

Defying the Odds: One Mother's Experience Raising a Twice-Exceptional Learner

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Abstract

Twice-exceptional learners benefit personally and academically from supportive individuals. Additionally, those learners with a parent well-versed in understanding the needs of one's child and capable of advocating on his or her behalf are especially fortunate. Despite the desire to assist one's child and support his or her academic journey, many parents are left baffled and overwhelmed with challenges and expectations. Experts suggest parenting a gifted child can, at times, be challenging (Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007). Consequently, it can be assumed parenting a child with multiple exceptionalities would also offer unique challenges. Thus, it is important to support the parent of such a child, for, in supporting the parent, one is supporting the child. This qualitative case study considers the lived experience of one mother currently raising a twice-exceptional, gifted and dyslexic sophomore, struggling with ADHD and anxiety. Collected data highlights the thoughts and feelings this mother has toward parenting such a child. It is hoped that such an account can help parents in similar circumstances as well as stakeholders better appreciate and understand such children and the struggles parents raising such a child may encounter.

Keywords: twice-exceptional; gifted children; parenting gifted children; parenting anxiety

Introduction

Students benefit personally and academically from supportive individuals, especially those with a parent well-versed in understanding the needs of one's child and capable of advocating on his or her behalf. However, despite the desire to assist and support one's child in his or her academic journey, parents may feel baffled and overwhelmed with choices and circumstances. Indeed, although rewarding, all parenting can be difficult, but parenting a gifted child has its own unique set of challenges, and parenting a child with multiple exceptionalities may be especially challenging. It is important for educators to support parents of such children, for, in supporting the parent, one is supporting the child.

The Gifted Learner

The U.S. Department of Education (1993) considers gifted learners as those possessing "outstanding talent" who "perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, and environment" (p. 26). Although gifted learners vary in their (among other things) tastes, motivation, abilities, temperament, and desires, there are defining traits found within this special population that could create emotional sensitivities for some. One defining characteristic, asynchronous development, parallels the child's IQ and can create an awkward feeling of being "out-of-sync" with oneself and others (Silverman, 2013, p. 44). Overexcitabilities (Dabrowski, 1964, 1966) may be recognized and heightened sensitivities may be exacerbated. Some gifted learners may experience fear (Tippey & Burnham, 2009), anxiety (Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011; Lamont, 2012), and depression (Jackson, 1998; Webb, 2008; Webb et al., 2006).

There are misunderstandings regarding the ways in which a gifted learner lives and learns. Commonly-believed myths (Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007), may intensify unrealistic expectations and create additional stress on such learners. Perfectionism (Mofield & Peters, 2015; Perrone-McGovern, Simon-Dack, Beduna, Williams, & Esche, 2015; Silverman, 1999) and underachievement (Blaas, 2014; Delisle, 2009; Ritchotte, Rubenstein, & Murray, 2015; Rubenstein, Siegle, Reis, McCoach, & Burton, 2012), for example,

may result from such internal and external expectations, and this may trigger additional frustrations. Additionally, some gifted learners choose to conceal or deny their gifts and talents in order to be approved and accepted by others (Webb et al., 2007, p. 172).

Parenting the Gifted Learner

The exceptional needs and characteristics of gifted learners may concern some parents. At times, parents may feel inadequately equipped in their parental role (Delisle, 2001) and feel unsupported and isolated from those who can understand and empathize (Webb et al., 2007). For example, understanding asynchronous development as well as understanding how to help one's gifted learner cope can be particularly challenging for some parents because this population differs so vastly, and one positive integration or solution will not accommodate all. For this reason, proper resources and information, as well as the social support from interpersonal relations, becomes especially important for parents' self-efficacy. However, parents of gifted learners may have difficulty finding such support, and, as Webb et al. (2007) expect, few have opportunities to discuss their perceptions, feelings, and concerns with others.

