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Identifying twice-exceptionality — a case study of a gifted child with ADHD

Abstract. The article focuses on a case study of a gifted child with ADHD to illustrate the condition of twice-exceptionality — an association between giftedness and disability. This case study aims to shed light on this condition, and to highlight the importance of identifying and considering both exceptionalities in a remediation program.

Keywords: twice-exceptionality, high ability, attention deficit disorder, remediation, gifted.

Twice-exceptional people are those that have high cognitive abilities such as the potential for high achievement in one or more academic domains together with one or more disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a learning disability and so on [1]. It is important to identify both the child's high ability and disability, as usually one is more apparent than the other and each one plays a role in the treatment. This study focuses on the treatment of an 8-year-old boy, who was evaluated through a neuropsychological assessment, and the results of the proposed treatment.

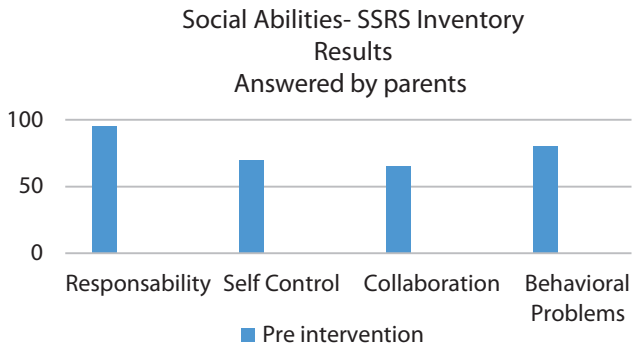
The assessment consists of an interview with parents and school teachers and quantitative tests as WISC-IV; Raven Test; Five-Digit Test; Rey Complex Figures Test; attentional tests; Social Abilities, Behavior Problems and Academic Achievement Inventory for Child (SSRS); and SNAP-IV Rating scale.

The subject was an 8-year-old adopted boy, born with syphilis from drug using parents. He was left in an orphanage when he was 2 months old where he received treatment for the disease and recovered. At the age of 1, the child was adopted by a wealthy family, received love and care. His skills were well developed, except for the language skills. After sessions with a speech therapist, which he started at the age of 3.5 and finished

at 5, his language skills significantly improved. When the boy was 7, the school suggested evaluation as he was having concentration and organization problems as well as some social issues. At that time, the parents said that he always forgot things, was disorganized, and was frequently disconnected from other people, staying in “his own dreamland”, as they used to say. On the other hand, he was very good at drawing, had highly developed logical thinking skills and memory.

The results indicated that he had attention problems related to the 3rd block of Lurian theory [2, 3] as well as highly developed skills in perceptual organization, indicating high abilities (Wisc-IV, IOP 134, 99 %, which means better results than 99 % of his peers on perceptual organization skills); high development of language skills (92 %); above average results on working memory (84 %) and average results on processing speed (42 %). His Wisc-IV IQ was 125, 95 %, probably downgraded by his attention problems. The inventory filled by the parents indicated that he showed more problems than average: deficits on responsibility (95 %) and self-control behaviors (70 %), the lack of collaboration in daily activities such as good time management (65 %), and emotional problems such as self-esteem issues (80 %).

Although the parents were aware of his learning abilities, they were also concerned about his regular attention problems. The child constantly felt repressed by his faults. Although he could memorize events easily, at times he also struggled with forgetfulness, which suggested the interference of his deficits on his performance. In the case twice-exceptional people, the gift may mask the child’s disabilities, or the disabilities may



mask their gifts. In the case in question, the boy's attention difficulties with regulating and monitoring his activities, his executive problems, were masking his gifts. He struggled to pay attention in class or to complete his assignments. He used to play by himself and was constantly distracted by his own hands or thinking.

To treat this patient, we chose the Lurian psychomotor and cognitive remediation protocol [3] based on the Basic Method of Compensatory Development, learned with Irina Shevchenko. The sessions were conducted twice a week for 6 months. We developed a stimulation program based on neurodynamic, control functions and interhemispheric interaction and used positive reinforcement to improve behavior. During the therapy, the boy had no difficulty understanding the instruction and was attentive when learning new exercises. Having an amazing memory, he could remember long sequences of movements from one session to another. When familiar with the exercises, he tended to lose focus, taking time to switch between the movements, sometimes shaking or dancing between the exercises. During the program, inhibition, complex and self-control exercises were always part of the sessions. In order to boost his self-esteem, we made a point of highlighting his abilities and facilities. Meanwhile, his social skills were addressed through cognitive exercises and through the relationship established with the therapist. Dancing and shaking between the exercises were discouraged and temporal challenges and strategies that included rhythm activities were added as an encouragement. After 6 months of intervention, the parents observed that he did not go daydreaming anymore, participated in conversations, asked questions about the current events, paid attention to classes and completed more tasks on time. He was also more adequate in social interactions. The therapeutic work is still in progress and the boy's rhythm in performing some tasks still needs to be better developed despite the great progress he has already made.

ADHD tends to decrease children's results on neuropsychological cognitive tests. When facing a case of twice exceptionality, the intervention should face the deficit while taking advantage and valuing the ability, aiming the habilitation and the emotional development. Giftedness tends to facilitate a child's progress in a habilitation program. It is important to evaluate and identify if the high ability is associated

with a disability and to address both of them properly, to achieve better and faster results.

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