



Gifted and Twice-exceptional Children in the South of the World: Chilean Students' Experiences within Regular Classrooms

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Contents

Introduction	2
The Case of Chile	4
Status of Gifted Education	4
Theoretical Approach to Gifted Education in Chile	5
Chilean Research in Gifted Education	5
Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom: Conceptual Framework	6
Classroom Climate	6
Relationship with Peers	7
Relationship with Teachers	8
Gifted Students' Classroom Experiences: Evidence from Two Studies	10
Relationships with Peers	10
Relationship with Teachers	14
Discussion and Conclusions	16
Gifted and Twice-Exceptional Students and Their Relationships with Peers in the Classroom Context	17
Gifted and Twice-Exceptional Students and Their Academic and Socio-Emotional Experiences with Their Teachers	17
Implications for Research and Future Directions	18
Implications for Practice and Future Directions	19
Conclusion	20
References	21

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Abstract

In a country like Chile, in which provisions for gifted students are scarce and extracurricular, little is known about what happens with gifted students within their schools. This chapter presents a theoretical and research-based exploration on the experiences of gifted and twice-exceptional (2e) students in regular classrooms. With a focus on the interactions between peers and teachers, the construct of classroom climate and the complex interactions and relationships that emerge from this context will be examined. First, we present a context for the Chilean educational system. Second, we review the research on classroom climate and socio-emotional adjustment of gifted and twice-exceptional students. Third, we present two case studies conducted in Chile with gifted and 2e students that explored the complexities of students' classroom climate experiences. The quality of these experiences is mediated by gifted students' characteristics and by the focus set by teachers on their strengths or difficulties. They need an undisturbed and comprehensive environment to successfully progress through the curriculum. Practical recommendations are provided on how to support gifted students to face the complexities of the classroom climate.

Keywords

Gifted and talented students · Twice-exceptional · Classroom climate · Peers · Teachers

The aims in this chapter are to:

1. provide a contextual overview on the situation of gifted education in Chile;
2. offer a research-based and theoretical discussion about classroom climate and its relationship to gifted and twice-exceptional students' experiences and engagement within the regular classroom;
3. analyse two studies conducted in Chile with gifted and twice-exceptional students and provide evidence about classroom climate factors that are critical in this context;
4. delve into the socioemotional aspects of students' experiences with classroom climate
5. include implications and future directions for both practitioners and researchers

Introduction

In Chile, considerable efforts have been made over the past decade to serve gifted students through enrichment programs that operate outside regular classrooms. However, the number of students being served roughly approaches 1% of the total gifted population in the country (Conejeros-Solar, Sandoval-Rodriguez, & Gomez-Arízaga, 2018). With almost no special programs implemented at the school level,

thousands of students who are gifted must survive daily in their regular classrooms and face a social/psychological classroom climate that can be welcoming or in conflict with the characteristics displayed by gifted individuals.

Different results have been reported regarding gifted students' socio-emotional traits and behaviours within regular classrooms, with some authors leaning toward an adequate social adjustment (França-Freitas, Del Prette, & del Prette, 2014), whereas others reported isolation and/or exclusion from peers (Gross, 2006; Ogurlu, 2015). A major reason that has been investigated for these feelings of isolation is students' perceptions of being different from their same age peers (Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Yssel, Prater, & Smith, 2010).

To add complexity to the regular classroom scenario, the role of the teacher is crucial to positively promote giftedness or by contrast, may exacerbate the feelings of isolation a gifted student can experience. Results of studies regarding teachers' attitudes have found that not all teachers hold positive attitudes toward giftedness (Lassig, 2015; McCoach & Siegle, 2007) and that there are cultural differences among countries. For example, a study conducted by Shayshon, Gal, Tesler, and Ko (2014) focussed on the teachers of mathematically talented students from the United States, Israel, and South Korea. They found that all the teachers showed positive attitudes toward working with gifted students within mainstream classrooms; however, South Korean teachers were more prone than their colleagues from Western countries to assign higher importance to the work with disadvantaged groups than nurturing the needs of gifted students.

Underlying teacher behaviours and/or attitudes toward gifted students stem from previous training and knowledge about giftedness and their own conceptions about this topic. Researchers have found that teachers' stereotypes of the gifted can lead to erroneous expectations (Baudson & Preckel, 2016) and, at the same time, these expectations can affect classroom climate and peer relationships (Rubie-Davies, 2010). Moreover, when a difficulty or disability is added to the equation, that is, when teachers are faced with twice-exceptional (2e) students—that is, students in which there is a co-occurrence of giftedness and a disability—they tend to overlook their potential and attend more to their weaknesses (Rinn & Nelson, 2008; Townend & Pendergast, 2015), which can lead to student invisibility within the classroom and a lack of adequate services for their particular characteristics (Conejeros-Solar, Gómez-Arizaga, Sandoval-Rodríguez, & Cáceres-Serrano, 2018). Teachers overlooking 2e potential may be due to misunderstandings of twice exceptionality that may result in students “who remain under-identified and, consequently, underserved” (Assouline, Foley-Nicpon, & Huber, 2006, p. 18). The problem is whether gifted and twice-exceptional students can adjust and/or integrate to this complex scenario in the regular classroom. Integration can lead to a successful experience due to students feeling highly engaged to the school community (Godor & Szymanski, 2017). However, researchers have found that the school experience can be radically different for these students, especially the relationship that gifted students may have with their peers (Peterson, Duncan, & Canady, 2009; Wang & Neihart, 2015). In the case of twice-exceptional students, difficulties with social skills and heightened sensitivities can leave them vulnerable to peer bullying (Danielian & Nilles, 2015).

In this chapter, we will focus on exploring the experiences of Chilean gifted and twice-exceptional students within the classroom climate. Through the results of two qualitative studies, we will focus on students' peer and teacher relationships, to explore how these interactions can affect and shape students' learning and socio-emotional wellbeing in the school context and how they cope with the complexities of the classroom climate. Implications for practitioners and future directions are also discussed.

