, the one day a couple days before
she got put in a self-contained classroom, when they were telling me about the stitch-it toy she had, and she was frantically holding this toy and turning it around, and she had her head down and refusing to do the work. I was writing back and telling them, write back and tell them she’s overstimulated. She needs to chill out. She needs to be removed from the class or given a corner to sit in. Let her read for a few minutes or put her head down. Probably she’ll revive and do work later.

Does this happen in the self-contained classroom, or both that and the gifted classes?

Actually, in seventh grade they took her out of self-contained, so she wasn’t in there at all. And she did okay, fine. They also, we pointed out that she really needs to be at the front of the classroom. If she’s not at the front of the classroom... but they had her at the front of the classroom, most classes in the middle-front or near the special ed. teacher. They also had her in classes where there was either an aide or a special ed. teacher in that classroom. So there was always a second adult in there that would help with things.

Carrie’s one who will not turn in homework unless it’s asked for, and if she doesn’t get it done in class or the next day, they don’t ask for late homework or missed class work. They don’t ask for it so she doesn’t turn it in, and they’ve started deducting grades for it now to try to get her to be more responsible and to remember. But in her IEP it says they’re supposed to ask her up to three times. But they don’t. So you’re not really getting the assistance that you need. But then I don’t know whether it’s frustrating for me because I don’t know, should she just be allowed… should they not ask for the homework at all?

Well I mean, if it’s written into the IEP they should be doing it.

But they’ve done things like use visual cues, like putting a red spot or a green or yellow spot on her desk or something to give her warnings, you need to calm down or you need to pay attention, stuff like that. But we found out in this English class that she was in that she got in trouble for being disruptive and for not paying attention when they were reviewing, stopping going over learning new material. Now, the special ed. teacher was absent that day. Found out for the first time she was in the back of the classroom that class. So I went all, “It’s in her IEP, blah blah blah.” Well usually the special ed. teacher’s there, and she keeps an eye on her and makes sure she’s not doing origami or drawing or whatever, and that day she was absent, so she got away with it.

Yeah, but the teacher should be helping her.

So that kind of stuff goes on.

Okay. And the last question would be, is there anything you want educators or me or anyone to know, not just about your child but about students with dual exceptionalities in general?
Well, from what I’ve read and experienced, I think that probably most problems I see in schools is the lack of understanding, and partly, lack of education. They need to truly understand the disabilities in order to understand how that plays into being gifted. And seeing that that can be a bit frustration, knowing that you’re smart but then realizing that you don’t… like, she gets upset if she can’t do something. She’ll panic and sometimes blow up for that reason. That’s why she’ll blow up when she didn’t know the instructions or didn’t know how to do something, because it was her fault for not paying attention, but to her, “They didn’t go over this, we don’t know this, you can’t expect us to do eighth grade work when we’re in seventh grade!” or something, and she panics because she didn’t know how to do it. She’s thinking, usually things are easy for her to do, so that’s frustrating for her.

So educating the students and the teachers?

And the teachers, to realize, it’s okay to ask questions but you’ve got to pay attention, and to try to get her to focus better to realize that paying attention, even though it’s review, you can say, “I know that, I know that,” you can feel good about yourself because you knew that already. And you can use that to help someone else who doesn’t know something already, to try to channel her in that way. So that’s been… I feel like they don’t do some of those things. But there’s large classrooms… it’s hard for a teacher.

I know that even in my undergrad we didn’t get much teaching even about gifted students.

And for general ed. teachers, they have a little class about various, you know, you get a brief introduction to some of these disabilities… you don’t know that much about them. And typically, or at least that what it seems like, so they’re not going to understand it typically. But you can’t be an expert on everything. But when you read special ed. law and stuff, it says they’re supposed to know about these things, about the disabilities your child has if the child’s in their classroom, yet they don’t. So that’s what’s really frustrating, and I don’t know the answer, to try and get more general ed. teachers to be required to take their continuing education courses or something, to learn more about them to or to do more in-service classes for these. I know we offered, we had a behaviorist working with us in fifth grade when all that trouble was going on, and trying to get her to switch classrooms and all that, the behaviorist specializing in autism was volunteering to come in and do free classes for the school. They didn’t take her up on it. Do a work session with the teachers and staff.

Thank you. That was really good information.

So I don’t know, some more… I think one more thing is I’m on the special education advisory committee and we’ve been really pushing for disability awareness to be taught in the schools. Faculty, staff, and students, and not just students, but faculty/staff need to
be aware of it more, and the struggles, because they can help see it when it’s happening, the bullying is happening or to help guide them along. So I figured some of this just comes down to disability awareness also.

Do you think the teachers have a good understanding of giftedness?

Probably not. Otherwise I think she would have gotten a differentiated education plan, and everything would have been great. But we were told they gave her extra work to do.

And that’s it.

Instead of changing it to modify it so it’s actually gifted work. Which also brings me to the AP classes in high school. You go into the gifted program, you go into advanced placement classes. Well, you don’t have to be gifted to go into the advanced placement classes, so it’s not really a gifted class. I heard that the gifted advisory committee is working on that, that they’re realizing that’s the case, and they actually mentioned at a school board meeting at the end of the year that they needed to have more... I forget what the wording was, but somehow be more inclusive of students with dual exceptionalities. So that’s good to hear. I thought, I should really go to the gifted advisory meetings even though I can’t be on both committees, I could go to their meetings. That might be a goal this year to try to go to some. Then I can be a special ed. voice at those meetings.

Anything else?

That’s it.
Interview 11A: Justin

Do you know why I’m interviewing you?
Because I’m dual exceptional.
All these kids know these words!
Because my mom told me.
Because your mom told you! That seems to be the running thing. Do you know what that means?
It means that I’m gifted and I have a special disability. Again from my mom.
And what is your special disability?
Dysgraphia.
Anything else?
ADHD?
Okay. What are your areas of strength? What do you think you’re the best at?
Math.
Math. What do you like about math?
I don’t really know.
You don’t really know, you’re just good at it?
And I also like it.
You also like it? Do you like anything else besides math?
Yeah, pretty much everything except writing.
Pretty much everything but writing. And why don’t you like writing?
Because it’s hard for me to write.
What’s hard about it? Is it the actual writing, or coming up with ideas?
Both.
Both? Okay. And can you tell me about your classes, your classroom? How is that? How’s school for you?
Great.

