

# Tailored Education for Twice Exceptional Gifted Students: Facts and Myths on the Prevention of Talent Frustration

## Summary of

“Passend onderwijs voor dubbel-bijzondere (hoog)begaafde leerlingen: Fabels en feiten over (het voorkomen van) frustratie van talent”

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## **Tailored Education for Twice Exceptional Gifted Students: Facts and Myths on the Prevention of Talent Frustration**

**The current thematical review study brought forward the lack of empirically based knowledge on how to adequately identify and adjust to the psycho-educational needs of twice exceptional (2E) students. 2E students are characterized by high intelligence and/or high academic results on the one hand and learning, developmental and/or behavioral problems on the other hand. This review study analyzed both empirical and review studies. The main conclusions are that it is very difficult to diagnose these students and their educational needs, and that it is important to apply an individual approach, by an expert diagnostician. The empirical shortage on this matter was firstly recognized more than two decades ago, emerged continuously thereafter and is still present nowadays. However, within practice-oriented literature, statements are made on the needs of these students – without empirical basis -, which are then followed by professionals. Consequently, the risks of these unsubstantiated facts or even myths could possible result in a lack of (inclusive and) equitable quality education for 2E students.**

### **Motivation for the current study and research questions**

In the Netherlands, the demand for practical guidelines for 2E students increased substantially after “*Tailored education*” was introduced in 2014. 2E students are characterized by high intellectual capacities and/or high academic results on the one hand and learning or developmental problems on the other hand. These intraindividual discrepancies in development often result in internalizing or externalizing problem behavior. The current educational system seems insufficiently able to meet the complex educational needs of these 2E students. This increases the risk on problem behavior, school drop-out and lower educational levels than would be expected based on the students IQs. High potential could therewith be lost, both in case of the students’ personal developmental trajectories as for society in general. A growing need arises within schools to gather profound, grounded insights on this specific group of students and on guidelines that match their high capacities on the one hand and their relative weaker didactical, neuropsychological and/or social-emotional developmental aspects on the other hand.

The goal of the current study was to gain more insight into the question who those 2E students are, mapping their characteristics and behavioral problems and finding out more about possible identification processes. Moreover to learn more about adequately adjusting to their needs within the educational system, and finding out which factors could possibly contribute to a successful school carrier in which frustration of talent could be prevented as much as possible. To meet this goal, a review was conducted of the (inter)national empirical literature and by comparing those findings with

the popular scientific and practice oriented literature. A total of 6 review studies, 20 empirical studies, 7 popular scientific book(chapters) and 16 practice oriented sources were analyzed. The following research questions were posed:

1. Exploratory research: What risk factors can be defined, both in terms of child characteristics as in terms of educational practices, with regard to frustration of talent, behavioral problems, and school drop-out in 2E students in primary and secondary school?
2. Advisory research: What is needed in order to reduce the frustration of talent, behavioral problems, and school drop-out of 2E students in primary and secondary school within The Netherlands and to optimize their future perspectives?

### **Concluding remarks from the literature study**

The following main conclusions have been drawn based on the study of the scientific sources. The first conclusion concerned the large variety in the identification criteria of 2E students. Various criteria are used, both for determining high intelligence (such as minimal IQ scores of 120 or 130) and for the determination of learning and behavior problems. The large [inter- and intra-individual differences](#) between levels of intelligence, learning results, neuropsychological and non-cognitive characteristics generate even more complexity to the diagnostic process. The second conclusion emphasizes the importance of the discussion on the [discrepancy criterion](#). The question is whether there must be an absolute weakness in order to attribute a certain disorder to a student, or if a larger discrepancy between strengths and weaknesses of a student would be sufficient enough for a diagnosis. The latter is related to the third conclusion, namely the fact that there is still no clear evidence on the so-called [masking effect](#) in 2E. It is often claimed that talents and weaknesses can either compensate, camouflage or distort each other leading to incorrect or missed classifications in 2E students. However, the current literature study shows no evidence either supportive or rejective for the masking effect. The fourth conclusion drawn from the literature is the fact that the literature is scarce on [need-based](#) and treatment-oriented diagnostics. The fifth and last conclusion is that there are still no effect studies on effective psycho-educational interventions for 2E students.

Based on our study of Dutch practice oriented literature we can conclude that little has been written about 2E students and the general picture is that knowledge of and experience with 2E students is still young and unbalanced. A few of the Dutch authors appear to base their work mainly on their own experiences and seem to use empirical sources only scarcely or biased. Statements are regularly made without referral to any source, nor by providing any further explanation or discussion as to why these ideas were put forward. It also appears that ideas are taken out of context or miss a reference to its true origin. We assume this to be a consequence of a combination of enthusiasm regarding 2E

students, the lack of grounded theoretical data, and the increasing duty to meet the needs of 2E students in tailored education.

Popular scientific and practice oriented publications are necessary in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The consequences of bridging this gap in an undesirable manner such as outlined above could be detrimental. It could encourage false representations of 2E students and insufficient educational practices for these students, in not only teachers and other educational professionals, but also in parents and students themselves as well as for trainers and policy. This emphasizes the importance of scientists and practitioners cooperating in order to bring about a decent image, knowledge, the development of expertise, and adjustment in- and outside the educational domain. It is along these lines that spreading certain ‘truths’ that are hardly based on facts or reside on one-sided thinking can be avoided. Parents, students, teachers, and others have the right to receive empirically based information wherein limitations are recognized. In that way myths can be distinguished from facts.

### **Practical advice**

Based on our literature study we can conclude that there is still a shortage on scientific knowledge about 2E students. Furthermore, we can provide some practical advice.

The teacher is often one of the first to be involved with 2E students. It is important that teachers (and educational supervisors, remedial teachers or special needs coordinators) are able to recognize and detect discrepancies within 2E students, without unilaterally attributing these discrepancies to either the giftedness or the learning, developmental, or behavioral problems. If 2E is suspected in an individual student, for example in case of notable discrepancies or apparent contradicting behaviors or performances, a 2E-expert must always be consulted. For the time being, the researchers recommend individually tuned comprehensive assessments of strengths and weaknesses and related educational needs, performed by experts.

For policymakers, we have the following recommendations. We advise educational partnerships (‘samenwerkingsverbanden’) and schools to facilitate adequate assessments of strengths and weaknesses by experts in order to translate the associated educational needs into adequate interventions. This requires professionalization, (in-service)training for (upcoming) teachers, special needs coordinators, healthcare experts, and (school)psychologists. Various initiatives are currently being developed to design education for 2E students. However, it appears that adequate source referencing seems to be missing in the design process of ideas and materials. That is a pity given the fact that these ideas cannot be verified. Our advice for education in general is to create a theoretical framework and proceed in a step-by-step manner through interdisciplinary cooperation in the development of ideas, instruments or materials. It is important to bundle expertise and evaluate these

initiatives, in order to expand the knowledge base, for example through practice oriented scientific research.

Subsequently and because of the lack of empirical literature, it is strongly advised to expand the research on 2E students and their educational needs. An extensive research agenda is composed for this matter, which among others contains topics such as prevalence, diagnostic criteria, care without labeling – based on psycho-educational needs – and cooperation with youth care.

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