The Case of Chile

Status of Gifted Education

The Chilean educational system is currently divided into three types of schools: public, voucher (charter), and private. These schools have been defined as highly segregated and homogenous in terms of Socioeconomic Status (SES), meaning that they tend to concentrate students from a similar SES (Ortiz, 2015). Regarding academic achievement, a similar pattern can be found, with public schools having lower scores on standardised national and international assessments (Mizala & Torche, 2012).

Given this scenario of inequity, the first extracurricular, university-based enrichment program for gifted students in the country was created in 2001, mainly to serve students from public schools who do not have opportunities to potentiate their giftedness (Conejeros, Cáceres, & Riveros, 2012). Currently, there are seven of these programs in the country. Students must be in grades 5 (elementary) or 9 (secondary) to enter and go through different stages of identification to become a participant. This educational provision does not serve twice-exceptional students, as they are not specifically identified within programs, and in the Chilean case, they have more probabilities to be identified in schools by their disability rather than their high ability (Gómez-Arizaga, Conejeros-Solar, Sandoval, & Armijo, 2016).

Despite all the efforts that have been made to date to establish adequate programming for gifted students in Chile, there are no services provided for this population at the school level, just a few private initiatives. There is no existing legislation that can guarantee sustained services for these students, leaving them adrift from enriched and complex educational opportunities. This is not different from what happens in some countries in the Asia-Pacific region, where the lack of a coherent and holistic approach to giftedness influences the type and quality of the services for the gifted population. Jarvis and Henderson (2014) assert this situation, "On a large scale, though, Australia joins other countries in being unable to boast a truly coordinated, system-wide, sustainable approach based on a shared vision" (p. 6).

Theoretical Approach to Gifted Education in Chile

In Chile, the most widely used theoretical model for understanding and providing educational opportunities for gifted students is Gagné's Integrated Model of Talent Development, or IMTD (Gagné, 2015), as is the case of other countries in the Pacific region, such as Australia (Bannister-Tyrrell, 2017; Lassig, 2015). However, because no systematic interventions can be found at the school level, this model was adopted exclusively for university-based enrichment programs, with the goal of providing high quality educational opportunities for gifted students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The goal of these programs is, therefore, to offer educational provisions to underserved Chilean students who do not have extracurricular enrichment opportunities in their immediate contexts or schools. Gagné's model is coherent with its overall perspective of talent development from giftedness potential, and because of the idea that an enrichment program can become a critical environmental catalyst in the process of talent development (Dever, 2016).

Chilean Research in Gifted Education

Even though giftedness is a research topic that is still very young and under development in Chile, several investigations have been conducted regarding environmental factors that are critical for talent development. Regarding schools, teachers appear to have been either the participants or the focus in most of the investigations. Research conducted by Cabrera-Murcia and Udaquiola (2016), for example, addressed the perceptions of Chilean primary teachers about giftedness. They found that teachers can recognise the characteristics of gifted students at cognitive and socio-emotional levels and hold views that are not stereotypical. The challenges they perceived, however, were the lack of strategies to work with this population. It is important to acknowledge that Chilean teachers do not receive special preparation to address the needs of gifted students in the classroom. Furthermore, researchers have claimed that they hardly receive any training to work with children with different needs and to face the diversity that exists in the classroom (Infante, 2010; Ruffinelli, 2013; San Martín, Villalobos, Muñoz, & Wyman, 2017).

Regarding professional development, the only existing option is a diploma provided by one of the university-based enrichment programs. Conjointly to this diploma, the same program created an internship for teachers from regular classrooms to attend courses offered for gifted students. Garcia and Arancibia (2007) found that this experience helped teachers with knowledge and strategies for addressing the needs of regular students at their schools. Similarly, Cabrera-Murcia (2011) studied the impact of this internship experience and found that the strategies acquired by teachers can effectively transfer to the regular classroom and benefit gifted students' learning.

Another set of Chilean studies has been conducted regarding the ideal characteristics of teachers who work with gifted students. Conejeros-Solar, Gómez-Arizaga, and Donoso-Osorio (2013) explored this issue from the perspective of gifted

students. They found that the best learning scenarios happened with teachers with whom students have a social and emotional connection, and those who are flexible, can move at a faster pace, and integrate theory into practice. Similarly, Gómez-Arizaga, Conejeros-Solar, and Martín (2016) investigated the critical competencies of an effective teacher of the gifted, considering the views of a learning community. They found that for the teachers in the program, one of the essential elements was the mastering of content knowledge in a theoretical, interdisciplinary, and practical way. For the students, even though they recognised the importance of instructional strategies, socio-emotional characteristics were also deemed important by them, especially empathy, closeness, and passion. In this way, students feel that they can relate to a teacher who is actively engaged both with his or her teaching and with them as individuals. Moreover, students tended to make comparisons between teachers from the enrichment programs versus teachers from their regular classrooms, stating that the latter are less flexible and unmotivated due to the rigidity of the national curriculum. This situation is complicated due to the high possibility of seeing their classroom teachers in a negative manner and the resulting lack of learning motivation that these views can promote in gifted students (Conejeros-Solar et al., 2013).

Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this context is inclusive of the classroom climate and experiences, relationships with peers, and relationships with teachers.

Classroom Climate

The concept of *classroom climate* has multiple definitions in the existing literature. For this chapter, we incorporated this term—that is, classroom climate—to understand students' unique perceptions of the different elements that make up their classroom experience (Rowe, Kim, Baker, Kamphaus, & Horne, 2010), and the ways through which they envision the quality of the classroom environment. Particularly, we focussed on two elements that can be critical in this context: the relationships students have established with their classroom peers and the connections and interactions with their teachers, two aspects that can have important impacts on academic and social outcomes (Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010).