Great? What’s great about it?

Everything except writing.

Everything except writing. Do you like your teachers?

Yeah.

You have one teacher, right, since you’re coming from fifth grade? Or did you have more than one teacher?

I had two.

And do you think they were helpful?

Yeah!

Yeah. So they were helpful to you. Have you ever had any really great experiences with teachers that were really helpful?

Well, there was this was this one time when my switch class was in a dunk tank.

So a dunk tank. What about in class? Do you think they understand how to help you?

No, not really.

No, not really? Why? What makes you say that?

Well I mean, they never give me really advanced work, and that’s sort of what I want.

So you want more challenging work?

Yeah. Because I already know most of the stuff. Well it’s true!

And have you had any bad experiences with teachers in class?

My fourth grade teacher in OAC.

What happened?

What my mom said.

Well, can you tell me what she said?

My fourth grade teacher thinks that I was lazy and sometimes I stayed home so I could go to the library and she thought I might be slacking off or something.
And how did that make you feel?

Upset.

Upset? How do you get along with your peers in your class?

Great.

Great with all of them?

Yeah. Well, mostly.

Mostly? What about the other times?

I mean, there are some people I don’t get along with.

And do you have any good friends at school?

Yeah.

What do you like to do with them?

Play outside, play video games....

So what do you like to do, in general? At home, what do you like to do?

Video games.

Video games? Anything else?

I play with the cats. Play with my cats. I’m going to have to put a piece of duct tape on her.

Alice, if you can’t stop talking we’re going to have to go out in the hall.

So play video games...

Play with our cats, play four square, run around outside...

And do you think you ever had any problems with kids in your class?

I have a problem with my sister.

With kids in your class?

Well my third grade classmates...

And what was your problem?
Oh, nothing really. No matter what I do, she would hate me for whatever.

And do you think you behave well in all of your classes?

Not all of them.

Not all of them? What kinds of things do you do that are not great behavior?

Speaking out.

And do you do that a lot?

Yeah.

Why?

Because I don’t raise my hand. I’m very impulsive.

And what about at home? How do you behave at home?

Hmm. How do I behave at home? Usually fighting with her.

And how do you feel about having dysgraphia and ADHD and being gifted?

Well I didn’t really know about it until people told me.

When did they tell you?

When I was diagnosed, in my first ten visits to a therapist. And I went to that therapist for about a year and a half and I didn’t know it was that long. And we got tacos afterward.

Do you mean the occupational therapist or do you mean Dr. Huff?

Dr. Huff.

Who’s Dr. Huff?

He’s the psychologist.

So before that, before you were diagnosed, did you think you had any trouble in school?

Once my mom told me, yeah.

So you thought that you didn’t like writing?

Yeah.
Okay. What do you think is the hardest thing about having ADHD and dysgraphia and also being very smart? What do you think is the hardest thing about that?

The hardest part about being smart is that people just keep bothering you. They’re saying, “Hey, could you come over here and tell me the answer to this?” and stuff.

Really? And do you think you ever have any trouble or feel bad when writing gets in the way, or when you’re impulsive?

I’m impulsive about being impulsive.

Can you explain that to me?

I don’t think about not thinking.

Okay, that’s a good answer. You don’t think about not thinking. And the last question is, what is the most important thing you want me to know about you? About being gifted and also having some difficulty in school? This might be a thinker.

The biggest difficulty is basically writing.

And what would you want your teachers to know?

That I need harder math work, easier writing work.

Harder math work, easier writing work.

Actually, easier writing work, harder everything else work.

And do you think they understand you?

Yeah.

Yeah. Well, maybe not, because they’re not giving you the harder math work, right?

That’s because I never ask for any.

Thank you for explaining your gesture to the recorder. Do you have any questions for me?

Mmmm, more shifty eyes, no.
Interview 11B: Misty

Can you state the name, grade, and age of your child please?

Justin. He is eleven and he’s starting sixth grade in September, a couple weeks.

Can you tell me about the disability that he’s been diagnosed with and his giftedness? That whole journey, wherever you want to start.

Well, he’s been diagnosed, I guess, with giftedness—I don’t know if that really counts as a diagnosis—I mean, we knew he was smart anyway but the school system officially diagnosed him in first grade, and then in second grade he started having trouble with writing. We knew writing was not his strength for a long time. He didn’t want to color… he just didn’t want to do anything that had to do with writing. And his kindergarten teacher told me it was within the range, and so did the first grade teacher, but his second grade teacher said, “We’ve got a problem and we need to do something about it.” So the school system decided to test him and they confirmed other tests that he was gifted but also that he had…they did not say at the time that he had dysgraphia because then he would have had a specific learning disability and he would have qualified for special ed. and he was going to a magnet school and they didn’t really want to deal with that there.

Oh, is that the reason why I didn’t get into Ganslamin [name of school—unintelligible]?

Well you haven’t got… he’s going to a different magnet school. So they said that he had… I don’t know if they gave him a diagnosis at that point. And also we went to an occupational therapist and his pediatrician said he had a graphomotor impairment. She said she couldn’t diagnose learning disabilities. In fourth grade he started having other trouble in school. His teacher said that he was lazy. His teacher said that he just didn’t want to do the work, and then he started acting out. So we went and saw another psychologist who said, yeah, he’s gifted. Yes, he has dysgraphia. He’s depressed, he has ADHD, and he also has a discrepancy in reading, but he reads on a much higher level than he needs to for school and so it really doesn’t matter that he has this reading problem.

I didn’t even know I had a reading problem.

Well there you go. So we moved him back to his home school instead of the magnet school and the teachers there think he’s brilliant. They said that ADHD they can deal with, and he’s been getting help. He’s got an IEP now, and he’s been getting help with writing. And that’s about where we are. He’s going to middle school. He also has a growth delay, so he’s like extremes. He’s either here or he’s here but there’s not a whole lot in between.
What is behavior like in class?