Delisle (2001) suggests that, despite the excitement in raising such a gifted and talented child, parents may feel a sense of guilt. This guilt may coincide with feelings of inadequacy. Consequently, it would seem that such feelings might create obstacles affecting intrapersonal relations as well as stifling positive self-efficacy, hindering appropriate goal setting and productive steps toward advocacy, and obstructing successful family dynamics. Identified myths (Webb et al., 2007) about the gifted learner may only add to the already fueled emotions and insecurities of the parent. Therefore, the joy in having a gifted and talented child may sometimes be dwarfed by unsettling emotions and uncertainties.

The Twice-Exceptional Learner

Twice-exceptional learners are recognized as G/T learners who have disabilities or other problematic issues and disorders (Berninger & Abbott, 2013; Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). The National Education Association (2006) recognizes several types of twice-exceptional disabilities that include physical, sensory, or learning disabilities. These include, but are not limited to: Asperger Syndrome, emotional and/or behavioral disorders, and ADHD (p. 6). As is considered "a milder form of autism" that is difficult to recognize because of "subtle hidden disabilities" within individuals that seem "normal" and "intelligent" (Powell, 2016, p. 7). Lyon, Shaywitz, and Shaywitz (2003) consider reading disabilities as separate from learning disabilities and claim that dyslexia "affect[s] at least 80 percent of the LD population" (p. 2). Dyslexics are characterized as having:

Difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities.

These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction.

Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (p. 2)

Reis, Baum, and Burke (2014) assert that there are problems diagnosing students with disabilities and, for this reason, advise "multidisciplinary teams familiar with both giftedness and disabilities" to collaborate on a twice-exceptional diagnosis (p. 224). Consequently, since such learning disabilities and "neurobiological problems" can be destructive to one's "academic and social/emotional functioning" and success (Kobot, 2003, p. 42), it is important for stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors) to address such needs in order to support these exceptional learners.

Current Study

This qualitative case study considered the narrative of Andrea¹, a mother currently raising a twice-exceptional (i.e., gifted/dyslexic with ADHD) sophomore. Andrea's daughter, Christine, is currently enrolled in a public high school and taking Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Andrea, a willing participant through

snowball sampling, was selected for her role in raising a highly-gifted (146 IQ), twice-exceptional learner. As a dyslexic herself, Andrea understood the difficult struggles and experiences one faces with such a disability. However, this understanding seemed to strengthen her perspective and appreciation for how Christine was able to cope and excel despite her disability. The researcher felt Andrea's parenting experiences would be invaluable for all stakeholders hoping to better understand and support twice-exceptional learners and their families. Thus, the purpose of the study was to gather data that could add informational value to better understand the uniquely defining experiences, perceptions, and challenges that mothers raising gifted, twice-exceptional learners might encounter. From the collected data, the researcher hoped to identify and consider circumstances that could explain individual thought patterns resulting from one's parental role in raising such a child and in dealing with perceived societal expectations and opinions of both the self and child.

Method

The qualitative in design study intentionally explored twice-exceptionalities and unique maternal experiences as it related to such exceptionalities in order to illustrate discovered elements in narrative form. Based on thoughtful, introspective communications, the approach highlights meaningful lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018), in this case for the mother. As personal truths are revealed in thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that emerge during personal, shared communications between the researcher and the mother, the process in gathering data is worthwhile. For the purpose of this study, the researcher chose a case study design where one semi-structured approximately 1 hour 15 minute FaceTime interview was the primary mode of communication, providing a more intimate look at a personal narrative that would be considered individually and, through planned future research, collectively. An informed consent document explained the nature of the study and the participant was assured that all identifying information would be changed in the transcription process and the voice-recording would be immediately destroyed afterwards. Once informed consent was granted, the researcher encouraged the participant to share her personal account and interpret her own experiences. During the interview the researcher asked the following open-ended questions:

1. Tell me about what sets your daughter apart from her peers.
2. Tell me about what pleases/excites you the most (even if you can't voice it to others) regarding the gifts/talents and/or future possibilities for your daughter.
3. Tell me about a really bad day where your daughter was misunderstood by others.
4. Describe a time where your daughter was treated unfairly or where there was discomfort or resistance (e.g. jealousy, frustration) from others (e.g. classmates, teachers, coaches).
5. Explain your concerns (for both you and your daughter) resulting from such experiences.
6. Consider the educational resources, intellectual assistance, and logical direction you provide your daughter. Are you satisfied with your choices and parental role? Please explain.
7. Consider the emotional support you provide your daughter. Describe a day where you were pleased/dissatisfied with the emotional support you provided.
8. What makes advocating for your daughter and her rights and educational opportunities difficult?
9. What is it like to be with other mothers who don't have G/T children? What might you wish was different?
10. What might others who have never raised a G/T child think of your role as a parent to a G/T child? In general, do you think these opinions are correct and justified? Please elaborate.
11. Describe a/another time when the comments (or lack of comments) and actions by another adult (possibly a mother to a non-G/T child) caused tension and discomfort for you.
12. What challenges in raising a G/T child might others who have never raised such a child not understand? How might their image of you as a mother to a G/T child be erroneous?
13. Tell me about a time you withheld information about your daughter – even when other mothers were sharing positive news or stories regarding their own child and his/her accomplishments. Why might this have happened?

14. Tell me about additional ways in which you might have adapted/adjusted your communications with others regarding your G/T child.
15. Describe the community in which you live (e.g., urban vs. rural). Explain the benefits/hindrances of living in such a community as it relates to parenting a G/T child(ren).
16. Having had time to reflect upon your experiences in raising a G/T child, tell me about any enlightening thoughts or new discoveries regarding these experiences. Has your opinion/attitude shifted in any way?

The interview dialogue allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the participant's experiences and take a more analytical look at her narrative. After the interview, the participant was given a copy of the single-spaced 27-page transcript via email for approval, with the option to edit and provide commentary if needed.

It was believed that sample size was a limitation as well as limitations that could occur if the mother chose to end the session early or if there was resistance and withheld information or if the mother could not articulate her thoughts, feelings, and perspectives adequately. However, this participant shared openly throughout the interview although she struggled to recall concrete examples to some questions. One interview was adequate for this particular study since it enabled the researcher to understand thoughts and feelings the participant may have toward parenting a gifted, twice-exceptional learner. It also enabled the researcher to recognize possible perceptions toward societal opinions, expectations, and acceptance of both mother and child. This is one case in a larger study (Hidalgo, 2017) where participant narratives illustrated three overarching themes that highlighted social and emotional components as well as varied educational concerns and challenges: (1) Emotional Responses, (2) Parent Protective Factors, and (3) Misunderstanding of Mother.

The same procedures were followed in this case study, running parallel to a larger dissertation study (Hidalgo 2017). Andrea was not a participant for the original larger study; however, since her case had a twice-exceptional component, the researcher felt her case would be an interesting and valid addition. Thus, with the intention to further research and study the lived experiences of parents raising highly gifted children as well as those with additional exceptionalities, the researcher used the same analysis tools and followed the same procedures already established and validated in the larger study (Hidalgo, 2017).

Credibility for this study was obtained through member check (i.e., returned transcript with participant approval) as well as through telephone conferences between the investigator and another experienced investigator who served as a peer-reviewer. These telephone conferences were to recognize any researcher impartiality of data as well as to discuss findings, consider coded themes, and contemplate analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The reviewer verified that the categories and themes were accurate. Any questions that the reviewer had were thoroughly discussed and remedied. Investigator and reviewer conclusions matched, and the reviewer verified that conclusions were valid.

Data Analysis

An analysis and review of the data continued during and after the transcription process. The transcript was read entirely on multiple occasions, key ideas were noted, and annotations were made in the margins. Demographics (e.g., age, marital status, number of G/T and non-G/T children living at home) and analytic memos where thoughts during the interview were documented were also considered. For example, the researcher considered the flexibility of Andrea's time and recognized a need for further research around parents with less flexibility of time. After an initial and generalized review, similar themes and codes were recognized to parallel a larger study (Hidalgo, 2017); however, in this particular case, the code of Dyslexia and Learning Disability (LD) was added. Other codes were identified, classified, and interpreted, and from these codes themes became more easily recognized. A table was made to visibly present each code, subtheme, and theme. The provided table illustrates the three overarching themes that highlighted social and emotional components as well as varied educational concerns and challenges.