In the Chilean context, a classroom climate-related study that was developed with teachers and students showed that this relationship constitutes a recursive process of interactions where the action of the student and the teacher unfolds according to a series of norms, behavioural habits, rituals, and social practices existing in the context of the classroom. When teachers and students accept these, the type of climate tends to stabilise. Classroom climate and pedagogical practices influence each other determining the limits and possibilities of knowledge development

(Ascorra, Arias, & Graff, 2003). Chilean research, in which classroom videos of 51,329 school teachers were analysed, found that classroom climate had a powerful influence on students' academic achievements and that an important aspect of it was classroom management by the teacher (Gazmuri, Manzi, & Paredes, 2015).

Relationship with Peers

Relationships that are established with peers are perhaps the most critical ones during students' lifespans, with a particular focus in the period of adolescence, in which profound bonds can be created that are relevant for students' psychosocial and educational development (Veiga, García, Reeve, Wentzel, & García, 2015). Gifted students' social adjustment and the connections they have with peers has been a matter of debate among researchers in the field, with some claiming that no differences exist in social adjustment between gifted and non-gifted students (Jenaabadi, Marziyeh, & Dadkan, 2015); whereas others acknowledge the existence of negative experiences with peers, bullying being the most commonly reported issue (Peterson, 2015). The prevalence of bullying for the 2e population, however, remains unknown (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015).

Setting potential problems with peer interactions aside, what usually occurs is that at early ages, gifted students can encounter and perceive differences between them and their peers, realising that there is a mismatch regarding interests and attitudes (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Thomson, 2012).

Twice-exceptional (2e) students are another group within the gifted population that face issues of social integration and adjustment in regular classrooms. This group of students can present with many challenges, as their strengths are often disregarded and they are often labelled by their disabilities (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). Also, they can possess unique socio-emotional needs, as they usually struggle with low self-concept, perfectionism, and perceptions of themselves and their achievement that are unrealistic (Barber & Mueller, 2011).

Relationships with peers can vary within the population of twice-exceptional students. Foley-Nicpon, Rickels, Assouline, and Richards (2012), in a study comparing gifted students with and without a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), found that both groups had very similar profiles regarding interpersonal relationships, self-reliance, and social stress. These findings suggest similarities in social characteristics between both groups that are more closely related to giftedness than profiles with only an ADHD diagnosis. However, the same study found lower self-esteem and lower overall happiness in the gifted/ADHD group, highlighting the need for interventions (e.g., counselling) that is focussed on satisfaction for these students.

For gifted students with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), social relationships and emotional expression can be difficult, because of the characteristics of the ASD that are still present in this duality (Rubenstein, Schelling, Wilczynski, & Hooks, 2015). In a qualitative study conducted in New Zealand, Ng, Hill, and Rawlinson (2016) found that one recurrent complaint of gifted/ASD students was

the interaction with classroom peers, particularly regarding noise and distraction. The highly increased or severely decreased reactivity to sensory aspects of the surroundings, such as the constant noise made by classroom peers, had negative consequences for gifted/ASD students' learning (Assouline, Foley-Nicpon, & Fosenburg, 2013). Taking these problems into consideration, the interventions that had been suggested for the gifted/ASD population are related to student-focussed services in which talents are nurtured and strengths amplified (Baum, Schader, & Hébert, 2014). These interventions include gifted programs to address both academic and social-emotional characteristics (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015).

Peer relationships of 2e students can also include negative experiences, such as bullying episodes. These episodes can have a greater impact on 2e students because they do not always have the abilities required to face the negative consequences of peer aggression. For example, Franklin-Rohr (2012) stated that twice-exceptional learners may not have the appropriate communication skills to address bullies at their schools. Also, 2e students have reported feelings of being outsiders, because of the many issues they face with peers like bullying, exclusion from games, and name calling (Ronksley-Pavia & Townend, 2017).

In a case study with 2e students conducted in Chile, Gómez-Arízaga, Conejeros-Solar, Sandoval, and Armijo (2016) found that 2e students had a small and close group of friends who were valued for their honesty, respect, and a sense of humour. However, both gifted/ADHD and gifted/ASD students reported having trouble with classroom peers who not only were seen as obstacles for an optimal learning process but also gifted/ASD students had experienced physical and psychological bullying episodes in the past.

Relationship with Teachers

As with peers, the relationships that students establish with their teachers can be critical for their engagement (Furrer, Skinner, & Pitzer, 2014), participation, and interest in class and school activities. For gifted students, this relationship is also related to the views and conceptions of giftedness a teacher holds, because negative beliefs can be detrimental for this bond and can even foster a classroom climate that does not welcome the characteristics of gifted students (Baudson & Preckel, 2016). Negative stereotypes, associations, and affect toward giftedness can include believing that gifted students "use" their high abilities for poor social behaviour, such as being insensitive and disrespectful (Geake & Gross, 2008), a view that was more negatively associated to gifted boys according to Preckel, Baudson, Krolak-Schwerdt, and Glock (2015). However, there are also positive experiences reported regarding teacher-student relationships and climate, such as the results reported by Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine (2010), in which gifted students reported feelings of being accepted, nurtured, and valued at the classroom and school levels. Other studies point to the competencies teachers need to have when interacting with students in the regular classroom. Samardzija and Peterson (2015), for example, found that students valued teachers that were able to adequately manage behaviours

in the classroom that promoted self-regulation instead of constantly scolding them. Students also valued teacher traits, such as patience, ethics, and being calm and respectful.

The experiences of 2e students with their teachers appear to be critical for a successful school experience and to develop a sense of belonging to the school context (Townend & Pendergast, 2015). Relationships with teachers can have a negative impact where educators focus excessively on the difficulties rather than 2e students' strengths and exhibit a lack of understanding about the manifestation of dual exceptionalities (Ronksley-Pavia & Townend, 2017).