The issue he has is that he talks out. His teachers say he has a hard time sitting still, or even sitting sometimes. But he does really well in school, and none of this has ever affected grades. He has “A’s” and “B’s” and made the principal’s list most of the time this year. He’s going to take algebra... most kids can take either pre-algebra or sixth grade math, and his teacher said, “Well he can take algebra.” We live in Virginia Beach and there’s two magnet schools that he could go to, well that are available, let’s say. One of them is an IB program and one of them is a gifted magnet school. However, because of his writing, I don’t know if it’s because of his writing. No one’s telling me exactly. But he didn’t get into those schools, so he’s going to the regular middle school. So we asked about algebra then and so they said he needed to go take these summer school classes, and a summer school teacher said he’s not going to have any problems in math. So he’s skipping a year of math, but he’s taking other sixth grade classes.

Do you think he’s generally had a positive school experience?

I think it’s been mixed.

And how has his relationship with his teachers been over the course of his school?

The lower grades his teachers really liked him. As he got into upper grades, the teachers who taught math and science really liked him. The reading teachers were very frustrated, I think. The reading and the language arts teachers have been more frustrated. I think teachers who see where he is intellectually have a lot more tolerance than teachers who see where he struggles.

And do you think for the most part his teachers understand his giftedness and ADHD and dysgraphia, or not?

Not really.

Do you think they’re meeting his needs at school?

I’ll be honest. I’ll say it’s mixed. I’d say no, really. It’s just they’re not... I understand this. They’re teaching a whole bunch of kids. They’re not just teaching him. And so he knows stuff that other kids don’t know, but he has behaviors that other kids aren’t doing and at the same time he needs help with writing. And he really doesn’t want to learn to write well, because it’s hard and everything else is easy.

Besides the talking out, what other behaviors?

He has a hard time sometimes getting along with other kids. He says things that upset other kids, he makes jokes that the other kids don’t understand, he doesn’t get socially sometimes...he doesn’t understand that what he’s doing might be threatening...and I say
threatening like, he’s getting into their space. He doesn’t understand socially what he should be doing at what time.

What is his social life like in school?

He has kids that he hangs out with. He has kids that he can eat with. But, you know, kids will tell him that you need to stop doing this, and he doesn’t understand why he should stop. He doesn’t have many kids calling him to play with him or get together with him as he would like.

I’m going to backtrack a second. Is there a gifted program in this school that he’s in?

They have a gifted cluster. I’m not really sure how they do it in middle school, but in elementary school they take gifted kids, and they’re supposed to be in groups of six to eight in a class with other kids that are above average, but not necessarily... I know a lot of people who say, we’ll take kids who are above average in school but still have a lot of... if you misbehave but you’re above average, they’re going to put you in that gifted cluster, because otherwise, they already have behavior problems and other problems that teachers have to deal with kids who are lower achieving. So most special ed. kids are not in his class. You have to be gifted to be in the class he’s in. Gifted overrides everything. But other special eds. go in the other classes. There are four classes. There are two classes that have inclusion, special ed. kids, and two classes that have gifted kids. If you’re a behavior problem and you’re smart they’ll put you in the gifted cluster. I’m not sure he’d be better off in the other class. The gifted teacher comes in and does some enrichment with the whole class, and then some with just the kids who are identified. But it’s not the same... he was at a magnet school before, but they expect you to be gifted across the board, and I think they expect better behavior. So a kid with ADHD looks like a really bad kid, because they don’t have kids who are beating other kids up. They don’t have real behavior problems. Not that ADHD isn’t a behavior problems, but they don’t have real problems, so they don’t realize that he has ADHD. Most teachers are just like, “That’s okay, we can deal with that.”

Is he challenged enough in his class?

No. Some of them, but I don’t think so.

Has he ever complained about not being challenged enough or about having difficulty in school?

Yes. He’s complained that he doesn’t want to be the smart kid. When we moved him back, and I think if he had stayed in his home school he might not have realized, but when we moved him back to the home school after he had been in the magnet school, he complained a lot about how people didn’t understand, and he was bored, and he already
knew that. He moved in the middle of the year, and there’s a certain curriculum for fourth grade, and some of it they did in a different order at his other school, so maybe he really had been taught it, but some of it he just knew.

Related to teachers again, do you communicate with them, or do they try to communicate with you?

It depends. Mostly teachers tell you about what’s wrong, and so when he was at the magnet school, I was hearing about writing in second grade. In third grade we were hearing about behavior. In fourth grade it was bad enough... He only had one teacher that year and everything she had to say was negative. He also has migraines, and so he was missing school, and she was very concerned that we were letting him stay home too often, that he didn’t really have migraines... I mean, he goes to a neurologist, the neurologist has diagnosed him. We didn’t make this up. And stress has something to do with migraines.

What do you think they can do better to meet his needs? The school, the teachers...

Well I think one thing...he is going to take algebra next year, and that’s a positive, but that’s something I had to initiate. There just aren’t a whole lot of kids like him. There was a big discussion about whether he should take honors English next year or something else. Because he can take honors, he can take core, or he can take inclusion. But most of the kids who have trouble with writing don’t read very well. And he can read very well, he just has trouble with writing. His writing’s probably average. So for reading he needs to be in the honors English, but for writing he needs to be in maybe the core English. But it’s not even just that one class. I mean, the algebra, we’re good. But English, there’s two components to that, and I don’t know exactly how it’s going to work next year. He’s supposed to meet with somebody to get help with writing where he needs it, but we’ll see. And they told me maybe his English class won’t work out for him and they’ll have to drop him down, but it depends on the teacher, it depends on how much writing. So, if you’re gifted, you don’t get as much support.

That’s true. What are his interests outside of school?

Video games. I’m sure that’s a surprise. He really likes math. He does a lot of reading on his own about math.

Reading about math!

Yep. We’ve found some fun math books. He likes to go outside and run outside and things like that. He plays four square a lot. Because of his size he can’t play team sports.

Does he ever become focused on one particular thing?

Do you think that he understands the interaction between his giftedness and dysgraphia and ADHD?

No. I’m not sure anybody does.

This is more geared toward you, but when you were figuring out that he was gifted, and then ADHD and dysgraphia, was there enough information available to you?

No, because you can find information about one aspect of it, but it’s hard to get the whole picture together.

Do you think there were enough resources? They’re kind of similar questions.

I mean, I have done research, and there’s a lot written, but a lot of its conflicting. I don’t think science at this point knows enough at this point to give me all the information I need.