Table 1

Codes, Subthemes, and Themes

<u>Codes</u>	<u>Subthemes</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Child's Gifts & Talents Child's Accomplishments Child's Future Opportunities	Appreciation	Emotional Responses
Fear of Bragging Downplayed or Withheld Information Societal Interactions	Discomfort	
Frustration with Child Frustration with Educators or District Advocating for Educational Rights & Opportunities Parenting Challenges Parenting Self-Efficacy Guilt & Remorse	Anxiety	
Social Interactions Masked Intelligence Work Ethic & Educational Experience Emotional Needs Negative Self Talk Dyslexia and LD	Concern for Child	Parent Protective Factors
Child's Personality & Ability Asynchronous Development	Misunderstanding of Child	
Mother's Decisions Mother's Challenges Parental Role Influence on Child's IQ & Academic Strengths	Misunderstanding of Mother	Misunderstanding of Mother

An initial summary attempting to identify challenges and emotional complexities as described by the parent informant was then created. The researcher used a categorical aggregation analysis where “a collection of instances” were found in order to see developing “issue-relevant meanings” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 206). Patterns were then discovered and naturalistic generalizations followed from the data analysis. Afterwards, an analyzed narrative was formed highlighting themes and subthemes found within the participant narrative.

Results and Discussion

Andrea is a Caucasian, middle-class, work-from-home seamstress from a rural “oil field town” of about 13,000 residents. The community supports one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. Andrea believes the resident children are close because they “go to school together their whole lives.” Andrea is raising a gifted, twice-exceptional sophomore who was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD at the age of seven. At that time, when Andrea was attempting to understand the reason behind Christine’s classroom “meltdowns,”

she sought the help of a doctor who would later refer her to a child psychiatrist. It was this psychiatrist who tested for and identified Christine's 146 IQ and recognized the source of the panic attacks – anxiety. The psychiatrist also attributed some of the problem to ADHD and, for this reason, he chose not to medically treat Christine for anxiety at that time. He did suggest, however, that Andrea put Christine on ADHD medication “to calm the noises” and “help her focus.” He believed she would eventually “grow out of it.” However, the anxiety forcefully returned in middle school, and it was then that she was also given medication for the anxiety. Andrea believes this approach has been successful and now as a sophomore, Christine is “doing fine.”

Andrea felt the child psychiatrist was a mentor to some extent, helping her better understand her daughter and her emotional needs. She valued the suggested tools he provided for helping Christine cope with her anxiety, and having the paperwork from a credible source gave Andrea confidence to strongly advocate for her daughter's educational opportunities. In elementary school, however, Christine was denied gifted enrichment services because her district would not grant services for both dyslexia *and* giftedness. Thus, Christine did not receive gifted services until her seventh grade year. Andrea later admitted: “I wish then I would have forced them to take her into the gifted and talented program because she tested into it.” However, she accepted the district's policy because “at the time [Christine] was so behind on reading that I was more focused on [getting her to read and write].” The researcher thought there may have been some regret and remorse when Andrea disclosed: “We probably should have home-schooled her instead of putting her in public school.”

Regardless, Andrea tried to make the most of those elementary years. She claimed: “I read *everything* I could get my hands on about dyslexia and about how the brain works and about how they think.” She felt that in order to teach Christine, she needed to teach herself through available literature. Even now when other parents ask her to share her success story, Andrea does not hesitate to tell them about what she did to help her daughter and about, for instance, the “*thousands* of flash cards” she made to accommodate “picture thinkers.” Andrea's animated enthusiasm in recounting how she helped her daughter during those early years seemed to highlight positive self-efficacy for her parenting role. More specifically, Andrea credits the lengthy sessions “spent outside of school” where she attempted to build skills and spark confidence within her daughter as a large “reason Christine is as successful as she is.” Consequently, Andrea prides herself on the time and effort she devoted to helping her daughter read, and she proudly recalled: “Once it clicked, she flew.” The researcher recognized her efforts at home, but she also credited Andrea for her research and advocacy at school, as well, and it was obvious that the educational professionals at her daughter's schools were also impressed:

Once we got the dyslexia diagnosis and we went in for what they call a 504 meeting... they had never had a mother come in with a 504 handbook printed out... I [had] read the 504 handbook cover to cover... [and] when I went in for the meeting, they said they never had a mom come in *this* prepared.