Townend and Pendergast (2015) found that most of the 2e students in their study were very sensitive and aware of the connection they had with their teachers, which helped them to feel valued and had an impact on their academic achievement. One gifted/ASD participant of their sample, however, did not achieve that connectedness, feeling isolated from his school. Ronksley-Pavia and Townend (2017) also reported bullying from teachers, which included verbal aggression and ridiculing students in front of the other students. The authors also reported an aggressive teaching style regarding classroom management, which particularly affected gifted/ASD students because of their sensitivity to noise.

As for the gifted/ADHD group, it has been found that teachers, even when acknowledging the coexistence of giftedness and a disability, remain sceptical about the co-occurrence of giftedness and ADHD (Schultz, 2012), which can translate into a negative disposition by the teacher when interacting with this group. However, some researchers have found that teachers of students who are gifted/ADHD can be supportive and provide help and guidance when needed (Wang & Neihart, 2015).

In the Chilean study with 2e students previously described, students also reported their relationships with teachers, with different connotations. Whereas the group of gifted/ADHD students cared and valued their teachers, some gifted/ASD students felt negatively about them, especially because teachers displayed negative attitudes and made 2e students feel uncomfortable (Gómez-Arizaga, Conejeros-Solar, Sandoval, & Armijo, 2016).

From the aforementioned studies, it can be inferred that both groups, gifted/ADHD and gifted/ASD, need a strong relationship with their teachers in which positive feedback can influence the way they feel about themselves and their schools (Coleman & Gallagher, 2015). A positive relationship with a teacher can foster good academic experiences, work on students' strengths, and make the student feel less inadequate regarding his or her cognitive functioning deficits. For this purpose, Baum et al., (2014), proposed a strength-based model, where teachers are supportive, understanding, open, flexible, and have empathy with the students and work with them based on their strengths.

Gifted Students' Classroom Experiences: Evidence from Two Studies

In this section, we provide evidence of two studies conducted in Chile that were part of two different research projects. Study 1 was a two-year qualitative longitudinal study in which the main goal was to conduct an in-depth exploration of the experiences of *gifted-only students in regular classrooms*. In this study, 12 gifted students (ages 12–16) participated in different data collection activities, including in-depth interviews. The project had three foci of analyses: teaching and learning experiences, teachers' socio-emotional traits, and students' experiences within the climate of the regular classroom. Results of the classroom climate are reported here (For further information refer to Gomez-Arízaga & Truffello, 2018; Gómez-Arízaga, 2016; Gómez-Arízaga, Hébert, Castillo, & Valdivia, 2017).

Study 2 was a 3-year project aimed at *characterising twice-exceptional (2e) students* for the first time in the country. The project was focussed on two types of 2e: Giftedness with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Giftedness with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The study comprised several phases of testing with different instruments (i.e., cognitive, social-emotional) and interviews with parents, students, teachers, and peers (For more information see Conejeros-Solar, Sandoval-Rodríguez, & Gomez-Arízaga (2018) and Gómez-Arízaga, Conejeros-Solar, Sandoval, & Armijo (2016)). Here we report the second phase of the project, in which 20 students, ages between 9 and 15 years old, were interviewed, with emphasis on the experience of being a 2e student immersed in the complexities of the classroom.

Regarding methods and analyses, both studies followed very similar qualitative techniques for student interviews, creating protocols that were easy to understand and that also allowed students to speak freely about their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. The analyses were framed in a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this way, data were collected and analysed as a systematic and ongoing process (Engward, 2013). This process informed further data collection procedures, allowing the researchers to orient future interviews to saturate the data. Triangulation techniques were conducted to ensure the credibility of the data analysis process: (a) participant checks before starting each new interview, in which emerging findings were discussed; and (b) investigator triangulation between investigators and research assistants. Hereunder, we present the results of both studies, divided into two components of the classroom climate: relationships with peers and ties created with teachers.

Relationships with Peers

Study 1: Exploring the experiences of gifted students and their peers in regular classrooms. For almost all the students in the study, meaningful experiences were reported with close friends, which were relevant and allowed an adequate social adjustment to the school environment. This is closely related to the developmental

stage that they were undergoing (adolescence), in which the search for a positive interaction and acceptance is no exception in the case of gifted students, as stated by an elementary gifted student: “I have real friends...they don’t tell anything...I have a friend who is my same age, he is very unconditional. He always supports me” (Thomas, Individual Interview, June 10th, 2016). Loyalty and trust are traits that were valued with intensity by students in the sample, as it was sharing common characteristics with their friends, as a secondary student mentions: “I found a friend who is silent as I am, and she goes from one topic to another. She loses track of time, as I do. So we stay together” (Veronica, Individual Interview, July 21st, 2016).

However, even when an adequate social adjustment exists between gifted students and their close friends, when it comes to peers that are part of the larger group (classmates), some experiences of bullying were reported that are more visible in male students who are younger (12–13 years old). In one case, one of the students had a long history of bullying at the school level. In another case, the bullying experience was among gifted students, a sort of “gifted popular vs. gifted unpopular” type of rivalry and conflict that ended with the participating student moving to a new school.

Another set of unpleasant experiences for gifted students in the regular classroom was related to an academic/cognitive imbalance between them and their peers. In this case, the asynchronous development of the gifted student became more evident, because classmates did not match with the students’ characteristics. In this context, the classmate was perceived as an obstacle, because of displaying less interest in learning and behaviours that are detrimental for gifted students’ quick progress through content knowledge. A secondary student who attends an artistic high school described this situation as the frustration of not being able to “ask more” from her classmates, especially when working in groups:

because I couldn’t make my classmate, because most of the work was done in groups, to play something more complex. Because if I did that they would say: “that’s too difficult. Let’s do this, that’s easier”. And for me this was a no, I don’t like easy things. I’ve never liked easy things. (Mary, Individual Interview, June 22nd, 2016)

Therefore, a discrepancy was noticed between the importance of making significant bonds with true friends, especially at a critical developmental age versus a genuine interest in learning that is restricted by peer interruptions and behaviours that do not favour the display of gifted characteristics. An elementary student narrated this situation stating how hard learning can be in the context of the regular classroom: “I don’t know, I have many differences with my classmates, because I take things, learning, very seriously. It is hard to learn new things, because they talk a lot. I try not to do the same” (Sebastian, Individual Interview, August 24th, 2016).

