

Productivity and 2e

By Christopher Jackson

Introduction:

Twice-exceptional persons are meant to produce. They are curious, creative problem solvers whose insights can lead to new inventions, works of art, and ways of thinking. Twice-exceptional folks also have disabilities which can make creative output difficult. Given that so many environments are poor fits for 2e kids and adults, it is very important to create environments in which these people can succeed. Within these surroundings, twice-exceptional persons can thrive, creating valuable products for companies or for other people. Having a good strategy is extremely important for 2e students to stay productive.

Strategy 1: Learn in small bits to get bigger picture

Because dyslexic, anxious, or ADHD students can't focus well in schools, they often struggle to grasp new information in fast-paced classes, resulting in poor test grades. However, 2e students love learning and exploring, so it's important to develop their natural talents to encourage productivity. To this end, Youtube offers many educational videos that teach topics succinctly and provide excellent demonstrations; since each video lasts five to ten minutes, 2e audiences will not feel overwhelmed. The videos are fun to watch and really help 2e students learn effectively. If 2e student combine knowledge with talent, they can produce interesting, creative work. For instance, a sensitive, a precocious 2e artist with excellent abstraction skills and attention to detail, might struggle drawing linear perspectives (e.g. vanishing points, horizons, scales). In this case, the artist could watch online geometry videos on parallel lines and similar triangles; the videos would cover the main ideas without the need for a full geometry class. With the new knowledge, the artist could then produce works having greater visual depth.

To be productive, 2e students should learn the big picture first, studying during times of low stress and academic demands. It would be a good strategy for 2e students to get a head start on coursework during the summer break. For example, consider a 2e student scheduled to take a biology class during the school term. The student could spend the summer break before the class watching biology videos on CrashCourse or some other video platform, absorbing the main ideas at his or her own pace. Under the low stress conditions, the 2e student would learn and retain information more effectively than during the fast-paced, test-focused school year. Coming into a class already knowing the main ideas could be boring for a 2e student, but it could also take off the burden on a student's learning disabilities. In this situation, the student would produce high quality work, such as essays, lab reports, or projects, as the energy and focus previously diverted to manage the disabilities would now be available for higher order thinking skills.

To produce creatively, 2e students must gain sufficient knowledge on a subject, but they need to learn with a simple approach. A practical strategy works around 2e weaknesses while building 2e strengths, enabling the twice-exceptional student to produce high quality work, without being stymied by harsh demands. Ideally, 2e students would excel academically, with excellent time, stress management, and organizational skills, but realistically they are smart students who often fail because of their lopsided, underdeveloped skills. Although not always possible, having a flexible teacher who understands this asynchrony will result in the best outcomes for the student. An innovative teacher can develop new ways to teach and test 2e students. For example, instead of giving students a single four hour final exam, a teacher could break up the final over a two or three day period. Professionals working with twice-exceptional students should realize that 2e folks don't improve through continual failure; to help this population succeed, these professionals should adopt a less demanding but more effective strategy. A smart student who doesn't constantly feel incompetent will produce good work and feel driven to keep doing good work.

Sometimes, 2e folks will face obstacles exacerbating their disabilities, but which can be overcome with the right strategy. Many 2e adults have the ability to retain large amounts of information, but getting that information into their brains is tricky. For example, many tech and IT jobs now require certification exams, in which test takers need to answer a large number of factual questions in a limited time. Because twice-exceptional people can have reading comprehension deficits, learning by reading can be inefficient, especially for highly detailed and dry material, like technical manuals. And if the 2e person can't absorb the information well, he or she will fail the competency test. To learn effectively, the person needs to find a way to bypass the reading comprehension deficits, or other issues that prevent learning. To this end, I have created my own software to help retain core facts; the software is simple, but it helps users with learning differences retain facts solidly. With practice, users can retrieve information quickly, imbuing confidence, and resulting in an improved outcome. If 2e workers pass competency tests, they can find work and produce prolifically. This is just one out of an infinite number of ways 2e persons can work around their deficits to improve their competency and productivity.

Strategy 2: Commit to a flexible schedule

2e persons should make a realistic, flexible schedule, which accommodates their disabilities. Having an overly rigid, tightly packed schedule creates high anxiety and stress, which actually reduce the quality of work, and demotivate 2e students, curbing productivity. Twice-exceptional students should allot time to a specific task, but allow for some extra time if they cannot finish it. For example, a 2e student might set aside two hours on the weekend to program; however, it is OK if the student spends two and a half hours on the task. As long as students work consistently at a task, they will produce more in the long run, despite initially unimpressive results. As 2e persons adapt to a schedule, their brains adjust so that time-management becomes easier. The students can then gradually tighten the schedule to meet tougher demands. It's unrealistic to expect 2e folks to adhere instantly to a strict schedule that works well

for neurotypicals. Forcing 2e students to follow a rigid schedule will cause avoidance behaviors, including panic attacks or meltdowns. In this situation, nothing gets accomplished, and the student is in a worse state than before. However, if students ease into a schedule, they will produce, even if in small amounts at the start, without the adverse reactions. As the students gains confidence, productivity will increase. So, the flexible schedule is not about coddling, but about sharpening skills through kindness and patience.

