

Amy:

Amy was identified in third grade for the gifted language arts pull-out program. Reading comprehension was very strong on achievement tests, yet it is also noted that she appeared younger than her classmates. She lacked a certain sophistication shared by her peers. She had friends and was a talented singer who sang solos in school and at church several times during her elementary years.

She was a deliberate worker who sometimes took much longer to complete work than her pull-out classmates. Her work was always well done. Her math skills were not at the same level as her reading skills. She seemed to have difficulty with number sequences and keeping the order of solving problems in her memory. She was assessed, and it was determined that she had ADD.

During sixth and seventh grade she had more difficulty with computation although she could discuss abstract math concepts. Through testing it was determined that she had a math learning disability, dyscalculia. She remained in the gifted language arts program during middle school although it was a yearly decision. She worked long hours on her schoolwork to compensate for what yet another assessment revealed as a reading fluency disability. Amy's reading fluency was in the bottom 5th percentile while her comprehension was in the top 5th percentile.

Amy took algebra twice and had a tutor in high school that was able to use the conceptual understanding to overcome the computational disability to the extent that she was able to successfully take the college entrance exams and qualify for good colleges. In college she was offered a reading support system for fluency but had by then figured out her own accommodations and preferred to use those. An IEP for the use of a calculator and extended time was instrumental in her early school success.

Al:

Al knew how to count in several languages by the time he was four. He could read and discuss articles from the newspaper at age four as well. His social skills at this time were not much different than his peers as they parallel played at his early childhood school. By first grade it was obvious that Al, who had extraordinary cognitive skills in reading and math, had some other exceptionalities to work with. First diagnosed as ADHD this diagnosis was soon changed to Asperger Syndrome.

Through elementary school, Al has had the support of a special education teacher who is available to help him with his social needs. As a current fifth grader, he is taking algebra and will take the ECA in May. He is accelerated in language arts as well and works with the 7/8th grade humanities teacher and the 6th grade language arts teacher. His written work is behind his other cognitive skills. He has struggled with writing for the past three years and at times refused to write. He is showing improvement this year especially when he can choose the topic. He is very interested in technology.

Perseveration can be a real issue for Al. This can occur in his relationships, behaviors and his choice of computers. Contracts and time to regroup are used to help keep Al in a

successful place in school. Middle school is ahead and plans are being made to meet both his academic and social skills needs.

Charlie:

Charlie was an early talker with a very large vocabulary. Though he loved being read to, he could not sit still to look at the book. He would play on the floor with toys, but would follow and comprehend the entire story. In Kindergarten Charlie was one of two students in his class that did not know his letters and struggled with identifying or writing them. By second grade teachers were concerned that he was struggling in reading, although he was a year ahead in math. Charlie's parents had him work with an Orton-Gillingham tutor, who said Charlie was not dyslexic. Over the next few years, Charlie worked with a total of four tutors, including one that tried to strap him into a chair to have him sit still to pay attention.

In third grade Charlie qualified for his school's gifted program. He still struggled with reading, and his mother wondered if he could be dyslexic. His teacher in the gifted program said he couldn't be, and that they never had a student in the gifted program that had a learning disability. In fifth grade he hit another wall in language arts. By this time he never read a book for pleasure, and made the comment that "reading is for snobs." At this point his parents enrolled him in Lindamood Bell, a program to help individuals with challenges in reading, comprehension, spelling, critical thinking, and math skills. The program helped, but he was still struggling compared to other students in his grade.

Finally, in seventh grade, Charlie had a psychoeducational evaluation, and was diagnosed with dyslexia. His parents are working with the school to work out accommodations and modifications.

Cameron:

Ten-year-old Cameron is a classic example of the child who falls through the cracks in school because his gifts and learning disabilities mask each other. Because he performs at or above grade level across the board and causes no disruptions in the classroom, Cameron's teachers see him as a model student. He's also very popular with his classmates. But Cameron dreads school and has been placed in five different schools in only four years.

In kindergarten, Cameron started begging his mother not to make him go to school. By second grade, he was getting sick to his stomach as he approached the school building. Cameron's undiagnosed dysgraphia made certain fine motor tasks laboriously difficult, causing him to work much harder than his classmates just to complete worksheets and writing assignments. His teachers suggested that he just wasn't trying hard enough. Though he wanted very much to please his teachers, Cameron's AD/HD (hyperactive type) made it extremely difficult for him to sit still at a desk all day.

Despite his challenges, Cameron's superior-level intelligence, knack for higher-level science and abstract thinking, and high math aptitude helped him keep up and, at times, even exceed grade-level expectations. But because he was using all his mental and physical energy just to survive the school day, his gifts went unnoticed and

unencouraged. When Cameron got home from school, he would fall apart, tell himself he was stupid, fear leaving home again, and cry himself to sleep. Although an enthusiastic learner, he became completely school avoidant at the age of eight, and his parents have home-schooled him for the last two years for lack of a better alternative.