Study 2: Describing the relationships between twice-exceptional (2e) and their peers at the school level. For 2e students, relationships with their peers were complex and central to their school experience. The need to have friends and not be invisible to others emerged as an inner and profound wish both for ADHD and ASD students in the sample. For the gifted/ADHD group, fewer obstacles were

found in the socialisation process; however, for gifted/ASD students it was found to be more difficult. The gifted/ADHD group reported having more friends: “Yes, I like it, I have a lot of friends. . . , yes! It’s cool” (Ingrid, Middle School, Individual Interview, June 28th, 2016). Whereas for the gifted/ASD student socialisation was a less free-flowing process:

It’s just that basically it’s hard to become friends with my classmates (. . .) almost all of them are different persons, is just that I don’t know how to explain it, they are like. . . , that I don’t find a reason to talk to them (. . .) is just that I don’t find like. . . a way. (Lauren, Elementary, Individual Interview, July 18th, 2016)

Even though the need for friendship and closeness was salient in both groups—with different nuances—a different relationship occurs when facing classroom peers. It is important to state that Chilean classrooms have between 25 and 45 students, and they spend most of the day together in the same physical space. Hence, this was a critical aspect for gifted/ADHD and gifted/ASD students. Both groups tended to perceive negatively their group of classroom peers, noticing that they exclude them, they do not accept those who are different, and do not understand their needs and characteristics, such as a gifted/ASD student indicates: “Not very, accepted, I feel somehow excluded by my class, nobody wants me to get close, nobody asks me to come, I know that nobody wants to get close but I think that if they don’t want me to be near them, okay!” (Michael, Middle School, Individual Interview, June 7th, 2016).

Another element that generated a feeling of lack of understanding by classroom peers refers to the interests and capacities of the 2e student, like this gifted/ADHD student expresses:

I knew things they didn’t know, then too and I felt kind of weird, I knew things they didn’t know, I saw things they didn’t see! Then I knew more about things and. . . , there, I was at school. (. . .) I didn’t feel that different, actually that didn’t interest me, but yes, it was weird, it was weird because like, they talked about other things I didn’t talk about, I also knew other things and was used to talk about, like, bigger things. (James, Elementary, Individual Interview, June 13th, 2016)

Similarly to Study 1, there was also a negative view amongst both groups of 2e students about the academic conduct of classmates that was understood as a lack of interest and collaboration. Students could not understand why their classmates do not pay attention, do not focus, do not do homework, and do not write. Students were bothered because their classmates did not make an effort in the school environment, which finally led toward a preference for individual work, refusing to work with classmates that do not do anything and leave them to take responsibility for all the work, as one of the gifted/ASD students expressed: “Since sometimes I finish first, I end up doing the work (...) It doesn’t work for me, no, I don’t like that. . .” (David, Middle School, Individual Interview, November 18th, 2016). Students also preferred to work alone because of the distraction the classmates generate when they spend time talking and do not focus on the assignment.

Therefore, classmates are perceived as loud people, feisty, rude, and with little interest in learning, a situation that causes difficulties and bothers the 2e students who want to learn and pay attention, like this gifted/ASD states:

I like to be in school, but just what I don't like are my classmates that are always fighting and are very loud (...), what I don't like is that the noise is so loud (...) They scream loudly! (...) An emotion appears every time the noise gets louder if the noise increases to the max, my fury arrives...and they make me really angry! (Michael, Middle School, Individual Interview, June 7th, 2016)

This idea is reinforced by this gifted/ADHD student; "Yes, or they stick to their phones and then I have to try to pay attention. Also, I don't know, if they understand something those people because noise pollution is very serious..." (Karlos, Secondary, Individual Interview, July 8th, 2016).

Also like in Study 1, both groups of 2e students reported bullying episodes at school that impacted their social interactions with peers and reinforced the negative view they had of them, like this gifted/ASD states: "Because they just ..., they just want to irritate me ..., they just want to bother me and they do it together, not one ..., but many!" (Michael, Middle School, Individual Interview, June 7th, 2016). Some students had their own "methods" to deal with bullying, which allowed students to maintain control over a threatening and painful situation, such as peer abuse. This gifted/ADHD student explains his coping strategy:

I have a technique, you know? When they start making fun of me, I am, 'my mom says I'm very smart about this', but, I keep making a fool of myself on that subject so that I'm laughing with them, and not that at the fact that they're laughing at me (...) that's like my logic, laughing with them and that they do not laugh at me, (...) it's like, making jokes with them, I laugh at what they tell me, so they're not making fun of me. (Tom, Elementary, Individual Interview, July 13th, 2016)

Like study 1, some students reported having close friends, some of which supported them in difficult situations and from whom help is received when needed. The relationship of mutual help—both academic and socio-emotional—seems to be a central aspect of the friendship relationship as this gifted/ASD states: "We used to play together (...) They usually help me, we used to help each other when we are in trouble (...)" (Daniel, Middle School, Individual Interview, November 18th, 2016). For the 2e students, friends were also individuals with whom they could share mutual interests as it is expressed by a gifted/ADHD student: "No, is that I generally hang out with people that are like me (...) that we can understand each other and, are alike in the sense that we understand each other, help each other, hum.. all that, like the good we have, and some failures as well" (Aldo, Middle School, Individual Interview, June 29th, 2016).