One more question before the last question, backtracking again. What is he like at home?

He can be kind of intense, but a lot of times he’s doing what he wants to do.

Playing with the cats.

He likes... we have cats. He likes the cats. He likes animals. But he’s pretty cooperative. It’s not like we’re asking him to do a whole lot of writing or asking him to raise his hand. He interrupts a lot.

I also do a lot of fighting with her.

The actual last question is, what do you think is the most important thing about these students that you want me or teachers to know?

I think it’s what you need to know about all kids is that they’re all individuals. I don’t know if a public school can address what any kid needs, but I think you can’t just make assumptions about one child based on what you know about everyone else. You have to get to know them all.
Interview 12A: Gloria

Can you please state your name?
Gloria.

Okay, age and grade.
14, ninth grade.

Do you know why I chose you for this study?
Because I’m dyslexic and I have ADD?

And you’re gifted. This is a two part thing. Have you ever heard of the term dual exceptional?

Not until this.

Yeah, I think a lot of people haven’t heard of it. But it basically means someone who’s gifted who has a learning disability, ADD, a physical disability, anything like that. So basically two exceptionalities. Are you in the gifted program at your school?

There is not one.

So are you in any kind of accelerated classes or anything?

They don’t offer them in ninth grade.

So what kind of classes do you take?

I’m taking this year biology, geometry, some type of English, and art, and a few others.

And how are those classes?

I think they’ll be good. Last year I enjoyed most of my classes.

And last year, and probably in the years before, have you been challenged enough in your classes do you think?

Most of them yes, but some classes are easier than others. Math has always been a hard one for me.

So what do you think your strengths are?

I really enjoy science and history.

And what about your areas of weakness?
Definitely math.

What about writing and reading? How are those?

I do not like reading at all.

I have to ask these questions.

But I enjoy writing.

Okay, what kind of writing do you like to do?

Just for reports. I like doing that.

When were you diagnosed with ADD, well let’s talk about dyslexia first. When were you diagnosed with dyslexia?

I think I was in second grade, I guess.

And did you know what was going on?

No. No idea.

They were just like, “Take this test?” Okay. And did you notice it affecting your learning?

I really noticed how slow copying things down, and reading. I really hated reading out loud. Still do.

Did you notice that it was just you that was slow or did you compare yourself to your peers?

I didn’t really compare myself.

You just realized that you were having some trouble? And did this persist up until now, obviously?

It’s gotten better. I’ve been with tutors that have helped me.

Okay. So what kind of things have they done that have helped you?

We worked with the Wilson program.

What’s that?

It’s almost like a phonics program where it helped you with phonics and writing. And then I can’t remember what it was, but it was a course at CHKD that helped me with my copying down. But it didn’t have anything to do with writing.
And what about ADD? When were you diagnosed with that?

I think the same time. And I actually did not know that until last year when I told my mom I couldn’t focus when I was on the tennis court.

So you were diagnosed with ADD in second grade, but you didn’t know you had it until last year. So nobody told you! That’s interesting. So how did it affect your learning at all?

When I’m doing homework I’ll zone out and take a long time to do it. I just kind of don’t pay attention sometimes.

Are you good at following directions in class and instructions?

Yes.

What about homework? Remembering to turn it in?

Yeah, I remember to turn it in. It takes a long time for me though. I have to study a ton.

So how long does it take you extra, do you think?

It just depends on the night. Probably two hours to do my homework. Sometimes four.

What are your areas of interest?

I enjoy tennis and soccer and dance.

And do you have any academic interests? Or just school?

I really enjoy science and medicine.

So do you want to be a doctor? Mmhmm. I once wanted to be a doctor, and then I took chemistry and changed my mind.

I think that’s almost what changed my mom’s mind too.

Is she a doctor? Okay. I forgot my next question. I was on a roll here. Interests…Okay. Your teachers. How have your teachers been?

I’ve had very helpful teachers and very kind teachers.

Do they know what you struggle with and they help you?

Only a few of them have known, that my mom has connected with and talked to.

What kind of things do they do to help you?
They just kind of make points of working on this, certain things.

And do you have an IEP at school?

I don’t know what that is.

I mean, your mom will probably know, but it’s basically a document that tells teachers some goals for you.

I might.

I was just wondering because if you do, all of your teachers should know. Have you had any bad experiences with teachers?

I’ve actually loved all the teachers I’ve had. There’ve been some that have been stricter than others and some that haven’t been as helpful, but I’ve liked all of them.

So do the stricter ones, are they helpful for you?

Mmhmm, they’re just strict to kids who act out, so it’s kind of like… but they’ve all been really helpful. No one’s rejected anyone.

Have you ever had any problems acting out in school?

No.

No? Okay. What about your peers? Do you get along well with your classmates? Wait, did you say yes or no?

Yes.

Okay, because you shook your head and I was like, “I’m not going to remember that she said yes.” I lose my mind sometimes.

Do you have issues…

Ah yes, thanks. Have you ever had any issues with classmates?

Not particularly, no.

And do you have any close friends in school?

Mmhmm. I have a few.

And do they share the same interests as you?

Most of them are very athletic, and do well in school.
Do you think overall your school is helping you with your dyslexia?

I think so. It’s kind of pushing me to get over it.

And do you think they help you with your inattentiveness too?

Mmhmm. You can’t stop focusing for a second or you’ll miss something that’s going to be important.

From your perspective, what do you think the hardest thing...I know you don’t have a gifted program at your school, but your mom has told me you have been identified as gifted outside of your school just through testing. What do you think the hardest thing is about having those higher abilities and also having dyslexia?

That everyone expects you to do well and if you don’t then you feel like you let everyone else down, like, “Oh, how’d you do that badly on that test?”

And have people said that before?

We all talk about it, “I can’t believe I got this bad grade,” and “I can’t believe I did this.” But there are people who think, “Well, you should get the best grade because you’re smart.”

And what do you say to them?

I just didn’t know it very well, or something like that.

How does it make you feel when that happens?

It just makes me think I should study more and work to do better.

And inside yourself, when you’re trying to read something or write something and you think that you should be able to do it but maybe you’re having some troubles, how do you feel about that?