And the only thing I know is that in order to help her be prepared is for *me* to be prepared. And so I did that.

Andrea was prepared to advocate for Christine in parent-teacher communications either orally or in writing. She remembered “mak[ing] a point to [say], ‘Put the dyslexia on the back burner. I want you to listen to her and realize how smart she is. And I'm not bragging... I want you to listen to her and I want you to help her.’”

Themes

Three overarching themes that paralleled a larger study (Hidalgo, 2017) were presented in the data. The first theme, Emotional Responses, yielded three subthemes: (1) Appreciation, (2) Discomfort, and (3) Anxiety. The second theme, Parent Protective Factors, yielded two subthemes: (1) Concern for Child and (2) Misunderstanding of Child. An additional code was added to the Concern for Child subtheme: Dyslexia and Learning Disability (LD). The third and final theme was Misunderstanding of Mother.

Appreciation. Andrea revealed much appreciation for Christine's gifts and talents, accomplishments, and future opportunities, despite her dyslexia and learning disability. In fact, Andrea might have felt that Christine's disability strengthened her character, for she asserted there would be no future limitations for her

daughter; she proudly said: “The sky’s the limit with her.” One of the traits Andrea felt especially appreciative of was Christine’s drive and determination. She understood, for instance, that Christine’s effort to make Banner Roll all year was to be applauded since, as a dyslexic with ADHD, she had to “[work] twice as hard to get there.” The fact that Christine rallied behind other dyslexic students and encouraged them to do their best in a support group she formed was praised by her mother. According to Andrea, during these monthly meetings, Christine’s testimony is inspiration for others who hope to have the drive and determination Christine has shown in her academic success. Andrea might think those students see what she sees in her daughter, and Andrea elaborated on the fundamental traits that helped Christine find success:

When she doesn’t know what it is, she finds out what it is... when she is on task, she doesn’t quit until she gets the answer and once she knows it, she doesn’t forget... plus it’s being dyslexic [and] the fact that she’s able to do this with they say a pretty *profound* diagnosis of dyslexia and still be ranked in the top 10% of her class right now... we weren’t sure if she’d accomplish it, but she has by sheer *force of will* that she was *not* going to be put in special classes. She was going to be like a regular kid and she *forced* herself to learn how to read... if she didn’t have dyslexia, where would she be? You know, if she didn’t have that block, where would she be?

Such drive and resulting success highlights the appreciation Andrea feels not just for her daughter’s intelligence, gifts, and talents but also for her willpower. Andrea respected and valued Christine’s steer determination not to be victimized and limited by dyslexia and ADHD but, instead, to have resolve to succeed.

Discomfort. It was apparent that Andrea was cognizant of the reactions of others when she shared information about Christine, and she wished others would understand that “when I talk about some of the stuff that Christine does that I’m not bragging.” She seemed to feel that most people did not want “to hear about the one kid who’s perfect.” Consequently, Andrea admits:

I catch myself. If I brag about Christine, I brag about her to my best friend who has a kid just like her. I brag about her to my mom and to my family and to my husband. Because if I said that to some of these other mothers, then I’m not doing the right thing... I’m bragging on her... I would like it for people to understand that I’m not talking about her being smart again, I’m just proud of her... I’m proud of what she’s done. How many kids can come up with the stuff she’s coming up with?