Relationship with Teachers

Study 1: Experiences of gifted students and their teachers in regular classrooms. In the context of the classroom climate, the teacher appears as a crucial figure, as an individual who can foster meaningful learning experiences only if, before learning occurs, he or she can avoid student disruptions by firmly maintaining authority. Students in this study highly valued rules and order because these aspects allowed both the teacher and the student to be on constant progression toward learning outcomes. In this context, the concept of the teacher as a “strict peer” emerged, which was more prevalent in secondary students. In this sense, teachers are considered peers, because students need teachers to be approachable as this secondary student mentions: “I like the relationship I have with my teachers, because we are like friends” (Sergio, Individual Interview, July 11th, 2016) and at the same time a person who can promote order and organisation for an optimal learning process, as put by one of the secondary girls, “she was strict, but she was cool. It’s like opposites on the same person. I like this because with this style I can always learn” (Sara, Individual Interview, June 16th, 2016). For many secondary students, this was the way to keep learning within the chaos of the regular classroom: “I mean, relaxed and strict at the same time. It’s weird...because he likes so much what he does that he wants to be heard. And for me it’s a very comfortable way of learning. I can’t learn otherwise. Someone who is strict but relaxed. Knows when to stop things that are not helping us learn” (Mary, Individual Interview, August 10th, 2016).

On the other side, negative experiences—although not an everyday event—were reported by students with teachers in the regular classroom. These narratives were related to the teacher expressly ignoring gifted students or publicly insulting them in front of the class because of their characteristics. An elementary student described recurrent “ignoring” episodes by a Language Arts teacher:

when I raised my hand to answer she ignored me. She asked someone else. And after everybody answered she would come back to me. Sometimes she said: “someone wants to read?” I would raise my hand and she would say “no, not you”. (Kenneth, Individual Interview, July 23rd, 2016)

Other stories of the teacher ignoring a gifted student were the ones narrated by another elementary student: “...she always looks at me in a weird way. Once I didn’t go to school and a classmate told me she said: For me, Andrea doesn’t exist in my classroom” (Andrea, Individual Interview, August 9th, 2016).

Other forms of teacher rejection were related to not being able to address the needs of gifted students. A secondary student reported an experience of being neglected in front of the whole class by a History teacher for her “special needs”: “He said that I needed special attention. That he wasn’t prepared to teach someone like me” (Mary, Individual Interview, August 10th, 2016). In some cases, teachers opted to exclude the gifted student as this secondary student states: “there is a Science teacher who always kicks me out of the classroom, he says I’m the devil’s advocate” (Daisy, Individual Interview, June 28th, 2016).

Study 2: Academic, social, and affective characteristics of the relationship between teachers and 2e students. For both groups of 2e students, it was important to have a teacher that offered support and that was sensitive to their needs, showing interest and concern for them and making them feel secure in the classroom context. This support referred to clarifying doubts and resolving academic difficulties, besides emotional support in situations of emotional distress. This gifted/ADHD student addressed the academic support provided by his teacher: “Well, sometimes teacher Elena helps me with the assignments” (Aldo, Middle School, Individual Interview, June 29th, 2016). In certain occasions, teacher support was focussed on “the difference,” which was not very well appreciated by students as this gifted/ADHD states:

What, it makes me take, my head teacher makes me take special education tests and somehow, it irritates me and bothers me a lot that they make me take special education tests and that they treat me specially. . . , I like to be treated like the rest. (Tom, Elementary, Individual Interview, July 13th, 2016)

Twice-exceptional students in this study recognised having good relationships with their teachers. Teachers were described as fun, warm, understanding, and likable persons with whom you could talk and establish cordial relationships. Students also recognised that they had different types of teachers, which reflected a critical view of their work. For example, the teacher who tries to challenge students cognitively but fails despite her intentions, because she cannot focus in any student in particular, as stated by this gifted/ASD student:

hummm, I don't feel it's a school, that challenges you, there are some teachers that do it, they try to help their students get better, make you a better student..but no, it's not possible because of the same fact that there are so many students in here, that they can't focus on anyone in specific or things like that. (Martin, Secondary, Individual Interview, June 16th, 2016)

Students also referred to other types of teachers, such as the “fast” teacher (the one they cannot keep up with); the “unpleasant” (who does not know the needs of the 2e student and is not receptive to students’ demands); the “reader”; the “serious” teacher; and the “nice” one. The “nice teacher” is the most valued by the students as these two gifted/ADHD students state:

I like the teacher a lot and besides doing a bunch of fun stuff, I like her and I like knowing things, learning things about history that no, that I didn't know (...) if I could I would tell the teacher ‘teacher I want to stay here’ and at least she gives me a homework that, that I can research, I don't care if it's 10, 20 pages, I don't care I still do them!” (Aldo, Elementary, Individual Interview, June 29th, 2016);

(...) I need to be learning new things, repeatedly, because if not I get bored and I start to make a mess, so!” (James, Elementary, Individual Interview, June 13th, 2016).

In general, students indicated that they did not like when teachers were rigid or too inflexible, did not understand or see them, sat down doing nothing, did boring classes, and when their teaching was slow. A gifted/ADHD student expresses this:

No, I like how they teach me, even though some are like more. . . , relaxed! They are like ‘we have to do this and if you don’t do it like that is very bad’. (. . .) more than rigidity, is that, how do you say it? big fans of their ideas, like ‘we are going to this and if it’s not done like everything is going to go wrong’ but in general, I like the education. (Ingrid, Middle School, Individual Interview, June 28th, 2016)

For most students in both 2e groups, school was seen as a boring place in which they have unpleasant feelings because of having to “write too much,” disgust for the classes that are not of the student’s interest, and for classes that are repetitive and not challenging, in addition to teachers—who in certain occasions—treat them as if the students do not understand, reminding them about their difficulties. Despite the feeling of school being useless and boring, students tried to pay attention because their interest and desire for learning came first, as this gifted/ASD states:

I would like to learn more. I: To be more challenged? M: Mhum. I: (. . .) do you get bored sometimes during classes? M: Yes. I: Does that happen often or not? M: Yes, but I still pay attention. I: Do you pay attention during the whole class? S: hum (Michael, Middle School, Individual Interview, June 7th, 2016); and this gifted/ADHD: Yes, I like learning, it’s like fun, because. . . Like “woohoo” I’m learning (Ingrid, Middle School, Individual Interview, June 28th, 2016).