When students can't implement a flexible schedule, try approximating it. Underprivileged 2e college students, who support themselves through school, do not have the luxury of a flexible schedule. Still, some strategies could help. A diagnosed 2e student could ask the professor for time accommodations or ask to meet outside of office hours, explaining the situation as needed. A working 2e student could **tactfully** ask his or her boss for some job flexibility. Twice-exceptional student workers should also consider which jobs can pay bills without exacerbating disabilities. For example, a 2e student struggling with slow auditory processing should consider working on campus (like at the library) rather than waiting on tables at a busy restaurant. Except for the worst cases, 2e students can get moral support from friends or a significant other, who probably understand the situation.

In corporate positions, 2e workers may struggle to integrate a flexible schedule. Big businesses move quickly and have firm deadlines. Because lots of money is at stake, 2e workers have to produce quickly and effectively. In this situation, 2e persons should implement a flexible schedule in their personal lives. The schedule could incorporate cooking, household tasks, or personal projects. By sticking to a flexible routine, while exercising self-compassion, 2e persons can improve their organizational skills. They can then gradually make the schedule demands tighter, sharpening skills that carry over to their main jobs. Undoubtedly, 2e workers who struggle with executive functioning have received criticism, or even been fired; cultivating this skill is important, but doing so in an encouraging manner is even more important.

Strategy 3: Find a receptive audience

2e kids and adults need an audience that appreciates their work. No matter how hard they try, twice exceptional students are often labeled as underachievers for not meeting expectations. While their work may be substandard, 2e persons still have great potential, so it is important to find professionals who see this potential and can nurture it. If twice-exceptional students find someone who unselfishly acknowledges their worth and doesn't judge them for their disabilities, they will be motivated to produce and take risks. Because they feel validated, the students will lose hostility and other hang-ups that prevent them from succeeding. It's important for professionals to then steer the students to other people who will also appreciate the work. For example, if a student does poorly on timed standardized tests but does amazing work one on one with a teacher who gets 2e, consider introducing the student to a veteran in the field, who may recognize the student's talent.

With a receptive audience, twice-exceptional persons will be productive and handle constructive feedback well. At some point, everyone will receive criticism, fair or unfair. Even the most prolific authors, film directors, and scientists have had some work that didn't sit well with critics, educators, or peer reviewers: William Shakespeare was booed off the stage for his performance in *Sejanus*, a humiliating event that spurred him on to write *Othello*; Leo Tolstoy, the writer of the epic *War and Peace*, dropped out of university, where professors described him as "unable and unwilling to learn"; premier scientist Isaac Newton, who sent the Royal Society his work on optics, was roundly criticized by Robert Hooke, whose own understanding of light differed from that of Newton's. However, for all of these historical figures, there was still someone that valued their contributions, and this support carried them through. For 2e folks, having a receptive audience builds a strong support network; with a good network, 2e students can handle criticism effectively, since they know that there are people who appreciate their work. Without a receptive audience, 2e persons don't develop the right skills to handle continual criticism. Although this stick motivation works for

some 2e students, for many others it demoralizes and cuts productivity.

Receptive audiences can give honest evaluations of 2e work, boosting productivity. Having endured so much criticism, 2e students doing good work sometimes feel that their work is still inadequate. This situation is counterproductive since it fuels perfectionism, which prevents students from taking on new projects. A receptive audience should tell students when they do good work, as it provides honest validation that encourages talent development. Honest validation can heal trust issues that 2e students often deal with. A receptive audience can also provide feedback when the student does less than stellar work. A twice-exceptional student who trusts an audience will listen to feedback and be less defensive about it. Without the hostility, the student will incorporate feedback, improving the quality of work. In this case, productivity will increase since less time is wasted overcoming resistance and defensiveness.

Conclusion:

In a flexible environment, 2e folks can produce abundantly. Resourceful twice-exceptional students must learn material in manageable chunks, so that they can use this knowledge to produce creative work. Without a solid knowledge base, it is very hard to produce effectively. Because of their disabilities, twice-exceptional folks should adhere to a flexible schedule, which promotes executive functioning skills without provoking maladaptive behaviors. They should also find people valuing their talents, as having a good support network can assuage the inevitable sting of real-world criticism. Twice-exceptional students should focus and develop areas of strength; find schools requiring fewer core classes for graduation but allowing advanced study in a field. For example, a gifted 2e artist should have more art classes to develop this talent, and fewer classes unrelated to this field, like chemistry, which take time away from advanced art projects. So, flexibility is the key to productivity.