This discomfort, as recognized in a fear of bragging, one identified code, has caused Andrea to withhold information, a second code, in the past. The researcher recognized that Andrea felt fortunate to have a friend with a gifted child a few years older than Christine. Together, the women help each other “smooth over rough edges” and “bounce ideas off [of one another].” However, with other mothers Andrea tends to withhold information about the accomplishments of her daughter. She remembered several instances where other mothers were bragging on their child’s grade or project – even when Christine’s grade or project was better – where she chose to either minimize her story or keep completely mum about it. In fact, Andrea admitted to learning early on that this was necessary for her to avoid discomfort. She shared: “We started dumbing down a lot of conversations with others because... you put yourself in another social area and... I had an older [non-gifted] child and saw where some other parents had issues with it. I kind of was able to learn from them what *not* to do myself.” Another interesting parental action to note was that Andrea often shared information about Christine’s dyslexia, and the researcher pondered whether this was to help detract from the gifted label and her accomplishments as a gifted learner. It seemed that Andrea could have possibly used such information unconsciously as permission to brag, for Andrea remembered saying, “She made all As *and* she’s dyslexic. What a great thing for her to pull off!” to other parents regardless of their reaction and she thought “I probably throw the dyslexia thing in there to dumb her down a little bit even though it’s not but to make her seem more normal.” Withholding or adjusting communications did not ease Andrea’s discomfort when she witnessed other people treat her daughter unfairly or disrespectfully.

Concern for child. Andrea further disclosed that she is intensely sensitive to the way others negatively treated Christine, especially in those elementary years when it “was the hardest.” She admitted that, during those years, “[Christine’s] friends made fun of her for being pulled out [of the classroom] for her dyslexia [special education class],” Andrea further admitted:

It would break my heart when the kids would just walk away from her and then she would come to me sad... It breaks my heart that she's grown up kinda lonely... kinda by herself. It's a shame that you're this smart and you have such a hard time socializing with the other kids. And the ones you *can* get to socialize with you are so much older, and then it's the balancing of the age difference.

Same-age peers were not the only ones to treat Christine poorly. Andrea vividly remembered adults (e.g., teachers, parents of her friends) brushing her off when she would attempt to share information. In the beginning, Andrea tried advocating for her daughter by voicing her concerns regarding Christine's ill treatment; however, she found that when she did, "I would push *those* parents away, so it got to the point where I would tell her I heard her and... move on."

Now, Andrea's "concern is [Christine] ostracizing herself" and "setting herself apart to the point where she doesn't have any friends because they just don't get her." She is concerned that Christine might "[expect] more out of these friends than they have the ability to give because they're not on the same level as her and she's trying to drag them up with her and they're not going to get there." Andrea understands her daughter's social and emotional needs and desires, and Christine seemingly feels comfortable sharing her honest feelings openly at home with her mother. Andrea claims there are, in fact, "a lot of tears" when she recounts happenings. She further elaborates:

She'll be explaining something that happened and she'll end up crying and then she gets frustrated with herself because she's crying... She *hates* being two different people. You know, at school she has to kind of dumb herself down and when she comes home, she's allowed to talk however she wants to talk and, you know, she gets frustrated with that side of it.

To help, Andrea encourages Christine to "have [her] filter on" because, she explains, this helps her "think about what she [is] saying... and make sure it [is] socially correct before she [says] it." Although Andrea did not know of the term *asynchronous development* before the interview, she did understand that there was indeed a gap between Christine's cognitive and emotional levels and she commented often on the anxiety created from such a gap.

This gap and the resulting anxiety affected, according to her concerned mother, Christine's social skills and made it difficult for her to avoid "social awkwardness." She remembered a recent occurrence where Christine's friend did not make the cheer team and instead of showing more empathy, Christine commented unknowingly in such a way that her friend felt slighted:

Christine made the comment, 'Oh well, better luck next year.' And it came across as a back-handed compliment, and... she didn't realize that what she said came across that way and she was like, 'Well, I was just trying to tell her that she has a chance next year.' And I was, 'Yes, but the way you *said* it, came across as just a slap in the face... I told her she needed to spin it properly and if you give a short and simple answer, most people want a little bit more flip and puff added in to the conversation... it took a lot of apologizing on her part – which in her brain she felt that it wasn't necessary – to explain to her friend that she didn't mean it to be that way.

Andrea continues to try to make her daughter aware of and help her understand how her comments and actions come across to others, but it does not minimize the often hurt feelings that occur from such scenarios – like the time a friend commented on Christine's comparison of a dance move to a geometry shape. Although that particular event was not necessarily as hurtful as some, it proved that Christine, to varying degrees, has to deal with daily occurrences where she is noticeably different and her friends do, in fact, comment on it. In the classroom, Christine has had several occurrences where the frustrated teacher reacted to something Christine said or did, and it concerned Andrea that the teachers did not better understand Christine's intention or the point she was trying to make. Such reactions by others make Andrea hope that "when she gets to college... she'll find that other friend on the same intelligence level that she can talk to" because Andrea realizes she will not be there to help Christine grapple with the discomfort felt in social settings.