A particular aspect that emerged from the stories of the 2e students with ADHD is the difficulty of being in the classroom, because of the effort they must make to adapt to the working dynamics, since it requires them to “focus,” “pay attention,” “being quiet,” and “not moving.” This scenario demanded students to look for strategies to manage the anxiety that was generated by the inability to control the lack of attention and worry is expressed by these two students: “No, more like exercises, too long, a lot of accumulated exercises even if they are too easy, if I see a paper with a lot of accumulated exercises, I begin to lose control. . . , I get a little nervous” (James, Elementary Student, Individual Interview, June 13th, 2016).

Like I’m lost, the teachers tell me (. . .) you are all the time on the moon and I don’t know, a friend asked ‘what’s that?’ I explain to him that is being lost, not paying attention, like, looking at the flies (. . .) No, I don’t even realise it. . . , like that, sometimes I begin to draw and I’m just gone (. . .). (Ingrid, Middle School, Individual Interview, June 28th, 2016)

Discussion and Conclusions

The results from both studies briefly illustrated in this chapter shed light on critical aspects that emerged from gifted-only and 2e students regarding their social and academic experiences with peers and teachers.

Gifted and Twice-Exceptional Students and Their Relationships with Peers in the Classroom Context

For all groups, there is a need to find a connection with a “true” friend, in which values such as mutual trust and loyalty are considered a common ground for a solid friendship. This close group of friends can even act as a haven to face complex scenarios at the school level.

Proneness toward friendship, however, is not necessarily a guarantee of social competence, as differences between students were found. This may reflect the variability in results found by the researchers about the social adjustment of gifted students. Gifted-only and gifted/ADHD students reported friendship as being a straightforward process, the latter being consistent with previous research on gifted students with ADHD (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2012). The gifted/ASD group, however, had more difficulties in approaching and finding true peers with whom they could connect both at intellectual and social levels.

Both groups of students reported bullying episodes as negative experiences with peers, which is consistent with findings by Peterson (2015) and Ronksley-Pavia and Townend (2017). Twice-exceptional students, especially the gifted/ASD group, felt at the periphery of school daily events, such as recess, and also perceived a lack of understanding and acceptance from their classmates. Social isolation can also be considered as a type of aggression that impacts students’ lives.

One salient aspect in both the gifted-only and the 2e students was the interaction with classroom peers, which are viewed as an obstacle for learning. However, nuances were found regarding the nature and impact of this relationship. For all students, their academic skills and the seriousness attributed to the learning process is what separates them from classroom peers. These findings are similar to those reported by Lee et al. (2012), regarding a mismatch of interests between gifted students and their peers. For the 2e group, however, classroom peers not only were perceived as uninterested in learning but also as detractors of their efforts to overcome their difficulties. This aspect was more salient for the gifted/ASD group, causing emotional distress in students when facing sensory disruptions, such as constant noise. These findings relate to what authors in the field have found regarding obstacles to learning in gifted/ASD students (Assouline et al., 2013; Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015).

Gifted and Twice-Exceptional Students and Their Academic and Socio-Emotional Experiences with Their Teachers

As with peers, the role of the teacher in this study was critical in helping students become more engaged with school and their learning, and even to bring back gifted and 2e students from a peripheral role that they may have assumed because of their characteristics. Being close, warm, and empathetic were traits that were highly valued in both groups, which is consistent with findings at both the international level and the Chilean context (Conejeros-Solar et al., 2013; Tucker et al., 2010).

Particularly for the gifted-only study, the teacher profile that emerges is “strict but nice,” meaning that he or she can set boundaries and manage students’ behaviour in an orderly manner, so students can learn effectively. These findings relate to Samardzija and Peterson’s (2015) study, in which students valued a teacher’s capacity to promote self-regulation. *Niceness* appeared for the gifted/ADHD group as well, but the connotation is different, because it relates to a teacher who is understanding and sufficiently flexible to adapt and adjust according to their students’ needs, which is in line with the findings of Wang and Neihart (2015) with a group of gifted/ADHD students.

Regarding negative experiences, the most salient results had commonalities and differences between the gifted-only and the 2e group. In study 1, students reported aggressive behaviours from teachers that ranged between deliberately ignoring them to making it clear in front of the class that they cannot deal with their unique characteristics. These teacher bullying behaviours have not been widely studied in the gifted population, though some research has been conducted for the 2e population in the Asia-Pacific region (Ronksley-Pavia & Townend, 2017). For the 2e group, negative experiences with teachers were that some of them would point out their differences in the form of “support,” but instead of helping, it was detrimental for students as they do want to be treated like everybody else. This focus on difficulties is consistent with the findings of Ronksley-Pavia and Townend (2017).

Also, the 2e group appeared to be more sensitive to teacher traits and characteristics, providing information about different classroom scenarios that they liked and disliked in relation to their teachers’ behaviours, which is related to what was found by Townend and Pendergast (2015) about 2e students’ awareness of the teacher-student relationship, and the sensitivity and connectedness they had with their teachers. An interesting result is that even if 2e students find school boring and frustrating, they do engage with learning, since for them learning is and must remain a priority. Also, if a teacher is flexible and challenging, this perceived student monotony can be inhibited.

Implications for Research and Future Directions

An important body of research exists on giftedness related to characteristics, identification, curriculum, and strategies, amongst others (Hodges, Tay, Maeda, & Gentry, 2018; Smith, 2017; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2006). However, there is still a need to capture the everyday experiences and lives of gifted students in both academic and non-academic contexts. In the words of Coleman, Micko, and Cross (2015), “students’ perspectives told through their voices need to be heard” (p. 2).