I feel really stressed, and like I kind of get stressed out and aren’t able to finish it very quickly.

So it takes you some extra time to do stuff. Okay. And have you ever felt frustrated during school trying to get stuff done?

Yes. I’ve felt frustrated during tests trying to figure out how to do something or trying to finish a paper.

Do your teachers give you extra time for tests?

Yes, they will.
I think my last question is, I don’t want to say this before I ask you any more questions. My last question is, what do you think is the most important thing that you want me and people like me to know about people like you? This might be a thinking question.

I don’t want to be cheesy, like, “It doesn’t make you different.” I don’t really know. Just that it just makes things harder, and you should cut them some slack.

And do you think that for all people, or would you say that to teachers, or?

I think so, but sometimes. It just kind of depends, because if they don’t try, obviously you shouldn’t, but...

Okay, that’s good. Thank you!
Interview 12B: Cora

Can you please state the age and grade level of your daughter?

She is fourteen and she is entering the ninth grade.

What school does she go to?

Barfield Academy.

Okay, so it's a private school?

Private school.

Can you tell me the disabilities that she's been diagnosed with?

Dyslexia, a disorder of written expression, and potentially inattentive ADD.

When was she identified with these disabilities?

I believe at the age of eight.

When was she identified gifted?

At the age of eight.

All at the same time? Okay. And how was her class experience like before diagnosis?

She was a well-received kindergartener and first grader, and in the second grade she was well-received because she's got sort of a pleasing personality. It was during the second grade, and none of the teachers really had any concerns about her from an academic standpoint, probably because she's such an avid listener and really picks things up from an auditory standpoint. And so she was doing fine and managing fine, but there was just this... how do you say... the puzzle pieces just did not really fit, because she has always seemed quite bright, and always seemed to have sort of an understanding of the world around her that was a little beyond her years, and yet her work was really sloppy. And she would be assigned these books to read. She would tell them to you verbatim, but would never ever sound out words. She would leave out "the" and "a" and "the," that sort of thing. I could remember when we took her next door neighbor over to study at the library one day and he was a year younger, and I watched him sound out just the phonetic approach, you know, he was trying to sound out a particular word. Never would she ever do that. She would memorize all these books. She always had a phenomenal memory. So it was at that point... and, there was this sort of fatigue about her, sometimes, where she wants to be a pleaser and do well, and I felt like I was having to really push her. The puzzle pieces just didn't fit. And my husband is dyslexic. So that's when I decided to go ahead and get her tested. But she was doing fine. Her experience in school at that point...
was fine. But something just didn’t seem right to me. My mom was a reading specialist in Fairfax County school systems. I was sort of inundated with that growing up. Oh, the other issue, apparently parents do talk more than the kids. The other issue was that she, from the time she was eighteen months old, just demanded. At that point I’d have to read five books a night for her. Five books every night.

So she would memorize them?

And she would let you know what you wanted. She was just voracious at wanting to hear what was being read. And then at five we started on the Harry Potter series. All these great... I mean, she’s read any number, or I’ve read to her any number of Newbery Award winning... she’s read a ton. Her vocabulary, as such, is exceptional. My son’s, on the other hand... But, never as much as she wanted to hear it, she would never sit down with a book, ever. Never sit down with a book. So that was another thing, I was like, something’s just not quite right here.

Did the teachers notice that she wasn’t reading?

No. Because they would assign her, she would do what she had to do, but you know. There were always a few kids in class who would be carrying a book and reading, but she just wasn’t one of those kids. But they never noticed that.

Is there a gifted program in her school?

She attended St. Andrew’s Episcopal school, so it’s a small private school, which does not have a program on either end of the spectrum. And HRA doesn’t have a gifted program. She started at HRA in the sixth grade. They of course have AP classes going to high school and those sorts of things, but there is no gifted.

Is she taking any of those AP classes?

Well, she’s not a candidate yet. That’ll be in tenth grade.

So what about now? How is her dyslexia affecting her in school now?

So we got that testing done. They identified those issues. We did two formal things. One was the interactive metronome. I don’t know if you’re familiar with that.

I’ve heard of that.

Where she would go to an occupational therapist, and basically they wear headphones. They have sounds that are being transmitted to their ears and they have to coordinate their movements with what’s being played. And she did that for whatever, I can’t remember how long, probably three months’ time. The other thing which was not a formal program, but she’s been involved with dance, a bunch of sports and things as well,
but tap dancing. It’s something I think about movement. So it was an interactive metronome, tap dancing that she became involved in, and she did maybe two years in the Wilson reading program.

She was telling me about that.

She’d have a tutor who’d come. And I don’t know. I think that she has had... I mean, she’s done very well in school. She still requires some support, but I don’t think it’s any more than... for some kids, it’s probably... I don’t really know exactly. She’ll require some support to have her meet her potential, but she is absorbing the information in the classroom, she is taking notes, she’s doing the work. I’m not doing the work. But I do... I guess maybe it’s that inattentive ADD or a fatigue factor that will set in sometimes when a big volume of work comes up.

What happens then?

Then she just poops out and makes more mistakes. What I thought was interesting was that after, and I didn’t print out all of the testing she had done, but she used to score sort of in the, you know, I guess in the sixth or seventh grade she only scored in the 88th percentile on the national norms on the math, but the next year it was in the 92nd, and the next year it was in the 94th. She would have math, but she’s not natural with it.

Yeah, she was telling me that.

But I can learn a task and apply it. Something seems to have clicked or approved in terms of her abilities, I think, with some aspects of math. She still leaves out “the” and “a” when she writes. What’s interesting is that we recently got her the Dragon Speak program.

Yeah, I’m going to actually use that to transcribe my interviews.

Yeah. And I looked at a couple. She hasn’t done much with it, but I looked at a couple things. When she goes from here, from her brain, to her hand, to write out something, it is less descriptive and less mature and less interesting than if she just goes from here to here. It’s pretty fascinating. She can spill out volumes verbally, but when she has to process the thought to the hand, you know, and write it, it just becomes a little choppy, and less. There’s just less there. So I’ve noticed that that program I think is going to help her in the future. The other thing we gave her as her Christmas gift last year was the Kindle.

Oh, I love my Kindle.