Misunderstanding of child. Part of this sensitivity and the resulting frustration is in knowing how misunderstood her daughter is to same-age peers and adults. Andrea said that even family members have a difficult time understanding when so often "she's like a little adult" one minute and then in another minute,

she's playing with her American dolls. Regardless, misunderstandings can often make it difficult for Christine who "has a hard time connecting with people of her same age."

In the classroom, Christine has had a teacher who believed "because she was dyslexic, she was spoiled" and who believed since she was dyslexic, she couldn't know certain things. Christine has tried to defend her knowledge in the classroom with teachers who were disbelieving of some of the things Christine tried to share, and as a result Andrea asserted: "I don't want anybody to think she's a bad kid because it seems like the smart kids... get thought of as rude or get thought of as blunt."

Oftentimes, Andrea feels that people misunderstand her daughter's intense emotions, and she feels that she often has to explain how the two (i.e., intelligence and emotions) are connected:

I get a lot of... 'Christine cries a lot... What in the world does her being smart have to do with her emotions?'... I've already dumbed it down to where I don't even use the right words anymore... her intelligence level is up here [*moves her hand just below her chin*] and her emotional level is down here [*moves her hand just above her stomach*], they don't meet.... A lot of the tears are not necessarily that she's upset and crying. It's anxiety and it's the way it comes out in her.

Andrea realized misunderstandings will inevitably and naturally occur, especially since her daughter is twice-exceptional. However, dealing with the anxiety and frustration for both mother and daughter can be challenging. When Christine whole-heartedly began a support group for dyslexic students like her, Andrea admitted: "It was her way to reach out and help other kids with a learning disability... to show them how they can do this... It was a neat thing she started but when she started talking about it on the high school campus, she was [thought to be] bragging and she had to quit talking about it." Like mother like daughter, Andrea and Christine learned quickly that even things done in kindness could be misinterpreted and criticized.

Anxiety and frustration. Although Andrea felt parents may never be completely pleased with their parenting choices, she did seem to have positive self-efficacy – despite her challenges – in her parental role. She admitted to regrets of the past like the intolerance she had for Christine's idiosyncrasies, especially in the beginning, when "I've let her down." However, the majority of her anxiety and frustration seemed to result from external sources. She elaborates on some of the frustrating challenges she has had to endure:

Getting the counselors at school to understand or even getting her teachers to understand that she's an above-board thinker. That she doesn't think at the same level as everyone else in the class. I mean, I have had knock-down-drag-outs last year with her English teacher... and he was not happy and informing me that at her age she should be fighting her own battles and not have to have a mother fighting her battles for her.

It would seem parents of gifted children experience such frustrations to varying degrees, but –because Christine is twice-exceptional – Andrea has to deal with additional stresses:

We have the double whammy where we have the 504 plan for dyslexia in her file and they automatically shove her to the side... I mean, they have to sign a piece of paper saying that they know what's in her file, that they've read it, and that they understand it. And it's a federal offense if they don't read it, and they *still* just sign it and throw it to the side and they don't dig in a little deeper to realize that she's *highly* intelligent and she's highly highly knowledgeable on her own and they just push her to the side. It's a fight to jump over the 504 plan and have them realize that she can go above this and to not push her into a corner. She's right here in front of you.

Andrea has had to stay on top of the situation and request accommodations for Christine when, for example, a teacher did not "understand that writing her spelling words out five times was busy work for Christine." In this particular situation, the teacher agreed (after about six weeks of persuading by Andrea) that if she took a picture of the words Christine had written in clay, it would be an acceptable replacement for written work. Andrea has continued to take such experiences in stride and consistently advocate on her daughter's behalf, shedding light to educators and others on the struggles of a dyslexic yet highly intelligent learner.