Qualitative methods have shown to be relevant to achieve depth and to capture details and nuances of students’ lives. However, besides interviews, which are the most widely used method, researchers can use other qualitative techniques that have not been explored in the field, such as the use of photo elicitation and ethnography. Through the use of these techniques, which provide an immersion within the lived

experiences of students and their context, one can deepen the exploration of some aspects that were salient in both studies, such as the following:

- (a) Exploring teacher aggressive behaviours (sometimes disguised as “punishment”)
- (b) Going in depth into the social relationships and dynamics with classroom peers
- (c) Knowing the type and quality of teacher support provided to 2e students and possible interventions to improve this relevant aspect of the student-teacher relationship.

Implications for Practice and Future Directions

Lack of teacher preparation to meet the needs of gifted and 2e learners is an aspect that urgently must be addressed in the Chilean context as stated by Conejeros et al. (2012). Strategies to cope with the unique characteristics of this diverse population of gifted and 2e students is a major challenge for teachers that teacher preparation programs will need to face in the near future, especially because of the national efforts toward more inclusive classroom practices.

A more rigorous effort needs to be undertaken, not only by the seven universities that are already developing enrichment programs but also by the Chilean educational system to offer talent-developing opportunities for the gifted and 2e learners, such as appropriate educational provisions (e.g., enrichment, acceleration, ability grouping, and the like, that are relevant to their individual needs); creating a differentiated learning environment that considers students’ abilities, interests, and characteristics; and establishing regulations and policies about identification, curriculum, and instructional methods for working with this population (Assouline, Colangelo, & VanTassel-Baska, 2015; Castellano & Frazier, 2010; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2013; Renzulli & Reis, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014).

The existing Chilean enrichment programs may be relevant options for 2e students, as previous research has found a positive impact of academic programs on this population (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015; Baum et al., 2014). It is crucial that these programs offer some entry options or quotas for this group, because 2e students do not always match the profiles of traditional candidates that enter these programs (Beckmann & Minnaert, 2018; Silverman, 2013). These programs, at the moment, are the only formal option 2e students have for nurturing their potential in the Chilean educational system. The current legislation, educational supports, and opportunities are focussed on identification services and interventions provided at the school level and aimed at 2e students’ disabilities. High abilities are therefore invisible within this scenario (Gómez-Arizaga, Conejeros-Solar, Sandoval, & Armijo, 2016).

Teacher preparation needs to address teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward giftedness due to the aggressive behaviours found in Study 1. Knowledgeable and sensitive teachers with a focus on students’ strengths rather than difficulties are urgently needed to challenge and nurture this group of students. Also, a strength-

based model (Baum et al., 2014) can be a strong framework for teacher training due to the characteristics that this model promotes in a teacher, such as: empathy, supportiveness, understanding, openness, and flexibility.

There is a scarcity of professionals and parent associations that can advocate for this population of children and adolescents in Chile. Therefore, the civil society needs to become empowered, organise, and advocate for the rights of these children, with a sustainable and shared vision that can facilitate the development of public policies.

Regarding the social and emotional development of gifted and 2e students, psychologists with preparation that includes developing understandings of the traits of this population are needed. They can offer possibilities of counselling regarding interpersonal aspects such as life satisfaction—especially for gifted/ADHD students—and social relationships with both groups, as proposed by Foley-Nicpon et al. (2012).

From an inclusive perspective, progress needs to be made in accepting students' differences, because both classmates and teachers generally do not recognise the characteristics of these groups, which increases the feeling of not fitting in by the gifted and/or 2e student. In this sense, pedagogical practices are critical to the generation of positive classroom climates (Gazmuri et al., 2015). Within a positive scenario, the gifted and 2e student will feel comfortable and have meaning in their school experience.

As expected, and given the characteristics of the group under study, gifted students' adjustment to the classroom climate is not easy and straightforward. Instead of choosing sides in the discussion about social adjustment in gifted students, we propose to address the topic in two levels: on one side, the micro level, in which meaningful relationships are indeed created by gifted and twice-exceptional students with a few friends who are close, loyal, and provide mutual support in times of need. Something similar occurs with a few teachers who are empathetic to their characteristics. On the other side, it is the macro level in which challenges and difficulties can be found, due to factors such as classmates' non-compliance to the social norms of the classroom and the indifference and lack of interest in learning perceived by gifted students in their peers.

Another relevant aspect in the macro level is that despite the fact that classes are perceived as boring, repetitive, and not challenging, students' interest in learning remains and is shown by focussing on and adhering to the norms of the classroom, even if they are not motivated or able to acquire new knowledge. This is particularly difficult and overwhelming for 2e students, because for some of them it can be hard to remain focussed, which does not always lead to optimal results.

Conclusion

From the results of the two studies shown in this chapter, it can be inferred that for inclusion to be achieved in Chile—particularly at the school level—it is critical to generate awareness of the presence of gifted and 2e students, and to address their

particular needs within the regular classroom. Stronger and more determined steps are therefore required to break the status quo and to successfully serve the gifted population, considering the existent diversity within this group.

It is important to acknowledge that students in the gifted-only and twice-exceptional samples in this chapter did not expect special treatment to make them feel superior or inferior from their classmates. From what was gathered and analysed in both studies, they aspire to be recognised, visualised, and to have the opportunity to learn and develop in a space that accepts and embraces their diversity. Nevertheless, they have to coexist daily within an environment that can be hostile, chaotic, and not welcoming or supportive of their characteristics. This then, is an overarching message to both teachers and peers of students with twice-exceptionalities: that diversity can come in many forms, and that from a social justice perspective, there is a need to show respect for others, regardless of differences. This can be achieved by forming meaningful and constructive peer and teacher relationships with gifted and 2e students and developing understandings of the unique characteristics of these unique students.

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