Guess what? Since January of this year, so for nearly fourteen years I read to her every single night. Every single night. One night I got mad at her and didn’t read from her and
that was fourteen years, or I guess the time she was eighteen years old, until she was fourteen. And then all of a sudden she got the Kindle and something about the way she reads more easily with it. I guess she can adjust the font visually, something about the tracking, and it’s not like she’s been reading Tolstoy on there, but she’s read. She’s read. And she’s read the entire Sean Pollack series, she’s read some books for school, she’s read these… I don’t remember, there’s some British book with a funny name. Frontal Snogging is part of the title. She had to read that for school and then, “Oh, can I buy the next one?” Sure, buy it! Please, please do. And so I have not been reading to her at night any more. And it’s been since then, so something about that has helped her with her reading.

Has she ever expressed to you that she was having any difficulty in school?

Yes. Occasionally, but it’s hard to say. Initially we didn’t really talk… she was eight or nine, so we didn’t use diagnoses. We didn’t talk to her saying, “You have this issue.” We just said, “I know it’s hard for you to get the reading accomplished, or whatever you’re doing, so we’re going to do this to try to help you. But then over time she has become familiar with what the testing showed, and occasionally she’ll sort of joke about it. She’ll joke about it or she will say, “I’m flipping a word,” or “I’m flipping my letters.” But she’s never really specifically said, “I think I have a particular issue in this,” you know, not really particularly.

And how has your communication been with her teachers?

At St. Andrew’s I talked to her teachers a fair amount. Since she’s been at HRA, I have not. When she started at HRA I did not walk in to school and demand, I don’t think you can anyway at that school, an IEP or whatever. At all. And I didn’t mention… I spoke, because one teacher queried me, you know, asked me about issues. I spoke with her and shared with her the results of the testing, and that was the reading teacher in sixth grade, who was phenomenally good. Who’s no longer at the school. So I shared with her the issues, but otherwise I haven’t. And she’s really… I don’t have a lot of contact with her teachers. I went in for one group meeting, and they arranged for parent-teacher conferences, of course in the middle of my work day, individually with all the teachers, but they said you can, because you’re paying so much money to go to this school, you can arrange for a, you know, sit down at this table with all the teachers there, and I did that once, when we first came in. And they basically said, “Why are you here.” Well, aren’t I supposed to do this? Aren’t I supposed to be an interested parent? But they were all, because she’s a pleasant person, and she likes to please, and she listens well, they just said she was doing fine. So they didn’t really… they’re all sort of subtle issues. So I don’t have a lot of contact. I’ve really sort of stayed out of it since she’s been in middle school.
Do you think they’ve been supporting her enough in school? Or do they understand where she’s coming from?

I don’t think she has really yet met an obstacle that, with a little bit of assistance from me, say, or using Dragon Speak, or some sort, just a little bit of extra help, a hurdle she hasn’t been able to climb over yet. My fear is, and we’ve talked about, you know, should I get her re-tested, or is there any role for re-testing, for would she ever benefit from a stimulant or one of those, we’ve hated to even think about medicines. Every once in a while give her a little coffee, or something when she’s faced… my thought is, when you’re faced with this much reading, are you going to be able to get through it. And she hasn’t really faced that sort of obstacle yet. She’s been able to get through for the most part. So that’s really my fear.

Do you think the school in general is working out for her and supporting her?

She loves it. She loves it there. You know, you can be a gawky white gal and play sports, and she can be in the student government and she can be on the sports field even though she’s not exceptional at those types of things, so I think it’s given her sort of a little community setting. And the prior headmaster was I think fairly liberal and open-minded in his approach, and there are all these different types of people there, which is neat. They’re all… it’s not as if there are cliques that are apart from one another, but you’ve got your theater crew, and of course you have your athletic crew, and you’ve got your artsy folks that are there, and you have the gay and lesbian club, and it was this sort of open-minded environment, which I think is nice. She’s been very happy there.

So we’ve talked some about the areas she struggles in. What are her top areas in school? Her strengths? You mean from a standpoint of courses, or…? Courses, what you have observed, maybe what teachers have told you about how well she’s doing… I know you said she has exceptional verbal ability, and listening.

Yeah, she does. That’s definitely a skill. Her memory is phenomenal. It might get in her way sometimes, though. Another issue that I’ve often wondered, sorry, back to that. I’ve asked her, and perhaps it falls under the inattentive ADD part, I’ve said, “Okay, if you’re watch falls on to the floor and you lean down to pick it up and you see a pink paper clip down there during a test,” she goes, “Oh yeah, that pink paper clip reminded me of the time that we went, and it was on the fourth of July, in 1999 when I was two, and we were flying down the…” You know, so she will get off. She’s all about memories. She can tell you a lot of details from that standpoint. She’s a quirky artist, she’s a great photographer. She got a lot of kudos this year for her writing in history. She would formulate an organized sort of essay. She got some kudos for her writing when she was
in the sixth grade, too, from that English teacher. And she’s, you know, as we said, not exceptional in math, but gets by learning the skills pretty well. Science, she’s good. She’s interested in. She says she wants to do medicine.

She did!

Yeah. She’s phenomenal with kids. She’s a kid magnet. She’s also a mature lady magnet. She’s too nice. Sitters love her! They’re teaching her to do all these things. She’s just entirely capable now. When she was eight or nine, or nine to eleven, I could not put her in front of a recipe in the kitchen and expect her to... and she’ll still make errors, like she’s got that issue, like I don’t think she should do pediatric oncology where she has to dose chemotherapy to make sure the zero is in the right place, you know, that kind of thing. But she really is interested in doing pediatrics in some form. And she’s really... I did not have that patience for children when I was that age. Not until I had them. I still don’t necessarily have that patience for children. But she really loves them. She put together that Mom’s Day Out program that she did. She’s done that for a few years on the holidays where she’ll help out these moms by just inviting all these kids over and she puts on this big three-hour event for all these little girls, and crafts, this, that and the other thing. Very capable, very easy to be with, very interested in things. I don’t know. She’s a nice young lady. Mean as a snake to her brother, though.

Of course. I mean, it wouldn’t be great any other way. So in school, is she challenged enough in her classes, do you think?