Andrea wished that others would better understand her struggles, however, and that of her daughter. For example, she felt others did not understand Christine's academic "hunger that's almost impossible to feed" and how bored she is in school. This anxiety and frustration may stem from feeling misunderstood herself in her

parenting role. Additionally, it may stem from irritability for those (e.g., educators especially) playing a significant role in her daughter's academic journey and self-esteem who take little time or interest in an attempt to better understand Christine's character, social and emotional needs, or academic plans and desires.

Misunderstanding of mother. It would seem that Andrea's parental role and decisions were both criticized and misunderstood in society. Andrea admitted to being called "overprotective" and a "Helicopter Parent" at times. She has also had people tell her "to just let [Christine] be a *kid*" as criticism in recognizing Christine's social awkwardness. She elaborates that since Christine "doesn't fit into that little box that all the other kids do," others do not seem to understand her challenges. She felt that these same people who say Christine should spend more time with same-age peers do not consider "when she hangs out with other kids, she gets ostracized, so she goes to her room and reads." Teachers have also misunderstood her intentions when she has advocated her both educational opportunities and in speaking on her daughter's behalf in teacher-student conflicts. Overall, Andrea has learned to just move on unbothered by the opinions of others.

Conclusion

The narrative illustrated in this study offers a glimpse at the complexities and challenges, despite appreciation and joy, that parents may experience while raising a twice-exceptional learner. Christine was like many highly-gifted learners in her asynchrony and emotionally-heightened intensities, and this affected her vulnerability to anxiety as seen in her panic attacks and "meltdowns". In Andrea's case, early detection of her daughter's disability and emotional distress compelled her to seek professional help, and the psychiatrist was able to give Andrea the resources and support needed to support her child. This professional support also enhanced her parental confidence and desire to advocate for Christine.

Andrea's experiences seemed to spur an innate recognition of misunderstandings of both mother and child; such misunderstandings could be a result of commonly-believed myths (Webb, et al., 2007) concerning the gifted learner. The sensed misunderstandings caused concern for Christine and affected Andrea personally in her parenting role. This may have been cause for her choosing (either consciously or unconsciously) to downplay Christine's abilities and achievements at times.

Andrea's challenges in parenting a twice-exceptional learner was apparent. Fortunately, in Andrea's case, there were individuals who served as confidants and mentors, supporting her decisions and giving her encouragement when needed. The support, especially, of her husband and a close and understanding friend, providing both solace and a sounding board for articulating her position and preparing her for action, encouraged Andrea further in her quest to support and advocate for her daughter, and this unquestionably helped boost her confidence and determination. Consequently, even though the rural community in which she lives has few gifted and twice-exceptional learners, both mother and child were able to thrive, recognizing and feeling comfort from the support of both individuals and research literature even in their unusual and isolated position.

Arguably, Andrea's work-from-home seamstress position granted her flexibility in time. However, it was her internal drive to help Christine find academic success. As a dyslexic herself, she may have been especially motivated in helping her daughter through the struggles that she was all too familiar with from her own personal childhood narrative. Andrea had much appreciation for her daughter's gifts and talents, but it was Christine's drive that her mother seemed to appreciate most. Although dyslexia and learning disabilities can hinder one's academic success as well as one's emotional development, Andrea's narrative shows that some defy the odds and confidently reach personal success nonetheless. Andrea's positive self-efficacy seemed to propel both mother and daughter to success. Although there were certainly moments of discomfort and frustration resulting from the characteristic social and emotional needs of a gifted, twice-exceptional learner, it was obvious that she excelled academically and had grown individually in social settings.

Indeed, their narrative has defied the odds, and the researcher hopes this success story can inspire others to push for and seek early detection, professional assistance, mentorship, research, and educational opportunities that can provide support and encouragement for the twice-exceptional learner to reach his or her

fullest and optimal potential. However, additional illustrated and considered stories would enhance educational professionals' understanding of the challenges parents face when raising twice-exceptional learners. Therefore, future research is planned to provide a stronger body of evidence in order to meet and accommodate such needs, for in order to support the child, it is important to support the parent. Andrea's story may help create stakeholder awareness to better understand the unique circumstances and lived experiences of such parents.

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