Alex:

Alex has always been precocious as well as stubborn. At 18 months, he would tell his parents the colors of passing cars; and, if he didn't get what he wanted, he would cry until he threw up. He was reading by three; by eight, diagnosed with diabetes; and by ten, enrolled in his third school in three years.

Alex has a superior-range IQ but is struggling to hang on in his gifted public education fourth-grade classroom, the last stop before his parents consider special education. His executive functioning challenges make it hard to organize his thoughts and work; and his diabetes makes him feel doubly different, physically and socially. What's hard for Alex academically is translating his ideas into something others can recognize and assess; so he struggles to write even a three-sentence essay (though he reads 500-page books voraciously) or to show his work on a multi-step math problem he understands intuitively.

When faced with a task that comes easily to him, Alex doesn't read the directions; he rushes ahead and makes careless errors. When faced with a challenge, he either gives up quickly or refuses to try at all. Because of the vigilance and control his chronic illness requires, his parents feel Alex has a hard time accepting direction and control from authority figures in school. Because he's so empathetic and socially adept, he's well-liked among classmates; but because he's so bright, perfectionistic, and self-directed, his teachers regard him as arrogant. Ultimately, Alex' anxiety is his undoing, causing him to disengage from the education process altogether. He refuses to do his schoolwork, or he simply refuses to go to school at all.

Simon:

The first sign that Simon was out-of-sync with his age peers was when, at the age of two, he was kicked out of a playgroup. Parents complained that, though not aggressive, Simon was too physical with their children (e.g., grabbing and hugging too hard). Precociously verbal, Simon seemed to be trying to get and sustain his playmates' attention in a way he thought they'd understand.

In a Montessori preschool, Simon thrived at first; but as he sped ahead of classmates in reading, he became bored with the learning materials and increasingly disrupted the classroom routine. He narrowly missed score cutoffs for gifted kindergarten programs and was rejected by numerous private schools for being disrespectful at interviews and disobedient during group activities.

His public school kindergarten teacher tried engaging Simon by giving him extra homework; but Simon had trouble with everything from transitions, to standing in line, to the curriculum itself, which was several grades below his abilities. He got into trouble in class so that he'd be "punished" by having to sit outside the principal's office all day reading. On the playground, he was reprimanded for telling the other kids he was a

monster. Later, Simon would later tell his mother, “I wasn’t pretending. I am a monster. I’m a freak.”

First grade in a private school was similar – except that Simon had no problems whatsoever during his twice-weekly one-on-one periods with the school’s learning specialist. He was asked to leave halfway during the school year.

Unfortunately, Simon’s mixed bag of strengths – high creativity, precocious general knowledge, college-level reading skills – and his (relative) weaknesses – average processing, visual/spatial reasoning, and math skills, plus low frustration tolerance – make it hard to assess his abilities via formal testing. He frequently refuses to answer questions or complete tasks that are too repetitive, too simple, or too difficult. Also, despite his early advantage of being identified at the age of three both as gifted and as having AD/HD (inattentive type), the absence of a school that could support both his exceptionalities has meant that, at the age of eight, he has four years’ worth of negative school experiences under his belt. Simon fears that no school teacher will ever accept him for who he is.

Julien:

At his third birthday party, Julien either ignored his guests or – using his vocabulary of 12 words – told them what to do. He ran around nonstop, touching everything and everybody, but made only fleeting eye contact with anyone. He also spent an hour by himself building an elaborate bridge system using Duplo® blocks. Earlier that year, during a state-mandated IQ test, he largely ignored the tester and was determined to have an IQ of 84. But later that year, Julien learned to speak and read almost in tandem. A visit to one renowned psychiatrist yielded an Asperger Syndrome diagnosis; a psychologist cited AD/HD “tendencies”; and a neuropsychologist suggested Julien’s hearing be tested. His pediatrician insisted Julien was a brilliant child on his own trajectory who just needed speech therapy.

Between the ages of three and nine, Julien attended four special education and three general education schools, none of them a good fit. He didn’t score well on a kindergarten screening test for gifted programming because he couldn’t stay in his seat during the test. He was removed from two general education kindergarten classrooms for calling out answers and asking off-topic questions, not sitting during circle time, and other “disruptive” and “noncompliant” behaviors.

Over the years, many teachers complained that Julien wasn’t trying hard enough, that he didn’t pay attention during group lessons (though he remembered everything that was said), that he refused to do worksheets in school, and that he would have a tantrum when asked to write. Julien complained that school was too hard and too easy. Because the special education schools he attended were so focused on controlling his classroom behavior, remediating his writing challenges and finding productive outlets for his talents were neglected.

Julien, now 10 years old, is both “gifted” – with a full-scale IQ of 136 – and “learning disabled,” with diagnoses of AD/HD (combined type), generalized anxiety disorder, and a disorder of written expression. He writes like a 2nd grader, but works on 9th-grade math, with college-level concepts thrown in “for fun.” With his jigsaw collection of talents and relative deficits, Julien is a “typical” twice-exceptional child.