I think so. I think so. Yeah. She doesn’t complain. Every once in a while she’ll complain one way or the other where it’s dull. Something is dull or it’s infrequent where I’ll see that sort of anxiety about a volume of work she has to do and she doesn’t think she can do it and then two hours into the evening all of a sudden I see her settle because she’s sort of gotten over that hump. That feeling you get when you feel overwhelmed a bit. But yeah, I think she’s enjoyed it for the most part. I would say, yeah. I guess when I think about her brother, I feel like he could be doing so much more in math than he’s doing, so he’s probably not in some ways challenged enough. But I think it’s been all right for her.

And what are her areas of interest?

She loves literature. She loves reading. She didn’t groom herself at all until she was twelve and now she’s into...

She looked very put together.

Oh my gosh, the hair was stringy, hair in the face, not at all interested. But she’s got a fairly...although the shorter the shorts, the better, but she’s got a nice little sense of her
own style. She likes artistic things. She likes... well, she likes a lot. But she’s a pleaser and she’s fallen into... we are big into athletics, and skiing, all that sort of thing. She’s had some fear along the way, had to overcome, you know, getting stuck on the top of the mountain, not feeling like she could ski down, and she and I have just gone at it, “You have to do this!” “I’m not doing this!” “You have to do this!” “I’m not doing this” and of course Daddy rides back up on the lift and skis her down because he’s capable of doing that. But she enjoys that sort of thing, but, you know... In tennis, both the kids are sort of heavy into tournament tennis. But she...it’s hard to figure her out a little bit sometimes in terms of her drive. We wanted to make sure she’s doing things not to please us necessarily but to please herself. And you feel like sometimes she wants to be competitive, and you don’t know how much of it is just teenager, I want to sit on the couch, oh but I want to practice my tennis so I can be competitive or play on the varsity team this year because it’s going to be a really good team, good chance to win states. So she sort of goes back and forth. It seems like a little bit of a conflict, and it’s hard to figure out how much drive she has, because she will sit her fanny in front of the boob tube and watch the Kardashians. But you know, so she’ll do that too. But interested in lots of different things. Love being on the boat, enjoys skiing, enjoys all sorts of things.

Is there anything she has an intense focus on?

No. Neither of my kids are really like that. You know, there are some kids who have an absolute passion for one thing, and they will build Legos until the day is done, that sort of thing, or be so fired up about something. And they are not that way. We are probably not that way either. You can give me whatever ask and I’m going to good, better, best. You have to do your best at whatever it is and it doesn’t matter if it’s washing the dishes or it’s, you know, putting together a new treatment plan in my clinic or whatever. So I think we are more task oriented, that sort of thing. No, she is not a child that has that passion for one...she’ll have these bursts where she’ll really get into making her cards. Did she show you her cards at all?

No. See, this is the thing about kids. They’re like, “Oh, how was school today?” “It was fine.”

And it’s been pushed, as a parent, you have to be honest, I’ve pushed it and carried her with it. She started to take some pictures and they looked sort of, things around town, and they looked really cool. And one year we sent them off to Shutterfly and had them made into cards for her teachers. And they were really popular, and all of a sudden we said, “Why don’t you just go and take a whole mess of pictures,” and I don’t know how she started doing it, but she’s taken all these pictures. She calls them “Our Town Photos.” And they’re sort of quirky shots. I mean, she’s got this close-up of a horse from Colonial Williamsburg with the jaw. But you know, down on D.O.G. Street. So she’s got Williamsburg and Norfolk and Newport News, and they’re these little
notecards. She has sold them with 100% of the profits going to Relay for Life. And she
donated about three grand this year. She was like number fifteen on the peninsula for
individual donations. So she’s done that. Now, she gets a total tickle out of it when she
does it, but I’m the one who’ll say, “Hey, my office needs new cards, here’s your stuff.”
to just kind of… because I think it’s been good for her to get that recognition, you know,
of course mommy’s trying to promote her a little bit, that sort of thing. But that’s one of
the things she’s done with a little support. I think it’s been good for her. And that sort of
thing. But her photography is kind of industry. Like you said, does she have a passion
for it… we gave her a new camera and it wasn’t for about six months that she, “Yeah,
this is really cool, and I want to do this…” so it’s not like she’s totally immersed in one
particular thing.

And what about her social life at school? How’s that?

Interesting. She has been very much a home girl, not particularly social. Not at all a
loner. She would interact with girls at school, and have good friends, but never felt the
need to, you know, have them over. My son? Yikes. Social Sam. I mean, William is
very social and always wants a playmate, wants to be cyber dating some girl when he was
nine, has no idea what he’s doing, “Are you my boyfriend? Okay…” You know, but
never talk in public. But he’s very very social, and she has not had an appetite for that.
Has enjoyed family friends, so my friends and their children, good close friendships
there, until this year. And this year she’s started to branch out a little bit. Like, she hated
sleepovers. Would not go for a sleepover. Did not like that. And there’s a fear factor.
She had this period of time, I don’t know if it was eleven, twelve, where she was a fraidy-
cat. We actually at one point, I forgot about that. We thought she had, what the heck is
that thing called? She had strep throat and then got really freaked out. Saw the movie
Forrest Gump and freaked out from that, was crying, had these periods of crying and not
sleeping well, and didn’t know if it was just a developmental thing or whether… oh,
PANDAS. You can look it up if you’ve never heard of it. But it’s some sort of freaky
thing that can happen after a bad strep infection. So, not big from a social standpoint, but
now she texts fairly… she still, if you looked at the social spectrum, she is not anti-social,
and she is not super social. I would put her about a third of the way up. She still doesn’t
have that need like my eleven-year-old does to interact constantly. She’s still happy with
us. That won’t last long.

Has she ever had any problems socially in school?

No, never. Never. And she’s not as interesting, gosh, she’s so, unlike a lot of her friends,
she had those sort of adjustment issues where she had the fraidy-cat period, but she has
never... she’s like, unlike me, she could give a rat’s what about what other people think
for the most part. She’s just now starting to look at style and clothing, but she was never
one to be a copycat. You know how those kids do that, they have the style, have to wear
a certain thing because so-and-so in class was wearing it. Never much cared what other
kids thought. Still doesn’t, doesn’t much care what other kids think. Doesn’t get ruffled
by that, it’s really pretty interesting. She has a lot of her granddad in her, really. She’s
got a thick skin. Unless I’m beating on her, mentally. She doesn’t… I can bring a tear to
her eye if I’m hard on her. That’s the only thing. But otherwise she’s really thick
skinned for the most part.

And have any kids ever been hard on her?

I mean, I can remember growing up, I can remember my mom telling me, “You get back
out on that playground and you give her a slugging!” You know? But oh my gosh, no. I
honestly don’t think. You know, part of the reason is she’s not threatening. She won this
big award at school this year with eighth grade, the citizenship award, for just being that
steady force that’s always helpful and always nice, but she hasn’t threatened. I guess
there’s one. There are a couple of gals that have been a little mean to her, but they’re
actually jealous, I think, about her tennis, because they’re actually older and they were on
the tennis team but not as good, and she was better. But most of the time she doesn’t face
that because she’s not a big force in that way. Really it’s not happened. It’s been pretty
amazing, where her friends have been “Oooh,” it’s been a blessing for us not to deal with
that.

What is she like at home?

Mercurial, a little bit mercurial. Jealous of William, mean to him often. She just is. But
when the cards are down, like there’s a kid on the playground when they were at St.
Andrew’s who was bullying him, who was tripping him and knocking him, and this kid,
they were in like the second grade, and he was as tall as you are, he was huge, and she
went up to that kid and said, “If you ever…” you know, just gave him the head spinning,
“If you ever do anything mean to my brother, I’m going to” blah blah blah. So, she’s
mean to him but when the cards are down she really loves him. But she’s, you know, not
particularly nice to him. She’s a little bit, we have to get a fork to get her off the couch
sometimes. She will just hang out there given the opportunity, but then some weeks,
she’s like totally capable and helpful and you can ask her to do all these things and she
just does them, that sort of thing. She loves to make a plan to, we have a tiny little
runabout boat, and we’ll take it across the James River and go to Captain Chuck Muck’s
Seafood. She loves to do things like that. What does she… Probably pretty much
typical. But not really typical. She’s a kook. She is not that, “Drama!” There is no
drama. So hopefully that doesn’t come, but it might.

It probably will! From your perspective, how do you think she sees… Herself? Herself.
Her disabilities and her abilities.
You know, it’s funny. Somehow, she sometimes seems to have a little bit of an inflated view of herself. For example, she got a little fussy about being put in the exhibition lane for the swim meet for her breast stroke, because there’s one stroke that she can do, that she’s pretty good at. We went to the same meet last year. And she got flustered, she was like stomping her feet, and I said, “Gloria, why are you upset about this?” And she said, “I can swim fast.” I said, “Honey, I watched the last meet. The other gal is faster than you are. That’s why she’s swimming point.” And I said, “I’ll stand right here and I’ll tell you at the end of the meet who touched who out. But she had this view of herself that’s a little bit inflated. It’s kind of funny. And the same thing with tennis sometimes. She’ll have a view of herself that way that’s a little bit inflated.

What about in academics?

In academics, I don’t think … I think in academics I don’t know what’s in her head. I think she… A couple times she’s said… You know, a lot of kids, she would be like the go-to person who always knows what work needs to be done, always seems to be on top of it, would never be the top grade in the class but I think she sees herself where she is academically. That she’s usually, like, I remember she made this comment with this cute boy in Spanish. He got a 97 on the test, and she got a 93 on the test, and she was really happy. I don’t know, I think academically, she recognizes that she does have a pretty good understanding of the world around her and she’s bright, and I think she likes being thought of as bright, but I think she recognizes where here… maybe she thinks she’s a little weaker in some things than she really is. Maybe it’s the opposite in academics than it is in the other things. I don’t know, exactly.

Well this is good, to hear what you think to compare to what she thinks. Do you think there’s a lot of information available on this type of student? A student who’s gifted who also…

No, and I also don’t think there’s necessarily a lot of flexibility in that you still feel very tied to old ways in terms of testing and evaluation. So I don’t think… hopefully things are changing, but I don’t think there’s a lot out there. I think, you know, testing is out there, and they’re building, but I don’t think within some of these schools, maybe within the public school system there’s more flexibility because they have funding for these individual plans that they formulate for kids, but you know I feel like sometimes I’m like, ooh, if she could only take that Spanish test verbally, she could blow it out of the water, whereas I know she’s never going to put those …whatever those things are called in the right place, you know? Or spelling. She cannot spell, so she can really be docked for that sort of thing. So I do think there’s a need for more.

Do you think there are enough resources for you?
No, I don’t, actually. I would love, I wish someone, I’m constantly trying to find ways to ease her to allow her sponge to fill well with information, and I wish there were... no. I would crave more resources. I mean, I’m trying, like the Dragon Speak that I ordered online, and I’m trying to find things that seem to help her and kind of smooth the path for her a little bit, but no, I definitely...

And has there been any frustration on your part during this whole process?

Well yeah, you know, she and I had conflict before this all came up, because I’d be like, I could tell there was more there, or that she was so bright, but I wasn’t seeing the effort or the results. Something about... we were conflicting, with her work, and tears, and all that sort of thing, until I was like, something’s just not right, and we did the testing and learned okay, there are some issues here, it’s not just. She seems to be such a pleaser and wants to do well and yet, something was off, so there was conflict there. You know, beyond that, probably not much. Just every once in a while she’s had a rough spell or something at school has been a little more challenging than it needed to be for her, and I’d be a little bit frustrated. But she’s been fine.

And the last question is, what is the most important thing that you want me to know about these types of students, or even educators or people in the field of gifted education?

You know, I think probably it’s what you were just asking about earlier, what comes to my mind, that we have in our society sort of this very limited, what do you call it, system for educating and evaluating. So we have this limited, and it’s an old timey system for educating and evaluating students. And I think that, gosh, the brain is just fascinating, and it works in such different ways for so many different people, and I think really trying to become more personalized and individualized with the education and the evaluation of these kids, I think should be a focus. So I think that perhaps, I guess people squawk about that in terms of, they just look at standardized test scores in certain schools, or they just look at how they do X, Y, and Z, when verbal things are not necessarily always assessed, and that sort of thing. So I think we’re too limited in the education, evaluation, and it would be nice if we could expand that to accommodate all of these different approaches that kids have.